



Province of Alberta

The 29th Legislature
Third Session

Alberta Hansard

Tuesday morning, May 30, 2017

Day 41

The Honourable Robert E. Wanner, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta
The 29th Legislature

Third Session

Wanner, Hon. Robert E., Medicine Hat (ND), Speaker
Jabbour, Deborah C., Peace River (ND), Deputy Speaker and Chair of Committees
Sweet, Heather, Edmonton-Manning (ND), Deputy Chair of Committees

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| Anderson, Hon. Shaye, Leduc-Beaumont (ND) | Luff, Robyn, Calgary-East (ND) |
| Anderson, Wayne, Highwood (W) | MacIntyre, Donald, Innisfail-Sylvan Lake (W) |
| Babcock, Erin D., Stony Plain (ND) | Malkinson, Brian, Calgary-Currie (ND) |
| Barnes, Drew, Cypress-Medicine Hat (W) | Mason, Hon. Brian, Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood (ND), Government House Leader |
| Bilous, Hon. Deron, Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview (ND), Deputy Government House Leader | McCuaig-Boyd, Hon. Margaret, Dunvegan-Central Peace-Notley (ND) |
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| Coolahan, Craig, Calgary-Klein (ND) | Miranda, Hon. Ricardo, Calgary-Cross (ND) |
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| Dach, Lorne, Edmonton-McClung (ND) | Orr, Ronald, Lacombe-Ponoka (W) |
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| Gill, Prab, Calgary-Greenway (PC) | Schneider, David A., Little Bow (W) |
| Goehring, Nicole, Edmonton-Castle Downs (ND) | Schreiner, Kim, Red Deer-North (ND) |
| Gotfried, Richard, Calgary-Fish Creek (PC) | Shepherd, David, Edmonton-Centre (ND) |
| Gray, Hon. Christina, Edmonton-Mill Woods (ND) | Sigurdson, Hon. Lori, Edmonton-Riverview (ND) |
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| Horne, Trevor A.R., Spruce Grove-St. Albert (ND) | Strankman, Rick, Drumheller-Stettler (W) |
| Hunter, Grant R., Cardston-Taber-Warner (W) | Sucha, Graham, Calgary-Shaw (ND) |
| Jansen, Sandra, Calgary-North West (ND) | Swann, Dr. David, Calgary-Mountain View (AL) |
| Jean, Brian Michael, QC, Fort McMurray-Conklin (W), Leader of the Official Opposition | Taylor, Wes, Battle River-Wainwright (W) |
| Kazim, Anam, Calgary-Glenmore (ND) | Turner, Dr. A. Robert, Edmonton-Whitemud (ND) |
| Kleinsteuber, Jamie, Calgary-Northern Hills (ND) | van Dijken, Glenn, Barrhead-Morinville-Westlock (W) |
| Larivee, Hon. Danielle, Lesser Slave Lake (ND) | Westhead, Cameron, Banff-Cochrane (ND), Deputy Government Whip |
| Littlewood, Jessica, Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville (ND) | Woollard, Denise, Edmonton-Mill Creek (ND) |
| Loewen, Todd, Grande Prairie-Smoky (W) | Yao, Tany, Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo (W) |

Party standings:

New Democrat: 55 Wildrose: 22 Progressive Conservative: 8 Alberta Liberal: 1 Alberta Party: 1

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| Christina Gray | Minister of Labour, Minister Responsible for Democratic Renewal |
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| Ricardo Miranda | Minister of Culture and Tourism |
| Brandy Payne | Associate Minister of Health |
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STANDING AND SPECIAL COMMITTEES OF THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ALBERTA

Standing Committee on the Alberta Heritage Savings Trust Fund

Chair: Mr. Coolahan
Deputy Chair: Mrs. Schreiner

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| Cyr | McKitrick |
| Dang | Taylor |
| Ellis | Turner |
| Horne | |

Standing Committee on Alberta's Economic Future

Chair: Mr. Sucha
Deputy Chair: Mr. van Dijken

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| Connolly | Orr |
| Coolahan | Piquette |
| Dach | Schneider |
| Drysdale | Schreiner |
| Fitzpatrick | Taylor |
| Gotfried | |

Standing Committee on Families and Communities

Chair: Ms Goehring
Deputy Chair: Mr. Smith

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| Drever | Pitt |
| Hinkley | Rodney |
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| Jansen | Swann |
| Luff | Yao |
| McKitrick | |

Standing Committee on Legislative Offices

Chair: Mr. Shepherd
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| Littlewood | |

Special Standing Committee on Members' Services

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| Dang | Orr |
| Jabour | Piquette |
| Luff | Schreiner |
| McIver | |

Standing Committee on Private Bills

Chair: Ms McPherson
Deputy Chair: Connolly

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| Anderson, W. | Kleinsteuber |
| Babcock | McKitrick |
| Drever | Rosendahl |
| Drysdale | Stier |
| Fraser | Strankman |
| Hinkley | Sucha |
| Kazim | |

Standing Committee on Privileges and Elections, Standing Orders and Printing

Chair: Ms Fitzpatrick
Deputy Chair: Ms Babcock

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| Carson | Loyola |
| Coolahan | McPherson |
| Cooper | Nielsen |
| Ellis | Schneider |
| Goehring | Starke |
| Hanson | van Dijken |
| Kazim | |

Standing Committee on Public Accounts

Chair: Mr. Cyr
Deputy Chair: Mr. Dach

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| Gotfried | Turner |
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| Luff | |

Standing Committee on Resource Stewardship

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| Drysdale | Nielsen |
| Hanson | Rosendahl |
| Kazim | Woollard |
| Kleinsteuber | |

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

10 a.m.

Tuesday, May 30, 2017

[The Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

The Speaker: Good morning.

It's a beautiful day in which we can just reflect and pray, each in our own way. As we enjoy this privilege to start yet another day in such a beautiful province, in such a wonderful country, let us remind each other of our responsibility to find a democratic solution to the issues that our province faces.

Please be seated.

Orders of the Day

Government Bills and Orders

Second Reading

Bill 17

Fair and Family-friendly Workplaces Act

Mr. Hanson moved that the motion for second reading of Bill 17, Fair and Family-friendly Workplaces Act, be amended by deleting all of the words after "that" and substituting the following:

Bill 17, Fair and Family-friendly Workplaces Act, be not now read a second time but that the subject matter of the bill be referred to the Standing Committee on Families and Communities in accordance with Standing Order 74.2.

[Adjourned debate on the amendment May 29: Mr. Nielsen]

The Speaker: Anyone wishing to speak to the referral amendment? Cardston-Taber-Warner.

Mr. Hunter: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to support my hon. colleague in this referral amendment. The government should separate the job leave components of Bill 17 for immediate passage and send the bulk of the bill to committee. We have a system of democracy in place, and this government continues to disregard the importance of that process in crafting workable legislation for the benefit of all Albertans. The result is that all too often things are gotten wrong and we have to come back here in a two-year period to get them right, wasting the time and energy of Albertans.

This government is rushing through major changes. A 124-page bill was introduced yesterday afternoon, and we're already expected to be educated on it and to debate it intelligently. Come on. This is far too quick. We are all hon. colleagues working on behalf of Albertans. The least we can do is to get this right the first time, and it takes a little longer than the short period they've given us.

A 36-day consultation is not enough. Send it to a legislative standing committee to examine and to call witnesses. Then we can be sure to get a fair and balanced consultation. Maybe the government intended for very little discussion to happen. That's what happens when you have 124 pages go through so quickly. I'll be anxious to see if the House leader invokes closure, or time allocation, on this.

This legislation from the NDP government is omnibus in nature and would be best served if split into two distinct components to allow for faster passage of compassionate care leaves. This government is being disingenuous by lumping together changes to both the Labour Relations Code and the Employment Standards Code into one big omnibus bill.

This bill is far reaching and has the potential to change the economic landscape of this province. Alberta has been a prosperous, peaceful province for decades. We've had labour peace for decades, and the government's move could have incalculable consequences, consequences that could lower wages. I have even seen things in this bill already about allowing a union onto private property. Private property, Mr. Speaker. Those are property rights that we're dealing with. I don't allow anyone into my house that I don't want. Why should a private business allow someone unwelcome onto their property? It is a show of government having an unhealthy view of private property rights despite whatever the Government House Leader says as he rises to defend property rights. By their deeds you shall know them. Now the NDP will force employers to allow office space for unions on business property and allow access to their private property. This is scary stuff. This is why this bill needs to be split and sent to committee.

Should the government decide to split the current omnibus legislation into two components, it would allow for quick passage of compassionate care while allowing the summer to be used to consult on Labour Relations Code changes and other changes to employment standards, as was done last year with the Municipal Government Act. We have a session in October. That is plenty of time to get the consultation right. People that need to be consulted include Merit and the Progressive Contractors Association. I'm sure they have plenty to say about allowing salting and MERFing into Alberta. I'm also sure the Christian Labour Association of Canada would have much to say about these practices.

For these reasons, Mr. Speaker, this is why I need to see this bill sent to committee. Thank you very much.

The Speaker: Are there any questions under 29(2)(a) to the hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner?

Are there any other members who would like to speak to the amendment? The hon. Member for Little Bow.

Mr. Schneider: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today in full support of the referral motion. Now, that motion revolves around the government separating the job leave components of Bill 17 for immediate passage and sending the bulk of the bill to committee. If the NDP were true, if they were sincere in their often-expressed desire to work with all parties of the House, then it is only logical that they would separate this bill and, like I just said, send most of this bill to committee for real and extensive consultation with all interested parties, not just those that the government chose to consult with privately.

You know, before I move on, I just want to address that last statement on consultation. I'm not sure that the other side of the House is hearing what I hear when I run into people, but consulting with those that the government chooses rather than everyone in the province that may have an opinion or wish to make a submission on whatever the subject may be is not going unnoticed.

Anyway, it was a few short days ago that the Member for Calgary-North West was lamenting the lack of co-operation in this House. She commented how disappointed she was that an opposition member didn't give her a chance to sit down and discuss an amendment he had proposed. She was frustrated that there wasn't the opportunity for back and forth, and rightly so, on some of the good ideas of the amendment, and she didn't feel there was time to discuss the subamendment on her private member's bill.

Well, you know, folks, this side of the House knows only too well that feeling as the government side had every opportunity to do just that with Bill 204, the Protection of Property Rights Statutes Amendment Act, 2017. Instead, they chose to use their majority to outright kill that bill, not propose reasonable amendments or send

it to committee for submissions from Albertans. They just plain and simple completely destroyed it instead with a majority.

On reflection, this is the perfect time for the government to put their words into action. Let's truly consult on this bill. Let's take the time to truly work together and have some back and forth here. Opposition members are sincere in updating employment standards for the province to protect those on compassionate leave and are more than prepared to work with the government to have those portions of the bill pass as quickly as possible. Splitting up this 124-page monstrosity would help us do just that.

Rushing through this giant omnibus bill is a great disservice to Albertans. How can we as legislators be expected to properly do our job when we have this enormous bill to go through and be expected to educate ourselves and those we are entrusted to represent in this House? How do we speak for them? Or does this government have such short memories concerning how their hubris got them in trouble with the farming and ranching communities? But they still believe they know best.

The government needs to stop pretending that it's a reasonable idea to lump the Employment Standards Code changes in with the Labour Relations Code changes. Government wasn't even that disingenuous to do that for the farm and safety round-tables. You knew that these two issues were so completely complex and far reaching that you realized it was best served to separate them into two different tables. I wonder why it is okay to do that for the round-tables and not for Bill 17. What is the government afraid of? Is it possible that the government rightly believes that the best case is for the government to jam through the more contentious aspects of this omnibus bill by hiding them under the reasonable aspects of the employment standards parts? That's just a notion, but I'm just going to talk about that notion for a moment.

Government set up two distinct tables under the enhanced safety for farm and ranch workers round-tables, obviously because they are two separate and distinct issues. Interestingly enough, in discussions with members of those tables as well as in review of the reports from the same, it came as no surprise and was easy and reasonable to see how those tables came about to almost complete consensus on the employment standards. There were good discussions back and forth and a respectful give-and-take. As a result, there was only one minor issue that wasn't agreed upon. I think it was light work for teenagers. The term "light work" has yet to be defined by regulation after consultation with the public as a matter of fact. Also, 16- and 17-year-olds cannot be employed in any hazardous activity without a permit. Hazardous activity is defined in future regulations after consultation with the public, something that's already been going on.

You know, it was a pretty good discussion if the final report came out with only those minor points that couldn't be agreed upon, obviously some give-and-take. As a result, it came as no surprise to me or anyone else, actually, that had seen Bill 17 that when the aspects of the farm and ranch employment standards portion of the bill were put forth, it was clear that they were being rolled out almost exactly as the recommendations from the round-table report.

10:10

Now, as far as the labour relations round-table discussions went, good discussions and respectful back and forth and give-and-take were not the case. As one member put it to me, quote: we strongly disagreed going into the discussions at the table, and we strongly disagreed coming out of those discussions. Unquote. I don't think it will surprise anyone here that the comment that I just quoted came from a rural resident, obviously, a farmer, actually, one of the few that was allowed on those farm and ranch safety round-tables, a

farmer that over and above the busy life of just being a farmer is involved with many of the aspects of the ag coalition. But I digress.

I doubt it is much of a leap to figure out that the government knew there would be backlash, and that is why they brought forth Bill 17 as a giant omnibus bill rather than bringing it out as separate entities. Once again it bears repeating that the Wildrose would support those employment standards changes that make life better for everyone. Heck; we could move forward immediately, straight through to Royal Assent if there was the political will from the government. But it appears that the government is going to be taking the spoonful of honey with the bitter medicine approach here in trying to make a bitter labour-friendly bill more publicly palatable by including the feel-good employment standards changes that they knew opposition parties would all agree on.

This is an obvious ploy that the government publicity machine is churning out on the social media feeds of the NDP members, tweets of feigned outrage that the opposition is voting against domestic violence leave, compassionate leave, et cetera, et cetera. All that is just a red herring. For a year and a half we've heard this stuff. I scrape it off my boots every weekend when I go home to work with cattle.

You know, the government pulled this on Bill 6. They do their best to change the channel every single time they know they are in the wrong. Mr. Speaker, the shtick from the government side of the House is getting tiring. If the government is truly sincere about this, then take the time to get this legislation right. After all, doing what is right for all Albertans is our responsibility. That is a phrase that the government side uses every time someone from the front bench stands up to speak. It would be best for all of us to use the summer to receive meaningful feedback on all the proposed changes and come back in the fall with recommendations to committee and also to suggest stakeholders who may wish to appear or submit. Rushing through such important legislation at the end of session under the guise of a 124-page bill is a ploy that Albertans will see right through. If the government continues to move forward in the direction it appears it's going to take, their credibility will fall faster than Alberta's credit rating from Standard & Poor's.

Everyone in this House has a responsibility to all Albertans to respect the process and the role of democracy and make sure that the government puts forth workable legislation that benefits us all. Separate this bill into usable pieces. Identify all of the best of the employment standards legislation that will protect the vulnerable and the marginalized, get these solid pieces passed quickly, and take the time to properly consult with Albertans on the rest. It's imperative that we work together and send the unwieldy parts to committee, where it can get its proper due diligence, not a rushed, 30-day cursory consultation with private, hand-picked groups. We need to throw light on the process. Make it public, make it engaged, and make it fair for all people.

Once again, the members of the Official Opposition are willing to provide unanimous consent for all three stages of reading for the components of the bill that relate to protecting workers from being fired for taking a sick day, protecting workers from being fired for caring for a baby, protecting workers from being fired for attending a citizenship ceremony, for looking after a sick relative, or for taking time off as a victim of domestic violence. I'm sure that the other members in opposition would agree. The fact is that there are good, solid pieces of legislation here, but the government needs to show Albertans they are serious about working for all of them. They need to show that they aren't just about ideology and protecting their labour friends, because, folks, that's what it looks like.

Mr. Speaker, there's no need for the haste in which this bill is being pushed through. There is no public emergency like with our current fentanyl crisis. It's simply the government being lazy in

their approach and lazy in their preparation. We've already acknowledged the good that many aspects of this bill can achieve, but it's the education of it that is suspect.

We've seen weeks of the NDP backbench tossing up speeches on their own legislation in order to string out the session. It speaks volumes about the preparedness of the government. If the session needed to be extended because you thought you had so much important work to do, then why did we not start session a month earlier? Remember how you wanted to make the Legislature more family friendly? I'm sure running night sittings is the exact opposite of family friendly, Mr. Speaker.

It's time to show this province what kind of government you want to be known for, a reasonable one that can work with opposition or the type of government that bullies its legislation through simply because it can, the same type that several members of the government used to decry when they sat on opposition benches.

There is no way – no way – that you can sell the urgency of the labour aspect of this bill. Even the most uninformed Albertan knows that anything as hefty as a labour bill such as the one before us now cannot have received proper consultation in a mere 36 days. If anything, you will gain support by taking the time to send this bill to committee and using the summer to consult with all affected parties, not just those chosen and hand-picked. Do the right thing, separate this bill, and let's pass the good pieces quickly and start consultation on the labour process.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Under 29(2)(a) are there any questions for the Member for Little Bow?

Seeing and hearing none, speaking to the amendment, the Member for Drumheller-Stettler.

Mr. Strankman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's interesting. I enjoyed your comments at the opening of our morning session, talking about using democracy to achieve an end here. That's what I'm hoping we're going to do here today. It's a fine day in Alberta, and democracy is well achieved on days like this, sir. I appreciate that.

Some of the early commentary and the banter in the Chamber reminded me of early days in my farming background when I was asked to go out and gather the eggs and I heard a lot of cackling and chortling in the farmyard. It was interesting to watch the chickens scratching around in the dirt, and then you'd hear the cackling and chortling. And as members came to the Chamber, there seemed to be a lot of that going on in here, but now everybody has settled down and seems to be occupied with some form of reading and modern material.

I'm going to continue on with my opinion in support of this amendment. An option could be to refer it to a standing committee. That, too, Mr. Speaker, is some of the important work that we do here. To reiterate, this bill does have important aspects that, I believe, all members should be able to agree on. For example, parental leave extension, compassionate leave, and time for citizenship ceremonies are easy to get behind. Coming from a rural background – and many people know of this era – we take our days of compassion and respect for death and/or other humanistic functions at our own choice. In many ways they don't have to be legislated. They are done out of complete and absolute respect for the people that have earned that relationship with those who attend either at a wedding or a church service or a funeral service to exhibit their personal and open respect. They don't need legislation to force them there.

I'm going to be reiterating in some cases what my opposition colleagues have said over and over again, that we sincerely have no issue with updating these employment standards components of the bill. We are here willing to work with the government to get these passed as quickly as possible. What we won't do is allow the government to use these compassionate changes to bulldoze through labour changes without proper consultation. That's a good part, Mr. Speaker, of the frustration coming from the opposition side of the Chamber through all this. This legislation from the government is, for all purposes, a bulky 124-page bill and would be best served if split into two distinct components to allow for quick passage of the compassionate care components.

10:20

It is no secret that this government has an atrocious record when it comes to proper consultation on legislation. They failed miserably on Bill 6, to the point of mass protests outside this Chamber, historical sized protests. Over 1,800 people were hoping to have their representation heard outside the Chamber.

They failed on consulting on the carbon tax, opting for a weighted, highly biased, and leading questionnaire instead of public consultation. They're failing to do a proper public consultation with the education curriculum, and they're once again failing to adequately consult on this labour legislation.

Webster's defines consultation as "the act of consulting or conferring," a meeting for deliberation, discussion, or decision. Public consultation is defined as a process by which the public's input on matters affecting them is sought. That can be done in many different ways, whether it be by referendum or broad white paper consultations, for example.

Mr. Speaker, inviting select groups who are primarily favourable to this government's world view isn't exactly the definition of proper, fair, or equitable consultation. It doesn't take a Leap Manifesto of logic to predict that those types of consultations will come down heavily on the government's side. What needs to happen is to separate the components of this bill into employment standards and labour elements, much like the government recognized was needed on the farm safety round-tables. This precedent has already been established by the government. They recognized that the issues were too complex to simply lump together into one round-table.

In this case, the case of this legislation, 124 pages of eloquent reading: what has changed? This government has rushed through major changes introduced late last week, and we're already expected to be fully educated on it and debate it in a robust, educated way. Could it be that the government intended for little discussion to happen and simply wanted to move it on through or jam it on through? Why can't we ensure that this is done properly? Why not take this summer to consult with Albertans and amend it if necessary? We can fast-track the important employment aspects without opposition. Why the artificially set urgency in this legislation? Some would even say that there is contempt to including the public in the consultation process. That does not lead, Mr. Speaker, to the democracy you talked about in the opening of this morning's session.

Alberta's current union certification system has resulted in 30-plus years of stable labour peace and the highest wages in the nation. How would taking the summer to gather more public and business opinions hurt that process? What harm would sending it off to a standing committee that's dominated by government backbenchers possibly have in the passing of the legislation? Is there a question of solidarity in the government ranks?

We need to take the time to do this right, and that means more than barely a month of consultation and a week of debate or less.

Ontario has taken years of consultation for their labour rewrite. Why not take a minimum of five or six months for Alberta's legislation?

Mr. Speaker, there are several troubling aspects of these labour changes that I can highlight here. Let's use this example. The restriction requiring employees in the construction industry to have worked for an employer for 30 days in order to participate in a union certification vote would be removed. In addition, employees would not have up to 90 days to reconsider their decision. So you can literally have people join your workforce today with the full intention of unionizing the workplace. They get hired to work a job and get to work on unionizing the workforce immediately before even knowing anything about the actual job participation or anything about you or your co-workers or anyone involved in the workplace. This is known as salting, by the way, and it's a tactic that unions commonly use. Bill 17 removes the protection that the Labour Relations Amendment Act of 2008 provided against such a tactic. I note, in particular, a hyperbole from the other side claiming no changes to the labour act for decades. Perhaps they meant no changes favourable to big labour.

Another problematic notion is the fact that under the current provisions of the code it suspends the collection and remittance of union dues during an illegal strike, which would be removed under Bill 17. If the strike is illegal, why should the union be entitled to have the employer continue to collect and send those union dues in?

Lastly, this new legislation gives the Labour Relations Board new powers, including the ability to "decide how and whether to publish any of its decisions." Only under the NDP world view would anyone think that this constitutes an open and transparent process. It's just not clear what the impact would be to Alberta businesses should these labour provisions be rushed through. Again, you need to broadly consult with Alberta's businesses.

Mr. Speaker, these are but a few examples of some of the more contentious issues that need to be addressed. That's why it is so important that we take the time to get this right, and that means more than 30-odd days of consultation and a brief week of debate.

Should the government decide to split the current 124-page chunk of legislation into two components, it would allow quicker passage of compassionate care while allowing for the summer to be used to consult on Labour Relations Code changes and other changes to employment standards. This was successfully done last year with the Municipal Government Act, so why couldn't the same be done with this legislation?

This bill has far-reaching, possibly unintended consequences and has the potential to change the economic landscape of this province. Again I reiterate that it can possibly create a myriad of unintended consequences. Why not take the time to ensure that we get it right? I simply don't see the harm in doing that despite the purely hysterical attempt by the government to paint the opposition as villains. I quite enjoy the charades that that creates, and I'm enjoying hearing some of the comments from, again, across the aisle.

I'd like to reiterate what the Leader of the Opposition said from day one. We are more than willing to provide unanimous consent for all three stages of reading for the components of the bill that relate to protecting workers from being fired for taking sick days, looking after a sick relative, attending a citizenship ceremony, for example, or taking time off as a victim of domestic violence. These are all examples, Mr. Speaker, and in my upbringing and history or background we didn't need legislation to do that. They were done out of earned compassion and respect for the citizenry that we lived and worked with every day. We could get those most important aspects done within a very few days. We just need this government

to show a willingness to get this done in an amicable fashion. This can be done.

Again, Mr. Speaker, let's work together. Let's split this bill up and pass the solid pieces that we can agree on and potentially move the rest to committee. Let's take the summer to consult with all the groups affected by this proposed legislation and get them in front of a committee to publicly share their thoughts, take a broad reading on the perceptions and the perspectives of a greater portion of Albertans. It boggles the mind that this government would be content to have its legacy defined by their inability to get a simple thing like a public consultation done correctly.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I'd ask and plead: do the right thing, government, for the right reasons. Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. member for Rocky Mountain House-Sundre. Under 29(2)(a)?

Mr. Nixon: Of course, Mr. Speaker, and of course I don't want you to forget about the great community of Rimbey. I can't forget about the good people of Rimbey.

Under 29(2)(a) to the member for Strathmore-Drumheller. No. That'll be soon, from what I understand. But for Drumheller-Stettler I do have a question.

The Speaker: I need to remember Rimbey, and then you can remember Stettler.

Mr. Nixon: I'll try, Mr. Speaker, for sure. We might be able to practise together later on.

Anyway, I would like to ask a question to the hon. member under 29(2)(a). I was very interested in hearing his remarks, particularly around the need for consultation and how some of the actions of this government, not yours, of course, Mr. Speaker, but how this government's behaviour in their time in power has impacted his constituents and their inability to consult, to talk to the people that they're attempting to govern, and how they're often changing the way that they've done things for long periods of time. He referred to lots of good issues, including Bill 6. I know, Mr. Speaker, you saw that debacle first-hand, and I know that you, without a doubt, were disappointed in that, as I was.

10:30

One of the areas I like to talk about is the democracy portion of this. It is interesting that the only time this government seems to want to consult with the people that they're attempting to write legislation for is on things like time change bills or the hon. member's private member's bill that would stop taxpayer money from being used to advertise for the benefit of the governing party during by-elections or elections, something I think most Albertans would be behind right away. Those bills were sent off to committee, and we've never seen them again since. When it comes to a bill of this magnitude, the largest bill that I have seen in my elected life, this government wants to try to force it through this House in one week. One week. In one week they want to try to bring it through the House. I know they think it's funny that they want to do that to Albertans, but I certainly don't, Mr. Speaker. They want to bring it through in one week, but they'll go and consult on other stuff.

I mean, there was also another situation, of course, over the last year where this government, as you know, Mr. Speaker, spent all their time trying to get their campaign finances paid for instead of consulting Albertans on that, where this side of the House had to fight on behalf of Albertans to finally get that silly behaviour to stop. In regard to this government now, with this bill, trying to take away secret ballots, it's so appalling, just appalling behaviour.

Ms Jansen: Super PACs and you guys.

Mr. Nixon: I know the Member for Calgary-North West seems to be trying to defend that behaviour. It would very interesting for me to hear . . . [interjection] Oh, then the Minister for Education really wants to defend that behaviour, too. That doesn't surprise me as much as the Member for Calgary-North West.

Mr. Speaker, I would be interested in hearing the member's comments on how his constituents feel about this great attack on democracy by the current NDP government, which, in some ways, maybe we shouldn't be surprised at because they've been attacking democracy since they were elected, over and over and over, trying to stack the deck to their advantage. Maybe I would be interested in hearing what the Member for Drumheller-Stettler thinks of this continued behaviour by this government to attack democracy in the province of Alberta.

The Speaker: Hon. member, I'd just caution on using the words "attack democracy." It's a pretty sensitive issue.

Mr. Strankman: Well, thank you to the Member for Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre. It still is Drumheller-Stettler, the diverse constituency of which I'm proud to be the representative only. And, yes, I do take great umbrage at the democracy that Bill 6 did or did not represent for the constituency.

To that end, I'd like to relate a situation that occurred on the last day of passing that legislation. Some members may remember the emotion expressed by government members in the House that day. Some people may not know that during that debate, when there were some 1,800 people out in front of the Legislature here, I personally received a note from the Sergeant-at-Arms requesting my presence at the front door. There were great concerns that those gentlemen had that day at the front door regarding the security that would be exhibited by the demonstrators, who were right on the steps. They were right at the door. They were right up at the steps. The gentlemen down there asked me to go out and speak to those people while we were having our QP session here, Mr. Speaker. Not a lot of people know this, but I actually went down there and was asked by the security of this building to go and speak to the demonstrators down there. I said, "Why do you want some humble farmer from Drumheller-Stettler?" "Because," they said, "they know you, and they know what you're going to do."

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other members? The Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat. We're speaking to the amendment.

Mr. Barnes: Yes, please. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise this morning to speak to the referral amendment on Bill 17, the Fair and Family-friendly Workplaces Act. This amendment seeks to ensure that all Albertans have an opportunity to provide input and advice to the government on this critical bill. This is what this amendment seeks to ensure.

This is a massive omnibus labour bill – a massive omnibus labour bill – that brings forward sweeping changes to both our Employment Standards Code and our Labour Relations Code. While many of the changes proposed in this bill on their own might be defensible, we need to stop and ask ourselves: what is the big picture? Although several of the changes that have been proposed in this ominous bill were more or less expected and not terribly controversial – in fact, some of them are supported by the Wildrose – this bill has dozens of small and large sections that chip away at employers, that chip away at employers while we are already facing tremendously challenging economic times. In fact, Mr. Speaker, we are sincere in wanting to update our employment standards in the

province to protect those on compassionate leave, and we want to work with this government to have them pass it as quickly as possible.

But this NDP government needs to realize that more consultations and analysis are needed before making these sweeping changes, again, Mr. Speaker, especially because of these challenging economic times. Alberta's job creators have already taken so many blows from this NDP government's insistence on putting ideology over reason. The best protection for employees is a strong and stable economy. Sadly, this government continually puts ideology and imposing their NDP world view above keeping our economy strong.

Mr. Speaker, I want to talk about that strong and stable economy for a couple of seconds. I think back to my high school and university years, where for fellow students and fellow Medicine Hatters there wasn't a need to look for a job before the last day of school because the economy was so strong, jobs were everywhere and plentiful, pay was good. Employees had tremendous, tremendous options.

Up until three or four years ago, up until two years ago especially, that same type of labour market existed for employees, where lots of employers went above and beyond, knew that being fair, providing good options and good pay for their employees were ways to everyone's success: employers, employees, Albertans. I think John F. Kennedy said, "a rising tide lifts all boats." Well, when the tide used to rise in this province – Mr. Speaker, when the tide used to rise – many, many Albertans benefited, including our employees.

Sadly, Mr. Speaker, this government continually puts ideology and imposing the NDP world view above, before keeping our economy strong, and this government doesn't understand what it costs Alberta families, what it costs Albertans, what it costs Alberta communities. And I'm not talking about debt ratings plummeting; I'm talking about families not being able to afford the basics. Alberta's economy simply cannot afford to absorb it. This NDP government is sacrificing jobs, our jobs, purely to please their base.

I would implore this government to do the right thing, split this bill in two so that we can pass the compassionate leave portions of this bill as quickly as possible and send other components of the bill for further review to experts, to Albertans, to employees and employers, to those Albertans that spend most every day out there making our province, our communities, and our families strong. If they are sincere in taking the time to get this right, the NDP government will use the summer to receive meaningful feedback on all of the changes and the combined ramifications, including a closer look at their unintended consequences.

As has already been stated by some of my hon. colleagues, we will even provide unanimous consent for all three stages of reading for the components of the bill that relate to protecting workers. We will provide unanimous consent for protecting workers from being fired for taking a sick day or looking after a sick relative, caring for a baby, attending a citizenship ceremony, or taking time off as a victim of domestic violence, those changes in life where we all can support each other and will. Again, I'm just asking the NDP government to do the right thing and make this part go unanimously and quickly.

10:40

Mr. Speaker, the changes being proposed in this bill are not subtle and minor changes. They will have drastic intended and unintended consequences for our labour market. It's supply and demand. It will affect everyone both ways. They are not aspects that Albertans want to see rushed through. For example, the changes to the Labour Relations Code include card check certification – goodbye, secret

ballot – salting and MERFing, farm and ranch workers, first contract arbitration, essential services, dependent contractors, the Rand formula, suspension of dues, reverse onus, secondary picketing, enhancement of powers of Labour Relations Board arbitrators, duty of fair representation, greater transparency, and international loopholes. Sadly, those are only the changes to the labour relations portion of this bill, an omnibus bill at its worst.

There are also substantial changes to the employment standards, with underage workers, leaves, overtime pay, holiday pay, farm and ranch – back to that Bill 6 nightmare – temporary layoff periods, persons with disabilities, termination, and administrative penalties taking away more control of Albertans' lives.

Changes to workplace-related legislation are important, and, Mr. Speaker, they will have a direct impact on businesses, employees, supply and demand of labour, and the province's overall economic future. Due to the large impacts workplace-related legislation has on the province as a whole, some other governments that have endeavoured to make significant changes to their workplace legislation have embarked on formal reviews and lengthy consultative processes. For example, in Ontario – even in Ontario – there was the changing workplaces review, which took place over a two-year span. It focused on reviewing their employment standards code and their labour relations code. Over this two-year span there were over 200 public presentations, over 500 written submissions, which resulted in 173 recommendations being put forward. My goodness, it's nice to see an Alberta NDP government learn something from a left Ontario government.

This is in stark contrast to this government's consultations, a mere 36 days of consultations and a week of debate in the Legislature: instead of two years, a week of debate and 36 days. Changes of this magnitude, that carry this much weight on the overall economic well-being of our province, deserve and need to have more consultation. Mr. Speaker, I'm sure there's a happy medium between the two-year process in Ontario and a five-week process that this government thinks is good enough.

Mr. Speaker, I must say that I've noticed an alarming trend, whether it's a carbon tax, changes to our electricity market that soon will have the taxpayers subsidizing the ratepayer at perhaps \$10 million a week, tax hikes, or the minimum wage. This NDP government either refuses – refuses – to do an impact assessment, or they just completely ignore the evidence in favour of advancing the NDP world view and ideology.

Mr. Speaker, another alarming trend is their lack of consultation, something they campaigned on doing the opposite, but whether it's budget, farm safety, emissions caps, and the carbon tax – totally silent on the carbon tax – once again one could only assume that they either don't want to hear what Albertans have to say, or they don't care and once again push their NDP world view.

Mr. Speaker, we both know that Albertans deserve better. I would encourage all of my hon. colleagues to support this excellent referral amendment and allow the sweeping changes being proposed in this omnibus bill to have more thorough consultation with stakeholders and Albertans. We cannot go wrong if we allow Albertans a bigger voice. This would allow government to split apart the bill and bring forward a bill that would protect those on compassionate leave – a good thing – and let us pass this portion as quickly as possible.

As I said earlier, we will even provide unanimous consent for all three stages of reading for the components of the bill that relate to protecting workers from being fired after taking a sick day or looking after a sick relative, caring for a baby, attending a citizenship ceremony, or taking time off as a victim of domestic violence. Mr. Speaker, this also allows the government to bring other aspects of the bill forward for further consultation and study.

Mr. Speaker, this is why this is so clearly a win-win and something that Albertans deserve. I ask all of my hon. colleagues to support this referral amendment.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Are there any questions or comments? The hon. Member for Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre.

Mr. Nixon: Well, thanks, Mr. Speaker, and thanks to the hon. member for an excellent speech. I found it very informative and educating.

An Hon. Member: Riveting.

Mr. Nixon: Riveting. Speaking towards the amendment, I can see, of course, Mr. Speaker, that it seems the government agrees with me on that assessment, which is excellent. I'm always happy when the NDP is following the opposition's example. That's usually when they're doing good work. In this case I would strongly suggest that they take the member's words seriously to heart and have a look at this amendment and the importance of consultation.

One of the questions that I have for the member, after listening to his presentation, is around this whole concept of consultation. Some of the concerns that I know I hear from my constituents and, I suspect, that he hears from his constituents are about this government's tendency not to consult on bills, particularly on bills where I think they're probably nervous about the reaction of the public.

As I was talking about earlier in the day, Mr. Speaker, we see stuff like a time change bill go to committee for lots of consultation. Stuff like the hon. Member for Drumheller-Stettler's private member's bill, stopping taxpayer money from being used by the governing party of the day during elections to be able to finance campaign-funded advertisement stuff, went off to committee. We never saw it again inside this Chamber. But a bill of this magnitude is all of a sudden being pushed through within a week, with no consultation. Certainly, the constituents that I represent don't feel that they've been consulted with. The government says that they consulted with them, with these come-and-be-told meetings. It's quite shocking.

Now, some of the other examples I could think of since this government has come into power is stuff like Bill 6, which, of course, has been talked about many times in this House. You know, the government's behaviour on Bill 6 has made it so that generations of people inside of rural Alberta and farming and ranching communities will never look to the NDP again. I was at a 4-H sale last night in Sundre, Mr. Speaker, and little kids showing me their projects, their steers and their sheep and stuff that are going into their sales, are still talking about the government's blatant – blatant – disregard for their way of life and complete inability to consult with them. That's just one example.

The hon. member brought up carbon tax. Carbon tax: that's another one. I see, Mr. Speaker, that the minister of agriculture is really, really concerned about it. I don't blame him. Based on the reaction there and the fact that he represents a rural riding, I would be very, very concerned, too, about how they're feeling, which is the point of this referral. Instead of making the same mistakes that the hon. minister made with Bill 6, with the complete disregard for all of rural Alberta and our second-largest industry, maybe they should not make the same mistake that his department made during that debacle, and they should consult with the people of Alberta. That is the core of this amendment that we're debating right now, whether or not this should be referred to committee.

Now, the carbon tax is another good example. The hon. member talked about the carbon tax, again something – I know, Mr. Speaker,

as you travel around your constituency, you're hearing from just as many constituents as I would hear from in regard to their concern over the carbon tax and the fact that this government never campaigned on it. They brought forward a tax that's buying people light bulbs but not doing much else. They didn't consult with the people of Alberta. If they did, they would have heard that our schools are having trouble staying open now as a result of the decisions associated with the carbon tax. Our municipalities are struggling, are going to have to raise property taxes. How do we know with this bill right now, that the government is trying to ram through this House in a week, that there aren't going to be similar consequences?

Mr. Bilous: Hey, we can stay for three weeks.

10:50

Mr. Nixon: Now, I know that the hon. Deputy Government House Leader wants to stay for three weeks. Well, certainly, we should stay for three weeks if that's what it takes to get the work done. What would be nice, though, Mr. Speaker, is if the hon. Deputy Government House Leader would take the time to consult with the people of Alberta rather than just coming here.

That is what's most disappointing. This government continues over and over and over not to want to talk to the people of Alberta, not to want to talk . . . [interjections] This is 29(2)(a), questions and comments, of course, for the hon. member. The government continues to not want to consult with the people of Alberta, and there are serious consequences of that decision. There are serious consequences to the future of this government.

Now, I don't care about the reputation of this government – it's shot with the people of Alberta, again, for generations – but I do care about the people of Alberta, who can have consequences. We've seen it with Bill 6, the carbon tax, election changes, all these things that are coming from this government as a result of their complete and utter refusal to communicate with the people of Alberta.

So I would like to hear, under my 29(2)(a) questions and comments, what the Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat feels about . . . [interjections] Well, you know, I've got five minutes to talk on comments. That's what the standing orders say, and I'm quite happy to do that, Mr. Speaker. It appears that the government really wants to hear from me by their reaction, so I'm quite enjoying that.

With that said, though, I would like to hear from the hon. member . . . [interjections] Of course they want to. Agreed. They want to hear from me. So enjoyable, Mr. Speaker, the time and the behaviour of the government.

Now I would really like to hear from the hon. member on what he thinks about the consultation question. [Mr. Nixon's speaking time expired]

The Speaker: Are there any other members who wish to speak to the amendment on Bill 17? The hon. Member for Chestermere-Rocky View.

Mrs. Aheer: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am very happy to rise and speak to this bill, and it's with concern, of course, that I'm rising to speak about this. There are a couple of things that I wanted to speak about today. In my mind, I'm extremely confused, I guess, for lack of a better word, and my confusion is based on the language that is used in the title of this piece of legislation and what is actually being accomplished.

To reiterate what some of the members on this side have said, there is a very good reason to be looking at the compassionate care. As a private-sector worker I probably – we've got a roomful of experts here who work in the public sector, who have worked under

the auspices of unions and have a great deal of knowledge. So I certainly do look towards that knowledge in order to understand a little bit more about this legislation.

But coming from an area of the private sector, Mr. Speaker, you know, when I look at things that are in the compassionate care, these are things that, when you're in the private sector, you also have to follow through with as well. It never occurred to me that we wouldn't do these things for people that work for us. I think one of the things that was devastating to read was the fact that there has to be legislation for the death or disappearance of a child, that it actually has to be written into legislation to make sure that people can have leave for something so absolutely horrible. I just can't imagine that an employer would not allow that to happen.

If that is the case, obviously, this legislation needs to be changed in order to make sure that the people that are working in these unions are able to actually access the ability to leave if they need to. I didn't realize until after reading this that the jobs in a labour union would not allow for a person to leave if their child had disappeared, and with the fact that it has to be put into legislation, well, I'm grateful. I'm grateful that it's in there. Obviously, if it has to be listed, it's something that somebody has suffered within the labour legislation. So thank you for making those much-needed changes in order to make sure that people who work for labour unions are actually protected and are able to leave if a child disappears or dies or for miscarriages or any of those other things.

Like I said, in the private sector, for the folks that work for us, anyway, these are things that you would take care of within the business that you work in. I've never actually had a contract that I've had to have one of the people that work for me sign where I had to lay out the number of days for a particular issue such as domestic violence or bereavement leave or any of those kinds of things. Those are usually negotiated upon. I mean, especially when somebody is bereaved or if your child went missing, I can't even imagine having to go negotiate with your adviser to see if you could actually leave to go and take care of your family.

Anyway, I'm very grateful that the legislation is being changed. So thank you to the government for putting in these changes, where people within the industry have been obviously hurt by not having this in the legislation. I think that's why it's so important to make sure and why we've said on a couple of occasions to actually split the legislation. The name of the legislation refers, I think, to this piece, and I think there's a lot of work that could be done on this piece to make sure that these numbers are correct. Potentially, the government has consulted on these particular things through hearing from people who work for labour unions that they're not being taken care of by the people they work for in order to have to lay these kinds of things out. So thank you for doing that, and thank you for making sure that the folks that work for labour unions have these things.

Aside from that, we're talking about two different chunks of this bill. We're talking about compassionate care – that's this piece – so things like maternity leave, parental leave, compassionate care, death or disappearance of a child, critical illness, long-term illness, domestic violence, personal and family responsibility leave, bereavement leave, citizenship ceremonies, overtime pay, a lot of these things that I've seen that are listed in the legislation. So thank you for making sure that the workers are protected from the people that they work for.

One of the things that I wanted to bring up, too, is that we've got the family-friendly piece – that's that – but then we also have the piece on the Labour Relations Code changes. When we're talking about that, that's where I'm particularly confused. Why we're asking to keep this legislation going a little bit longer is because we really believe that 36 days is not long enough. I have a document

that I'm going to table a little bit later. It talks about the need to actually take a look more deeply at the legislation, especially because we're looking at federal changes for this legislation as well as provincial changes for the legislation. [interjection]

One of the members across the way said: 30 years. You might be correct that 30 years have passed since the legislation has changed, but please don't mince words in that there has not been 30 years of consultation. If you have that, please present it. If you have 30 years of consultation, please present that. That would be wonderful. There are some things that you can say, you know, that in 30 years haven't been changed – that's fair; nobody is saying that the legislation doesn't need to be looked at – but to assume that for 30 years you've consulted and that you have the data that you need in order to make sure that these changes are actually appropriate, that's a completely different argument.

Like I said, if we're talking about the compassionate care pieces, I couldn't agree more. If it has to be detailed and written out like that to protect the workers that work for unions, yes, I agree one hundred per cent. Aside from that, if we're looking at the other parts of this legislation, I think we have some discussion that we need to have, and why not take the summer? It's really only a couple of months. I mean, we're back here at the end of October. Some of our legislation that we've had the privilege of putting forward here in this session will actually be put to the next session. It actually gives all of us a little bit more time to consult. I'm certainly grateful for time to consult on my bill, and I'm very, very grateful that that stakeholder outreach will continue to go on.

Like many members have said and upon speaking to some of the people in my constituency, I'm pretty sure that union workers would appreciate an opportunity to chime in on this a little bit more. There's no harm. What is the difference of four months at this point in time, Mr. Speaker? To take the time, which is why we want to refer it to committee – right? – it would be absolutely within the auspices of serving Albertans. That's what we're put here to do, to serve Albertans. So why not take a few more months, four to six months, and put it into committee? We can have a chance to talk about it, and then when that legislation comes forward, you are absolutely certain that all of the folks that are going to be impacted by this have had a chance to speak up, to speak their minds.

Again, I think that the title is wrong, but that's just my opinion.

Mr. Nixon: It's a good opinion.

Mrs. Aheer: Thank you.

I think that any time you're bringing in a large piece of legislation like this, any time you do something like that, you have to ask a couple of questions. One of those things is: what does this bill mean to the people that it's impacting, right? The second piece is: has there been enough time or ability? There are a lot of reasons why consultation may or may not happen, right? So have you had the time and the ability to consult to minimize any of the unintended consequences? It's just another piece that needs to be looked at.

11:00

Then, the third piece is: have you actually drawn on the wisdom and the strengths of Albertans in crafting the legislation? As you look at other pieces of legislation, as the hon. members on this side have mentioned very eloquently, there has been lack of consultation on many, many pieces. I could go through and list them again, but, believe me, people know.

Again, it just goes to show that here's a government that really has a good chunk of experts on this particular piece of legislation, a lot of experts in the room, that could use that expertise and that knowledge and that ability to really reach out and take the time to

make sure that this legislation is really solid. There are some really good things in here as well. I'm only looking at the critical parts of it because that's my job. My job is to hopefully give you some interpretation of my eyes on it. Whether you choose to agree or disagree, you're completely entitled to your opinion, and that's fair, but I also believe that my eyes on it, coming from my perspective, will do nothing but help to enhance and strengthen this legislation. So it would be very, very appropriate for the government just to listen and actually to listen to Albertans and take that opportunity.

I don't even know how many pieces of legislation we've put to committee. I'd have to go through everything that I've actually spoken on to see.

Mr. Bilous: Almost everything. Almost every piece.

Mrs. Aheer: I think the minister is correct. I think that it could be close to almost every large piece of legislation.

Part of the reason that happens is because we're concerned about the consultation, but we're also concerned that a lot of the legislation packs in a ton of things into one piece of legislation that doesn't actually represent everything at one time, because if you vote against one thing, you end up negating an entire bill. There are good pieces of this bill. What does that say about the government that they would put pieces of this in a piece of legislation that you look at and you're going, "Yup, that's good; that's good," but there's no way without consultation that we can take a look at this bill in good faith and say we can vote for this?

So why not split it? Why not split it? I just don't understand why we can't put compassionate care through and protect the people that are working for labour unions and then take a look at the other pieces of this legislation a little bit more closely.

I mean, our job in being here is to try and work through the confusion. A lot of the confusion that I'm laying out for the government right now is confusion that is coming from people that I've spoken to. I don't think that that's a bad thing. I think it is fair to bring forward that and ask for clarity. So I'd like to have some clarity as to why we can't split this piece of legislation. Why? Why wouldn't you do that? It's a really, really easy request. Why?

Ms Fitzpatrick: You're going to chop everything up.

Mrs. Aheer: Well, why not chop everything up? There are a lot of good reasons, actually, to do that. It's actually a really fair, fair question.

The Speaker: Folks, I'd like to remind you to stay on the amendment.

Mrs. Aheer: Then, in terms of putting it to committee, that's exactly why I'm asking about that, Mr. Speaker, because there are so many pieces of this. With 36 days of consultation under their belt and the inability to actually talk to people succinctly about how this is – and the reason I bring this up is that I'd like to move forward on a couple of things here.

One of those is the secret ballot. Yesterday we brought that up in a couple of other speeches. I think that the government thinks that by what they're doing right now, Albertans don't understand the difference between having a secret ballot and not having a secret ballot.

I know this is going to bring some giggles, but I just have to do it. I'm going to table a policy brief from the Manning centre. [interjections] The reason why I'm tabling this brief . . .

The Speaker: Order, please.

Hon. member, if you're tabling it, table it this afternoon.

Mrs. Aheer: Oh, sorry. I apologize. I'm sorry, Mr. Speaker. I will table this later.

The Speaker: Thank you. Stay on the amendment, the issue.

Mrs. Aheer: Thank you, sir. This is towards the amendment.

The reason why I'm tabling this particular brief isn't so much about the opinions, which I think are interesting, which I'd like to bring up, but more than that is that this actually has data in it, like, actual data. That's why I want to make sure that the government gets this document, so that we can have a chance to maybe talk about it . . . [interjections]

The Speaker: Order, please. Keep it down. Keep it down.

Mrs. Aheer: . . . and maybe have an opportunity to look at it from a different perspective, Mr. Speaker.

One of the things that I wanted to bring up is that Manitoba right now is trying to change it so that there is a mandatory secret ballot. Up until now, Mr. Speaker, in a lot of jurisdictions 40 per cent would trigger that vote.

I have to say after reading this that quite often the secret ballot, just for the information of people like myself who are just actually in the process of learning about this legislation – what I found was interesting. The secret ballot actually doesn't take away from a union being able to unionize. In fact, the secret ballot is one of those pieces of democracy that strengthens a union's ability to bring forward and unionize. However, right now with the legislation that's being presented – and we're assuming that people have their own free will to sign these cards, so let's assume that that's true – at 65 per cent there's no more secret ballot. There's no more. The members were telling me: no; the secret ballot is in there. It's actually not. It's been negated completely by that piece of legislation.

Now, my question is: why did the secret ballot come to be in the first place? Why was it even necessary? Why did we need it? Well, the secret ballot was invoked for the very reason that under the auspices of democracy in a group of people, people could make that decision because you have the right to change your mind, I would assume. You sign a card saying: yes, this union looks good. Then you have a chance to look at the information, and you're like: maybe not.

The Speaker: Hon. members, are there any questions under 29(2)(a)? The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

Ms Fitzpatrick: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am rising to speak against this amendment.

The Speaker: Hon. member, you can't rise to speak to the amendment. You can make a comment or a question to the member, but it's, really, the statements now.

Ms Fitzpatrick: Yeah. What I'd like to know is that basically – there are a number of things. You've talked about how much you support different kinds of leaves, so I'm going to first talk about family-friendly leaves, in particular about the leave with respect to domestic violence.

I've shared my experience about domestic violence previously. When I finally charged my ex with domestic violence, I called the police 16 times in 14 days. One of those calls was when he showed up at my place of employment and was waving a gun. I worked at a brace shop, a private business. There were patients in the waiting room waiting to be measured or fitted for different kinds of orthopaedic or prosthetic devices. There were a number of men who worked in my

place of employment with me, and they came out to support and protect me. The police were called, and he left before the police arrived. My boss called me into the office and told me that he would have to let me go because our clients and other staff were put at risk.

I left and went home and felt absolutely devastated. I was at my wits' end. What was I going to do? Later that evening . . .

The Speaker: I need to remind you again that it's to the amendment that we're speaking.

Ms Fitzpatrick: Yeah. I'm going to get to it.

Later he called me. He apologized. He asked me to come back to work. He said that I was a great employee, and he was not going to put me at further risk; they would figure out what to do. I told him that I also worried about those things because I cared about the people I worked with. He apologized again and said that I could come back to work when I was ready, and they would figure out how to deal with the work situation to keep us all safe.

Situations similar to this happen over and over again. It happened when I was in corrections. I heard it from parolees, colleagues. I heard telephone conversations from open cubicles. As a union representative I heard those things. Within the public we don't hear about those incidents unless there is a death and the police become involved. The reality is that we all need to recognize those signs, and we need to take action. This bill takes action.

Certainly, one of the first things that we can do is having that time so that the person can go see a lawyer and not lose their job because things have to be done . . . [interjections]

The Speaker: Hon. members, don't dialogue.

Ms Fitzpatrick: . . . and she or he is out of the workplace. [interjections]

11:10

The Speaker: Hon. members, don't dialogue directly. Comment through the chair.

Please get to the amendment motion. That's what we're talking about.

Thank you.

Ms Fitzpatrick: Okay. Again, in terms of different kinds of leave we heard from Amanda Jensen last week. We know that those things are important. Keeping your job when you're going through this kind of stressful situation is really important.

Now, you've spoken a number of times about these leave items and said that you're committed to them. If you're really committed to them, then support the legislation rather than putting forward this amendment.

I'm going to give you another example. I worked with the federal government for 33 years. There were problems in the workplace just as I had experience with in private industry, problems which restricted the productivity in the workplace, things like harassment, unsafe workplace conditions. As an example, during my years as a parole officer I attended both the home and workplace of parolees I supervised. A day of community supervision meant that I was out of the office, meeting with parolees in the community from 7 a.m. until 6 p.m. I had no cellphone. I asked and didn't get one, but my supervisor had one. He was sitting at a desk with a cellphone. It wasn't until Louise Pargeter was killed – she was a parole officer in Yellowknife – that finally things changed, but it took my union fighting for this.

The importance of having a union in the workplace is what makes this, so I don't understand why you are opposed to this.

Speaker's Ruling Question-and-comment Period

The Speaker: Hon. members [interjections] Hon. members, let me remind the House again.

Hon. Member for Lethbridge-East and hon. Member for Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre, I want to remind each of you to continue to focus your questions on the amendment that's at hand and direct your questions or comments to the member who made the initial presentation. It's important to the debate that takes place. There may well be points that were made that can be made in your actual 15 minutes, but under 29(2)(a) please be more conscious of directing the comments to the member who made the initial comments.

Debate Continued

The Speaker: Are there any other members who wish to speak? The hon. Member for Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre.

Mr. Nixon: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Of course, I rise to speak to the referral amendment today. I do appreciate the hon. member bringing forward the referral amendment. I'd like to open up where the last speaker left off, and that was in regard to the compassionate portion of this legislation. Now, every member of the opposition that has risen to speak on this bill has made it clear that they support that, all of those portions of the bill. In fact, what we have proposed to this House – and this is why it's important for the referral amendment – is to separate those from the larger issues in the labour code, get those compassionate issues dealt with immediately. As the hon. Member for Chestermere-Rocky View did a great job of articulating, if there is that much detail that needs to go in, we are with it to support being able to get union workers what they need.

We have said that we would provide unanimous consent immediately, Mr. Speaker, to pass all stages of that legislation right now, right here, today. So if the hon. members across the way in the government truly believe that – and I believe that they do; I know that I do as well – they would support that, and they would immediately take steps to move to pass all of those compassionate issues through this Assembly today and get them to Royal Assent as fast as possible. But that's not what's happening, and that's why you're seeing this referral amendment come forward. Instead, what we're seeing is these compassionate issues being mixed up with extremely complicated labour issues, and the two issues are happening at once.

Again, Mr. Speaker, I want to be clear. I know that the hon. members across the way don't like to be called out, but they're being called out right now. We will pass that all today. They should do their job and pass that all through this House today, but they won't. Instead, they will continue to make this a significant bill, well over 100-some pages, 124 pages to be exact, and they will try to combine it all into one, without consulting – and this is important for the referral amendment because that's what this is about; it's about consultation – the people of Alberta adequately. They have no clue. They've been asked questions in question period for months leading up to this. They've been asked questions during this debate. They've had lots of time for them to communicate. It is clear, Mr. Speaker, that this government has no clue what the true impacts of this legislation will be on my constituents and my colleagues' constituents and on the good people of Alberta.

I want to reiterate, though, to be very, very clear, that the compassionate portion of this bill is something that all parties support, as far I'm aware, inside this Legislature right now and that we will pass today. We will provide unanimous consent. Let's move it through the House. Let's get it done. It's important.

The question we have to ask ourselves now, Mr. Speaker, is on why this government doesn't want to do that. Why this government would want to delay the passage of such an important issue goes to the core of the question that we are facing here today. [interjections]

The Speaker: Hon. members.

Mr. Nixon: Instead, they want to keep it attached to other issues that clearly need more consultation. Mr. Speaker, we have talked about this many times in this Legislature, you and I, and that is the concern. I know I've been to Medicine Hat, your constituency. Great place. And I know I hear from the constituents of Medicine Hat the concerns that they have with this government's lack of consultation on many – many – bills. Instead, we have to continue to rise in this Assembly to try to get this government to do their jobs and consult with the people of Alberta; to use the committee process, that you would see in other provinces and with our federal government, to make sure that we get this legislation right; to be able to come forward to this House with clear assessments of what the consequences, both pro and con, will be for the legislation that they're bringing forward in this Assembly.

Well, Mr. Speaker, they don't do that. It's extremely disappointing that they don't do that. It's had tremendous impacts on the people of Alberta because of the behaviour of this government when they don't consult with the people of Alberta. It's sad. My family, my friends, my neighbours, my constituents that sent me here to represent them in this Chamber have been severely – severely – hurt because of this government's actions when it comes to consultation, and it is no different with this bill that is before us right now, which is why we see a referral amendment.

Now, Mr. Speaker, I have to ask myself why there's so much concern from the NDP about talking to the people of Alberta. They are Alberta's government. It is their job to speak to the people of Alberta. But, in fact, I'll go further than that. It is their job to talk to the people of Alberta and hear from them. Instead, what we continue to see with this government is that they think they know better than the people of Alberta. They think they know better than the people of Alberta, and they keep telling the people of Alberta what they should think. Well, I reject that. I can tell you that the people of Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre don't want to hear from the government what they should think; they want to tell the government what the government should think.

Ms Fitzpatrick: Well, you're not listening to them.

Mr. Nixon: Now, the hon. member is telling me that I am not listening to my constituents in Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre. I assure you that I am listening to my constituents in Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre, and the number one issue that you hear from them if you go anywhere within my constituency – I'd invite you any time, Mr. Speaker. I have before. Come and visit the Sundre A&W in the middle of the day, a great place to come and talk to many constituents around the Sundre community to hear how they're feeling. The number one thing that they'll bring up is this government's lack of consultation. At Tim Hortons in Rocky Mountain House the number one thing that they'll bring up is the lack of consultation. In Rimbey, at the old motel, another great place to meet constituents, they'll say that the number one thing is lack of consultation.

The problem this government has is that they live in a bubble, and that's why they keep turning down motions like this. They live with their ideological friends and their people that have the NDP world view, and that's all they hear from. They don't leave this place and talk to the people of Alberta.

Ms Jansen: They listen to me.

Mr. Nixon: The MLA for Calgary-North West is heckling to me that they listen to her. No. If she was listening to her constituents, she wouldn't have crossed the floor, but I digress. [interjection]

The Speaker: Hon. member.

Mr. Nixon: Mr. Speaker, the core of this amendment is the fact that this government won't do its job and consult with the people of Alberta. I'm hearing it from the minister of agriculture. One of the worst examples of lack of consultation in this Legislature is Bill 6. He oversaw that, didn't consult with the farmers and ranchers of this great province, and brought forward legislation that still, to this day, is not operating properly: a great example of why you need to take something like this to committee. Take time to make sure that you get it right for the people of Alberta. It is a great responsibility to be a member of the Legislature. It is a great responsibility, even greater, to be a member of the government.

Drever: Shame on you.

11:20

Mr. Nixon: The Member for Calgary-Bow is yelling shame on me. No. Shame on her for not listening to her constituents, Mr. Speaker. Shame on her. [interjections]

The Speaker: Hon. members. Again, direct your comments to the chair and not directly to the party. Please continue.

Mr. Nixon: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The core, though, of the discussion today is how much this could or could not impact the people of Alberta and whether or not the government has truly shown to this Assembly that they have figured out all the consequences and that they have consulted the people of Alberta. That's the point of the referral amendment. If the government has not adequately done its job in consulting with Albertans, then the amendment is correct and this should go to committee to make sure the government can do its job, to make sure they hear from the people of Alberta.

I don't think anybody in this Assembly can argue that it is our responsibility to listen to our constituents and to the people of Alberta. Nobody in this Assembly should argue that. I don't think they would. I don't think the government members would. I think they would agree that that is their responsibility.

When we look at this amendment, Mr. Speaker, that's the question that we need to be asking ourselves as members before we vote on it: did the government adequately do its job and consult with Albertans? If not, we should be voting for this amendment, sending it to committee, determining the consequences, making sure that Albertans get a chance to participate in the legislative process. That, at its core, is what this is about. The concern I continue to have – and I rise in this House many times to talk about it – is the complete disdain of this governing party for democracy and for communication with the people of Alberta.

We have seen them over and over send legislation to committee. This is very relevant to this amendment. We need to ask: what bills does the government send to committee? When you're asking why they would or would not send . . .

Ms Jansen: That your constituents didn't vote for?

The Speaker: Member for Calgary-North West.

Mr. Nixon: I hear the Member for Calgary-North West still heckling me. I don't understand what the issue is because the core

of the issue here is this: whether or not this amendment should be passed and this bill should be sent to committee. That's the question we are asking. When we ask that question, we should ask ourselves . . .

Drever: Talk to Amanda Jensen. Tell them to wait a little longer because of your ideology.

The Speaker: Calgary-Bow.

Mr. Nixon: . . . what bills does this government send to committee, and why would they or why would they not send this to this committee? That would be a valid comparison.

We've seen recently that they sent a private member's bill on time change to committee to receive more consultation: consultation is good; we better get that right. That makes sense. You don't have to look too far back to see that the hon. member for Drumheller-Strathmore brought forward a bill to make sure that this government and all future governing parties could not use taxpayer dollars . . .

Drever: You mean Drumheller-Stettler? You don't even know your own area?

Mr. Nixon: I hear the Member for Calgary-Bow heckling again. She likes to use taxpayer dollars for expenses. We know. She worked in a committee this summer to try to get money for her political expenses.

The hon. Member for Drumheller-Stettler had a private member's bill that would stop this government from using taxpayer dollars to advertise during political campaigns. Do you know where that bill went, Mr. Speaker? It went to committee, and this House has never seen it again. A pretty simple bill. It was a couple of pages long. It went to committee because the government didn't want to pass it. We have to ask ourselves: why? Well, I would assume it's because they want to continue to use the good people of Alberta's hard-earned dollars to pay for their political campaigns, which we, then, again saw them this summer spending their main focus on. Disappointing. The Member for Calgary-North West agreed with me on that at the time. I do commend her for that.

Second, we have now a bill with 124 pages that only was put before us last week, that has only been consulted on with limited people in this province, limited by the NDP, at come-and-be-told meetings. They have not talked to Albertans at large, they have not talked to a large scope of Albertans to make sure that they understand, they have not adequately talked to employers, they do not know the consequences that are associated with the bill, but that bill doesn't go to committee to make sure we get it right when the hon. Member for Drumheller-Stettler's bill goes to committee and never comes back to this Assembly? It was just a little, tiny bill to make sure the government couldn't use taxpayer dollars to pay for political expenses during campaigns.

Now, the core of this is consultation. If you went to Sundre with me on Friday and toured around and talked to everybody across Sundre and you explained that, saying that a bill of this size won't go to committee but that a private member's bill that stops their money from being used for their political expenses goes to committee and never comes back, Mr. Speaker, what do you think the average person in Sundre will think when you explain that to them? They would say: "I don't think so. This is wrong. This is the NDP's continued behaviour to not consult with the people of Alberta. This is the NDP's continued behaviour to move forward their ideological agenda no matter what the people of this province think."

In the end, Mr. Speaker, it's not the members across the way that will be negatively impacted by it; it's possibly the people of Alberta,

the employers of Alberta. Without taking the time to properly consult – that’s why we continue to stand in this House and have to rise to speak to an important amendment like this to try to get the good people of Alberta an opportunity to be able to speak about legislation that will impact them, to be able to tell the government what they think, to be able to give the government advice.

Mr. Speaker, where the NDP has gone wrong on this and so much is that they think it’s their job to tell Albertans what they should think. The people of Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre outright reject that idea, and I think the people of Alberta outright reject that idea. We work for Albertans, and if this government wants to bring this big a legislation forward with no consultation with the people that I represent or my colleagues on this side of the House represent and, quite frankly, Mr. Speaker, with no consultation with the people you represent or they represent, then it is our job to rise in this House and to try to get this bill to a committee process so we can make sure we get it right for the people of Alberta.

It’s unfortunate that the government continues over and over not to think about the consequences to Albertans. They certainly don’t think about the consequences to them, but that’s really in some ways irrelevant. As I said, Mr. Speaker, I don’t care about this government’s reputation. It’s tarnished because of their behaviour. But because they continue it, they’re hurting the people that I care about. They’re hurting Albertans. They’re hurting business owners and employees by rushing things through. Instead, if we did the process appropriately through committee, we could come out with a bill – as has been said, there are many things in this we agree with, in fact, I would suggest, probably the majority of it. The government is essentially putting poison pills in certain areas of this to try to push forward their ideological, union-based agenda.

Mr. Bilous: Radical.

Mr. Nixon: It is a radical agenda. I mean, the Deputy Government House Leader just said “radical,” and I think that’s right. I think that is a good assessment of the agenda that he is putting forward. It’s radical.

How do you get around that, Mr. Speaker? The core of this amendment, that has been brought forward by the hon. member, is to get this to a body that could take the time to study it, take the time to communicate with the people that are impacted by it, and be able to come back to this Assembly and say: “Here are the consequences, both good and bad, of this legislation. Here are things that we heard from Albertans that could make this legislation better. Here are things we heard from the opposition that could make this legislation better.”

Now, the big argument right now – and it’s in some ways reasonable at face value – is that there are a lot of compassionate issues within this legislation. That is why this side of the House offered, again, to pass it in one day and get those compassionate issues immediately dealt with for the people of Alberta.

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

Mr. Sucha: Under 29(2)(a), Mr. Speaker. Thank you. I have a question here, but I want to make sure that I provide context for those who are watching the debate or watching this at home. There’s a long-acting tradition that we have whenever we vote on first reading of a bill in which we pass it so we can actually read the bill and we can debate the bill. You don’t have to look any further for legislation that we and, actually, the PC caucus at the time didn’t like, which was recall legislation, because it had been debated in the House many times. We recognized it was likely going to be unconstitutional, that there were going to be challenges with it costing taxpayers lots of money, but we still passed it at first reading so we could debate it in this House, and ultimately it did not pass.

Now, I want to throw this ironic sort of context onto it – and I want to first apologize to my constituents. I was unable to vote for first reading of Bill 1 because I was actually at home sick. I had pink eye, and I had to go to the doctor. You know what’s crazy? I didn’t lose my job for it, and some people could.

With that being said, I’ve heard from members of the opposition that they would like to amend the bill. I’ve heard from members of the opposition that they would like to see this bill split up. I have to ask the question: why did they vote against it in first reading before they read it? Further to it, when the Member for Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre is talking to the average person in Sundre on Friday, would they be okay with him voting a bill down without reading it or voting down compassionate care amendments in that bill without reading it?

I would love to hear from the Member for Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre, who is the opposition whip and can speak about why his caucus voted against this bill before they even had an opportunity to read it, about why it was reasonable to do so. Ultimately, this is an important bill. We’ve heard very important facts around compassionate care. I’ve heard from many members in this House who have heard from individuals who have lost their jobs over compassionate care. We’ve heard many of the members of the opposition talking about the importance of compassionate care and talking about how we need to protect the rights of workers who are either sick or their kids are sick.

11:30

Mr. Hanson: Apparently, that’s a union problem.

Mr. Sucha: Well, I hear some heckling from the hon. member that apparently compassionate care is a union problem. No. It’s an everyone problem, Mr. Speaker.

You know, it’s remarkable when I hear some of these comments that are coming on this. Many of them talk about how they’re business leaders, and they’re right now heckling me over compassionate care. I ran a business as well, and at the end of the day, if someone was sick, we made sure that we took care of that individual. So I’m a bit disappointed that I’m hearing those comments coming from that side of the bench here.

I further want to ask this: what are the member’s true motives in relation to compassionate care? What is the member hearing from the constituents in Sundre in relation to this? As he’s talked about consulting with individuals in his constituency, I can ultimately tell you that within the constituency of Calgary-Shaw we have spent many times . . . [interjections] I hear a lot of heckling about this, and I’m still talking about compassionate care. I’m a bit disappointed that I’m hearing this heckling while I’m trying to speak about compassionate care.

Even within the constituency of Calgary-Shaw we’ve made a huge point to reach out to third-party groups, to make sure that we reach out to many individuals throughout the riding. We’ve sent letters to every registered small business in the constituency to get their feedback, to have open houses, to discuss with them . . . [interjections] I’m still hearing a bit of heckling, and I’m still trying to tie it in with compassionate care.

I think it’s important, if we want to try to break up this bill, if we want to try to look at it in two different formats, that I ultimately hear what the constituents from that area are feeling about compassionate care, and if they feel all right . . . [interjections] I’m still hearing heckling over compassionate care, and I’m a bit disappointed over this. At the end of the day, I’m sure the constituents in Sundre think that if someone is sick, if someone has had a baby or happened to have had a miscarriage, they don’t want to lose their job. They would think that this is very important.

I'm extraordinarily disappointed that I'm hearing this while I'm trying to dig deep into the fact that they voted against this bill in first reading despite the fact that they're now talking about how they support elements around compassionate care. So I would be happy to hear from the member in relation to if he thinks that his constituents think this is appropriate.

Mr. Nixon: Mr. Speaker, we're short on time because of how long the hon. member took, which is fine, so let me be very clear. We say that we'll bring it through in one day. They did not bring it till the last week of session because they don't care. [interjections]

The Speaker: Hon. members.

The hon. Member for Battle River-Wainwright.

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Thank you for the opportunity to speak on this referral amendment to Bill 17, the Fair and Family-friendly Workplaces Act. You know, we're talking about taking this and bringing this to committee, to refer this to a committee, and that is super important because this is a huge bill. It's not one piece of a bill. We go back to the part we were talking about, the compassionate care portion. We would have passed that a month ago had this government brought this forward with that portion. This would have been done, and we could have dealt with the labour portion as a separate issue. But that's not what happened.

This is an omnibus bill, that puts everything in there together. That creates problems. It creates problems for us. We want to say, "Yeah, this is a bill I would support," but, you know, they didn't separate those two, and that's the unfortunate part.

You know, when you look at this bill and you look at how they've gone about the consultation part of this bill, Mr. Speaker, it's like when you were in school. We used to have show and tell. [interjections] I can hear from people that, yes, they remember show and tell. What we're seeing from this government is the opposite. We're seeing tell and show. They tell us, "This is the bill," and then they're going to show us through regulation what's going to happen afterwards. That's completely backwards. When we were in school, we had to show and we had to give reasons for what we were talking about, and then we'd tell them about it. Then people would be able to have feedback. Instead, this is just being told, and it is being rammed down the throats of the people.

So we need to separate these portions of the bill. If we take this and put it into a committee that can fully vet it, understand it, we'll be able to make some progress, I believe. Unfortunately, what we've got here is something that I won't be able to support as a whole because you've taken labour and then you've taken parts of compassionate care. That's the unfortunate part. I cannot support the bill because of all the different aspects that are, frankly, wrong with the bill.

You know, you're allowing salting, and I would like to know more about why you're allowing salting. For the people that aren't aware, who are listening or who may be seeing this in *Hansard* or who might be watching this, salting is when a union employee or a union sympathizer gets a job at a non-union workplace solely in order to organize the workers or the workplace and disrupt the company's operations. You know, with this, the person only has to be employed for one day. Hey, if they've only been employed one day – they've just gotten into the job – and in the first hour they're saying, "Let's unionize this thing," how do they even know what that workplace is like? As it stands, there are 30 days, but right now this could be changed over to one day, and that's not fair for the people that are working in that job and who actually like that job. This person wants to jump in there because they're a union supporter, a union sympathizer. They want to make it a union, and all of a sudden they can actually disrupt or change what's actually happening in that business.

The business of salting is, you know, something that is part of this bill. We need to go back, and we need to be able to take this to a committee and talk about that. Frankly, if I take that to my constituents – and I've been talking to my constituents. They've had portions of this. They've said that they cannot support anything that goes with this bill. I've talked to the people in Wainwright. I've talked to the people in Killam and Bruce and Holden and throughout my riding of Battle River-Wainwright, and they're looking at this. I was in Provost the other day, and one of the people in the businesses there was looking at that, and they're, frankly, upset with this bill.

You know, the government, I think, did a reasonably good job of trying to talk about the compassionate care part of the bill. They went forward and they made sure that people understood that this bill is all about the compassionate care part. They put in the Fair and Family-friendly Workplaces Act, but that's only a portion of this bill. When you're looking at, again, as I talked about, salting, does that sound like that's a fair and family-friendly workplace part of it? No. It's an omnibus-type bill, and this amendment will stop that. The name is misleading. I just would have trouble supporting the bill as it is, Bill 17. That's why we need to make this referral to a committee.

Major changes need to be made, and there's just, frankly, not enough time. When we're looking at just days, mere days, to be able to do this bill and they've taken – what? – two years in Ontario to look at the same kind of legislation, that's not fair to Albertans. That's not fair to my constituents. It's not fair to the people that own businesses. It's just, frankly, wrong.

Major changes need to be made, and there's not been consultation. I understand from my colleague over here that he was doing consultation, going out into his riding, but the people in my riding weren't given that same opportunity. They weren't able to see – perhaps you were highlighting some of the parts of the bill that we weren't able to see. You were given that part of the consultation or the compassionate care part. It's not fair that that information that you were giving was not spread out to all Albertans.

11:40

The member said that he gave it to his constituents, but it didn't go to all the constituents across all of Alberta so that all of Alberta could actually have a chance to see what was going to be contained in this bill, and never once did I hear anything about salting. I don't know if the member shared that with them. These are things where substantive amendments would need to be made to this bill to make it family friendly because the vast majority is not family friendly.

The constituents I've talked to agree. They were not advised. They never heard about most of these things. Now they're learning it for the first time, and they cannot support it. If the government were truly sincere in getting this bill right and took the necessary amount of time, like Ontario – they've taken two years. We're even asking just to take this until the fall session. We can talk about it over the summer. But we're not getting this whole summer to be able to talk about this. That, I think, would be a minimum, necessary amount of time to be able to make this bill workable, something that we can talk about to our constituents, to Albertans, and take this out and meet our constituents.

The government needs to put aside pursuing their ideological beliefs. Then they would be able to perhaps – perhaps – create something that we here in this House and all Albertans could stand behind. That's when you're taking the proper amount of consultation. We saw on Bill 6 that they rammed that legislation through and enacted it as of January 1 of that year, and frankly my constituents said that they wanted to be able to be heard on that bill. They wanted to be consulted. Time after time we're seeing bills coming through where the consultation is just not happening. Instead, they rush it through without thought or consideration.

Job creators – and we’re talking about job creators, Mr. Speaker – have taken hit after hit due to this NDP government’s legislative decisions. As the opposition we must stand for the people of Alberta and for the economy. I’m certainly standing up for the people in my constituency. The people in my constituency are clearly asking me to ask you these kinds of questions and ask you to pause and to consider what you’re doing and allow them to have input through sending us e-mails, writing us letters, making phone calls. There’s, frankly, not enough time for me to be able to get all that information. I first have to give them the information that’s contained in this bill and then wait for them to respond. That does not just happen overnight.

After all, they really would have to be serious about getting it right. They would have to have taken the summer. Let’s talk about it. They would have to have taken the summer to work things out and get it right. Instead, they have decided to rush through this legislation so that they could tick off another legislative, political item on their wish list. This is wrong, and I implore this government to consider taking more time. If we take it to the committee and do the referral – and I would support this referral. I would truly support the referral. The referral would allow this to go to committee.

Mr. Speaker, with that, thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Justice and Solicitor General under 29(2)(a)?

Ms Ganley: Under 29(2)(a), Mr. Speaker. Thank you very much. I think that I just feel compelled at this point to rise and make a couple of comments on this speech. This legislation and the things that are being said about it in this House are near and dear to my heart. As many members of this House will know, labour and employment was, in fact, my area of practice before I came to this job, so this is, of course, something that I’m quite familiar with. I’m certainly familiar with hearing from Albertans about it, taking calls day in and day out from people who had experienced a termination because of a maternity leave, who had experienced a termination because, you know, they had a child who was ill or because that child passed away and they needed to take counselling as a result of that. I heard from these individuals all the time, Mr. Speaker, so I’ve certainly had a lot of experience with this. I think, you know, it’s . . .

The Speaker: Hon. minister, you will speak to the amendment.

Ms Ganley: Absolutely.

I think that it is absolutely about time, Mr. Speaker. The hon. member across the way rises to say that we should refer this bill to committee, but it has been years – years and years – in the making. Those are people’s lives. Actual individuals who are experiencing these unfair labour practices are people; they’re Albertans who deserve to have their rights protected.

Just to comment on a few things that the member said, I’d like to begin by talking about the definition of what an omnibus bill is. An omnibus bill is something that combines disparate things that have nothing to do with each other. Fair workplace legislation, protecting the rights of workers, whether they are in a unionized environment or a non-unionized environment, regardless of who they work for in this province, Mr. Speaker, is one issue. It’s quite clearly tied together. In fact, it was not only my area but many people’s area of practice. So to say that this is an omnibus bill because it combines related pieces of legislation that impact the same thing – i.e., the rights of workers and employers vis-à-vis one another – is just a little absurd. I think that that’s the first thing that I’d like to comment on.

The second thing I’d like to comment on, Mr. Speaker, is the title of the bill. The title of the bill is Fair and Family-friendly Workplace Act. The member seemed to be objecting to the fact that

some of the fairness pieces affect people who have families and some affect people who don’t necessarily have children, so not everybody is in the same circumstances. Well, that’s the case with almost every bill that we pass. They affect different people across different circumstances at the same time. In this case we’re protecting workers’ rights, all workers’ rights: workers with children, workers with sick parents, all different workers, workers who don’t have those things. So I think it’s perfectly reasonable that these things would come together.

The primary objection, Mr. Speaker, that the hon. member seems to have to this bill is its length. I mean, we’ve certainly had a reasonable amount of time to debate this bill. I think it’s been before the House for about a week now, and, you know, I think asking to read 120 pages in a week isn’t actually that extraordinary a request. It’s totally reasonable that people would be able to do that and to debate it, and I absolutely think that that is what the public expects of us.

You know, I think that this has been an extremely long time coming. The members opposite say that we need more time, that we’re moving too quickly, but workers have been waiting for these rights for years, Mr. Speaker, and workers are being affected right now, each day, even as we speak. When I was in my practice and even now in my MLA office I have people coming to me all the time who have had these sorts of issues with their employer, who have experienced an unfair workplace practice. Those workers are across the spectrum. Some of them may be in unionized workplaces. Some of them may be in non-unionized workplaces. I think that, you know, to say that all workers ought to have rights, that all workers ought to have access to fair workplaces is a totally reasonable thing to do.

11:50

The Speaker: Hon. members, is there anyone wishing to speak to amendment REF1?

Seeing and hearing none, on the amendment to second reading of Bill 17, Fair and Family-friendly Workplaces Act, as proposed for the hon. Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills?

[The voice vote indicated that the motion on amendment REF1 lost]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 11:50 a.m.]

[Fifteen minutes having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

[The Speaker in the chair]

For the motion:

| | | |
|-------|--------|--------|
| Aheer | Hanson | Taylor |
| Ellis | Starke | |

Against the motion:

| | | |
|-------------|--------------|-----------|
| Babcock | Goehring | Miranda |
| Bilous | Hinkley | Nielsen |
| Carlier | Horne | Payne |
| Carson | Jansen | Phillips |
| Ceci | Kazim | Piquette |
| Connolly | Luff | Renaud |
| Coolahan | Malkinson | Rosendahl |
| Dach | McCuaig-Boyd | Sabir |
| Drever | McKitrick | Schreiner |
| Eggen | McLean | Sucha |
| Fitzpatrick | McPherson | Turner |
| Ganley | Miller | Westhead |

| | | |
|---------|---------|--------------|
| Totals: | For – 5 | Against – 36 |
|---------|---------|--------------|

[Motion on amendment REF1 lost]

[The Assembly adjourned at 12:08 p.m.]

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