



Province of Alberta

The 29th Legislature
Third Session

Alberta Hansard

Tuesday morning, December 12, 2017

Day 65

The Honourable Robert E. Wanner, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta
The 29th Legislature

Third Session

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

Aheer, Leela Sharon, Chestermere-Rocky View (UCP),
Deputy Leader of the Official Opposition
Anderson, Hon. Shaye, Leduc-Beaumont (NDP)
Anderson, Wayne, Highwood (UCP)
Babcock, Erin D., Stony Plain (NDP)
Barnes, Drew, Cypress-Medicine Hat (UCP)
Bilous, Hon. Deron, Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview (NDP)
Carlier, Hon. Oneil, Whitecourt-St. Anne (NDP)
Carson, Jonathon, Edmonton-Meadowlark (NDP)
Ceci, Hon. Joe, Calgary-Fort (NDP)
Clark, Greg, Calgary-Elbow (AP)
Connolly, Michael R.D., Calgary-Hawkwood (NDP)
Coolahan, Craig, Calgary-Klein (NDP)
Cooper, Nathan, Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills (UCP)
Cortes-Vargas, Estefania, Strathcona-Sherwood Park (NDP),
Government Whip
Cyr, Scott J., Bonnyville-Cold Lake (UCP)
Dach, Lorne, Edmonton-McClung (NDP)
Dang, Thomas, Edmonton-South West (NDP)
Drever, Deborah, Calgary-Bow (NDP)
Drysdale, Wayne, Grande Prairie-Wapiti (UCP)
Eggen, Hon. David, Edmonton-Calder (NDP)
Ellis, Mike, Calgary-West (UCP)
Feehan, Hon. Richard, Edmonton-Rutherford (NDP),
Deputy Government House Leader
Fildebrandt, Derek Gerhard, Strathmore-Brooks (Ind)
Fitzpatrick, Maria M., Lethbridge-East (NDP)
Fraser, Rick, Calgary-South East (Ind)
Ganley, Hon. Kathleen T., Calgary-Buffalo (NDP),
Deputy Government House Leader
Gill, Prabh, Calgary-Greenway (UCP),
Official Opposition Deputy Whip
Goehring, Nicole, Edmonton-Castle Downs (NDP)
Gotfried, Richard, Calgary-Fish Creek (UCP)
Gray, Hon. Christina, Edmonton-Mill Woods (NDP)
Hanson, David B., Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills (UCP)
Hinkley, Bruce, Wetaskiwin-Camrose (NDP)
Hoffman, Hon. Sarah, Edmonton-Glenora (NDP)
Horne, Trevor A.R., Spruce Grove-St. Albert (NDP)
Hunter, Grant R., Cardston-Taber-Warner (UCP)
Jansen, Hon. Sandra, Calgary-North West (NDP)
Jean, Brian Michael, QC, Fort McMurray-Conklin (UCP)
Kazim, Anam, Calgary-Glenmore (NDP)
Kleinstauber, Jamie, Calgary-Northern Hills (NDP)
Larivee, Hon. Danielle, Lesser Slave Lake (NDP),
Deputy Government House Leader
Littlewood, Jessica, Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville (NDP)
Loewen, Todd, Grande Prairie-Smoky (UCP)
Loyola, Rod, Edmonton-Ellerslie (NDP)

Luff, Robyn, Calgary-East (NDP)
MacIntyre, Donald, Innisfail-Sylvan Lake (UCP)
Malkinson, Brian, Calgary-Currie (NDP)
Mason, Hon. Brian, Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood (NDP),
Government House Leader
McCuaig-Boyd, Hon. Margaret,
Dunvegan-Central Peace-Notley (NDP)
McIver, Ric, Calgary-Hays (UCP),
Official Opposition Whip
McKittrick, Annie, Sherwood Park (NDP)
McLean, Hon. Stephanie V., Calgary-Varsity (NDP)
McPherson, Karen M., Calgary-Mackay-Nose Hill (AP)
Miller, Barb, Red Deer-South (NDP)
Miranda, Hon. Ricardo, Calgary-Cross (NDP)
Nielsen, Christian E., Edmonton-Decore (NDP)
Nixon, Jason, Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre (UCP),
Leader of the Official Opposition,
Official Opposition House Leader
Notley, Hon. Rachel, Edmonton-Strathcona (NDP),
Premier
Orr, Ronald, Lacombe-Ponoka (UCP)
Panda, Prasad, Calgary-Foothills (UCP)
Payne, Hon. Brandy, Calgary-Acadia (NDP)
Phillips, Hon. Shannon, Lethbridge-West (NDP)
Piquette, Colin, Athabasca-Sturgeon-Redwater (NDP)
Pitt, Angela D., Airdrie (UCP),
Official Opposition Deputy House Leader
Renaud, Marie F., St. Albert (NDP)
Rosendahl, Eric, West Yellowhead (NDP)
Sabir, Hon. Irfan, Calgary-McCall (NDP)
Schmidt, Hon. Marlin, Edmonton-Gold Bar (NDP)
Schneider, David A., Little Bow (UCP)
Schreiner, Kim, Red Deer-North (NDP)
Shepherd, David, Edmonton-Centre (NDP)
Sigurdson, Hon. Lori, Edmonton-Riverview (NDP)
Smith, Mark W., Drayton Valley-Devon (UCP)
Starke, Dr. Richard, Vermilion-Lloydminster (PC)
Stier, Pat, Livingstone-Macleod (UCP)
Strankman, Rick, Drumheller-Stettler (UCP)
Sucha, Graham, Calgary-Shaw (NDP)
Swann, Dr. David, Calgary-Mountain View (AL)
Taylor, Wes, Battle River-Wainwright (UCP)
Turner, Dr. A. Robert, Edmonton-Whitemud (NDP)
van Dijken, Glenn, Barrhead-Morinville-Westlock (UCP)
Westhead, Cameron, Banff-Cochrane (NDP),
Deputy Government Whip
Woollard, Denise, Edmonton-Mill Creek (NDP)
Yao, Tany, Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo (UCP)
Vacant, Calgary-Lougheed

Party standings:

New Democratic: 54 United Conservative: 26 Alberta Party: 2 Alberta Liberal: 1 Progressive Conservative: 1 Independent: 2 Vacant: 1

Officers and Officials of the Legislative Assembly

Robert H. Reynolds, QC, Clerk
Shannon Dean, Law Clerk and Director of
House Services
Trafton Koenig, Parliamentary Counsel
Stephanie LeBlanc, Parliamentary Counsel

Philip Massolin, Manager of Research and
Committee Services
Nancy Robert, Research Officer
Janet Schwegel, Managing Editor of
Alberta Hansard

Brian G. Hodgson, Sergeant-at-Arms
Chris Caughell, Deputy Sergeant-at-Arms
Paul Link, Assistant Sergeant-at-Arms
Gareth Scott, Assistant Sergeant-at-Arms

Executive Council

Rachel Notley	Premier, President of Executive Council
Sarah Hoffman	Deputy Premier, Minister of Health
Shaye Anderson	Minister of Municipal Affairs
Deron Bilous	Minister of Economic Development and Trade
Oneil Carlier	Minister of Agriculture and Forestry
Joe Ceci	President of Treasury Board and Minister of Finance
David Eggen	Minister of Education
Richard Feehan	Minister of Indigenous Relations
Kathleen T. Ganley	Minister of Justice and Solicitor General
Christina Gray	Minister of Labour, Minister Responsible for Democratic Renewal
Sandra Jansen	Minister of Infrastructure
Danielle Larivee	Minister of Children's Services
Brian Mason	Minister of Transportation
Margaret McCuaig-Boyd	Minister of Energy
Stephanie V. McLean	Minister of Service Alberta, Minister of Status of Women
Ricardo Miranda	Minister of Culture and Tourism
Brandy Payne	Associate Minister of Health
Shannon Phillips	Minister of Environment and Parks, Minister Responsible for the Climate Change Office
Irfan Sabir	Minister of Community and Social Services
Marlin Schmidt	Minister of Advanced Education
Lori Sigurdson	Minister of Seniors and Housing

Parliamentary Secretaries

Jessica Littlewood	Economic Development and Trade for Small Business
Annie McKittrick	Education

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

Cyr	McKitrick
Dang	Taylor
Ellis	Turner
Horne	

Standing Committee on Alberta's Economic Future

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

Carson	McPherson
Connolly	Panda
Coolahan	Piquette
Dach	Schneider
Fitzpatrick	Schreiner
Gill	Taylor
Gotfried	

Select Special Auditor General Search Committee

Chair: Mr. Shepherd
Deputy Chair: Mr. Malkinson

Cyr	Littlewood
Gill	van Dijken
Horne	Woollard
Kleinstauber	

Standing Committee on Families and Communities

Chair: Ms Goehring
Deputy Chair: Mr. Smith

Aheer	Miller
Drever	Orr
Hinkley	Shepherd
Horne	Swann
Jansen	Vacant
Luff	Yao
McKitrick	

Standing Committee on Legislative Offices

Chair: Mr. Shepherd
Deputy Chair: Mr. Malkinson

Drever	Nixon
Gill	Pitt
Horne	van Dijken
Kleinstauber	Woollard
Littlewood	

Special Standing Committee on Members' Services

Chair: Mr. Wanner
Deputy Chair: Cortes-Vargas

Cooper	Nixon
Dang	Orr
Jabbour	Piquette
Luff	Schreiner
McIver	

Standing Committee on Private Bills

Chair: Ms McPherson
Deputy Chair: Connolly

Anderson, W.	Kleinstauber
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

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

Barnes	Malkinson
Fildebrandt	Miller
Fraser	Panda
Goehring	Renaud
Gotfried	Turner
Littlewood	Westhead
Luff	

Standing Committee on Resource Stewardship

Chair: Loyola
Deputy Chair: Mr. Hunter

Babcock	Loewen
Clark	MacIntyre
Dang	Malkinson
Drysdale	Nielsen
Hanson	Rosendahl
Kazim	Woollard
Kleinstauber	

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

10 a.m.

Tuesday, December 12, 2017

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

The Deputy Speaker: Good morning.

Let us reflect. We are well into the holiday season, a time of sharing, generosity, family, goodwill. As we continue our work for this week, let us focus on kindness, on being good to one another, always remembering that we are here for something other than ourselves.

Please be seated.

Orders of the Day

Government Bills and Orders

Second Reading

Bill 32

An Act to Strengthen and Protect Democracy in Alberta

Mrs. Pitt moved that the motion for second reading of Bill 32, An Act to Strengthen and Protect Democracy in Alberta, be amended by deleting all the words after “that” and substituting the following:

Bill 32, An Act to Strengthen and Protect Democracy in Alberta, be not now read a second time but that the subject matter of the bill be referred to the Standing Committee on Legislative Offices in accordance with Standing Order 74.2.

[Debate adjourned on the amendment December 7: Mr. Panda speaking]

The Deputy Speaker: Any members wishing to speak to the bill? The hon. Member for Grande Prairie-Smoky.

Mr. Loewen: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I would like to speak today in support of the referral motion pertaining to Bill 32, An Act to Strengthen and Protect Democracy in Alberta. Now, this motion is just common sense, and while we know that it isn't a concept the government generally seeks to embrace, I hope that my colleagues and I may have some success in convincing them to let it be their guide today. I don't know why any person would be opposed to listening, to hearing what Albertans have to say on this bill, nor can I understand why anyone would be opposed to spending a little more time to review the details and intricacies of this 212-page piece of legislation. In fact, I think the apparent opposition from the NDP in regard to this motion is an example of a government saying one thing and doing another.

I think it is worth reminding this government of the positions and statements of their own party when it comes to legislation on democratic changes. As members of this House may recall, under the tenure of the previous federal government there was an electoral reform bill passed by the House of Commons. I would like the members opposite to listen carefully and try to recognize a few statements. Quote: the hotly debated legislation should receive more scrutiny. End quote. That sentiment came from the then leader of the NDP. I know they later threw him out, but – who knows? – maybe it was because the party decided his views on legislative scrutiny would be inconvenient for this government.

Now, I can guarantee that this will be a rare occurrence for members on this side of the House, but I want to cite Mr. Mulcair again just for the benefit of this House. He said the following in

April 2014 in regard to legislation that changes the rules for democracy, quote: never before in the history of Canada has a government tried to use its majority to unilaterally change Canada's election laws. End quote. How ironic is it that the party whose leader said this is now seeking to change Alberta's election laws by ramming through a bill in just days before the end of the session?

Madam Speaker, I think it may be worth while to look at and compare a little further this bill at hand now with the one that sat before the federal parliament a few short years ago. At the time, the NDP were outraged at the state of affairs. The bill needed amendment, they said. The bill needed further consultation. It seems, now they are in a position of government, that words like “consultation,” “amendment,” and “scrutiny” have magically disappeared from their vocabulary.

Now, one might argue that this is just a standard way of doing things when in government, that you ignore consultation and opposition to pursue your agenda. Well, it may be standard practice for the NDP governments, but I can tell you that the Conservatives actually heed their own words. When the federal Conservative government first sought to introduce electoral reform in 2013, it was in response to recommendations made by the Chief Electoral Officer. When the NDP went to introduce this legislation, they didn't even bother to consult with the Chief Electoral Officer.

In 2013, when Conservatives realized there were some issues with the legislation they intended to introduce, the minister chose to postpone its introduction and, quote, take the time necessary to get the legislation right. End quote. When it was brought up that there are issues with this NDP legislation, they decided to ignore the concerns and press ahead. When Conservatives passed this kind of legislation, they took it to committee. There were 29 committee meetings, more than 100 witnesses, and dozens of amendments passed. Conservatives took 135 days from the introduction of the bill until it was passed. This NDP government seems intent on not having one single committee meeting, not one witness's testimony, and not one single amendment. The NDP has forgone their legislative duty and not allowed for more than a few days of debate.

Madam Speaker, I think this speaks to the divide between this side of the House and the government benches. On this side of the House we want to take the time to produce the kind of legislation that Albertans deserve. On this side of the House we want to listen to what Albertans have to say. On the other side of things, like with most bills, the government is blinded by their ideology, driven by their partisan interests, and spurred by the ticking clock that counts down until Albertans get to return to the ballot box and turn the page on this accidental socialist government.

Madam Speaker, this bill is about democracy. It is about the rules that govern it. But for this government there are large pieces that don't appear to have anything to do with strengthening or protecting it. There are pieces of this legislation that seem to be all about the NDP's fear of the democratic will of the people of this province.

While it seems unlikely that we will gain support from the government for this referral, in order to properly examine it and gain input from Albertans, I will continue. I intend to use the time that is afforded me by the mandate to represent my constituents so that I may try and bring attention to the deep flaws that I see in this bill.

I will start with a portion of this bill that has received less attention than others but deserves to be highlighted. Some members may forget, but when it comes to positive democratic reform in this country, in past years Alberta was a trailblazer and a leader within Confederation. Long before the scandals and the intense public scrutiny Albertans knew that the Senate of Canada needed to change. Albertans knew that the status quo of unelected, unaccountable Senators was unacceptable. The body was supposed

to provide regional representation, yet too often Alberta's appointments were made by an out-of-touch government in Ottawa pursuing an agenda that Albertans did not support. That is why in this province we decided to pass the Senatorial Selection Act, so that Albertans could directly provide their input on who should fill the seats for our province. At the end of last year the NDP chose to allow this legislation to expire, and now they seek to repeal the remnants of this act.

Now we find ourselves with another out-of-touch government in Ottawa. But this time, instead of the provincial government seeking to empower Albertans, it has decided to take away the voice they had. Now, I understand that the NDP supports the abolition of the Senate, and that is a perfectly reasonable position to have, one shared by a number of Conservatives even. However, as long as the Senate exists in the unequal, ineffective, and unelected form that it does, surely the government of Alberta would seek to preserve any tools of opposition to the appointment of Liberal partisans by Justin Trudeau.

Madam Speaker, we have a situation here where this government has brought forward a bill called An Act to Strengthen and Protect Democracy in Alberta when they're actually taking away democracy from Albertans, an opportunity that we had and we took advantage of to elect people to go to the Senate. It doesn't stand to reason as to why this government – they seem to hate the Senate, and that's their position. They want to see it abolished. Whatever. But why would you take away the opportunity for Albertans to choose who goes there in a bill that says that it's to protect democracy in Alberta? Well, I don't know what anybody else thinks, but when I hear of democracy, I think of the ability to choose who represents you. I believe that's the basis of democracy. But this government has taken away that opportunity for Albertans. Why would they do such a thing? Why would they take away that opportunity for Albertans to choose who represents them in the Senate?

10:10

In 1989 Albertans made history through the appointment of Stan Waters, Canada's first elected Senator, but now, in 2017, the NDP seems content to abandon Albertans' position of leadership on reform. At the very least, the government could have gone out and asked Albertans if they supported this move. If they were willing to send this bill to committee, we could get this input and make a more informed decision based on the wishes of Albertans. Informed decisions are important, Madam Speaker, and Albertans expect the legislation that we pass to reflect this sentiment.

I would then ask how many members of this House know the reason why the government has chosen to ignore the expert opinion of Alberta's Chief Electoral Officer in regard to the matter of how enumeration should be conducted in our province ahead of the next election. Bill 32 would require full door-to-door enumeration rather than the strategy suggested by the Chief Electoral Officer, which would have consisted of targeted in-person enumeration accompanied by a full mail-out to cover the majority of people. This is a strategy that has been shown to be successful in other provinces and would serve to save Alberta taxpayers millions of dollars.

As we have discovered, the Chief Electoral Officer wasn't consulted by the government ahead of introducing this legislation. I'm sorry, Madam Speaker, but that just seems bizarre, that they wouldn't have done that. I would urge the government to help remedy this error by supporting this motion so that we can hear that expert testimony and make sure that we are making an informed decision.

Madam Speaker, I would also like to draw attention to the portions of this bill that address the prohibition on government

advertising during elections. The intent of this legislation is clear. Governments should not be able to use taxpayer dollars to give themselves any advantage in an election. This is common sense in a free and fair democracy. Unfortunately, this legislation does not take effective steps to eliminate this practice. When this government was in opposition, they were rightly against the use of tax dollars to create electoral advantages, yet now that they're in government, they have done nothing to close remaining loopholes. Why has the government refused to tighten up these rules when they had a perfect opportunity with this bill, that is supposed to be taking actions like this to strengthen and protect our democracy?

There would be a very easy way to look at the changes that need to be made. That is to send this bill to committee, like my colleague has suggested. This government has a choice on the message that they send to Albertans. Will they vote for this referral motion and commit that they will end the practice of government spending announcements during elections, or will they continue to ram this bill through and send a message that they don't really care about fairness in our democracy?

Speaking of fairness in democracy, we also need to talk about the removal of the residency requirements for voting in provincial elections. Madam Speaker, this is a very basic principle. Only Albertans should be able to vote in Alberta elections. Our representatives should be elected by those who have a long-term interest in our province and its communities. It is not at all unreasonable to require a term of residency in order to vote. This proposed change could cause serious harm to public confidence in our democracy. The legitimacy of our elections cannot become a matter of debate, and opening the door to the possibility of nonresidents voting in our elections is not acceptable.

The members opposite will surely tell us that this is not the case and that there is no risk in this change. Unfortunately for them, Albertans have had enough of taking the NDP at their word. The law needs to be strict and clear in order to mitigate any risks there might be. [interjections] It's interesting to hear the members opposite here, the government MLAs, laughing and joking about democracy in Alberta. I find it pretty shameful that they would sit there and do that. [interjections] They continue on, heckling and laughing and ridiculing democracy in Alberta. It's shameful. They continue on. They continue on. Madam Speaker, I don't think that democracy is funny; I think it's serious. That's why we live here in this free country. We respect democracy. The members opposite don't seem to care about that.

Again, Madam Speaker, I think that the people of Alberta have had enough of this government. They don't trust them anymore. They've heard one thing and seen another thing over and over from this government. When they were in opposition, they railed against things like this over and over again, but what do they do when they're here? They just ram it through. If this government wants to make this change and they have some other way of proving that they can maintain absolute electoral integrity, then they should come to the committee, tell Albertans what their thinking is, and provide evidence to support it.

If the government does not provide a detailed explanation to Albertans, it may raise questions on potential ulterior motives. Some may ask if enabling out-of-province voters is a hidden attempt of this change. Again, these questions could serve to erode the confidence of Albertans in our democratic process, which is exactly the opposite of what the bill purports to do. It doesn't seem to me that this would do anything to strengthen and protect our democracy and would in fact create an inherent weakness, one at risk of exploitation.

It is for the many reasons that I have mentioned above that I cannot support this bill as it stands.

The Deputy Speaker: Under Standing Order 29(2)(a), any questions or comments? Chestermere-Rocky View.

Mrs. Aheer: Thank you, Madam Speaker, and thank you for the opportunity to ask a question. I just wanted to thank my colleague for, I think, his very respectful approach to trying to understand what this legislation is about. Lookit, it's not always easy to ask difficult questions, and difficult questions quite often would get interesting responses. But what I find very interesting is that there's a lot of commentary coming from the government, lots in fact, especially when it comes to the piece about residency, which is probably one of the larger reasons why this bill needs work.

As my colleague was saying, there is an imperative piece, especially with a piece of legislation like this, that Albertans feel not only that their voice is heard but that it is their voice, that it's Albertans, people in this province, the ones who pay taxes here. Even for those who are living here – we have students that are living in our province; we have out-of-province workers that are living here – we want to make sure all of those folks have the ability to vote. That six-month space gives lots of time for anybody who's in the province to actually be able to do that.

The question remains, though – and my colleague was doing, I thought, a very good job of trying to at least ask the question – about why a government would feel it necessary to have a person be able to come across the border of our province and, by being able to be vouched for by a person who says that they live here, be able to vote.

My goodness, if I am misunderstanding that, I would absolutely love for one of the members across the way to correct the record. Honestly, with all my heart, Madam Speaker, if we are wrong, if we have misinterpreted this legislation, please, I would ask that one of the members stand up and explain that to us. If we're wrong, great. That's fine. I would prefer to find it out in here, and I'd prefer to discuss it in here. However, the interesting part is that with all of the yelling and all of the heckling and all of the commentary, we've yet to hear somebody actually stand up and explain to us, explain to Albertans, and actually put to rest any fear that this is a concern.

It's not just this government. Whatever government follows this government will have access to that same thing, and that's one thing to keep in mind. I mean, these pieces of legislation aren't just for right now. They have long-term effects, ripple effects, on the democracy of this province. Honestly, I'm terribly sorry if we have offended the government by asking difficult questions. That is absolutely our reason for being here at this point in time. Quite frankly, it's fine for with them if they're offended, but we need to ask those questions. I'm very grateful that my colleague brought up some very difficult – and to tell you the truth, Madam Speaker, I think what's most disconcerting is that these are the questions we're actually getting at our offices. It's very difficult to believe that they're not getting those questions as well.

10:20

If they've answered the questions for their constituents, do tell. Please share that information with us. Please explain it. If I'm not understanding, I am more than happy to be corrected and happy to share that information with my constituents. I've written quite a few bits and pieces about this. I've tried to look into it, tried to understand the mentality of what's happening here. There are lots and lots of opportunities to actually discuss it – that's why we're here, right? – and that's why we're in the House right now. There's no reason to be offended. That's the whole reason we're here, to ask these questions. If it is a question that can easily be answered, please, I really look forward to the response from the government to my colleague's questions and his concerns about this. I'm sorry

that the government is not as concerned as we are. This is one of those big things for me, the question of residency, the question of authentic voting within our province.

Again, you know, what's really, really magnificent about our country and about our province, Madam Speaker, is that we try our very best to make sure that people have the access to vote. It's actually one of the most massive privileges of our country. If you've travelled and you've been to other places around the world and understand the way voting works in other places around the world, we're very fortunate here.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Any other members wishing to speak to the amendment? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It is indeed an absolute pleasure to rise this morning to speak to this bill on electoral reform within the province of Alberta and indeed to honour the request of the Member for Chestermere-Rocky View to discuss the issue of residency and the changes that are proposed in this bill.

Now, over the weekend, Madam Speaker, there has been much discussion about this, sparked largely by some unfortunate misinformation on the part of the United Conservative Party of Alberta and, of course, their leader, Mr. Kenney, Hon. Mr. Kenney, noting claims that we were removing the requirement for residency in the province of Alberta. Now, there were some interesting suggestions from members across the aisle, including the Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat and some others, indeed the Member for Calgary-Fish Creek, suggesting that perhaps these changes were in order to bus in large numbers of supporters from outside the province, an absolutely ludicrous proposal. It reminds me of some of the ridiculous claims we've heard from south of the border about phantom suggestions of mass voter fraud, which all seem to come from the same side of the political spectrum.

Now, Madam Speaker, to be clear, the rules within the province of Alberta, as noted, I should note, by the mainstream press – indeed, CBC Edmonton yesterday posted a very clear explanation of how these changes work. Perhaps the member has not had the opportunity to read that article yet. I would suggest that she perhaps would like to take a look.

But it makes it quite clear that what is happening in this legislation is as was requested on more than one occasion by the Chief Electoral Officer of the province, and I will say that as the chair of the Standing Committee on Legislative Offices I have deep respect for the expertise that is in fact offered by those legislative officers. Indeed, I will note, Madam Speaker, that the CEO, in fact, himself noted that he was consulted on several occasions about specific pieces that were brought forward in this legislation.

On this particular note, which is in response to his request based on a legal case which found that it would be against the Charter of Rights and Freedoms to deny somebody the opportunity to vote, we are proposing to remove the requirement that somebody be ordinarily resident. Again, Madam Speaker, that is a specific definition that is provided on the Elections Alberta website, which, again, the members can read if they wish to educate themselves on this issue, and a term that is used in other areas. For example, in determining whether someone is eligible for the Alberta health care insurance plan, they also have to demonstrate that they are ordinarily resident within the province of Alberta. As long as that is the case, we are simply removing the fact that that has to be the case for six months, something which the Chief Electoral Officer has clearly stated was difficult and at times impossible to prove.

The members opposite are very fond of saying that we need to cut red tape and needless regulation. The CEO himself identified that this was a requirement that often could not actually be proven, so he recommended that we make this change and reduce it to the one item which is simple and basic to prove: is the individual who is wishing to vote ordinarily a resident of the province of Alberta? That is done, Madam Speaker, by that individual providing photo identification with their address or providing other identification as required under the act and clearly noted and explained on the Elections Alberta website. Or, in a particular case, if an individual does not have said ID – and in fact this is the case for some folks in my constituency who are homeless, who may not have access to identification and other things – an individual who knows that individual and who themselves produces the ID that is required, which shows who they are and that they are ordinarily resident in that particular electoral district, can vouch for one and only one other individual, sign a legal declaration stating that they are vouching for this individual. That individual then makes a legal declaration that they are, in fact, ordinarily resident in that area, and then that person is allowed to vote.

If this, Madam Speaker, is a mass conspiracy for voter fraud, it's a hell of an inefficient one. I apologize for my use of that word. I retract that word.

Mrs. Aheer: Angry.

Mr. Shepherd: Yeah. You know what? The Member for Chestermere-Rocky View observed that I'm angry. Indeed, Madam Speaker, I am angry because of this abuse of the facts, this incredible, as was noted by Graham Thomson of the *Edmonton Journal* in his editorial yesterday, this constant, extreme massaging of the facts by the members opposite and by their leader. In fact, this has increased exponentially since they acquired this new leader. Of course, that does make me angry. Albertans deserve better. Albertans deserve representatives that are able to discuss these issues based on facts, and the kind of fearmongering we're hearing from the UCP anger machine does a disservice to the people of Alberta.

Thank you, Madam Speaker. I'm happy to have this opportunity to put the facts out there.

The Deputy Speaker: Under Standing Order 29(2)(a), Grande Prairie-Smoky.

Mr. Loewen: Yes, Madam Speaker. It was actually good to see that one of the government members would actually stand up and speak. Now, of course, he had – I guess he was angry. He said that he was angry. I'm not sure what he's angry about. What I thought was interesting is that he said that he had a deep respect for the Chief Electoral Officer. Well, I would think that a deep respect would involve some sort of communication with the Chief Electoral Officer and would involve something of . . .

Mr. McIver: Make a call.

Mr. Loewen: Yeah. Maybe make a call to him. Maybe have a little chat.

Now, he did say that there was a lot of communication. Well, that's funny because the Chief Electoral Officer clearly said that that's not the case. He provided it in writing actually, Madam Speaker. I think that might be – what did he call that?

Mr. McIver: Abuse of facts.

Mr. Loewen: Abuse of facts: that is the term the member used. The abuse of facts, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker, I don't know where to go with this, really. This is just bizarre. Now, one thing I found interesting is that the member quoted Graham Thomson, and I know the Member for St. Albert also quoted Graham Thomson. From the exact same article I want to quote Graham Thomson for the record, too.

Some even consider the Alberta Federation of Labour something of a PAC. It raised the largest amount in donations of any third-party group in the second quarter of this year with \$230,000.

I think that while you're quoting Mr. Thomson, you should quote all of Mr. Thomson and listen to what he says about the Alberta Federation of Labour.

He goes on to say, if we want to talk about Mr. Thomson's article, in this very same article that this member quoted and the very same article that the Member for St. Albert quoted:

The courts have already supported PACs under Charter rights to free speech. Simply banning PACs isn't possible. Placing severe restrictions on their activities at all times, not just during election campaigns, would likely be deemed unconstitutional.

10:30

Madam Speaker, this government wants to get what they call dark money out of politics, but maybe they need to do a little more homework, which is why we brought these amendments forward, so they could do a little bit more homework and find out if we're going to have court challenges and everything on this.

Now, I did get a note from the Member for Wetaskiwin-Camrose here. It says: my copy of Bill 32 has only 105 pages, not over 200; how did your copy double? Well, Madam Speaker, I just want to, I guess, look at Bill 32. This is the copy the government provided me. Maybe what the member hasn't done is that he hasn't looked at the page numbering carefully. I'm open at page 71, and it says 71 on this page and on this page.

Mr. McIver: That whole math thing.

Mr. Loewen: It's that math thing where you have to figure it out. The last page on this is 105, but that isn't how many pages are in the bill.

Now, Madam Speaker, on one side it shows what's being amended in the original bill, and on the other side is what they're changing it to. That's normally how this is set up. But if you want to read the bill and you want to understand the bill, you have to see what it's changing. You don't just look at what it's going to be without seeing what it was before. That only makes sense.

I'll go back to Graham Thomson, another quote here: "In fact, Alberta government sources are expecting a legal challenge of Bill 32 ahead of the next provincial election." Madam Speaker, the government is even expecting this legal challenge, so don't you think that they should have taken the time to do a little more research and try to avoid things like legal challenges? Legal challenges are expensive, and what happens if you lose? If you lose, then all of a sudden you have limited options.

Madam Speaker, it was just, I thought, very rich to hear the Member for Edmonton-Centre get up and go on this huge rant, this angry rant. Of course, we've been listening to enormous amounts of heckling coming from the other side throughout this whole debate.

I think it's actually very, very – honestly, it's ironic that An Act to Strengthen and Protect Democracy in Alberta actually takes away from democracy in Alberta. It just doesn't even make any sense. Now, of course, if this democracy . . . [Mr. Loewen's speaking time expired]

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Just a reminder, hon. member, please, to table the documents you were quoting from later on.

The hon. Member for Little Bow.

Mr. Schneider: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I rise today to speak to the referral motion on Bill 32, An Act to Strengthen and Protect Democracy in Alberta. This motion, proposed by my colleague from Airdrie, would in accordance with Standing Order 74.2 refer this bill to a standing committee, and that's exactly where it should happen.

Now, sometimes I like to use the phrase "déjà vu" in this Chamber. Actually, my favourite, if you're a little bit of a baseball fan, is *déjà vu* all over again. I like that one. But today I use it again because it's with that feeling that I have to mention that once again we find ourselves late into session and the government has dropped a bill on us that, quite frankly, should have probably been served up as two distinct bills. Actually, there's another bill that is made up of two rather large pieces of legislation that could have been divvied up into two bills that was also introduced in the dying days of the fall session. So this isn't anything new for this session. It may be odd, but it's not new.

Bill 32 is several pages long, rather than debate whether the numbers are correct, and was dropped just days before the scheduled end of session. How many times have we seen that, huge bills that everyone will likely know will have to be debated a lot, probably require a lot of amendments from this side of the House, huge bills that are just set up to be pushed through this House? Bill 17 of the spring session comes to mind. Bill 6 from the First Session since we were all elected comes to mind, too.

Anyway, yes, the two main areas of Bill 32 delve into the subject dealing with rules around elections, but this several-page bill documents two distinct parts that deal with areas that could fall under a broader title, possibly election finances and election reform. The point I'm trying to make here is that we need to ensure, with legislation this important and vital to democracy, that the bill is right. We need to ensure that anyone in the province of Alberta that takes issue with any parts of any piece of legislation that is put before legislators of this House that is this important has the ability to make a comment, to make a comment in their own words, not necessarily words that are chosen by the government of the day on an Internet site.

Isn't that kind of what democracy is all about? What harm can be done by moving this proposed piece of legislation to committee, as the MLA from Airdrie suggested and made in her motion? You know – good grief – we're talking about elections here, among other things, of course. Elections, if I may be so bold, are the primary decision-making process of any democracy. We need to ensure that we have done due diligence and taken the time and care to make this piece of legislation solid. My colleague's amendment helps ensure just that. Let's consult Albertans. Let's engage Elections Alberta and their staff. Let's make sure we get this right.

I remember Bill 203, the Alberta Standard Time Act. While it may have been a private member's bill, the Legislature saw fit to refer it to Alberta's Economic Future Committee. There was a lot of fanfare about the bill as it went to committee, but the fact was that after hearing from submitters all across Alberta and in the boardrooms in the Federal building, the committee recommended to the Legislature that the bill not proceed. I'm not naive enough to believe that there weren't some politics involved on the government side either, but it slowed things down a little, and we got to consider more points of the bill than just making sure that a piece of legislation was rammed through the House.

Now, for a moment I'd like to speak about a comment that I made a few minutes ago. Let's engage Elections Alberta, among others,

to make sure that we get this right. I think it's been said quite a few times in this House – and it may be said a few more yet – that, once again, we are seeing that some consultation may indeed have been used in the creation of this bill, but it was not an in-depth account, the likes of which should be used when creating a bill that is this important.

I'm sure that consultation of some sort may have been used, but as we have seen and many of my colleagues have already talked about, the very first organization on the list of potential consultees, if that's a word, was not consulted, let's say, fully. I say fully because Mr. Glen Resler, the Chief Electoral Officer, no less, of Elections Alberta stated in the letter that he wrote to the minister responsible for democratic renewal that he was pleased to see that some of his recommendations were incorporated into Bill 32.

Now, nobody from my side of the House was involved in the consultation process, obviously, but Mr. Resler did use the word "some" in his letter to the minister, which leads those of us from this side to believe that he may have actually proposed more than the bill considered. The Member for Edmonton-Centre claims that this side of the House is telling part of the story, claims that this side of the House is abusing the facts and is massaging those facts.

At any rate, Mr. Resler wanted to bring to the attention of the minister the potential unintended consequences of the proposals about advanced polls and special mobile polls contained within the bill. I believe, Madam Speaker, that that letter has been tabled to the House already. If not, I'd certainly be happy to do so. To continue, he believes that "if passed in its current form . . . Bill 32 will [tend to] deteriorate the service provided to electors and increase the timelines for communicating results."

Now, I don't know. That may seem kind of trivial, but when the Chief Electoral Officer writes a letter to the minister who has created a bill that somehow affects elections in the province suggesting unintended consequences to that bill, I've got to believe that in the best interests of Albertans he may need to be listened to. His letter contains a lot of information, but that sentence or two alone are a good enough reason to refer this bill to committee. Chances are that there are lots of Albertans that have an opinion or an idea that may be beneficial to the legislation. That's why it should be sent to the committee.

10:40

Speaking of getting it right, I can see that there are portions of this bill that appear, on the surface, to have been gotten mostly right, and there are some that I think may not have been quite as accurately portrayed. I'm uncomfortable with the idea, for example, that someone who has just moved to Alberta could, under these proposed changes, within a day simply appear and be allowed to vote in an election.

While some of the more politically engaged folks may think that this is great – and don't mistake me; I certainly want as many Albertans as possible to become politically engaged – I can't help but feel that perhaps at least 30 or so days of residence should be a minimum standard for residency. That's just my own opinion. Again, what is the perfect number? We haven't determined that. This bill states one. Is it 30 days, 60 days, six months? Maybe that was the right number. That's why this referral amendment needs to pass, Madam Speaker. These things can be worked out in the standing committee, with opinions sought and stakeholders engaged.

Another part of this that has kind of irked me is this topic of government announcements during an election or a by-election. Now, nobody's hands are clean on this one. Governments have always skirted the line on this issue, and the present government has not disappointed despite how they make a great deal of outrage

about this exact topic and how much outrage they made while sitting in opposition seats. While they have tried to take steps to fix this issue, it's clear from the laundry list of exemptions that they don't seem to have the seriousness to fix it. A token resistance perhaps.

Why so many exceptions? Why do we need the ability to grant government such a wide discretionary grey area? It seems to me that the potential for abuse is too great in that instance. The grey area of keeping the Alberta public informed is so vague that it would simply be better to allow committee to look at this a little more in-depth and see if we can get this list down to a lot shorter list, deal with the announcements required by law or even ones that are vital for public safety. I would think that Albertans are certainly savvy enough to understand when an announcement is strictly done to further partisan interest during a by-election, but fine-tuning this act in committee would help alleviate that doubt, Madam Speaker.

When my caucus mate from Drumheller-Stettler talked about door-to-door energy sales, he made the point about how people are reluctant to open doors to strangers these days. With the rampant rural crime rate and property crime increasing everywhere, how effectively could a mandatory door-to-door enumeration prior to an election fare if folks are afraid to come to the door? I have concern about the cost of a mandatory full door-to-door enumeration in every riding in the province prior to the next election. Elections Alberta priced out the potential costs for this option, and it came up with the number of \$11 million.

In the last election 60 per cent of returning officers had difficulty recruiting enumerators. Those enumerators also expressed concerns and are now required to travel in pairs, which, of course, is leading to skyrocketing costs for door-to-door enumeration with the doubling up of staff for safety reasons. So it's not just the homeowners who don't feel safe. Elections staff feel uncomfortable out on the streets as well. The fix to this is to take the advice of the CEO and allow for targeted enumeration combined with a full mail-out, which has been proven to yield more accurate results and will cost approximately \$5 million. That's a lot more palatable than the \$11 million number being bandied about.

It's supposed to be more effective in engaging the public as well. The standing committee could continue to engage with Elections Alberta and see what else could be done to alleviate the concerns and maybe find more efficiencies in both process and cost. You know, I guess that we're not going to know until we try, and that's why passing this amendment matters.

I hope that the reluctance isn't, as my friend from Grande Prairie-Smoky mentioned, the same as when the government-dominated Committee on Resource Stewardship defeated his motion to take extra time to engage stakeholders simply because they weren't willing to put in the work. You know, Madam Speaker, that perception could easily change with the passing of this amendment. I know that they will disagree with this assessment, and that's fair, too. Sometimes politics comes into play.

You have to wonder if that's why this government turned down our old legacy caucus when we asked not once but on two different issues to create an independent office of the Legislature that would advocate for the disabled on one occasion and seniors on the other. In that instance, both were turned down as the government deemed them too costly, yet we see that the government is now interested in establishing an independent office of the Legislature in the form of an independent elections commissioner that would investigate complaints, recommend prosecutions, and conduct investigations on third-party advertisers. It appears that the government wants to very clearly define the difference between the administration of an election and investigations resulting from an election.

Okay. Now, I may be able to get behind the concept but not the flow through. At a time when I think we all need to be reducing the spending that government makes, it seems that this could be an unnecessary and redundant office that would be very expensive. Alberta already has a Chief Electoral Officer, that oversees matters like this, and that office comes with a very large budget. There seems to be no conflict of interest between the Chief Electoral Officer and the proposed elections commissioner that would require them to operate independent of each other, so why incur the expense?

Madam Speaker, too many complexities and too many nuances need closer scrutiny, and without a doubt that can be accomplished in committee by the standing committee. So I ask all my colleagues in this House: why not pass this amendment, and we can fix this bill once and for all?

I'll encourage everyone in the House to do so. I thank you very much, Madam Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Under Standing Order 29(2)(a), the hon. Member for Calgary-Hays.

Mr. McIver: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I'm grateful for this opportunity, and I thank the hon. member for his thoughtful reflections on the amendment before this, the reasoned amendment to move this to committee for some – I won't even say additional consultation, probably for some initial consultation in some areas. I say that advisedly because I'm sure they talked to some people.

The hon. member mentioned in his remarks that the government wants to create a new independent officer of the Legislature having to do with elections, which is kind of interesting because in the letter that we received from the current head of Elections Alberta, he made it clear that the government never talked to him about the legislation. Yes, it makes it clear in the letter that there was discussion in the previous committee that got shut down, but during the time the government actually was putting together the piece of legislation that's before us, they never consulted with him, never asked him how he liked it, what he thought of it. He said that in writing.

I wonder, to the hon. member, if the government has either lost the phone number of the current head of Elections Alberta or has just chosen to leave it in the Rolodex or their smart phone or wherever it happens to be. I wonder how anxious they'll be to actually find the phone number of the new independent officer of the Legislature when the phone number of the old, current independent officer of the Legislature was so darn hard to dial. There are, after all, 10 digits. That will take – what? – a minute, and these people are busy. They're busy. They're busy not talking to Albertans. That's what they're busy doing.

10:50

I'll ask him to reflect a little bit, too, on the massaged facts from the Member for Edmonton-Centre, in regard to the residency requirement, when he talks about the fact that no one would ever do this. In fact, Madam Speaker, it is true that a good part of our electoral system is based on the honour system, and I think all members of the House would think that, for the most part, that's good. But I would ask the member to reflect on whether we shouldn't leave ourselves absolutely open to widespread abuse without really any effort by those people that do it for the same argument that while most of the people are honest in the world, I still lock my door. And I imagine most of the members on the other side lock their doors at the same time as believing that most people are honest.

In the same way that we lock our doors to keep honest people honest, I would ask the hon. member whether he thinks having a residency requirement of longer than a day might actually be the equivalent of locking your door though most of the people out there are honest, you know, and whether he thinks it's probably common sense and would be an example of showing good judgment, especially for something as valuable as democracy.

Well, I'm not a wealthy man – I don't know if anybody in here is; it's not my business – but I don't own anything that's worth more than democracy. I don't own anything that's worth more than democracy, and I would ask the hon. member whether cheapening democracy by unlocking the door on the front of it is an example of the government showing good judgment or, indeed, whether it's an example of the government showing something other than good judgment.

The hon. member also reflected upon the title of the bill to strengthen democracy. Again, Madam Speaker, what I've often said here is that with the NDP legislation what the big print giveth, the small print taketh away. While they're talking about protecting democracy, they're actually taking away Alberta's ability to vote for their next Senators. Now, I would ask the hon. member to reflect upon whether that actually increases democracy or whether that actually reduces democracy for the very Albertans that we are here to protect, that we are here to represent, and whose voice we are here to strengthen, or whether indeed it diminishes their voice.

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

Mr. Ellis: Wonderful. Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. First of all, thank you to members who have previously spoken on this referral. I, of course, rise to support my colleague from Airdrie in regard to Bill 32, An Act to Strengthen and Protect Democracy in Alberta, and the referral to send this to committee.

I think that before I get started, I just, you know, want to acknowledge, of course, the importance of committees. I certainly have had the opportunity to be a part of a couple. Certainly, I've worked with the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre, and I've worked with the hon. Member for Calgary-Klein, and I will say that both of those individuals are more than capable of dealing with anything that is brought forward to them, especially something as important as this. I believe that they do have the ability to deal with these complex matters, and I certainly recommend that – especially in the case of Edmonton-Centre, if he ever had the opportunity to successfully get this referred to his committee, I believe that he'd be more than capable of dealing with this.

I also want to touch a little bit here, Madam Speaker, in regard to the identification that the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre, of course, brought up. I guess that maybe I come from a slightly different perspective, again, from that law enforcement perspective. I believe my hon. friend here from Calgary-Hays brought this up.

You know, I was very humbled to have been the only law enforcement officer ever appointed to the Alberta Secretariat for Action on Homelessness and very proud of the work that I did back in the day. One of the things that I was able to assist with during that period of time was helping those in vulnerable positions get identification, because there were challenges. There were challenges, especially in the Calgary drop-in centre, for people to obtain identification. Some of them, sadly, may have been victims of crime, and some of them may have lost their identification. Of course, that hindered them in their ability to at times find work and get some of the necessary services that they need.

There was a process that was put into place by the minister at that time which assisted those who were vulnerable in getting

identification, but I can tell you that it was longer than a one-day process where a friend swore an affidavit saying that you were who you were. It was actually a very extensive process that was put into place whereby the person is of course saying that they, you know, are a name, a particular date of birth, and then there was an investigation that took place.

That investigation was quite extensive. It was thorough. It required at times background checks that went on. In some cases, when people had come here who had no identification but were from a jurisdiction, you know, let's say, in eastern Canada, the process was to call and do their investigation in eastern Canada or wherever that person was alleged to be from, again, to confirm that they are who they are because of the importance of handing out government-issued ID. Of course, like my friend from Calgary-Hays said, for the importance of democracy, we have to be sure that that person is who they say that they are before they are issued a piece of government identification, before they vote, quite frankly.

You know, I can tell you that from my experience, again, as a police officer, using the computer system that we had available to us at the time, it could take me 30 seconds, 10 seconds, however long it takes for the computer to boot up, for me to confirm somebody's identity, but that's the police. That's dealing with an investigation on a criminal matter. We're not talking about criminal matters. We're talking about people and their ability to vote. We're talking about confirming people's identification, and that will take longer than a day. We have to be sure about who somebody is before we give them the opportunity and the right to vote. I hate to say this, but it does open itself up to fraud.

[The Speaker in the chair]

Sadly, again, you know, in my previous career, when I used to hand out – Mr. Speaker, good to see you, sir. You know, if I charged somebody with a criminal offence and maybe I gave them an appearance notice or a promise to appear, maybe sometimes there were conditions associated with that, and I had people signing that in good faith, which is the reason I chose that form of release for that individual. I believed that that person was going to show up to court, or I believed that that person was going to abide by their conditions. However, sadly, in some cases, not all cases but in some cases, people didn't show up to court. People didn't abide by their conditions. They weren't honourable on their sworn piece of paper that they signed. So we have to be cautious about this. I think we have to err on the side of caution when it comes to this, and I think that's extremely important.

You know, again, I mean, there are parts of this bill that are good, and there are parts of this bill that I think just require a little bit more consultation. I think they require a little bit more tweaking in order to make it even better.

11:00

You know, I do have some concerns, especially from the Chief Electoral Officer, and I'll quote Mr. Resler when he said, "Since I provided recommendations to the Special Select Ethics and Accountability Committee, I have not been consulted in relation to policy direction leading up to Bill 32." That's concerning to me, and I think that is concerning enough to me to where we should be taking a pause. We should be allowing those who are the experts to come in and talk about this.

I mean, I can tell right now, you know, that most people in this Legislature other than the two ministers – actually, I don't believe the hon. Calgary-Hays was even a minister at the time. Certainly, the Member for Grande Prairie-Wapiti might have been the only one in this Legislature that is aware that there was a process of

identifying people who did not have identification but, again, a process that takes longer than a day.

One of the other things, Mr. Speaker, I'd like to bring to your attention again comes from the Chief Electoral Officer, I think, when he stated, you know:

While I applaud the spirit behind the proposals about advance polls and special mobile polls, I wanted to bring to your attention potential unintended consequences of these particular proposals. If passed in its current form, I am concerned that Bill 32 will deteriorate the service provided to electors and increase the timelines for communicating results.

You know, it's a concern, Mr. Speaker, and I think, again, that has to do with a lack of consultation, especially with those who are in a position to best know our electoral system; i.e., Mr. Resler and his expertise as the Chief Electoral Officer. Those are concerns, and I think that it's very important that we, again, bring it back to what the hon. Member for Airdrie had indicated, that it goes back to committee for consultation with, again, committee chairs, who are more than capable of dealing with this issue that would be brought forward to them.

The other thing I would like to touch on, Mr. Speaker, of course, is the Senate. You know, I understand what the members opposite are saying. I understand what the folks on this side are saying. Yes, in the end, they are appointed. I get the impression from both perspectives that not everybody is happy with appointed. On reflection, I'm not sure I really agree that an appointed body has the right to overrule or stand in the way of or be a barrier to an elected body.

But Albertans, I can tell you – and I know some of the government members, well, have been here for about three years but at the time were fairly new to Alberta, and Albertans are very proud of this opportunity to elect or have the ability to elect a candidate who would then possibly be appointed to the Senate. So, no, it's not being directly elected to the Senate – we all get that – but Albertans were very, very proud, just proud of the fact that they had an opportunity to elect a Senator to stand to be appointed, potentially be appointed. You know, that's going to be taken away from them.

As somebody that's been here all my life, certainly, and talked with many of my friends and my colleagues and those who I've worked with, I remember when Albertans had that first right to vote for their Senator. It was thought of just as a step in the right direction – a step in the right direction – Mr. Speaker, whereby, hopefully, one day we would have that right to vote in our Senators, and to think that it's regressing and taking that step back is certainly a concern for Albertans. It's a concern for the constituents to whom I have spoken.

You know, I remember heading back to the constituency on the weekend and attending one of the hockey games. It seems to be my part-time job, doing that, with my son playing hockey all the time. But just in talking to some of the parents, one of them brought this up in regard to: "Hey, is that right? We won't be allowed to vote for the opportunity to have a Senator anymore?" They were concerned with that, and I think that their concerns are valid ones. I think that we should be progressive when it comes to this and not go in the opposite direction.

You know, Mr. Speaker, when I see a bill such as this – again, I don't want to get in an argument as to the page numbers – certainly, something that is a large bill, that is dropped on us a week before the session was supposed to end, it's concerning to me. I think that in order for us to make sure that this can be the best bill possible for all Albertans, I believe that we really need to send this to committee and give the opportunity for the experts to come in and give their opinions on what really, truly is going to matter.

It cannot be stressed enough that the Chief Electoral Officer is somebody – and that's fine. I mean, everybody makes mistakes. You know, as my friend said, although he was being funny, they may have lost the Chief Electoral Officer's phone number. But, quite frankly, what's important is that he needed to be consulted on this, and we really needed to have his input. I can tell you that for anybody in my constituency, anybody in the election that I have been a part of, the Chief Electoral Officer is the first point of contact, and I think that for the government the Chief Electoral Officer should also be the first point of contact.

Mr. Speaker, I can't stress enough the importance of sending this to committee. I want to thank you and all the members for this opportunity.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Any questions for Calgary-West under 29(2)(a)? The Member for Chestermere-Rocky View.

Mrs. Aheer: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member. A couple of things I'd like to bring up and comment on with respect to some things that were said earlier.

The Speaker: Hon. member, we're under 29(2)(a).

Mrs. Aheer: Yes, sir. Thank you so much.

With respect to what the member was saying, he was speaking specifically around the electoral officer. One of the things that, again, is very, very interesting about this bill is the piece on consultation, which the member was speaking about. The Member for Edmonton-Centre had said that they had spoken with the Chief Electoral Officer on many, many occasions. But, again, oddly enough, and like the member was saying, specifically around the piece that the independent officer – and I believe the Member for Calgary-Hays was also mentioning this as well – was never consulted, it's interesting that there are certain pieces that were consulted on and certain ones that weren't. I find that a little bit confusing.

One of the things I wanted to bring up as well is in response to some questions that I had asked earlier with respect to the residency pieces. I mean, to Mr. Resler's credit – and the member was mentioning this as well, around the six-month residency piece. He's asked for that change, for the six months to be removed because it is hard to prove, very difficult, which is what the member was mentioning. It's difficult to prove. Why is it difficult to prove? Because it's easy to abuse. It's easy to abuse because it is hard to prove. I know it sounds silly to say it back and forth. But that's the actual reason.

Now, does that mean that you stop the ability to have a body of proof? No. As the member had said, you have to have identification. We get that. My question, then, ultimately is – and hopefully the member will have a chance to answer this – does that mean that with removing that six-month piece, if a person is here for one day and has the ability to have somebody vouch for them, then indeed are they able to vote?

11:10

Further to that, on the other side of things, if you remove the six months, which other provinces have – and I get that – don't you think that it would be easier and better for Alberta voters and voters that have the right to vote in this province because they are residing here to have a little bit of time to be able to go get their documentation together, to be able to present at election that they do indeed live here?

I mean, obviously, if you're a student from another province, that's going to be slightly different, but you would have a piece of

mail that came to your residence or whatever that is. The issue of proof – and I'm sure the member will be able to elaborate on this a little bit more – is actually always going to be an issue, so if we want to create the ability for accountability, which we do, especially within the electoral process, if we want to make sure that residents feel protected, that they feel safe, that we're actually strengthening the legislation, don't we want to make, at the very least, the ability for the average Albertan or the average resident to make sure that they have all their ducks in a row before they go to that process?

And then, I mean, to the Member for Edmonton-Centre, like he said, there are people that do not have the ability or the means, or they don't have this identification and need somebody to vouch for them. We understand that. The question is, though, and the interesting piece is when I'd ask the question – and I ask the question to the member here – that Mr. Resler brought this forward not because of anything other than that it is hard to prove. So we're basically saying that because we can't prove it, that's the reason to remove it. In my opinion, if anything, fine; make it smaller; do whatever you need to do with it.

If I could ask the member to please respond. If you could tell us, from your perspective, in terms of safety, in terms of making sure of accountability: how do you feel with respect to that?

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

Mr. Ellis: Thank you. Thank you, hon. member, for the question. It is hard to prove. It's hard to prove six months. It's hard to prove. Again, that's why those checks and balances were put into place many years ago when dealing with people who have lost their identification. When people were challenged with being able to prove who they were, that was not something that could be done in a day. But the same to your argument as well. We couldn't prove six months or a year.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there members who wish to speak on the referral amendment to second reading of Bill 32?

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

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 11:14 a.m.]

[Fifteen minutes having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

[The Speaker in the chair]

For the motion:

Aheer	Ellis	Schneider
Anderson, W.	McIver	Stier
Cooper	Orr	Yao
Drysdale	Pitt	

11:30

Against the motion:

Anderson, S.	Gray	Notley
Babcock	Hinkley	Payne
Carlier	Horne	Phillips
Carson	Jansen	Renaud
Ceci	Kazim	Rosendahl
Clark	Kleinstauber	Schmidt
Connolly	Larivee	Schreiner
Coolahan	Littlewood	Shepherd
Dach	Luff	Sigurdson
Drever	Malkinson	Sucha
Eggen	Mason	Turner

Feehan	McLean	Westhead
Fitzpatrick	Miranda	Woollard
Goehring	Nielsen	
Totals:	For – 11	Against – 41

[Motion on amendment REF1 lost]

The Speaker: Are there any members that wish to speak to Bill 32? The hon. Member for Calgary-Hays.

Mr. McIver: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise and speak to Bill 32, An Act to Strengthen and Protect Democracy in Alberta. I will reiterate that when the NDP does legislation, what the big print giveth, the small print almost always taketh away. This is just one more example of where that is indeed the case. In fact, I'm going to reflect for a few minutes. The Premier came into the House to speak on this bill last night, and that was highly entertaining. In fact, the Premier got a standing ovation from members on her side. The members on that side of the House are excited about this bill, but I have to tell you that there are lots that ought to concern Albertans, because democracy matters.

There are several issues here. First of all, let's just talk about democracy. The fact is that what the bill does is reduce democracy. Right up until now, until this NDP government showed up, Albertans had the ability to periodically vote for Albertans that might after that be appointed as Senators. This government has repealed that ability. Rather than strengthening democracy, this government has said that Albertans' voices are not important. That, actually, should be concerning to everyone in Alberta, the fact that their government doesn't want their voice heard.

It should also be a concern – we talked about the residency requirement. The residency requirement of six months has been repealed. Now, Mr. Speaker, when I take a vacation in Mexico, I don't get to vote for the government there, and if I take a vacation in Arizona, I don't get to vote there either. I would hate for people to think that they could come to Alberta for the weekend or the week and manage to vote. I think that is something that becomes a realistic possibility under this legislation.

Now, Mr. Speaker, I know that members on the other side are feeling tender about this. In fact, one earlier today said that he was angry that he had to talk about this. I suppose that if a group of people I was connected to brought this forward, I might be angry, too, like the member opposite, having to defend such a piece of legislation. Then again, anger is the normal situation across the way. The fact that the six-month residency requirement has been taken away I think will be a concern for a lot of Albertans. I have to tell you that since this has been in the public discourse – you probably won't be surprised, Mr. Speaker – I don't judge what people really think.

Mr. Dach: Why do you want to disenfranchise people who want to come here to work?

The Speaker: Hon. member.

Mr. McIver: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member is so enthusiastic about democracy that he can't wait his turn. I hope that when he gets his turn, he will stand up and be just as enthusiastic about democracy, more enthusiastic than he's allowing Albertans to be that want to vote for their Senators, for example, much more than that.

Mr. Speaker, there's a discussion here about the possibilities. It's been talked about – and I don't know whether it's true or not – that there could be a Charter challenge here. Here's the concern. The government is going to take away some people's ability to speak: PACs, third parties, this or that. There's a school of

thought – and I'm not a lawyer, I'm not a judge, so I don't know whether this is right or not – that that might be considered unconstitutional. The government seems to realize that, but they're going ahead anyway.

What's common with this, as with several other pieces of legislation that they have passed with sections in that are widely thought to be unconstitutional: I can't help but wonder, Mr. Speaker, whether the government knows this, whether the government thinks that they might lose, but they just want it in place for one more election because if it's a constitutional challenge, it may well take more than a year and a half to get there. I'm questioning the government's motivation here and wondering whether, indeed, they're hoping to have these rules in place just for one more election, before a challenge could be mounted and concluded. I don't know. Perhaps some member of the government will stand up and make that clear one way or the other, but you can hardly blame me for wondering.

You can hardly blame me for wondering about the government's sincerity about listening to Albertans when they are trying to add a new independent officer of the Legislature when they're not talking to the current officer of the Legislature, Glen Resler, as he has made clear in a letter to the minister on December 6, 2017, where he says that he wasn't consulted. Yes, he says that he gave testimony at the committee that ended – I don't know – several months ago, whatever, but during the time the government was putting together this piece of legislation, the independent elections officer makes it clear that he was not called during that time.

Consequently, one really has to wonder about the government's sincerity in wanting to create another independent officer when they don't talk to the independent officer that they already have. You would think that they would pick up the phone and call. You would think one of them has access to e-mail. You would think that somebody has time to go and have a cup of coffee and knock on the door and say: hey, independent officer who is responsible for this area of legislation and democracy in Alberta, perhaps you should be included in the conversation. But, no, that's not what the government did. They ignored that independent officer.

Now, Mr. Speaker, you really have to wonder about their sincerity when you've got these inconsistencies, severe inconsistencies, in the bill. You've got to wonder about the fact that they've been warned after the fact, nonetheless. I'll resist the urge to reflect on the vote we just had because that would be out of order, but you do have to wonder about the fact that you've got so many pieces of this legislation that so many people haven't even talked about that are going to change the way, indeed, in which we pick our next government. You've got to wonder whether this is yet one more attempt by this NDP government to try to put themselves in an advantageous position in the next election. It's consistent with previous legislation where they set the spending limits based, generally speaking, on what's their own highest donation limit and below everybody else's. It's a great example, where they set the election donations limits at the place that would be most advantageous specifically for the NDP as compared to the other parties.

You know what, Mr. Speaker? As an Albertan anybody listening to this should be very concerned. I am concerned, too, which is why I'm on my feet talking about this, because whether they pick our party to be the next government or some other party to be the next government, I just want to know that the contest has been fair. I may not like the fact that the current government is the government. The fact is that they were elected, and they have the right to be that government. I want every election to be fair and unbiased and not weighted to one side or the other. I can't help but wonder whether

this is one more attempt by this government to weight things in their own favour.

11:40

Now, again, the fact is that the cost of enumeration has been talked about by Elections Alberta, \$11 million, and it's been noted that it probably won't be effective. In other words, why spend the money if you can't get the job done? It doesn't make sense, yet there it is in black and white. You know what, Mr. Speaker? It may not have been in there had the government actually talked to somebody who was in the know on these things. As we are sure of, that is not the case.

Now, the government has taken some steps to prohibit government announcements during the elections, to not use taxpayers' dollars. Unfortunately, the exemptions for this portion of the bill are too extensive and leave too much room for government discretion and potential abuse. In other words, what the big print giveth, there's a risk that the small print may taketh away. We think that the government has designed this in such a fashion that they could do an end run on it and basically put themselves in a position where others may not be able to advertise but they may. This is another reason why we should be concerned about this bill and another reason why Albertans should wonder about this government's intentions and whether they have any belief in indeed strengthening democracy and any interest in protecting democracy, which is really odd because they're here as the result of a democratic process that went their way. Yet they seem to want to tip the playing field in their favour as they go forward.

Now, the government also needs to provide clarity on the legal definition of, quote, the administration of political parties to ensure that the legislation is not unconstitutional given its regulations outside the writ period. This ought to be clarified before this legislation is put in place, Mr. Speaker. It's not one of those things that we should leave to hope and chance and leave to any party's discretion but this one's in particular, that has shown a real propensity for tipping the scales in their own favour. To have them decide after this legislation is beyond this House is most inadvisable for Albertans and, by extension, most inadvisable for this government.

The way that we're governed matters. The way that we choose those people that make decisions that everybody else has to follow matters a great deal. This is an example of ignoring those important issues. Now, this bill increases the maximum penalty for general offences under the Elections Act from \$500 to \$5,000, which, actually, may turn out to be a good idea. But I haven't really heard any explanation from the government side members of why that's the right number. I might even be prepared to agree with them. But the fact is that when they trot out a bill of such core importance to Alberta a week before the Legislature was scheduled to end – and thank goodness the opposition caused the Legislature to go longer so that we could at least attempt to debate this – and when it arrives on an eight and a half by 11 sheet rather than going to the printer, Mr. Speaker, it really shows that the government didn't have their act together, didn't have it planned out, and was jamming things in there at the last minute. It really shows that their claim to wanting to strengthen and protect democracy is a fleeting one indeed, especially when you consider that the House went many, many months between sittings after the spring session. We didn't get back in here till October, and during all of those months out of here the government didn't actually put enough effort into this, probably the most important bill because it has to do with the way we elect our governments, to have it ready before the day before they introduced it, which was almost the day before the Legislature was scheduled to recess.

The work hasn't been done. They haven't done the work. They haven't done the preparation. They haven't put the thought into it, and they're going to throw Alberta into the next election under the guidance of a government and an effort that is so haphazard, so slipshod, so half-baked that they ought to be ashamed of themselves. Instead, they're just angry that some people are questioning their shoddy workmanship when, in fact, they ought to be ashamed of their shoddy workmanship.

There are just too many things to be concerned about here. Now, again we're on the main motion, so I'll mention again the residency requirement. Mr. Speaker, I lock my front door; I imagine that you lock yours. I don't know. But there is a saying that you lock your doors to keep the honest people honest because dishonest people will come in whether your door is locked or not.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any questions or comments under 29(2)(a)? The Member for Calgary-Elbow.

Mr. Clark: Yeah. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to focus specifically on the hon. member's comments about the residency period. You said that the way we're governed matters. You know what else matters? Facts, actual facts, matter. I have some concerns with this bill. There's absolutely no question that I have concerns with this bill. I have concerns with how rushed it is. I have concerns with the fact that they didn't allow the Select Special Ethics and Accountability Committee last year to do its work, which would have avoided many of the problems that this bill seeks to undo.

But to attempt to deceive Albertans to think that somehow we're going to be overrun by hordes of Saskatchewanians and British Columbians and people from Prince Edward Island and wherever who just swan in one day to vote in Alberta and then take off again – it's factually incorrect. It is not true. It is the kind of fact-free, divisive, negative, pandering, dog-whistle politics that is infecting our province. It is unhelpful. It's worse than unhelpful, Mr. Speaker. It is a threat, frankly, to our democracy. It is not true that someone could simply show up in Alberta one day and vote.

Mrs. Aheer: Yes. It is true.

Mr. Clark: It is not true. You need to be ordinarily resident.

Why is this bit in the bill? Why is this in the bill? Because the Chief Electoral Officer suggested that it be in the bill. Why? Because the Ontario Court of Appeal, in a decision called, I believe, the Frank decision, ruled on the six-month residency requirement, okay? That is now before the Supreme Court of Canada. You need to declare that you are ordinarily resident in Alberta and provide identification to substantiate the place of residence. If you simply fly into the province and declare that you're ordinarily resident, you are not.

So to suggest that this is going to lead to widespread voter fraud, frankly, smacks of the kind of untruths that we see coming out of the United States right now. It isn't true. It isn't true, Mr. Speaker. [interjections] It isn't true. There was not widespread voter fraud in the United States, and there will not be widespread voter fraud in this province. It simply isn't true. People who come to this province and who are ordinarily resident should be allowed to vote. [interjections] It is problematic. How do we prove six months?

I have concerns with this bill, and I'm not going to defend every aspect of it, but the residency period and the way that the UCP has gone about using this as a divisive, dog-whistle wedge are not the kinds of things that I want to see infect politics in my province. It is disingenuous to do so. So I would encourage the hon. member and I would genuinely encourage the UCP to rethink their strategy on this. To suggest that there is widespread voter fraud even in the

United States appears to be completely untrue, and it certainly is untrue in Alberta. We do not have widespread voter fraud here. We will not have people who are fraudulently or illegitimately voting because of this bill. It simply will not happen, Mr. Speaker, and I think that it does not serve democracy, it does not serve the process for the UCP to suggest that that will happen here. I do fear for the tone of politics that we have seen recently in this province, and I fear that it's going to only get worse.

With that, I believe my time is nearly up. I look forward to finally moving on to the committee phase of this bill because we certainly have some changes that we'd like to propose. I would hope the government would actually take the opportunity to hear what the Chief Electoral Officer has to say as well and to . . . [interjection]

11:50

The Speaker: Hon. member.

Mr. Clark: . . . bring in some of the changes in Committee of the Whole and actually amend this bill and do so in this term, Mr. Speaker.

With that, I'll end my comments under 29(2)(a) and look forward to moving forward with the bill. Thank you.

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

Mr. McIver: Yeah. The gentleman just voted against listening to the Chief Electoral Officer less than 10 minutes ago, 15 minutes ago. You can't believe a thing that the hon. member has to say when he's so definitely inconsistent with what he says. [interjections] You know what? No one . . .

The Speaker: Hon. member. Just a caution about personal comments, with respect.

Mr. McIver: Thank you for that caution. I will be careful, Mr. Speaker.

In fact, no one has said that there will be widespread voter fraud. I said: you lock your doors to keep the honest people honest. We ought to lock the electoral door just enough to keep the honest people honest, too, because democracy matters.

Mr. Westhead: Mr. Speaker, I would like to request unanimous consent, if there happens to be a division before noon, that the bells be shortened to five minutes, please.

[Unanimous consent granted]

The Speaker: Members wishing to speak to Bill 32?

[The voice vote indicated that the motion for second reading carried]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 11:52 a.m.]

[Five minutes having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

[The Speaker in the chair]

For the motion:

Anderson, S.	Gray	Nielsen
Babcock	Hinkley	Payne
Carlier	Horne	Phillips
Carson	Jansen	Renaud
Ceci	Kazim	Rosendahl
Clark	Kleinsteuber	Schmidt
Connolly	Larivee	Schreiner
Coolahan	Littlewood	Shepherd

Dach	Luff	Sigurdson	Anderson, W.	McIver	Yao
Drever	Malkinson	Sucha	Cooper	Orr	
Eggen	Mason	Turner	Totals:	For – 40	Against – 8
Feehan	McLean	Westhead	[Motion carried; Bill 32 read a second time]		
Fitzpatrick	Miranda	Woollard			
Goehring					

Against the motion:

Aheer

Drysdale

Pitt

The Speaker: The House stands adjourned until 1:30 p.m.

[The Assembly adjourned at 12 p.m.]

Table of Contents

Prayers.....	2465
Orders of the Day	2465
Government Bills and Orders	
Second Reading	
Bill 32 An Act to Strengthen and Protect Democracy in Alberta.....	2465
Division	2473
Division	2475

Alberta Hansard is available online at www.assembly.ab.ca

For inquiries contact:

Managing Editor

Alberta Hansard

3rd Floor, 9820 – 107 St

EDMONTON, AB T5K 1E7

Telephone: 780.427.1875