



Province of Alberta

The 29th Legislature
Third Session

Alberta Hansard

Tuesday morning, November 14, 2017

Day 53

The Honourable Robert E. Wanner, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta
The 29th Legislature

Third Session

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Sweet, Heather, Edmonton-Manning (NDP), Deputy Chair of Committees

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Carlier, Hon. Oneil, Whitecourt-St. Anne (NDP)
Carson, Jonathon, Edmonton-Meadowlark (NDP)
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New Democratic: 54 United Conservative: 26 Alberta Party: 2 Alberta Liberal: 1 Progressive Conservative: 1 Independent: 2 Vacant: 1

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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

10 a.m.

Tuesday, November 14, 2017

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

The Deputy Speaker: Good morning.

As we gather today in this Chamber, let us reflect on the great privilege that we all share in serving the people of Alberta, and let our deliberations be guided by the knowledge that we are here to serve all Albertans to make their lives better today than they were in the past.

Please be seated.

Orders of the Day

Public Bills and Orders Other than Government Bills and Orders Third Reading

Bill 206

Child, Youth and Family Enhancement (Adoption Advertising) Amendment Act, 2017

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

Mrs. Aheer: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I'd like to move third reading of Bill 206.

I want to stress again what a privilege it's been to be able to bring this bill forward and to be able to work with the government and the various caucuses going through this bill. It's absolutely time to update the law in Alberta and to keep with the times, and we sure need to know that we're doing this the right way. The feedback that we've received from stakeholders, the ability to be able to go back and forth with the government over language and the way that this bill should sit: I'm very, very grateful for all of the input that has come forward. I'm very happy and hope that the entire Legislature will be able to support this bill going forward.

As we all know, if this bill is passed, it will be able to bring all of our parents that are hoping to adopt a child into a space where they're able to show who they are to parents that are looking to put their child into the system for adoption. There are so many things that are positive about this, but the most important positive step forward is that it gives prospective parents a chance to be able to advertise who they are. But it also gives the parents that are putting their children into the system, that are potentially looking at going into the system that ability to be able to look at prospective parents, take the time in their own home, with the ability to have whatever supports they need around them to be able to make this decision.

One thing I think I need to make clear is that when expectant parents are bringing their children into the system, this is a gift to the parents that are thinking about adopting, a massive gift, and we have to make sure that the expecting parents understand and that they are acknowledged for this beautiful gift that they're bringing forward. For anybody who has been in the system or has been adopted or who has adopted, we all know how important that is.

I actually can't even speak from experience, but I have quite a few friends that have had the privilege of being able to adopt. The look on the face of a parent who is receiving a child that another person has found it in their heart to bring forward and put into the system so that another family can complete their family or start to build their family and extend their family: there's nothing quite like

seeing that moment. I can honestly say that I've been there for a couple of those moments, not at the very first unification between this family and this expansion of the family but, certainly, shortly thereafter.

In my own family my cousin in India adopted a little boy, and I remember the letters and the videos and everything that came forward when that day happened for this couple. It's very, very difficult to put into words what that looked like and, certainly, how it felt for those of us who are his family and for other friends who have been through that as well. This is nothing short of a miracle for these families and is a tremendous gift.

For a long time now there have been some inconsistencies in the legislation. This is one of the things that will be fixed by being able to move forward with this legislation, that we actually give potential adoptive parents the ability to be able to put themselves forward and have a little bit more access for the parents that are the expectant parents to be able to look at parents going forward. It's important to restate that it's as important as possible, with, of course, regulations and all the other important things that go along with this, that we make it as easy as possible for people who need support and information to be able to access it and to be able to use the methodologies that are comfortable for them. This will be a huge shift in making sure that parents in Alberta have more access and are able to expand their families as soon as possible. We want to make sure that for the adoptions that are possible, those restrictions change, that we're actually able to make sure and open that up.

There's also been the talk – and this is one of the other things that we need to consider, too, that there have been signs and numbers that show us that adoptive parents in Alberta are looking outside of the province, and we really want to make sure that we can look within our province as well. It's hard to know whether there are fewer or more expectant parents that are putting their children into the system for adoption or it's simply that parents within this system have had to reach outside of the province to look elsewhere. It's hard to know for sure. Those metrics are not necessarily clear. But I think it's very important to make sure that we make as many options as possible for our parents here in this province and that they can post their profiles online and be connected as easily as possible.

One of the other interesting things – and we've brought this up a couple of times. Other provinces – Ontario, Yukon, and British Columbia – have already moved forward on this, and we've seen a tremendous, tremendous change in this and the ability of families to adopt there. Again, I think that we can look at that cross-jurisdictional information to make some very good changes within our own system. I believe that the language that we've all used together and that we've come forward with together really provides the ability for families to be able to do that.

We want to make sure that we are able to make this as comfortable and that that learning and the research online are as easy as possible. Because of this, adoption agencies and governments both provide in-depth information on the adoption process on websites, and many agencies also provide a text line. The interesting thing about being able to use that technology is that, should an expectant parent want to actually contact a family that is a prospective adoptive parent, if they want to, they can leave a text line, or they can leave information, which is a really wonderful option. It just opens up the door to even more families being able to be in that space.

As we know, adoption can be extremely stressful not only on the adoptive parents but, obviously, on the expectant parents. We want to make sure that those supports are there and that they're adequate and that we're taking care of everybody who's in the system. Because we know this, if it's easier for the expectant parents to look

online, why would we not want to make that available to them, with the obvious restrictions to make sure that there is no access to the children or to the expectant parents, that the expectant parents are the ones that are leading the charge on this but that the adoptive parents make themselves as available as possible to anybody who is looking to put their child into the system?

I would like to thank the member opposite, too, who brought the motion forward in the last session. That motion was so important to starting this conversation about how to move forward and certainly inspired a lot of the language within this bill. Thank you for that.

We wanted to make sure, too, that as we went forward with this bill, we had changed the language in the preamble to make sure that we were very, very clear on the intention. The actual intention of this bill is really simple. It is simply to allow prospective adoptive parents to be approved to advertise their profiles. The reason for not having this come forward in the past was simply that we just hadn't caught up. There are no reasons for not having it, that we weren't able or that we don't have the technology; it's just never been brought forward. It is time. It is time to make those changes.

Again, I want to be extremely clear on how grateful I am for having been able to work with the government to be able to work on the language in this, being able to work with the hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills, who is truly the inspiration for me behind this bill, and for being able to work with all members of our caucus and the government caucus and the other caucuses to make sure that this legislation is able to be brought forward. Thank you so much for your contributions.

10:10

The Deputy Speaker: Any other members wishing to speak to the bill? The hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills.

Mr. Cooper: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise today and speak just briefly to Bill 206. As many in this House will know, I have had the opportunity to rise on a number of occasions to speak to this particular piece of legislation, that has been carefully and diligently proposed and shepherded through the Assembly by my fantastic colleague the Member for Chestermere-Rocky View.

I'll just keep my remarks brief this morning as I know that there's lots of other great work to be done today. As well, I anticipate, from a lot of the comments that have been made in the Assembly from members both on this side and that, that we will see, in fact, this particular piece of legislation become law. It's my hope, as I mentioned in committee, that it, in due course, will also be proclaimed. You know, Madam Speaker, from time to time inside the Chamber, issues get quite politicized, and politics sometimes breaks out, and that sometimes means that the best idea doesn't necessarily win. But in Bill 206 what we've seen is that we have the ability to work together for a common cause and common goal. One of the reasons why I'm excited about the rest of the morning today is that we will in fact, I believe, see this piece of legislation passed.

Not only is it important that it's passed because it actually does good things for prospective adoptive families and it does good things for prospective biological parents in terms of adding to the process, but it's a good thing because, for a number of weeks now, we've had the opportunity to speak about such an important issue, an issue that is really at the heart for many in this Chamber, and an issue that is at the heart of making Alberta a better and stronger place. Madam Speaker, you'll know that in this House I have said on numerous occasions that strong families build strong communities, and strong communities build a strong province. Really, that's what adoption is about. It's about trying, wherever possible, to strengthen families. Sometimes that means working to

strengthen biological families. It means working to strengthen prospective adoptive families and, wherever possible, doing what's best for everyone in the process.

You'll also know, Madam Speaker, that I've said numerous times in this House that I wished we lived in a world where there was no need for adoption. Unfortunately, we don't live in that world, so we need to do everything that we can to be supportive of the process. We need to be supportive of all of the individuals involved in the adoption process, and I mean doing more to support biologicals, more to support adoptive families, more to support the children involved in this process and, wherever possible, lifting all of those folks up. All too often someone in the process is left behind.

I think that one of the great things about Bill 206 is that we've had this important opportunity to speak about this issue, to discuss some of the challenges, some of the stigmas, some of the successes, and some of the opportunities around adoption, all while doing a very small piece of the legislative portion of this to make this process just a little bit better, to make the process more equal across our country, to not put Albertan families at a disadvantage but to recognize that so much about our culture has changed over the last 15 or 30 years and, in many respects, the adoption process was left behind in that.

Now, as I've highlighted, obviously, there are some sensitive issues around this particular piece of legislation. I think it's important that we do allow the government to put the balances, the safeguards in place as they move forward. But, as I highlighted in the Committee of the Whole stage, I really hope that this isn't a delay tactic to not actually proclaim what is a good piece of legislation. So I encourage them to have the courage of their convictions, to have the courage that the House has placed on this piece of legislation in the form of Bill 206, and to ensure that the bill is proclaimed in an expedited way.

Certainly, on behalf of my family and my girls and all of us I want to say thank you to the Member for Chestermere-Rocky View and to the members of the government side of the House for their positive contribution to the adoptive process, the positive contribution around this particular piece of legislation today. I hope that we will continue as an Assembly to discuss together ways that we can help families grow, flourish, and thrive in our province and highlight the very important work that we all can do together.

It is exciting for me to say for one last time that I look forward to supporting Bill 206.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Whitemud.

Dr. Turner: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It is indeed a pleasure – and I'm going to echo the words of the previous speaker – to stand and comment in third reading on Bill 206, the Child, Youth and Family Enhancement (Adoption Advertising) Amendment Act, 2017. I have spoken to this in several phases of this bill, but I really think that there are some key messages here that we need to get across. I want to assure all Albertans that our government is committed to providing a loving, nurturing home to children who need one because every child deserves to grow up in a healthy, loving environment that supports their development and prepares them for a bright future.

Adoption is an important part of supporting strong families and building resilient communities. We want to make sure that the adoption process gives children and parents the best possible outcomes, and we need to ensure that changes to adoption are made in consultation with the adoption agencies as well as adoptive families and that all changes to adoption, including those that may

be recommended by the Ministerial Panel on Child Intervention, are made holistically.

The Member for Chestermere-Rocky View is to be congratulated for bringing this forward, and I echo her positive comments about the MLA for Calgary-East, who had a motion previously on this topic. It's something that all of us in this House agree with. I'm sure that everyone in this House has been touched in some way in their past experience by the adoption process.

I personally do not have direct experience with the adoption process, but I can tell you that one of the first constituents to visit my office after the election two and a half years ago was a family that was in a very comparable situation to the one that we're describing today. That family had been trying to arrange an adoption for about 10 years. They actually brought to my attention the fact that they couldn't advertise in the province of Alberta as they could advertise in other provinces their desire to adopt a baby and to tell adoptive parents what their family environment could provide. So I'm very happy for that family and the multitude of other families that are in this situation that we are moving ahead.

10:20

As was said by the previous speaker, there's a lot of regulatory activity that needs to be undertaken here to make sure that we preserve confidentiality. In my opinion, one of the most important things is that we make sure that these services are available to all Albertans, not just to those that have access to the Internet or have the technical skills to utilize social media but to all Albertans. I think this is probably the most important issue here. It isn't just the prospective adopting parents, but it's also the parents that are on the other side of that ledger that we need to reassure that all of these folks are getting all of the support that we possibly can give them.

I am very conscious of the social determinants of health, and you can actually translate the social determinants of health into this situation very well. The adoptive parents that are considering the adopting process need a lot of support. They need the support before this process, and in my opinion they need the support afterwards. At the present time we need to do more work in that regard.

I'm also concerned about some special situations. I've got constituents who have adopted children with Down syndrome. That's been a very positive experience for those families, but there's a lot of misinformation out there about what the struggle might be in adopting a child with Down syndrome. I think we need to maybe provide some better information in social media, perhaps, or in other ways as to what the rewards are for making those kinds of adoptions. That's just one example. There are many other examples of children with special needs that we need to make sure are accessing the loving care of adopting families as readily as possible.

You know, the social determinants of health basically relate to poverty. If a person is in a situation where they don't have the financial resources to support a child, I think it's sometimes too easy to say: well, we should make them think about being in the adoptive process. Let's make sure that they make that decision without the coercion of poverty. I think that's very important in all of this.

Basically, what we're talking about here are families. We're talking about enhancing families. In my introduction I talked about how having a resilient family leads to resilient communities. Having an adoption process that gives support to all components of that is very important, and I think that this private member's bill is going to lead to that in part. That's why I'm very pleased to provide my support and my urging to all my colleagues to support this bill in third reading.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Any other members wishing to speak to the bill? The hon. Member for Calgary-East.

Ms Luff: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I'll be really brief because I've spoken at length about this both in my motion and in second reading of Bill 206. I just wanted to take the time to thank the member for her work in bringing this forward and for the collaborative nature that we've been through in this process. I want to thank the Ministry of Children's Services for addressing concerns within our caucus and caucus members who have come to me with concerns they have with this. I think we've sort of landed in a place that most of us can agree on.

I know that this will bring a huge amount of hope to a great number of people, and I think that's really the primary thing that we are trying to do with this. This is an issue that was brought to me by my constituents very early on after I was elected, just the struggles that they've experienced trying to adopt children: that it can be very expensive, that there are different things that can be barriers, whether that's age of prospective adoptive parents or financial status. This is just something that seems so obvious in this day and age that we live in. It's something that's already in place in B.C. and Ontario.

I'm just grateful that we've come to this spot and that this is where we are, and I know that so many families out there will be thankful for this opportunity. So I just hope everyone supports this bill moving forward.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Airdrie.

Mrs. Pitt: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise today to speak to Bill 206. I do remember when the Member for Calgary-East brought forward a motion earlier in this Legislature and the conversations that we were fortunate to have around this particular topic and that we see brought forward here in a piece of legislation that will make this collaborative effort actual law. This is a great change brought forward by my hon. colleague from Chestermere-Rocky View.

I think that I certainly have heard from constituents that have experienced difficulties when adopting a child about the direct impact that this change in legislation would mean for them in their access, not only for them but for others who want to share their love with children that need a forever home. I'm so honoured to be a part of this discussion in this Legislature and the passing of this fantastic private member's bill.

I can see support from all sides in this House, and I know that there are many, many families that certainly appreciate this because whatever we can do to remove barriers and encourage it, make it easier to put people together in a forever home is exactly what we should be doing in this Legislature and especially here today. I'm very, very proud of my colleague for bringing this forward and doing a lot of the background work with all members in this House to pass through this legislation.

I certainly speak in support of this bill, and I urge all members that haven't already decided to to also vote in favour. Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Any other members wishing to speak to the bill?

Seeing none, the hon. Member for Chestermere-Rocky View to close debate.

Mrs. Aheer: Thank you. Well, I wanted to say again, one more time, how grateful I am that the bill we have before us, if it is passed – and I'm hoping that everybody in the Legislature will support this bill – will ultimately bring families together, will ultimately bring the gift of family to families that have struggled in being able to put

families together for whatever reasons, whatever backgrounds, however we all come together with this.

The honest thing that happens as a result of this legislation is that many people become connected, and they're connected through this precious little person that comes into the world through parents that are willing to put their child into adoption and through the prospective adoptive parents that are able to grow their families. Just the thought of being able to make that easier, to be able to streamline that and to bring families together, is something that I think every single person in this Legislature can be very, very proud of. As I've said earlier, the inspiration for this bill comes from so many spaces and, I'm so proud to say, right across this Legislature.

Again, I'd like to say thank you from the bottom of my heart on behalf of the families that will benefit from this legislation. All of us are extremely grateful and look forward to seeing this legislation passed.

Thank you.

[Motion carried; Bill 206 read a third time]

**10:30 Public Bills and Orders Other than
Government Bills and Orders
Second Reading**

**Bill 207
Regulatory Burden Reduction Act**

[Debate adjourned November 6: Mrs. Aheer speaking]

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

Mrs. Aheer: Sorry. Pardon me. I didn't realize I was on the speakers list.

The Deputy Speaker: Just for clarification, you have nine minutes left of your speaking time.

Mrs. Aheer: Nine minutes. Okay. Oh, my goodness gracious. Thank you so much. Madam Speaker, I rise in support of Bill 207, the Regulatory Burden Reduction Act.

The constituency of Chestermere-Rocky View is home to so many nonprofits. You know, nonprofits are actually what make lives better for Albertans. We have all sorts of youth sports leagues, social service providers. There are quite a few, actually, throughout the area. Some of those are Synergy, seniors' organizations such as the Whitecappers, Lions Club, Women in Need Society.

These not-for-profit societies do absolutely amazing work, and I don't need to explain that to this Legislature. All of us, having been in these positions for as long as we have, know how much the not-for-profits do for our areas. Sometimes it's as simple as helping out with getting baskets to families that are in need all the way to helping build arenas, funding for hockey teams coming in, making sure that the food bank is stuffed full over the holidays to make sure that we can take care of families in need. Of course, behind all of these organizations, Madam Speaker, are these incredible volunteers.

The constituency of Chestermere-Rocky View, that I represent, like so many constituencies across Alberta would have far less access to services and programs that are built by and for local communities and so much of our public funds would have to go towards these services that the not-for-profits actually provide, which is the point that I'm getting to. These not-for-profits not only supplement what's already there, but they actually add to it. There is usually quite a motivation behind a not-for-profit, their reason for

advocacy, so they're able to raise the funds that are needed which provide services that Albertans rely on.

The purpose of the organizations and the groups they support, Madam Speaker, is wide, and they vary. One thing all of these not-for-profits have in common is the requirement to spend donated funds on volunteer hours, and this is where it gets a little bit confusing and frustrating. They're spending it on volunteer hours to discover and understand complete mountains – mountains – of government paperwork. I don't know how many people in this Legislature have worked for not-for-profits. I know what it feels like to be under a pile, a mountain, of that paperwork, and so much of the money that is raised by these not-for-profits is going to dealing with these mountains of paperwork.

For instance, the CIP project grants consist of an 18-page application guide, eight pages of application forms of which two pages require around 10 long-answer responses each, 12 pages of more mandatory attachments, three pages of facts, and a four-page accountability report with two pages of instructions. Now, as you go through that, Madam Speaker, obviously, there are reasons for all of these things to be there, and this is in no way to disrespect the process by any stretch. But it took myself and my constituency staff at least two minutes per page just to read and understand each of those 47 pages of paperwork the first time.

You know, we're actually paid to do that job, right? So it's absolutely my privilege to be able to help with those forms and to go through the process, Madam Speaker, but that's an hour and a half of time to even begin to understand the paperwork, right? That's not even processing, that's not going through it, and that's not preparing the paperwork, and we're experienced at dealing with bureaucracy and paperwork from the bureaucracies.

The point that I'm trying to get to is that when constituents come into our office looking for help with their first CIP application and they have invested dozens, maybe hundreds, of volunteer hours into working with CIP programs, the officers are trying to understand what the program is actually looking for so that they can actually help to write the grant proposal so that it has a chance of being approved, which, of course, is why we have those grants available. We want these communities, these not-for-profits, these associations to have access to this very important money that actually helps families, makes life better for Albertans throughout every single one of our constituencies here.

Similarly, a larger application package exists for four other CIP streams, two of the CFEP streams, and one for ECAP. Again, I don't know how many people in this Legislature have sat down and gone through those mountains of paperwork, but they're massive. And then there's paperwork to maintain the status of the societies and the not-for-profit corporations, including an annual report to Service Alberta and audited financial statements that take weeks and months to prepare, sometimes costing these not-for-profits up to \$10,000 in hard-earned donations.

There are mounds of paperwork to file with the AGLC, including regular applications. And if we're even thinking – there are other groups, too. There are First Nations groups. There are other not-for-profit groups. A lot of these groups haven't even got access to somebody to help them fill out this paperwork. So there's a discrepancy amongst even the people that are applying for these applications as to whether they'll get their applications across the finish line because they may not have somebody in their area that is actually able to fill out that paperwork for them. It actually can be quite discriminatory.

We want to make sure that these applications and reapplications to be able to use charitable funds – the requirements on the applications should be the same programming the organization has done for years, and I don't think that that's too much to ask. This is

part of the red tape that we're talking about. If an organization has already filled out its paperwork, gone through the expertise, the work, the money, everything else that they've done to fund raise in order to get this grant, why is the programming for that organization not staying the same?

More concerning, though, is that the red tape makes it more difficult – more difficult – for nonprofits to change their programs to meet new and emerging needs in communities. I don't think I need to really clarify. All of us live in communities that are changing at the drop of a hat. I mean, the technology changes faster than we can blink, the families, the growth. I can just speak for Chestermere-Rocky View. Our growth is massive, absolutely massive, and to try and keep up with that and the different groups of families and the needs that are coming in and who needs what, I mean, that changes at the blink of an eye. So developing new programs or collaboration between organizations such as seniors' organizations, developing grant work for youth organizations is very difficult, very different mounds of paperwork.

A large part of the roadblocks, actually, to preparing the application package is that the AGLC uses the Charitable Gaming Policies Handbook, 151 pages – 151 pages – thick with pseudoregulations that are literally impossible to understand or negotiate. If you're lucky enough to have an MLA to help you go through it with you – it's absolutely unbelievable and mind-boggling. I hope all of you get a chance to do that.

That handbook is, by the way, updated a few times a year. It's not the same book that was there last year. It's not even the same handbook that was there a few months ago. It's updated on a regular basis, but nonprofit organizations don't always receive notice when the AGLC changes the red tape in ways that affect the nonprofits. Again, we're attacking the very people that help our areas, our constituencies, the people that we represent, to do great work and to actually make life better for the citizens in all of our constituencies.

Just to give a quick recap, because that was a mouthful, the average CIP application requires 80 volunteer or contractor hours to complete each. So depending on how much your contractor is charging or what your volunteer is available for, it's a good chunk of money and time. And that has to be completed for every single funding cycle. That's two weeks of time that is not used – not used – to provide services and programs to Albertans. The average CIP application requires 40 volunteer, contractor, or bookkeeper hours to complete each grant.

10:40

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills.

Mr. Cooper: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It's a pleasure today to rise and speak to Bill 207. You know, all across the country provinces are moving to find ways that their regulatory burden can be reduced and government can be streamlined, but unfortunately here in Alberta we have a government that wants to do the exact opposite of that. Left, right, and centre we see additional regulations and added burden being placed upon all sorts of different sectors. So my hon. colleague the Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner has made a pretty simple suggestion in Bill 207 that when the government has that unquenchable thirst to regulate, that we all know they have, they then take a pause, be a little bit introspective, and find other areas where they could reduce regulatory burden.

Now, Madam Speaker, let me tell you that at the start of this process it's really easy because there is a lot of unnecessary regulation that continues to remain on the books – and my hon. colleague from Chestermere-Rocky View made some illustrations

of those – that really just needs to go away. They don't solve any problems. They solved a problem that used to exist, or it's possible that they were implemented and actually created problems. The point remains the same. What my colleague from Cardston-Taber-Warner suggests is that when one new regulation is implemented, one old or no longer needed regulation is removed. It's a one-for-one process – and we've seen in other provinces, including the province of British Columbia, where they've reduced 36 per cent of regulations in just three years – and this is reported annually, and it provides certainty that there is positive work in red tape reduction taking place.

I actually don't understand when I've heard members opposite say, "Well, give an example of one" or "There's no problem." The government in the province of Alberta is absolutely massive, with significant – significant – regulation. For members opposite to say, "Oh; there's no problem; there are no regulations that need be removed," is also like saying that every single dollar that the government spends is a dollar well spent. Well, that's outrageous. The government wastes lots of money, and there's also lots and lots of regulatory burden that could be reduced so that we can make a path for the economy, so that we can create certainty in business, so that we can minimize regulation on small and medium-sized business. As we all know, those are the drivers of our economy. This is a small step that essentially costs very little but really has the opportunity to make a significant impact on our province.

I've heard members opposite speak last week about how they don't think that there's a problem or that there's no real need for this particular piece of legislation. I know that there are a lot of people who disagree with that position, not just members of the opposition caucus but also business groups, members of the nonprofit sector. So I think what we ought to do is before the government goes ahead and votes this bill down without giving it proper time consideration and thought and hearing from a lot of experts – I know that Bill 203 had that same sort of opportunity, to hear from experts and get testimony from industry. I think that it worked out quite well. That's often what happens at committee, Madam Speaker, that the best idea has the best opportunity of winning. Not only that, but we can make a much better decision as a collective by hearing from experts. We can get testimony from bureaucrats who will be able to provide examples of this. We can hear from – I know municipalities.

In my previous life I was a councillor in the community of Carstairs, as you'll know, and I know that regularly we heard frustration from administration on the significant burden that the provincial government imposed upon municipalities. Now, listen, there need to be checks and balances – I'm not saying that there doesn't – but many of the regulations that existed actually didn't provide any value for the municipality or, in fact, for the Department of Municipal Affairs. Often the municipality was filling out reports and paperwork that were never actually reviewed by the government, so it would be great to be able to invite some of those municipalities to come and speak to the importance of reducing regulatory burden.

I'd like to provide the government members that opportunity by proposing an amendment. I have an original for you and the table as well as for all of the members in the Chamber, who, I'm sure, are waiting with bated breath. I'll just wait until you have a copy of the original.

The Deputy Speaker: Go ahead, hon. member.

Mr. Cooper: Well, thank you. Just double-checking: will we refer to this amendment as A1?

The Deputy Speaker: No. It's a referral motion, so it would be REF1.

Mr. Cooper: A notice of amendment to Bill 207, Regulatory Burden Reduction Act. I move that the motion for second reading of Bill 207, Regulatory Burden Reduction Act, be amended by deleting the words after "that" and substituting the following:

Bill 207, Regulatory Burden Reduction Act, be not now read a second time but that the subject matter of the bill be referred to the Standing Committee on Alberta's Economic Future in accordance with Standing Order 74.2.

Madam Speaker, before the Chamber now we have an incredible opportunity to refer this bill to committee. I know that I had a chance to speak with my colleague from Cardston-Taber-Warner, and I look forward to his comments with respect to both the bill as well as the amendment. I know that he is in favour of this amendment. Now, I'm sure that he would have appreciated a more expedited process, but I think that he even sees the value in hearing from experts on an important issue. What we're doing today is giving the government and the government members the opportunity to really be thoughtful about this process, to consider the consequences of not doing it, and also to get very valuable feedback from those that would like to provide feedback on this issue.

All across the country and in many states they have a plan in place to reduce the regulatory burden. The federal Conservative government saved Canadian businesses over \$32 million in administrative burden as well as 750,000 hours in time spent dealing with red tape each year. Regulatory compliance costs are disproportionately borne by small business and small and medium-sized firms, and those firms constitute the largest segment of the Canadian economy.

10:50

These are the types of discussions that committee would allow to happen. It would really provide an opportunity for all of us to be able to ensure that we're doing the right thing for the right reasons at the right time. I would strongly, strongly encourage all members of the Assembly to support this motion so that Bill 207 can get the important study that it deserves.

The Deputy Speaker: Any other members wishing to speak to the referral motion? The hon. Member for Calgary-Shaw.

Mr. Sucha: Thank you, Madam Speaker. First, I want to thank the member for referring this to the Standing Committee on Alberta's Economic Future. I think it really shows some of the productiveness that the committee has had over time. If I can just kind of allude to some of the good work that this committee has done and why it would be important for a bill of this magnitude to actually come to this committee, it would be very prudent. Obviously, I sit on and serve on this committee with the Member for Barrhead-Morinville-Westlock, who is my deputy chair, and I've actually really enjoyed my time with him on this committee because it's been very collaborative in the last little while.

We recently tabled the report, as all members would recall, on the review of daylight savings. To be frank, one of the things I was most taken aback by during that review process was that someone thought the committee was entirely made up of New Democrat members because of how nonpartisan the committee operated. I think it spoke volumes on the ability that we could actually work collaboratively together on this issue, and it was really great to see.

Now, prior to that, we did the review of the agrifood and agribusiness act. I know that the Member for Athabasca-Sturgeon-Redwater is nodding his head because he was very enthralled with

this one. We unanimously voted in favour of 13 recommendations, which the Minister of Agriculture and Forestry is starting to review, to really try to diversify our agrifood and agribusiness sector. During my work with PNWER and travelling abroad with them, I've had the opportunity to really talk about some of the great work that we've been doing within Alberta from that committee's process. Then, prior to that, we've had some other legislative reviews as well, a review of PIPA, which looked at some of our privacy legislation.

This one really intrigues me because, you know, I don't see red tape as a very partisan issue. Red tape impacts everyone. I always refer back to a challenge that my mother had, actually, when my grandmother was admitted to hospital a few years back. It was her trying to get her unadmitted from the hospital and having to get her walker certified. It was the exact same walker that she had while she was in hospital. My mom went out and bought it to make sure it was the exact same one. The doctor had given it to her in the hospital, but we had to wait for that doctor to come back to approve this walker that had already been approved even though the RNs who are in the hospital had seen this walker, had seen the doctor approve it. Everything was, you know, filed appropriately. That was regulatory burden that prevented her from being unadmitted from hospital for about three to five hours if I recall. I remember my mom speaking to me – and this was in 2014, so this was before I had this position – about the frustration that she had, and I recall that the words "red tape" came up in relation to that.

I'm also very cautious of the one-to-one rule. A prime example that I say as to why I'm cautious about this is that we're about to enact a lot of regulations soon, and that's going around the legalization of marijuana. To be frank, if anything is going to create more bureaucracy and more cumbersomeness, it would be trying to find thousands and thousands of regulations to eliminate just because we're enacting a bunch of new regulations through the legalization of marijuana. Regulations play a key point in helping with public safety and helping with public trust. You know, I came from an industry specifically that dealt with a lot of regulations. Some would refer to them as barriers; I think that they were great opportunities to make sure that we had good safeguards in place.

In the restaurant industry – I'm not sure if the Member for Calgary-Klein is aware that I was a restaurant manager by trade – I dealt with many different governing bodies that were managed by regulations. The Member for Chestermere-Rocky View talked about the AGLC. Not only did they facilitate casino revenues, but they also regulated and managed the way my business operated because we served liquor. We also were overseen by Alberta Health Services and specifically within the food safety portion of it. Then we were also regulated on the business aspect, but that was more on the city scope. However, there were elements of the MGA that we also had to abide by being a business that was managed by the city of Calgary. Then we also had to be regulated by the fire codes that were coming into place. All of these things that regulated us were all around public safety, you know, barring any of the taxation side of regulations that came from owning a property with property tax. Many of them applied to safety, and when you're dealing with them applying to safety, it was important that the ability to enact regulation on the fly ad hoc was available.

We've had many scares in the food service industry in relation to E coli outbreaks or outbreaks of food-borne illnesses or outbreaks of pathogens, where regulations have had to be enacted really quickly by Alberta Health Services to help prevent a lot of people from getting sick. Specifically, I recall there was one for a McDonald's, and it was a hepatitis outbreak. When that occurred, regulations had to be enacted very quickly to ensure that people could be immunized for hepatitis, so it was streamlining all of the

employees and all of the people who had eaten at that place to prevent them from contracting hepatitis. So one of the fears that I would have in having a one-to-one ratio of removing regulations is the fact that, you know, you do have a risk to public health. We shouldn't be overburdening bureaucrats to eliminate this.

However, on the other hand, I do recognize that there have been many regulations that have been cumbersome. I saw that, actually, specifically dealing with the AGLC, and that was specifically in relation to just some of the drink service regulations. It was something that I actually advocated for, from having first-hand knowledge of the act and having first-hand knowledge of how the AGLC operated, to really try to provide some recommendations to the Ministry of Finance and Treasury Board, that oversaw the AGLC, and allow the board to independently make some decisions from some feedback that I received. I actually had an opportunity to play a part in an announcement to remove the time limits on happy hour. This was an example of some red tape that was created within the AGLC that basically prevented restaurants from being competitive because they put time limits on when you could define that happy hour could end.

The thing that was always frustrating was that it was 9 p.m. when it ended. I worked at a mall restaurant that had a bar, and 9 p.m. was when the mall closed. We wanted all the employees from the mall to come into our restaurant and receive a benefit or a perk from coming in. We weren't going to allow them to overconsume. They weren't drinking at work. We were only open for an additional hour, hour and a half if the business volume warranted it, so we wanted to have a drink special. We wanted to have maybe a \$3 highball for a mall employee or a mall closing happy hour to bring people in because it was actually a time when we started seeing a decline in business volume, in fact, to a point where we actually considered closing our doors a bit earlier because we weren't getting the guest counts and revenues. It was because of this burden that we had from the AGLC – it prevented us, actually, from being able to try to set a deal or a perk for an individual to come into our restaurant to be a patron of our establishment. I was very thrilled when we removed that regulatory barrier about happy hour.

It was very cumbersome, and it was actually a very – in my opinion, it was useless because there is actually an overarching regulation that exists within the AGLC and liquor service in general, which is: you don't allow people to overconsume. That is actually one of the biggest safeguards that exists within the AGLC. When I was being scammed by the media, they said, "Well, aren't you worried about people getting drunk because you're doing later happy hours?" My answer was, "Well, no, because there's the golden rule within liquor service: don't allow people to overconsume." It doesn't matter when you're serving, how much you're selling the liquor for at that time; if you follow the golden rule about liquor service, you're not going to run into any troubles, and people are going to be very, very safe in relation to that.

11:00

One of the things that I have a focus on – and I'm sure all members do – is that none of us like overcumbersome red tape. None of us like, you know, work-creating methods. I know that the Member for Calgary-Hays and I sit on the Ministerial Panel on Child Intervention, just as you do, Madam Speaker, and we've already started seeing the overcumbersome work that many of our social workers have to do when it comes to filing paperwork and the challenge that comes from that. To be frank, as we look to making recommendations and trying to reform that system, we also run into a situation where one to one sometimes isn't even enough, and we actually may have to look at removing more barriers than just one individual one.

I'm always very cautious about being very prescriptive on this because I always view some vantage points where you want to wipe regulation that exists. I also worry that if you create something like this, we're just basically going to put regulations in the queue and wait for us to enact another regulation before we remove one. That's the last thing I ever want to see anyone do, basically, trying to set ourselves up to queue regulations being removed just because we might have future regulations coming into place, which is bound to happen because technology changes, things change. How many regulations have we had to enact because of Uber?

I'm really excited to hear many members speak to this because I want to hear many vantage points before I really decide in what direction I want to vote on this.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner.

Mr. Hunter: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I rise to speak in support of this amendment so that we can take the time needed to address the issue of red tape reduction. I'd like to remind my fellow lawmakers that Bill 207 was designed to be simple. It states that for every regulation created or amended – and this is important – that adds a "burden on a business," one or more regulations need to be eliminated. I hope that they remember the wording of this. It is specific: that adds a "burden on a business." They talk often about the need to be able to bring Albertans back to work, and this is one of the best ways that I can think of for them to be able to do it at no cost to them.

I'd like to start off by quoting the Member for Edmonton-Glenora. She said:

I can't help but beg the question: how is tying up legal counsel in drafting a bill, how is tying up departments in drafting regulations, how is creating new red tape to reduce red tape actually an effective use of resources? Talking about how they want us to bring forward a bill to reduce red tape but that the bill is red tape and therefore would create red tape, to me, just doesn't actually – I can't square that circle.

She then went on to say that this bill is just grandstanding.

I hope to illuminate over the next few minutes for the Deputy Premier how this bill is certainly not grandstanding and how this bill can help everyday Albertans get back to work. Susana Martinez stated: the big corporations have a team of lawyers and accountants to help them; it's the small businesses, the ma-and-pa shops, that get lost in the layers of red tape. Madam Speaker, I think this government needs to remember that point because it's those ma-and-pa businesses that are the lifeblood of a thriving economy.

Germain Belzile wrote a great article on how red tape is affecting our oil and gas sector. It is entitled *Canada's Oil and Gas Sector at Risk?: How Excessive Taxes and Regulations Undermine Our Competitiveness*. In it she states, quote: new regulations in Canada, including things like carbon pricing, coupled with the reduction in the regulatory burden under President Trump in the U.S. have seen investments leaving Canada and flowing to the U.S. instead. Alberta, in particular,

is experiencing a dizzying downturn . . .

The regulatory burden seems to be primarily at fault, since it is estimated that its cost will rise by between 12% and 21% in the near future, and even more after 2023, when the carbon tax will be applied [in the oil and gas] sector.

If I finish my speech right there, members of this Chamber should have heard enough to motivate them to address the red tape issue, but I will continue. Let's get into the meat of this issue, the why of reducing red tape. I think the Minister of Health needs to ask herself: if her government doesn't even know how many regulations they have on the books, then how could she, as she

stated, already be dealing with red tape? If her government hasn't even figured out what Alberta's regulation baseline is, then she has no idea how big the problem is. How does Alberta compare with other provinces? Does the NDP even know?

The Alberta government is the only province in Canada that does not have a red tape reduction strategy. This is the reason why they receive year after year a failing grade of F from the Canadian Federation of Independent Business, who tracks regulatory burden across Canada.

As an example of a province that did it right, I want to tell you about B.C.'s red tape reduction journey. In 2001 the B.C. government undertook a comprehensive red tape reduction strategy. Their goal was to count all of the regulations, which would allow them to know how big the problem was. The count allowed them to create a baseline, which, in turn, allowed them to monitor their progress by simplifying legislation, regulations, policies, and forms. Within three years they were able to decrease red tape by 36 per cent. Seeing the success in terms of GDP and business growth, they continued streamlining government regulations. At the end of the project they were able to decrease red tape by 43 per cent, Madam Speaker.

British Columbia is clearly a model to follow. Every year the B.C. government undertakes a streamlining initiative, one, to reduce the length of processes and the time waiting for decisions; two, to eliminate duplication; three, to improve access and increase online services; four, to reduce the time and cost for public business in government. British Columbia even has a web portal for citizens to share their ideas in regard to red tape reduction. It even allows citizens to track the status of their ideas. This is an incredible way to tap into society's wealth of knowledge. This is the kind of entrepreneurship that Albertans want to see in their government.

Madam Speaker, British Columbia has created a comparative advantage over Alberta, and it's found in their lower regulatory burden. Alberta needs to catch up to regain that comparative advantage, and by coupling it with lower taxes, we can spur on economic growth in Alberta. The NDP government has been adamant that they intend on growing and diversifying the economy. Well, what better way to grow and diversify than to get government out of the way of business and let businesses do what they do best, create jobs?

Former federal NDP MP Glenn Thibeault said that looking at ways to eliminate unnecessary paperwork and save small companies time and money that they should devote to their business is a good idea. I hope this government will take the advice of their colleague and take action on red tape reduction and send this bill to committee. Making entrepreneurs devote time and resources to meeting regulations without a clear benefit to society is not only counterproductive, but it also acts to kill their spirit. Regulatory compliance costs are disproportionately borne by small and medium-sized businesses, and it's important to remember that small and medium-sized firms constitute the largest segment of job creators in the Alberta economy.

Across Canada the Canadian Federation of Independent Business estimates that business owners spend over \$30 billion a year on regulatory burden. Madam Speaker, that is money taken out of the economy. If each job was making, on average, \$50,000 a year, that would be 600,000 private-sector jobs lost due to regulatory burden and red tape. Former Prime Minister Stephen Harper called outdated regulation, which hobbles business, silent job killers. I've often heard business owners say that sometimes they wonder if regulation is more about keeping public employees working than safety. When job creators start to say that, we need to listen.

Five years ago the federal government launched the red tape reduction action plan. At the end of 2014 the government had

completed the administrative burden baseline, which calculated a total of 129,860 federal requirements and regulations and related forms that can impact Canadian business across different sectors and industries. As the opposition we do not have the resources of the government, but we can estimate. Our research team took a sample of regulations and found that in Alberta there were about 492 statutes as of last count. With an average of 230 regulatory pages per act, they estimate that there were approximately a little over 113,000 pages of regulations. Now, that is a lot of potential barriers, Madam Speaker. I'm not saying that every one is a barrier, but I'm saying that they are potential barriers that we need to take a look at.

Over the years other provinces have enacted red tape reduction task forces in order to reduce the number of regulations holding up small businesses. Alberta made a token effort to address red tape in 2011. A task force found that cumulative effects of regulations are detrimental to small businesses. The task force came back with four recommendations.

- Develop a small business strategy that acknowledges and responds to the needs of Alberta's small businesses.
- Strengthen Alberta government processes for making, amending and reviewing regulations.
- Work with other governments and related bodies to streamline business regulations.
- Encourage a service delivery culture in government that is collaborative, user-focused and ensures greater accountability.

Unfortunately, the report never called for reduction or elimination of regulations, and that, in my opinion, was its fatal flaw.

11:10

Reducing red tape doesn't have to cost the government anything, nor does it require the government to hire more public servants. All the work can be done in-house at the present staffing levels, as seen by the federal and B.C. models. The NDP government has said many times that they want to bring Alberta up to the same level as other provinces on a whole host of matters. Well, here's their chance to do it here. With red tape regulations out of the way, not-for-profits and businesses will be able to spend their time growing, not filling out government paperwork.

Jurisdictions across Canada and the United States have recognized the need to take action on this problem. If I had more time, I would tell you more about the excellent work done by Germain Belzile. I would also tell you about Laura Jones's work with Mercatus research and the red tape reduction work going on down in the United States. But due to time constraints I will just call your attention to these articles and hope that you and especially the Deputy Premier will read them.

I hope that now that I have explained how red tape reduction can support Alberta's business growth, especially small ma-and-pa businesses, all members will enthusiastically send this bill to committee and that we study it properly.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Klein.

Mr. Coolahan: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I speak to this referral amendment, and I don't share the intrigue that my colleague for Calgary-Shaw does on sending this to committee. I think that when you send something to committee, there should be a very strong, compelling argument to do so, and I think we haven't heard that, to be honest with you. Of course, there are probably instances where, you know, there is room for improvement in terms of paperwork and reducing burdens on businesses, but I think this is better done being brought forward on a case-by-case basis rather than as a blanket policy that could help some businesses and hurt others.

Now, I know that when we introduce these amendments and bills, we all do so believing that it's in the best interests of Albertans and in this case Alberta's businesses. But sometimes, Madam Speaker, our friends on the other side of the Assembly get blinded by their ideology and deafened by the echo chamber that they reside in. Calls to reduce red tape: it's one of those dog-whistle phrases that the UCP base responds to, very well apparently. This bill and the amendment seem to be no different, light on examples and charged with rhetoric.

As you may or may not know, Madam Speaker, the Canadian Taxpayers Federation was once headed by the UCP leader and the former Wildrose critic, now an independent member. Neither seemed to be very good at practising what they preached at the CTF when they turned to politics. That's for sure. I say this simply because I feel that this is going down the same path. Most of the current regulations were put in place by the member's ideological counterparts. But they're now a part of the same group, so where is the problem now? There's a real sense that the opposition wants to have things both ways. They want accountability, but they don't want the paperwork that helps keep accountability.

Now, this government recognizes the importance of strengthening a business's ability to be competitive and have a business environment that encourages start-ups, which is why we cut the small-business tax by a third and why we have increased access to funding for businesses of all kinds. Taking advice from leaders, our jobs plan has unlocked over \$3 billion of capital for small businesses, Madam Speaker, through the ATB, through Alberta Enterprise Corporation, through AIMCo and Alberta Innovates. We're ensuring that Alberta continues to be the best place to launch and grow a business.

In the first quarter of 2017-2018 ATB Financial authorized almost 3,500 loans to small and medium-sized Alberta businesses worth a total of \$875 million. Also, Alberta businesses with incubator support average a 25 per cent growth rate, much higher than the national average. So why are small businesses starting and loans being granted when there's too much red tape? That wouldn't happen if it were true.

I had the pleasure of meeting recently with the Rainforest incubator in Calgary as well as the honour of speaking at the launch of the Queen's University venture network in Calgary. When meeting with these groups and other entrepreneurs in my riding and across Calgary, you know, I hear of lots of things that are challenges, but the words "red tape" have never come up. What they actually want is more capital, and that's exactly what we're doing, more access to capital. It's something that for some reason has eluded previous governments, that access to capital.

You know, it's working, Madam Speaker. Some of Canada's most respected experts are forecasting Alberta's growth to be the highest in the country right now. The RBC pegged GDP growth at 4.2 per cent this year, far higher than the last few years. There were nearly 49,000 more jobs in Alberta this summer. In October the Alberta government helped bring 750 new full- and part-time jobs to the province as Amazon announced a new fulfillment centre near Calgary. I'm just not seeing the evidence supporting what's being said over there, so I'm not going to support this going to committee.

Beyond the lack of perceived need for this bill is the clarity on how the bill would actually work and how we could possibly remove regulations that are specifically there for the protection of both businesses and consumers. I mean, Bill 19, for example, An Act to Protect Gas and Convenience Store Workers: would that be considered a regulatory burden, red tape? It's just too simplistic, Madam Speaker, and it really lacks specificity, particularly the one-for-one rules, which are just far too simplistic.

Quoting the Canadian Chamber of Commerce report, it says that contrary to popular belief, enforcing a one-for-one rule actually increases bureaucratic inefficiency or lag time because policy-makers must spend time identifying regulations to repeal and replace as well as drafting new policies. Doug Fraser of the *Cape Cod Times* wrote that the obvious argument is that stripping away regulations, be they environmental, financial, or otherwise, exposes the public and the environment to substantial risks; i.e., mitigating public risk through oversight of private activity is the fundamental job of government. These one-for-one rules that are being proposed in this bill and now want to be sent to committee just don't cut it, Madam Speaker.

Again, of course, we, this government, recognize the need to make life better for all Albertans and our businesses, and this government is committed to working with businesses to make it easier for them to create jobs and get Albertans back to work. Alberta businesses have a bigger economic impact than businesses anywhere in the country. Between January and August 2017 over 29,000 new businesses were incorporated in Alberta, a level that is 10 and a half per cent higher than the same period in 2016. We've created tax credits that other provinces have enjoyed for decades. As Albertans we still pay the lowest taxes in Canada, billions less than Saskatchewan. Of course, I will repeat that we cut the small-business tax. With all this investment, Madam Speaker, where is the burden? I'm not seeing it, so I will not support this going to committee.

Also, a couple of other things that we've done to help improve businesses that kind of negate this red tape argument include that the Minister of Economic Development and Trade has done many things to ensure that businesses succeed in Alberta. In fact, the CFIB, the Canadian Federation of Independent Business, presented that hon. minister, Minister Bilous, and other trade ministers involved in the Canada free trade agreement with the golden scissors award, which is presented to those involved in helping eradicate red tape on Canada's small businesses. Congratulations, Minister. I would say that that's probably, again, another argument against moving this to committee.

11:20

Also noted by the CFIB – I'm starting to like these guys – is that the Canadian free trade agreement was "a major step towards resolving often conflicting rules and regulations across provinces."

In closing, Madam Speaker, I won't be supporting the amendment or the bill thereafter. You know, we know that regulations have an important role in protecting the health and safety of Alberta's families and workers. Regulations also help ensure that businesses are competing on a level playing field and ensure that clients and customers are getting a fair deal. One-for-one rules are overly simplistic because the number of individual regulations doesn't correlate with the burden imposed by regulations.

With that said, I do find this referral motion – I would not agree with sending this to committee at this time. Beyond that, I will not be supporting the motion nor the bill.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Grande Prairie-Wapiti.

Mr. Drysdale: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I rise to speak to Bill 207, Regulatory Burden Reduction Act, to support referring it to the Standing Committee on Alberta's Economic Future. This bill speaks to me because it has a strong single focus in that it will reduce red tape for all Albertans.

As we've heard during previous debates on this bill, red tape includes any regulation, policy, procedure, guideline, and/or order put in place by government that creates unnecessary administrative burden. It affects businesses, not-for-profits, and individuals by adding on paperwork and making them run around simply to satisfy some bureaucrat or politician. The problem with red tape is that it costs time and money, and that's why it needs to go to committee for a thorough review. It does not generate wealth or create private-sector employment. It only results in frustration and takes time away from our businesses and leisure activities.

Bill 207 mandates that for each regulation created that adds administrative burden on a business, one or more regulation be eliminated. The concept is simple: if you create one bureaucratic rule, you also eliminate one or more. It is important to note that we're talking about eliminating administrative burdens that do not compromise the health and safety of Albertans. That's the only caveat.

Why is it so important that this bill go to committee? Because in 2014 the CFIB tallied the cost of red tape at more than \$4.6 billion. That's a bureaucratic mire that hampers Alberta's economy and the equivalent of 15,000 lost jobs. The problem with red tape to our economy is that regulatory compliance costs are disproportionately borne by the small businesses, and small and medium-sized firms constitute the largest segment of the Canadian economy. Quite simply, outdated regulations are latent job killers.

With our economy desperately needing jobs for tens of thousands of unemployed Albertans, one of the best ways to encourage job creation is by reducing the regulatory burden on businesses, but it goes beyond just cutting regulations and administrative burdens, which is another reason it needs to go to committee for review. Bill 207 requires a change in government culture to come up with solutions that don't involve more rules. As soon as we come up with a new rule, the government must monitor and enforce that rule. Even the Minister of Labour agrees. Last month she announced changes to the Alberta immigrant nominee program that make it simpler and streamlined. Those are code words for reduced red tape.

Madam Speaker, these are just some of the reasons why it is important to refer Bill 207 to committee. Reducing regulations and thus the red tape on the books creates a business-friendly environment where entrepreneurs can be productive, creating jobs and wealth.

You know, the member opposite asked for an example. I talked to CAPP when I was there about a month ago, and they told me of an oil company out of Lloydminster that has a large oil reserve that crosses the borders of both provinces. It's the same pool on both sides. They're drilling lots on the Saskatchewan side right now and nothing in Alberta. I asked them why that would be. He said that on the Saskatchewan side it takes about six weeks to get permits to drill; on the Alberta side it's 12 to 18 months. So that's a good example of how reducing regulations and red tape would help to bring businesses and activity to Alberta.

You know, small businesses don't need a handout. They just need government to get out of their way sometimes. With Alberta's economy continuing to flounder, we can really consider this a way of removing burdens and letting it fly on its own. In the end, we all benefit.

I hope that for the good of Alberta all members are ready to support this referral motion. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Any other members wishing to speak to the referral motion? The hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek.

Mr. Gotfried: Thank you, Madam Speaker, and thank you to the Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner for bringing this bill forward for referral to committee, where I think it can receive the attention it deserves.

Madam Speaker, it seems like the NDP seems to like red tape, and I'm a little bit concerned about that. What we're hearing from small businesses is that they want government to support them, but they also would like them to get out of the way and let them create jobs and create wealth in our economy. Maybe some of the members that have spoken across the floor here are not talking to businesses as maybe they don't want to hear what they have to say. Maybe they don't want to hear about carbon tax, they don't want to hear about minimum wage, and most certainly, as we're hearing on this bill, they don't want to hear about the burden of unnecessary regulatory rules and compliance.

Madam Speaker, the regulatory burden negatively impacts things like competitiveness, investment, time sensitivity, business viability, affordability, innovation, and, yes, the result of all those things, jobs. The Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner mentioned the deregulation initiatives in British Columbia of the past during the Liberal regime there. They actually had a minister of deregulation, when they took power, whose sole job was to address the overburden of regulations. That member, Kevin Falcon: in fact, my sister-in-law worked for him for about four years as his constituency manager. I intend to speak with him to give us greater insights on the opportunity, and I encourage the members from the other side to read that report about the achievement there. This should not be a partisan issue. This should be about doing what's best for Alberta businesses to generate the wealth we need to support the services that Albertans demand and desire.

Reducing the regulatory burden placed on business by the government is an important step in allowing our job creators to flourish, as I've said before. Regulatory compliance costs disproportionately affect small and medium-sized businesses, who do not have teams and departments and staff to address them. These businesses are the economic drivers of the province, and they must be treated with respect. Again, these are struggling small businesses who are trying to keep their businesses alive and thriving under the burden of a tough economy, a carbon tax, and minimum wages. They don't have time to address the overburden of regulation.

Now, this doesn't mean that there should be a free-for-all and that every single regulation in place is unnecessary and should be removed. Far from that. However, there are instances where a regulation has become outdated, no longer reflects the realities of a particular industry, or simply is not producing the outcome which was expected upon its introduction.

During my time working in the home building industry in Calgary, I saw first-hand the detrimental effect that overzealous regulation can have on a particular industry. Oftentimes the company I worked with and many of our competitors would internally develop innovative and creative new options in terms of building form, lot sizes, building style, or neighbourhood design, indeed to take a risk, to break away from the proverbial cookie-cutter community and do something different: create more options, create more choice, and create greater affordability.

Now, anyone who has ever worked in home building or the development industry or the planning sector knows that receiving all the necessary approvals from various levels of government is a long and painstaking process, taking in some cases multiple years and millions of dollars of upfront investment with no guarantee of a return, the vagaries of an economy turning down in the middle of it certainly being one of them.

11:30

These insightful and unorthodox new approaches did not fit into the standard form that the various approval bodies had seen before. They addressed issues of affordability, density, creative design, the not-so-big house movement that we've seen emerge across North

America, and various other risk-taking initiatives with respect to lot size, building form, as I've mentioned before, doing something different, doing something creative, and doing something that's not currently necessarily on the books.

Instead of recognizing industry for attempting to create something new or different and working with them to ensure that proper regulatory compliance was in place, these new ideas often languished, waiting for approvals for months and months beyond the already drawn-out process in place for standard builds. In fact, there was no reward for innovation or creativity. That drives innovation and creativity out of an industry – in this case, the building and development industry – and can be the same in many other sectors.

Time is money, and in an often low-margin industry time will drive innovation out and make it an unprofitable venture. Then it ceases, and the consumer, particularly the first-time homebuyer in this case, loses out on the opportunity to actually take advantage of that creativity and innovation. At the end of the day, businesses have to make money to stay alive, and in fact they create wealth for our society – they're taxed on that; that's provided; that is where the first-stage wealth is created in our society – which then allows us to hire people to deliver the public services that we have. Without that first-stage wealth, Madam Speaker, we have nothing. Having your project sitting through never-ending approval delays means that you aren't making money, and neither are we as a province. We are not generating wealth.

This ends up forcing risk avoidance upon the industry because the companies are afraid that the reward for being innovative and creative will be months and months of delays resulting in reduced or even eliminated profits and greater risk as it stretches out over greater time and economies change. What the consumer ends up with is a lower number of companies who are willing to step outside the box and to try new things, in fact, in many cases deciding not to build the product which they are seeking to offer to the marketplace. As I said, it results in the same old same old cookie-cutter approach being the only way to do business because it's the only way to ensure timely approval of projects and getting to market without undue costs or costly delays, which can kill business. Madam Speaker, innovation often involves risk and risk dollars.

This results in reduced choice for the consumer and builders who do not want to try anything new because basic compliance becomes the end goal to ensure timely processing and approvals. Why try something new when you can just go to the approvals, fill out the form the way it's supposed to be filled out, and never say: "Can we try something different? Can we add something new here? Is there a write-in area here for us to do something a little bit different?"

Madam Speaker, recent legislation has only added to this burden, I dare say, and shame on all of us for having layered that on top of these striving and thriving businesses, striving businesses who are trying to thrive and trying to survive. Recent changes to the MGA and city charters have allowed the province to completely abandon any responsibility for timely and efficient approvals of building projects. These changes have essentially removed any repercussions for municipalities who decide not to make a decision on an application for a subdivision or development application.

Now, oftentimes this has nothing to do with a municipality. These staff may be overworked or inundated with development and subdivision applications, depending on the location. That regulatory burden is not just a regulatory burden borne by those that have to apply for it; it's actually borne by the civil servants and the bureaucrats that have to administer it. However, it also gives these staff the ability to refuse a decision on a project they don't like for arbitrary reasons, even if that project meets all the planning requirements.

Changes like this are exactly the type of thing that industry does not need and we as a province do not need. The province needs to be demonstrating leadership, Madam Speaker, in reducing the regulatory compliance burden on industry, allowing those businesses to survive and then, hopefully, thrive, and in many cases this responsibility is being shirked. As my colleagues have stated previously, these issues extend far beyond the building and development industry.

I would like to once again thank my colleague from Cardston-Taber-Warner for bringing this bill forward, and I hope that everyone in this Assembly will support these needed changes to ensure that we support the concept and the reality of a functioning and efficient administration and bureaucratic process across all levels of government and leave that partisan ideology behind.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Any other members wishing to speak to the referral amendment? The hon. Member for Highwood.

Mr. W. Anderson: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Today I rise to speak in favour of Bill 207, Regulatory Burden Reduction Act, and the amendment referring it to committee. This private member's bill has been introduced to reduce regulations that have previously been created and may be outdated and that also add administrative burden on small to medium businesses by mandating that for each regulation one or more regulations be eliminated.

Many other provinces already have implemented red tape reduction panels, task forces, and legislation, with good results. Some provinces, like B.C., mandate that a report be delivered every year on red tape reduction to help update information for better streamlining, to simplify process, and to make it easier and quicker for everyday businesses to deal with government.

Each year government should undertake and streamline initiatives, just as the B.C. government has, to reduce lengthy processing and added time for waiting and for decision-making, perhaps look into eliminating the duplication, and not only reduce the cost to the public but reduce the cost to businesses and to government. The question is: how do we modernize regulations and also maintain net zero increase?

Outdated regulations and overregulation has burdened business with so much red tape that costs to the business are sometimes costed in upward of thousands of dollars and many hours of unnecessary paperwork. Our economy has already been stifled in so many different ways through unnecessary taxes on small businesses and continual increases to the minimum wage that we need to always find ways to help small-business owners in this province succeed.

We need to streamline this process and perhaps begin by eliminating one or more of the outdated regulations that are already existing out there. Each and every time a new regulation is created, outdate an old one. Canadian-owned businesses spend over \$30 billion a year on regulatory compliance. For our businesses to succeed, we need to do everything in our power to help them achieve that.

The federal Conservative government saved Canadian businesses over \$32 million in administrative burden and also saved them 750,000 hours in time spent dealing with red tape each year. How did they do that? In 2012 they launched their red tape reduction action plan, which allowed them to complete the administrative burden baselines on businesses, which calculated a total of 129,860 federal requirements and regulations and related forms that could impact Canadian businesses across various sectors and industries all across this country.

The previous government in 2011 enacted a red tape task force. Their report concluded with four recommendations. One was to develop a small-business strategy that acknowledges and responds

to the needs of Alberta small businesses. As we can see, the needs of all of Alberta's small businesses have not been considered. This needs to change if we want Alberta to flourish.

Secondly, they recommended that we need to strengthen the Alberta government's process for making, amending, and reviewing all regulations. I believe that part of this equation would be dealt with if we enacted this bill.

Thirdly, they said that we need to work with other provinces, governments, and related bodies to streamline business regulations. This would also help to decrease the burden.

Fourthly, encourage a service delivery culture in government that is collaborative, user focused, and ensures greater accountability.

Unfortunately, at the time, the report never called for reduction or elimination of outdated or overlapping regulatory burdens. However, the conclusion was that the cumulative effects of regulations are detrimental to small business. If this was considered detrimental to small businesses, then it's no wonder our small-business industry is struggling under the current tax and wage conditions.

I do believe that as legislators we need to and can do better. This bill is a great way to start eliminating regulatory burden. I hope that all of us in this House will be able to agree on that today. You see, Madam Speaker, these regulations and the compliance costs are carried mostly by small business. A large segment of contributors in the Canadian economy is the small businesses and medium-sized firms and businesses here in Alberta. We need to do more to help them succeed. When they succeed, all Albertans will benefit.

11:40

A previous Prime Minister once said that outdated regulations hobble business and are the silent killer of jobs. This is only one piece of the pie of things that need to be fixed so that our businesses in Alberta can grow and flourish again and again and maintain and retain staff, employees, and growth factors. It is vitally important that government do all they can and work for the citizens of this province. Optimizing and minimizing regulations will only help to create an environment where regulations and policies are easy for everyday businesses to understand. It will create simplicity and a straightforward environment, and not only that; it lowers the regulatory burden on the women and men who work hard in this province every day. This needs to be the focus of our provincial government.

Canada has always been recognized as one of the best places in the world to do business. We had a solid fiscal standing, and when other countries were experiencing rising debt and increasing tax burden, Canada had a competitive tax regime and a robust regulatory system. We need to restore this confidence here in Alberta and in Canada. We need to maintain a competitive edge, increase small and medium businesses, and help them increase their productivity. We need to be constantly looking at innovative ways to improve the conditions for businesses so they can thrive here in Alberta. Businesses need predictability, transparency, and accountability, and that starts here with us in this House. We need to make red tape reduction a priority. We can help start and launch this by supporting this Regulatory Burden Reduction Act. It is vitally important for this province.

Of course, we cannot be overly cautious when it comes to health and safety. We recognize that in health and safety cases it may not be appropriate to strike through regulations.

Albertans are fully aware of the burden of too many regulations. Many businesses and families in my constituency face such burdens in bureaucracy and are burdened by bureaucracy on a daily basis. They've suffered due to tax increases and minimum wage increases. They are all too aware of the many hoops they are

constantly having to jump through. Whether it be time away from their families spent on paperwork or extra financial demands, these regulations imposed on their businesses are taxing on their time and on their efforts and on their personal lives. Having to continually process the same paperwork over and over and over again is frustrating, and it's a lot of money and a lot of time wasted.

We need to demand and require strong evidence of the need before regulating something. All existing regulations that remain should be relevant. Albertans need to have clear and consistent regulations simply and properly communicated. They also should be able to access and locate information on all provincial regulations relatively pain free. We need departments to verify the impacts of the regulations on stakeholders, whether they're developing a new regulation or reviewing an old one. This really needs to be the key when deciding which ones to update and which ones to discard. Albertans are often tired of being bounced around. We need to offer them more stability and some incentive to stay and bring back the Alberta advantage.

This is why I'm going to support the Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner on Bill 207, Regulatory Burden Reduction Act, and its amendment. This bill will ensure that each and every regulation created that adds administrative burden on a business, and no more, should be deducted. Across the House let's fully and finally all support something that will benefit business owners in this province.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Any other members wishing to speak to the referral amendment?

Seeing none, are you ready for the question?

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

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 11:44 a.m.]

[Fifteen minutes having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

For the motion:

Aheer	Gotfried	Orr
Anderson, W.	Hunter	Pitt
Drysdale	McIver	Stier

12:00

Against the motion:

Anderson, S.	Kleinstauber	Phillips
Carlier	Larivee	Piquette
Carson	Loyola	Rosendahl
Connolly	Luff	Sabir
Coolahan	Malkinson	Schmidt
Cortes-Vargas	Mason	Schreiner
Dach	McCuaig-Boyd	Shepherd
Dang	McKitrick	Sigurdson
Drever	McLean	Sucha
Ganley	Miller	Sweet
Hinkley	Miranda	Turner
Hoffman	Nielsen	Westhead
Horne	Payne	Woollard
Kazim		

Totals:	For – 9	Against – 40
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[Motion on amendment REF1 lost]

[The Assembly adjourned at 12:02 p.m.]

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