



Province of Alberta

The 29th Legislature
Third Session

Alberta Hansard

Wednesday morning, December 13, 2017

Day 66

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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Anderson, Wayne, Highwood (UCP)
Babcock, Erin D., Stony Plain (NDP)
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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)
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Strankman, Rick, Drumheller-Stettler (UCP)
Sucha, Graham, Calgary-Shaw (NDP)
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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

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| Clark | Horne |
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Standing Committee on Alberta's Economic Future

Chair: Mr. Sucha
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| Clark | Piquette |
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| Dach | Starke |
| Fitzpatrick | Taylor |
| Gotfried | |

Select Special Auditor General Search Committee

Chair: Mr. Shepherd
Deputy Chair: Mr. Malkinson

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| Kleinstauber | |

Standing Committee on Families and Communities

Chair: Ms Goehring
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| Ellis | Orr |
| Hinkley | Renaud |
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| Luff | Swann |
| McKitrick | Yao |
| McPherson | |

Standing Committee on Legislative Offices

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Deputy Chair: Mr. Malkinson

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| Drever | Pitt |
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| Kleinstauber | |

Special Standing Committee on Members' Services

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Deputy Chair: Cortes-Vargas

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| Cooper | Nixon |
| Dang | Piquette |
| Jabbour | Pitt |
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| McIver | |

Standing Committee on Private Bills

Chair: Ms Kazim
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| Babcock | Rosendahl |
| Drever | Stier |
| Drysdale | Strankman |
| Hinkley | Sucha |
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Standing Committee on Privileges and Elections, Standing Orders and Printing

Chair: Ms Fitzpatrick
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| Coolahan | Miller |
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| Gotfried | Pitt |
| Hanson | van Dijken |
| Kazim | |

Standing Committee on Public Accounts

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Deputy Chair: Mr. Dach

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| Hunter | Renaud |
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| Luff | |

Standing Committee on Resource Stewardship

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| Fraser | McPherson |
| Hanson | Nielsen |
| Kazim | Rosendahl |
| Kleinstauber | Woollard |
| Loewen | |

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

9 a.m.

Wednesday, December 13, 2017

[The Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

The Speaker: Good morning, hon. members.

There are many individuals in our province and some of our members who are in Hanukkah, and we wish happy Hanukkah to them.

Also, if you would bow your heads and reflect on the following Christian prayer.

I heard the bells on Christmas day
Their old familiar carols play,
And wild and sweet the words repeat
Of peace on earth, good will to men . . .

And in despair I bowed my head:
“There is no peace on earth,” I said,
“For hate is strong and mocks the song
Of peace on earth, good will to men.”

Then pealed the bells more loud and deep:
“God is not dead, nor doth He sleep;
The wrong shall fail, the right prevail,
With peace on earth, good will to men” [and women].

Please be seated.

Orders of the Day

Government Motions

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs.

Child and Youth Advocate

37. Mr. S. Anderson moved on behalf of Mr. Mason: Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly concur in the December 2017 report of the Standing Committee on Legislative Offices, Sessional Paper 640/2017, and recommend to the Lieutenant Governor in Council that the Child and Youth Advocate, Mr. Del Graff, be reappointed for a term to expire on March 31, 2020.

Mr. S. Anderson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To provide some context, I can indicate that on December 1 the Standing Committee on Legislative Offices met and unanimously approved reappointing Del Graff as Child and Youth Advocate for a two-year term ending March 31, 2020. As members know, the office of the Child and Youth Advocate and, indeed, the child intervention system as a whole is undergoing significant change, including as a consequence of Bill 18 from this spring as well as the minister’s child intervention panel. With this reappointment the office is assured of steady leadership during this period.

Thank you.

Mrs. Pitt: Mr. Speaker, if I may say a few words in response to the appointment of Del Graff as Child and Youth Advocate, the United Conservative Party is pleased to see the appointment of Del Graff into the role of the Child and Youth Advocate officially. Del Graff has worked tirelessly in that role and has exceeded his capacity to be able to offer investigative and advocacy services to marginalized youth in our province. As the scope of his work and his office has changed, we know that Del Graff will certainly rise to the challenge and do a great job moving forward, as he has in the past.

We congratulate him, and we look forward to working with him in the future.

The Speaker: Are there any other members who wish to speak to Government Motion 37?

The hon. minister to close debate.

Mr. S. Anderson: I close debate. Thanks.

[Government Motion 37 carried]

Government Bills and Orders Committee of the Whole

[Ms Sweet in the chair]

The Deputy Chair: Good morning, everyone. I would like to call the committee to order.

Bill 31

A Better Deal for Consumers and Businesses Act

The Deputy Chair: Are there any comments, questions, or amendments to be offered in respect to this bill? The hon. Minister of Service Alberta.

Ms McLean: Thank you, Madam Chair. I’m pleased to rise and speak in Committee of the Whole on Bill 31. One of our government’s key priorities is making life better and more affordable by protecting Albertans’ pocketbooks. That’s why we’re proposing to strengthen consumer protections. Since July we have been consulting with Albertans through an online survey, public open houses, and targeted engagement with industry stakeholders. This bill represents the culmination of this effort.

Before we begin, I would like to briefly highlight some of the issues for the committee. I want to start by speaking about the proposed amendments to the Veterinary Profession Act. We know that veterinarians are trusted professionals that Albertans look to to provide quality care for their pets. At the same time, over the past several months we heard from ordinary Albertans who told us that they want to be better informed when looking for veterinary services for their pets. We also met with the Alberta Veterinary Medical Association and other veterinary industry stakeholders, including clinics, and we heard feedback and concerns.

The new measures that we are proposing would require disclosure of all fees before administering any veterinary services or treatments for household pets except those fees exempted in regulation and require customer approval prior to administering veterinary services unless exempted in regulation; for example, in the case of emergencies. Currently ABVMA’s bylaws speak to informed consent but do not explicitly state that this includes the disclosure of fees in that process.

We are also proposing to enable advertising of fees, something that veterinarians in Alberta are prevented from doing currently. This would give Albertans similar transparency measures as are available in Ontario and British Columbia. We look forward to working with the veterinary community in the development of regulations for Bill 31 if it is passed.

Now, Madam Chair, I would turn to the wider provisions of Bill 31. We are proposing to rename the Fair Trading Act to the consumer protection act and add a plain language preamble.

As well, we are mandating the creation of a consumer bill of rights to better inform Albertans of the protections under this legislation.

Section 6.1 will prohibit unilateral changes to ongoing contracts without the consent of the consumer.

We'll also address the use of mandatory arbitration clauses and agreements. Section 16 of the act will prohibit suppliers from enforcing or attempting to enforce these clauses or agreements and make clear that they're of no legal effect in Alberta. Ontario and Quebec already have prohibited such clauses.

Online reviews of businesses are more prevalent than ever. Our bill will add two new sections to the act to make clear that businesses cannot stop consumers from writing and posting reviews. Consumers who file complaints in good faith or issue a negative review would be afforded a new right of defence against lawsuits, and businesses would no longer be able to prevent consumers from posting online reviews or intimidate consumers into withdrawing any negative reviews or complaints.

Our bill will also prohibit the use of bots and prohibit anyone from knowingly selling or facilitating a sale of bot-purchased tickets. Given the unfairness of bots generally, the bill will also require primary sellers to carry out reasonable diligence to identify and cancel any bot-purchased tickets. The bill will also give a ticket purchaser or business a right of action in court when they have suffered a loss due to bots. The bill will require resellers, also referred to as secondary sellers, to provide a full refund in certain circumstances such as where the event is cancelled, the ticket is invalid or unusable, or the ticket was purchased by a bot.

Aside from a house, a car is likely the biggest purchase that most Albertans will make, and that's why we are proposing changes that will increase transparency and Albertans' confidence when buying or repairing a car. Our bill will require automotive businesses to disclose key vehicle information to consumers, use a standard bill of sale, provide a warranty for repairs, provide a written estimate of work on request for repairs, and not carry out repair work unless the consumer has provided authorization.

Madam Chair, I'd also like to briefly speak to the proposed changes to AMVIC. Our bill will further advance the Alberta Motor Vehicle Industry Council's mandate and make it more responsive to the public interest, as envisioned in the Cuff report. If passed, the act will give greater public oversight of how AMVIC operates by transitioning it to a public agency. That means the government will have greater oversight of AMVIC's board, governance, and its bylaws. It also means that the AMVIC board will be subject to the same rules of transparency and accountability as the rest of Alberta's ABCs.

9:10

Currently the AMVIC board is a 13-member board of directors that includes seven industry appointees and up to six public-at-large representatives appointed by the minister. The intention of the proposed changes will shift the composition of the board to six industry appointees and six public-at-large representatives, with the minister appointing the board chair. The public members and the chair would be appointed through the existing open and transparent appointment process for all of Alberta's ABCs. As a result, I want to assure everyone that the auto industry will still maintain its voice on AMVIC while making AMVIC more responsive to consumer concerns.

Further, under the proposed changes the compensation fund will still exist, but these new provisions will allow the minister to work with the AMVIC board to address the existing issues related to appeals from claim decisions and notices.

I certainly want to recognize and do appreciate AMVIC's efforts to address the recommendations stemming from the 2016 independent review of their governance and operations by George Cuff. I also want to be clear that AMVIC will continue to play an important role in the auto sector, to the benefit of both consumers and businesses. I am committed to working closely with AMVIC

and its board to successfully implement the spirit of the remaining Cuff report recommendations, and the proposed changes will lay this foundation.

Payday loans are not the only form of high-cost borrowing, Madam Chair. Rent-to-own arrangements and vehicle title loans and other high-interest loans can raise many of the same issues as payday loans. This bill will regulate all lending that happens at a rate of 32 per cent or higher per year and will require that these businesses be licensed. In addition, these businesses will be required to disclose information about the credit being provided and have sufficient signage to warn consumers about the risks of relying on high-cost credit.

In summary, Madam Chair, this bill addresses a broad array of consumer issues and contains smart consumer protection proposals. This bill also aims to better protect the majority of honest businesses in Alberta by levelling the playing field.

I look forward to the debate on the bill, answering questions, and providing further explanations so that all members of this House have adequate information to support this bill.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. minister.

Are there any other members wishing to speak? The hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake.

Mr. Cyr: Thank you, Madam Chair. It is disappointing to hear the minister saying that she had consulted with veterinarians and AMVIC, the industry, but I will say that in the spirit of working with the minister, I'd like to move an amendment that I believe and my caucus believes fills a gap that is left within this bill.

The gap specifically is the fact that a person can own the software for doing these bot sales, but they are not allowed to use it. That seems strange. Why would we allow them to own something that clearly is not good for Alberta? A good example would be that you're not allowed to create commercial pills, yet we allowed commercial pill presses to be owned by Albertans. What my amendment is planning on doing is to make it so that people can't own the bot software as well.

The Deputy Chair: This amendment will be referred to as amendment A1.

If you could please go ahead, hon. member.

Mr. Cyr: Thank you, Madam Chair. As I was explaining before, this is filling a gap. I would encourage every member of the House to vote for this. I think that it's a reasonable amendment, and it shows that opposition and government can work together to strengthen legislation.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other members wishing to speak to amendment A1? The hon. Minister of Service Alberta.

Ms McLean: Thank you, Madam Chair, and I thank the member opposite for bringing this forward. This is clearly an amendment that I think is very well intended and brought forward with the intent to strengthen the legislation, so I certainly appreciate the member's intention on this and also the research that, I'm sure, he engaged in in order to bring this forward. That being said, it was really important to me and to our government from a policy perspective that all of the items that are found in this legislation are items that are enforceable. Enforcement certainly requires detection, which is why we have focused the bill in the way that we have.

Certainly, the policy proposals respecting ticket sales in this bill are intended to address secondary sellers that purchase a large

quantity of tickets to engage in the business of secondary sales, so we've referenced the use of bots to address this activity. Individuals who use bots with the intent to engage in secondary selling may procure bots, but they also often build them for the purpose of circumventing security measures, so it's not always through purchase. However, an individual can purchase a bot in order to acquire tickets.

Part of our concern here, Madam Chair, is that an individual can also purchase a bot in order to acquire a ticket for personal use. Given that this provision is not something that we've had the opportunity to consult on – the prevalence of bots being used to acquire tickets for personal use is not something that there is information available to the House on at this point – the extent to which this occurs, acquiring a ticket for secondary sales versus acquiring for personal use, is unclear to this House. Certainly, while this amendment would catch individuals who use bots to acquire tickets for secondary sale use, it would also catch them using it for personal use, which goes beyond the policy intent of these sections.

Additionally, Madam Chair, as I alluded to when I began, enforcement is difficult without detection, and there are no mechanisms in place to detect the procurement of bots. Through our consultations with the companies who are ultimately responsible for the due diligence portions that this would apply to, they have the ability to detect when bots are used. Primary ticket sellers have the technology and have invested quite a bit of capital to ensure that they can detect the use of bots to purchase tickets, which allows us from our side to be able to engage in enforcement. However, our consultations have shown that there are no mechanisms in place that exist to detect the procurement of bots, so while I agree with intention of the amendment, it is equally important to me that all of the sections in the legislation are something that I can practically effect, that are tangible, and that we have an avenue to be able to meaningfully address.

While I would love for this to be a reality, it unfortunately is not given the state of technology at this time, so for that reason I'm going to have to vote against this amendment. Certainly, Madam Chair, I do not want to suggest to Albertans that we can do something that we cannot actually effect or do and have a portion of the legislation that is not something that we can effect and that would suggest to the public that we could do more than could be done on this issue given the issues around detection. So I would encourage members to, unfortunately, vote against this amendment due to practicalities of the situation. But I thank the member for bringing it forward.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. minister.

Before I move on to the next speaker, we have a request for unanimous consent to revert to introductions.

[Unanimous consent granted]

Introduction of Guests

The Deputy Chair: I will call on the hon. Member for Calgary-Mackay-Nose Hill to do introductions.

Ms McPherson: Thank you, Madam Chair. Katie Soles is a highly regarded consultation and engagement professional known for her process design and facilitating contentious and complex issues, and she's helped unlock the best thinking groups across Canada and United States. Nominated and shortlisted for several awards, she is often called upon to design and deliver events and consultations whose outcomes demand significant shifts in behaviours and philosophies. She might be useful here. She's known for her skill with a wide range of stakeholders, from kids to councillors,

bohemians to businesspeople, artists to athletes, those seeking empowerment and the powerful. And she also has a fierce fashion sense. Katie, if you could please stand and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Deputy Chair: Welcome.

9:20

Bill 31

A Better Deal for Consumers and Businesses Act

(continued)

The Deputy Chair: Are there any other members wishing to speak to the amendment A1? The hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake.

Mr. Cyr: Thank you, Madam Chair. I'm disappointed to hear that we're not going to be moving this forward. Largely, I will say that, unfortunately, when it comes to this part of the bill, a lot of it is unenforceable, so one of the few things that we can put forward is that it is at least something we can do in Alberta, saying that it's not okay for owning this software. I'm very disappointed to hear that the minister is not accepting this.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member. Are there any other members wishing to speak to the amendment A1?

Seeing none, I will call the question.

[Motion on amendment A1 lost]

The Deputy Chair: We are now back on the main bill. The hon. Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster.

Dr. Starke: Thank you, Madam Chair. I have an amendment that I would like to put to the House, please. I will wait until members have had a chance to have the amendment distributed to them before speaking to it, but it should probably come as no surprise to anyone that my amendment deals specifically with the veterinary portions of this bill and deals with something that – certainly, I as a member of the Alberta Veterinary Medical Association have received literally hundreds of e-mails over the last two weeks on this topic. I know, speaking to my colleagues on both sides of the House, I believe just about every member if not every member of the House has received some form of communication from a member of our association. Thus far, at least, in those communications I have yet to hear from a single veterinary colleague who is in favour of the changes that are contained within Bill 31. Not a single one.

Bill 31 creates a significant problem for us, so, Madam Chair, what I'm moving today is that Bill 31 be amended such that section 2 be struck from the bill.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member. Your amendment will be referred to as A2. Please go ahead.

Dr. Starke: Thank you very much. You know, it's difficult to know where to start with this, Madam Chair, because this bill and the changes within it will result in changes to our profession that are so profound that I'm not even sure that everybody really understands just how significant they will be. You know, when you're not necessarily a part of a profession, when you're not necessarily involved with it, I think it's probably hard to really grasp what the effects might be and what the consequences might be. When I read some of the letters from my colleagues, both registered veterinary technicians and veterinarians, and I see the passion that they describe for their careers, for the work that they do, for their clients,

for their patients, I'm reminded of what it is about veterinary medicine that I first found special when I decided to become a veterinarian 45 years ago. It's something that I feel very, very strongly about, clearly.

I'm desperately proud of my profession. I think I communicate that, as I've also communicated that I, actually, have been retired. I saw my last patient in my hospital on December 31, 2011. Since that time I've only put my stethoscope back on once, and that was in May 2016, when I spent several hours volunteering to examine pets that had been evacuated from Fort McMurray from the wildfires. I was proud to be part of a veterinary team that donated hundreds and hundreds of hours to that effort. My contribution by comparison was small. I worked with a team of veterinary technologists from the Fish Creek clinic that had been there around the clock for three days. They had arrived there on the weekend, and they'd spent the entire weekend and Monday and Tuesday, and they were taking turns going back to their hotel room to rest. So I was very proud of my profession.

With specific regard, Madam Chair, to the bill and why I believe that the entire section on the Veterinary Profession Act should be deleted, I believe this because in order for this to be workable for the veterinary profession and for the animal-owning public in Alberta, there has to be a strong and productive working relationship between this government and the profession. I will say that Bill 31 and the way that it has been handled by the minister has destroyed that relationship irrevocably. It is damaged to the extent that, if this is proceeded with, our profession will suffer damage to an extent that I don't think anyone can even really imagine.

But, you know, last Tuesday the minister – on December 5, on page 2265 of *Hansard*, I quote the minister:

Our legislation is supported by a small-business owner, for example, the owner of Sandy Lane auto. It's supported by the Alberta Motor Association, which is very trusted in Alberta. They've said, "We believe all Albertans should have confidence in the service they're receiving." You know, they've got a long history of standards that make them experts, really, on the voice of this. I would encourage the members opposite to listen to the experts.

That's what the minister said last Tuesday, to listen to the experts. Well, I'm going to say exactly the same thing. I would encourage the members opposite to listen to the experts as well. Now, if you're stating that veterinarians aren't experts in this field, I would invite you to stand up and say that. But I would suggest to you, and in fact the minister has said in her letter, that veterinarians are trusted professionals. Sounds like they're experts. Veterinarians are trusted professionals. I would think that the over 300 emails that I have received – and I don't know how many have gone to the minister's office – would indicate that a large number of veterinarians and registered veterinary technologists indicate that Bill 31 is problematic.

But don't just listen to veterinarians. Why don't we listen to a lawyer? Mr. James Casey is a lawyer, a specialist in labour relations law. He is a Queen's Counsel. He graduated from the University of Alberta's Faculty of Law. He is a partner at Field Law. Actually, I got most of this information, interestingly, from the Labour department website, where Mr. Casey is listed on the website as being an expert on labour relations. I'll just give you some of his credentials because it's, like, a page long.

Jim is a sought-after speaker and author on labour and employment law topics and taught labour law at the University of Alberta as a sessional lecturer. Jim is the author of many labour and employment publications and is the editor of *Remedies in Labour Employment, and Human Rights* which has been cited by the Supreme Court of Canada. Jim also acts as legal counsel to many professional regulatory organizations. He founded the

Firm's Professional Regulatory Group and is the author of one of the leading texts in the area, *The Regulation of Professions in Canada*, which has been cited by the Supreme Court of Canada and many other Courts.

I read that, Madam Chair, to establish that Mr. Casey is indeed an expert. Mr. Casey has been retained by the Alberta Veterinary Medical Association to take a look at Bill 31. He has provided them with a preliminary opinion. In this opinion, amongst other things, it says, and I quote:

Part 5.1 of Bill 31 over-rides the AVMA's advertising rules that were democratically adopted by its members and creates a specialized regime for disclosure/consent that applies in certain circumstances. This was all done with very minimal discussion with the AVMA and without any reasonable advance notice that legislation was under active consideration. There was no crisis that needed to be addressed. Considering all the circumstances, I conclude that Bill 31 dramatically undermines self-governance for the profession of veterinary medicine and should be a matter of grave concern, not only to the AVMA but to all self-governing professions in Alberta.

That is from the Canadian legal expert on self-regulating professions. That's his opinion. It's not my opinion. It's not a veterinarian's opinion. It's from a lawyer who's an expert on self-regulating professions, and he's right here in Edmonton.

9:30

You know, it is stunning to me how this can proceed, and it seems that it's also quite surprising to Mr. Casey. I'd like to quote further from his brief.

In her letter of November 2, 2017 the... Minister for Service Alberta and Status of Women made an express commitment to the ABVMA that should the Government of Alberta determine this is an area of focus, then "... further consultation and engagement with industry stakeholders would be necessary to develop the details of any potential legislative or regulatory amendments."

The letter was copied to the Minister of Labour.

What consultation and engagement with industry stakeholders took place about potential legislative and regulatory amendments? There was no "heads-up" during meetings with officials that legislation was under active consideration. Instead, the matter was presumably kept secret so that the ABVMA could not rally opposition until it was too late.

Based on how matters unfolded, I conclude that the ABVMA is entirely justified in feeling that it was "blindsided" by the legislation. In my 30 years of experience with self-governing professions and legislation, I have found that the best public policy is developed through robust dialogue between government and professional regulatory body about the details about potential legislative initiatives. The approach by the government with respect to engagement with the ABVMA on Bill 31 falls far, far short of what we have come to expect in Alberta.

Madam Chair, that is why veterinarians are concerned, and their concerns have been confirmed by, as I said, a gentleman who is an expert.

But let's look at another reason why veterinarians do not trust the minister. On that same day on page 2265 the minister said:

Then the next piece is with respect to giving permission to veterinarians to advertise or post their fees. Now, this is a simple matter of transparency. I think that the value of transparency is something that we can all get behind.

Well, I would agree.

Now, in my two hands I'm holding two documents. One is a document that was presented at a meeting with the Alberta Veterinary Medical Association, the only one that was held, on October 26, and at that meeting some results of the survey were

shared. In my other hand I hold a copy of a document that, while it looks similar, is in fact different because this is what was shared publicly with a member of our association and forwarded on to me.

Now, what's different? Let me read you a paragraph.

Veterinary billing. From the consumer protection survey results, out of the 15 issues that were consulted on, the issue of veterinary billing ranked number 13 in importance. The top four issues of concern for Albertans were the consumer bill of rights, automotive sector issues, ticket sales, and truth in pricing.

That paragraph that I just read was not in the document that was discussed with the veterinarians. How can you call that transparency when you use two different versions of a document, one that's been edited for presentation to the veterinarians that very clearly shows that the issues that are perceived to be so burning in the minds of so many Albertans are in fact way, way, way down the list?

You know, the other thing that's missing from the document that we shared with the veterinarians is this. Interesting how it was edited out, too.

Some respondents who commented on this issue expressed that the government's priorities should be elsewhere. Surely, the government has a higher priority than vet service fees. How about addressing the much higher costs of centralizing all AHS lab testing into a government-run laboratory?

That was deleted. That was conveniently left off the version that was submitted and discussed with the Alberta Veterinary Medical Association. How on earth are you supposed to build a relationship of trust that ensures that the best interests of both the public and the profession are being garnered when you're not being told all the information, when information is being deliberately withheld?

Madam Chair, that is why I am moving to strike all sections relating to the Veterinary Profession Act, and I'm going to encourage this government to go back to the drawing board. We'd like to go back to the drawing board with the Minister of Labour, who's actually responsible for the veterinary profession, not the Minister of Service Alberta.

From the relationship we had with her – and I talked about this yesterday – this was the consultation leading up to Bill 13, this stack of documents, with no fewer than 12 separate communications back and forth between the minister and the Alberta Veterinary Medical Association, including the exchange of four copies of the draft bill. And this, by contrast, is the sum total of the consultations and the documentation on Bill 31. It's not even comparable, Madam Chair, and Bill 31 is far more profound in terms of how the association operates, how the profession will conduct its responsibilities, and how it will discharge them to the people of Alberta.

Bill 13 was certainly important, but really what it did was that it formalized what was already in place, a close working relationship between the registered veterinary technologists and the Alberta Veterinary Medical Association, and we're glad to have it. It was a great piece of legislation, and there was a great deal of trust built up between the association and this minister. We'd like to go back to this minister. If there are problems, perceived or real, with the way veterinarians are handling things, we are interested in self-improvement. We want to work with this government in making things better, but we don't believe that a self-regulating profession should have dictated to it how to do it by government, by cabinet, by a group of individuals who, while well meaning, do not know or understand the veterinary profession. They simply do not.

Madam Chair, I'm moving this amendment because I do want to improve my profession. I absolutely do. This bill will not do that. This bill will cause more problems than the perceived ones that are there, and it won't solve the perceived ones that are there. Billing, making things more affordable: Ontario advertises fees. I just went

on the Ontario Veterinary Medical Association website, and their published total for an annual veterinary cost for a dog in Ontario, where they advertise fees, is \$406. I went onto our association and checked our fee guide. If you total the same procedures, in our fee guide the total is \$359.80, roughly \$50 less than Ontario. But they can advertise, and we don't. Not that we can't. We don't because we've chosen not to – we've chosen not to – and as a self-regulating profession we should be able to retain that right because of the damage that it creates to the profession when advertising is allowed. I've stated that at every stage of debate, and I continue to stand by it.

The Ontario and B.C. associations and several jurisdictions in the United States that allow the advertising of veterinary fees have seen the deterioration of care, and they have seen the deterioration of the collaborative work that needs to be done between veterinarians and veterinary practices. It will damage the veterinary profession in Alberta. I would say, without, I think, too much fear of contradiction, that veterinarians are trusted professionals. If we weren't trusted, why would we have a 93 per cent trust rating in Alberta according to a 2016 survey? I won't even give the number for politicians, pollsters, or lawyers, but I will tell you that the number for veterinarians is always within the top five. We are a trusted profession, and if there is 7 per cent of the population that doesn't trust us, we'll work on that, and we're happy to work on that.

All I'm saying to my colleagues on both sides of the House: do not vote in favour of this bill. Vote to remove these clauses from this bill because, I can tell you as I stand here, they will damage the veterinary profession. They absolutely will damage the profession, and they will not result in a solution to the perceived problems that are talked about in this survey. They will not. I can absolutely tell you that with absolute certainty.

9:40

You know, the minister is well intentioned. I really think she wants to make things better for Albertans and for pet owners, but the way to do that is to work with the association, not against it. The way to do that is to consult and collaborate and bounce ideas back and forth, not blindsides them with a bill with zero effective consultation. That's not how you make things better for Albertans.

Madam Chair, these sections are deeply offensive to veterinarians, but what is even more offensive is the way that veterinarians have been dealt with throughout the course of this debate. Many of my colleagues have received a form letter from the minister, or a form letter written by the minister's department that was then signed by a number of the members across that in most cases didn't even address what they had talked about in their letter. Veterinarians, justifiably, I think, feel just a little bit slighted by this government, but it's not beyond hope. It's not beyond hope.

Get rid of these amendments. Vote in favour of my amendment to remove the sections of the Veterinary Profession Act from this bill, and in my view you have a chance – a chance – to win back the trust of the veterinary profession in Alberta. But if these go through, that trust has been shattered, and I can tell you, from having treated some patients and having them be tearfully presented to me in my veterinary clinic, sometimes when things are shattered, you just can't put the pieces back together again. It's sad – it's really sad – when that happens, but that's what we're dealing with here.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other members wishing to speak to amendment A2? The hon. Minister of Service Alberta, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Mackay-Nose Hill.

Ms McLean: Thank you, Madam Chair. I thank the member for his passion and dedication to his industry, that he is certainly vested in and cares deeply about. We know that veterinarians are trusted professionals and that Albertans look to them to provide quality care for their pets. We met with the Alberta Veterinary Medical Association and other veterinary industry stakeholders: the Alberta Veterinary Technologist Association and the Western College of Veterinary Medicine. We met with them in person and had telephone conferences with them and department officials from both Labour and Service Alberta on October 27, November 10, November 28. Then we met with various vet clinic owners on September 22, November 23, and November 26.

Madam Chair, certainly, we had in-depth conversations with them. We heard their concerns, but I think that there are some important things to point out here. First of all, as I've mentioned in my speaking notes, the provisions of this legislation are not dissimilar to what we find in other jurisdictions in Canada where self-regulating professions of all kinds are alive and well. This is also not dissimilar to other professions. For example, in Canada lawyers are permitted to advertise and are required to disclose their fees.

Additionally, Madam Chair, when we look to medical professionals in private, non publicly funded situations, we can look, certainly, very easily to our neighbours to the south for what that looks like in terms of advertising. The doctors in the United States, that are providing all kinds of care, including surgical services to humans, are advertising their fees and are permitted to do so, and I don't think anyone in this House would suggest that those doctors are not also trusted professionals as people are putting their very lives in the care of those medical professionals.

Certainly, these changes are very much in line with other professions, similar other professions in similar circumstances, and in line with other Canadian jurisdictions, Madam Chair, where self-regulating professions of all kinds are alive and well. It is within the purview of governments across Canada to set the scope for the associations that are self-regulating. Again, this is not dissimilar to what has been done in B.C. and Ontario.

We certainly did consult. We met with them. We had telephone conferences. We met with them in terms of their availability as well. Over several months we heard from ordinary Albertans as well, who told us that they want to be informed when they're looking for veterinary services for their pets. Madam Chair, we heard from average Albertans. We heard that they want to be informed when they're making these decisions.

A woman here in Alberta, Davida Marantz, got an unwelcome surprise when she got out of the hospital in 2014 and went to pick up her beloved sheltie named Libby from friends. The dog, while in her friend's care, needed \$4,800 in dental surgery while the Edmonton senior was in hospital care, an amount she felt obligated to pay back to her friends. She said that they were so generous in taking care of her pet and doing a really fine job that there was no way she would leave them with the bill. When she checked around at other clinics, feeling that that \$4,800 was very high, she found that the quotes that she could get were for thousands of dollars less. She is certainly in favour of transparency because she feels that this will help Albertans to get a sense of what they're in for.

Another woman came forward and told us her story. She took her cat in because it had swallowed a sewing needle, Madam Chair, during her spring cleaning. The animal was taken in and given an X-ray, and she wasn't told the cost of that X-ray before it was done. They just took their pet to the veterinarian nearest to their home. They were then told that it would be an additional \$1,200 to \$1,500 to repair the pet. She said: I can't afford that to operate on the pet. I imagine that an operation was required. They said: If you give us

\$400, we'll do the surgery, and we'll take your cat. She said that they paid the money, and they never saw their cat again. She said to me, in speaking with her, that she didn't know what happened to the cat at the end of the day, and she said that it was an absolutely wretched experience. She remembers sitting in her car crying, thinking: I just paid someone to take my cat away. She's glad that the government is making sure that veterinarians will have to make it clear how much the care will cost. As mentioned, certainly, disclosure is required by the association, but that does not expressly include fees, so she applauds this, stating: there's going to be more information up front about costs, and I think that will be hugely beneficial.

9:50

Kath Oltsher is the cofounder of Zoe's Animal Rescue in Edmonton. She also likes the proposed guidelines. The animal rescue that she is involved with takes in unwanted animals and attempts to help those with low incomes pay for the cost of veterinary care. She says that she's had positive experiences with veterinarians who provide services to the shelter, and she doesn't want the profession to think that the changes are meant to be adversarial. Neither do we, Madam Chair. She says: it does come like we're coming after you, but I don't know how else to make a change happen. I think that is important. We've heard impassioned pleas from Albertans who want to be informed, who want to know what the cost is going to be. Many of these are vulnerable Albertans with low incomes who rely on their pets for companionship. At the end of the day, Madam Chair, these individuals don't know who to turn to, don't know who to talk to. Like with any medical professional they deal with, they don't have the knowledge and expertise to know what is required to heal their pet, so they are left with very little information, reliant on one individual without being able to compare effectively.

Now, I appreciate the member, you know, bringing forward what the posted costs are in Ontario. He graciously informed us of what the costs are in the fee guide that is provided to veterinarians in Alberta, but that fee guide is not publicly accessible. It's a guide for veterinarians by veterinarians. It's not assistive to the public. That's what we're doing here, being assistive to the public.

Madam Chair, with that, this proposed legislation will help Albertans, will help pet owners find high-quality care for their pet. I've heard the member opposite speak passionately about how veterinarians provide quality care, take their ethical standards to the highest of their concerns and provide high-quality care. I have no doubt and I have every confidence that even with the ability to post their prices, they won't bring their ethics into disrepute. They will keep their own ethics at a high standard, as we expect them to and as their regulator expects them to do, regardless of whether or not they are now enabled to post fees despite the fact that they're not required to do so.

With that, Madam Chair, these changes are not out of the ordinary for the country. They are not out of the ordinary with respect to other professions, and they are something that Albertans have expressed they are very, very pleased for change in in terms of their interactions with veterinarians. While I appreciate that this may be a difficult adjustment, certainly this is something that will help many Albertans. So many Albertans are pet owners. There are over a million pet owners in this province. I cannot support the member's amendment, though I do thank him for continuing to be an advocate for the profession of which he is a member.

Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. minister.

I will now call on the Member for Calgary-Mackay-Nose Hill.

Ms McPherson: Thank you, Madam Chair, and thank you to the Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster for bringing forward this very sensible amendment. Bill 31 has been brought forward quite quickly, without enough consultation with the veterinary profession.

Registered veterinarians and veterinary technicians of the Alberta Veterinary Medical Association take the privilege and the responsibility of self-regulation very seriously. Their current bylaws consider it unprofessional conduct to not obtain informed consent from a pet owner prior to performing any procedures. Part of this consent also includes divulging the expected cost of the procedure to the client. This can be seen as providing the public with more information and clarity when choosing their provider of veterinarian services.

We have observed similar changes put into effect in British Columbia and Ontario. Not only does allowing advertising of price not clarify the situation for clients, it can actually make it more complicated. In many cases a price is advertised for a service, but at the time of invoicing hidden charges are added on. In both Ontario and British Columbia complaints to the veterinary regulatory bodies increased substantially after rules similar to Bill 31 were introduced.

The best patient care is not achieved by price shopping, especially when, as mentioned, the prices often do not match what the final invoice totals, but by long-term patient/client-veterinarian relationships. As seen in other provinces, the advertising of prices will only tempt clients to seek seemingly less costly solutions, which very often are not, at the expense of their pet's health. Let's allow stakeholder input, especially from the hard-working, dedicated veterinarians of Alberta.

Section 2(2) replicates an existing bylaw already enforced by the ABVMA that upholds a universal requirement for health care providers to obtain informed consent, a vital part of which is fee disclosure, before proceeding with any procedures or treatments. The proposed amendments to the Veterinary Profession Act constitute an overreach and an intrusion into the veterinary profession's ability to self-regulate and were made without enough consultation with the ABVMA. To amend the VPA without consultation amounts to overreach. Just because other jurisdictions are doing it, it doesn't necessarily follow that it's right for Alberta. There appears to be a disconnect between Service Alberta and the ABVMA.

This amendment makes sense as Bill 31 is addressing a problem that doesn't seem to exist. I urge all members of the Assembly to support this amendment.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Any other members wishing to speak to amendment A2? The hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake.

Mr. Cyr: Thank you, Madam Chair. I have to say that the opposition came up with a similar amendment, and the Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster has brought forward a sensible amendment. This is a sensible amendment.

Now, I don't want to go over the points that he's brought up because I've already brought up a lot of those, but they're fine points. What I would like to do is touch on the one letter that was sent to veterinarians that the hon. member had brought forward. We had tabled this letter before, so it's been tabled in the House. It's just a short part here. This is from the Minister of Service Alberta to veterinarians that are writing her office.

We know veterinarians are trusted professionals, and Albertans look to them to provide quality care for their pets. During consultations on wider consumer protection proposals, we met

with the ABVMA and other veterinary industry stakeholders and we heard their feedback and concerns. However, we also heard from ordinary Albertans who told us they want to be better informed when looking for veterinary services for their pets.

I can't believe we're sending that letter to our veterinarians. I can't believe, seeing that veterinarians are writing the minister saying, "We haven't been consulted," that you're actually correcting them with a letter saying that they have been consulted. That's truly unbelievable. I think that is very disingenuous of the government in this case in point, which is why this amendment is so important. Actually, to be honest with you, the fact that we had requested this whole piece of legislation go to committee was another thing that was disappointing to see this government didn't move forward on.

I would like to quote from an article that Emma Graney had written, Alberta Bans Ticket Bots under Sweeping Consumer Protection Bill. This was done on November 29, 2017. Now, you're going to find that, I would say, 96 per cent of this article is about other things that are in this bill, and a little tacked on at the very end says, "veterinary services." It's literally two sentences.

Any veterinarian procedures will require approval from pet owners. Vets will also have to disclose all fees for treatment (unless it's an emergency procedure), but they'll also be able to advertise their fees.

It doesn't say that they're pretty much destroying a self-regulating body there.

10:00

I think is something that needs to be put out in the public because right now it is making our veterinarians look like criminals, when we can consistently see in the last three years that for over 3,000 of the veterinarians that are reported within the province, we had no more than 30 to 35 complaints within the year: "Holy cow. This seems to be an epidemic. These guys are rampantly going out there. They're going out there to harm consumers." Well, that's clearly not the case.

This is disappointing that we are moving down this route. I fully support my colleague from Vermilion-Lloydminster with the amendment to say: let's strike this. If the government chooses to come back and consult and bring forward legislation after they've consulted with the industry and not send them a letter that says, "We consulted with you," then at least they can have some feeling that they've been able to be heard, that their voices have been heard.

Madam Chair, I think that this is a very reasonable amendment. I think that we all need to take it seriously. I believe we all have veterinarians that are either within our constituencies or near our constituencies. We all have deep respect for them.

I can tell you that I had a long conversation with one of my local veterinarians, a wonderful woman. She was very concerned. I told her: I will ensure your voice is heard. And you know what? I believe that through this amendment we can make that happen.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other members wishing to speak to amendment A2? The hon. Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster.

Dr. Starke: Well, thank you, Madam Chair. I do want to say a few things about some of the comments that the minister made. I'd like to also thank very much the Member for Calgary-Mackay-Nose Hill and the Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake for their supportive comments with regard to this amendment.

Madam Chair, it seems that we almost seem to be doing this in this discussion. In every speech that I have given thus far on this issue, I have pointed out that British Columbia and Ontario have

gone down this road, and it has caused a great deal of harm to their profession, to the people who own animals in their jurisdictions, thereby also to the animals. The reason I say that is because we have veterinarians in Alberta that have practised in those jurisdictions. We have people that have practised in B.C., we have people that have practised in Ontario, and they've experienced it themselves. They know, and they don't want that to be visited upon us in here in Alberta.

The other thing we have in the Alberta Veterinary Medical Association is veterinarians who have served on the council and served as president of the Canadian Veterinary Medical Association, and as such they have interaction with their provincial colleagues from all the provinces in Canada. The thing that those members have told me again and again is that the folks from B.C. and the folks from Ontario do not feel that the advertising of fees has any benefit whatsoever. Now, I'm not sure if the minister consulted with the Ontario Veterinary Medical Association or the British Columbia veterinary medical association to find out, you know, what the history of those were. I'd be very interested in hearing if she did.

By way of interest, because the Member for Edmonton-South West, when I asked him these questions last night, was unable to give me an answer, but perhaps the minister can, I'd be very curious to know when you met with the Western College of Veterinary Medicine and who was there and what was discussed. I'd love to know when you met with the Alberta Veterinary Technologist Association because I have a letter here from the president of that association, who writes:

I have been [a registered veterinary technologist] for 20 years and have seen a lot of changes in that time. All of the practices that I've worked at have had clients sign consent forms (which include estimates) before carrying out procedures.

Why would you not meet with the president of the association if you're going to have a meeting with the association? Did you meet with some other envoys or liaison people from the association? I'd be very interested to hear the details of that meeting.

[Mr. Sucha in the chair]

If it was a separate meeting from the meeting with the Alberta Veterinary Medical Association, I guess I'm a little curious as to why that happened because, of course, since May of 2016 veterinary technologists have been incorporated into our association. We are equals, and it's been good for our association. I think it's been good for animal health care. I, for one, am absolutely gratified by the support that our profession has received from our colleagues who are registered veterinary technologists. They are professionals. They work extremely hard.

Perhaps one of the sad things is that, contrary maybe to what some people believe about the veterinary profession, the veterinary profession has, in fact, on average, the lowest salary of any profession in the health care field, less than doctors – way less than doctors – less than dentists, less than optometrists. Way less. The reason for that is that there are economic realities that we deal with. We know what the minister is talking about with regard to the capacity for people to pay. We deal with that, Mr. Chair, every day in our day-to-day practice. We know all about that, and we can provide advice to this government with regard to how you can go about, you know, regulating things and making things better for all Albertans.

Now, the cases that the minister cites are absolutely, you know, very unfortunate circumstances. I guess the question that I would have is that we have a disciplinary process. We have a complaints process. Were either of those cases brought to the ABVMA for adjudication by the association? We have a process in place. It is a

very robust process. It is one that we treat with a great deal of respect, and we take it very seriously. As I said before, I've sat on the hearing tribunals before. While I haven't had very much to do on those, when a case does come up, we make sure that we're taking care of the public interest. We take that responsibility seriously.

Even in the discussion and the way that this bill has been presented, our profession has already been damaged. This bill has already caused damage in our profession. I'm quoting from a registered veterinary technologist who wrote me and said:

Bill 31 is asking us to do something that we, already, require of ourselves and is giving the public the impression that we need to be told to do this.

That's with regard to informed consent.

I have seen people's shocked comments to articles on Bill 31 about how sneaky vets must be to do things without consent. This is untrue, and extremely hurtful.

I really don't know why it is that the minister feels that she needs to suggest that our profession is doing something that's unprofessional. That's very disturbing to me, and it's disturbing to my colleagues. To suggest that we don't currently require consent is wrong. It is simply wrong.

With regard to fee disclosure I can tell you that fees are disclosed. They need to be disclosed to the clients before the procedure is started because if it's done afterwards, I can tell you that you have a lot harder time collecting that fee. Veterinarians always disclose the fees ahead of time, especially if it's a larger, more major procedure. But with regard to fee disclosure in every practice that I know, if there's a phone call from a client who wants to know the fees, we're happy to provide it.

Mr. Chair, I'd also like to hear from the minister an explanation as to why two different sets of documents were presented, one to the general public and one to the Veterinary Medical Association. I would very much like to hear her comments on how that engenders trust with the profession when an altered document is presented to the profession at a meeting with them, yet a different document with some very critical additional sentences is presented to the general public. I'd really love to hear an answer to that.

10:10

You know, Mr. Chair, perhaps some of the most compelling arguments on this have come from my colleagues; for example, from a doctor who is a former president of the Alberta Veterinary Medical Association and also a past director of the animal health division of Alberta agriculture. He said:

I... was responsible for the government's role in administering the Veterinary Profession Act and its predecessors. I was involved in the rewriting and revising of several Acts and regulations including the Veterinary Profession Act.

I do not understand why you...

I'm talking to the minister.

... wish to undermine the responsibility of the Alberta Veterinary Medical Association in the governance of Veterinary Medicine in Alberta. You may be setting precedent for making arbitrary changes to the acts relating to other professions in Alberta.

We heard that in the legal opinion of Mr. Casey.

Another e-mail, this from a past president of the Alberta Veterinary Medical Association and the Alberta representative to the Canadian Veterinary Medical Association. In this case he's writing to one of my colleagues, an MLA on the government side:

With all due respect, it appears to me very clear that your own party has been actively misleading its MLA's. Certainly if you were briefed that there was consultation and negotiation and compromise in development of the amendments to the veterinary

profession act that are contemplated to be pushed through with Bill 31, you and your colleagues were indeed misled.

If that's what you've been told, you've been misled.

I have been watching debate in the legislature on this point, and I must say that the minister who is pushing for these changes (not the minister responsible for the veterinary professions act, a fact which I find very curious) tends to obfuscate the issues rather than clarify them, in my opinion.

He goes on to say:

It appears to me that someone in the halls of power is doing what they can to make changes to the [VPA] by manufacturing a problem that is not real, and not realizing that the effect of these changes will almost certainly reduce the caliber of veterinary services to the public of Alberta. The minister speaking for the proposed changes suggested that she had heard from "regular Albertans" on this issue. If she is referring to the service Alberta questionnaire that was used, I encourage you to have a look at it. With your background and awareness of the factors required to have a meaningful questionnaire you will see right away that the survey was very poorly done, with questions that were so leading that the use of the results would border on shameful, unless they are relied on only in total ignorance.

And then this one might have some interest to you from a political standpoint. This is from the same writer.

When the NDP was voted in I had anticipated some changes to the positive. Now I see brute use of power even in the absence of need is not something that was limited to the previous government – despite what we were told when the NDP was seeking a mandate to govern. As a member of the public of Alberta (i.e. also a "regular Albertan") I am so disappointed to see the government of Alberta so keen to ignore and sideline a professional group that has acted in the best interest of Albertans for decades. I know for a fact that the ABVMA is always eager to participate with government – we have not had so many unanswered requests for a chance to collaborate with government as during the period leading up to tabling Bill 31 . . . I fear that your government is not being forthcoming with what they are doing, and this to a degree that they are misleading their own MLA's. For that I am deeply disappointed and for me this whole affair has me very likely changing my allegiance from the NDP to some group that deserves a chance to govern in a more transparent and collaborative way.

From a veterinarian in central Alberta: "Should this bill pass, the ABVMA will continue to be ignored, with decisions on standards and delivery of veterinary care being made by people outside of the profession, which will demolish the respect given to veterinarians as medical professionals."

I guess, on that note, Mr. Chair, I turn to my colleagues. You have a vote on this, and you have a chance right now to remove these clauses from the bill that are so harmful to the veterinary profession. I will state again that these clauses will not solve the perceived problems. The perceived problems will only be successfully solved if the government and the veterinary profession are working together. If they're not working together, I'm sorry; you just simply won't get a good solution to the perceived problems.

If there is a problem, then I would suggest that you turn to the Minister of Labour and have the Minister of Labour and her officials, who worked very closely with the Alberta Veterinary Medical Association on Bill 13, address the problem. Then those problems have a much better chance and likelihood of being addressed effectively. But if you continue on this path, you will then be left with a shattered glass, one that cannot hold any sense of trust, and you won't be able to accomplish what you're trying to do. So not only will you do no good; you will do a tremendous amount of harm.

Now, none of you are veterinarians. This is perhaps the only bill in the five and a half years that I've been here, other than Bill 13, that is very directly involving my profession. With most of the other bills we discuss, we're not directly involved with what's going on, not necessarily, but with this one we are. With this one we are, and I'm telling you – and I'm trying to be as persuasive as I can – that veterinarians know what the risks are in this motion and in this bill. Veterinarians have tried to explain that in many, many different ways, and I've got a lot more quotes.

Ultimately, it lies in your hands what decision is made. I guess I'd just ask you: if you vote for this, if you vote to keep Bill 31 as it sits, with these changes to the Veterinary Profession Act, are you going to be okay with what happens to the veterinary profession afterwards? Are you okay with that? Are you okay if we see the same deterioration in the collaborative nature of our profession that has been seen in British Columbia and in Ontario? Are you okay with that? Are you okay with situations where it's harder to get an exchange of medical records? That has happened in B.C. and Ontario.

[Ms Sweet in the chair]

I would suggest that you don't want to see that. I would suggest that the best way to deal with the perceived problems that may exist is through a co-operative relationship, working with the Alberta Veterinary Medical Association, through the Ministry of Labour, to whom we are responsible, and that that is the true way to develop a better system of veterinary care for all Albertans.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other members wishing to speak to the amendment?

Seeing none, I will call the question.

[Motion on amendment A2 lost]

The Deputy Chair: We are now back on the bill. Are there any other members wishing to speak?

Dr. Starke: Three members rose for a division.

The Deputy Chair: Sorry. My apologies. A division has been called.

Some Hon. Members: Only two.

The Deputy Chair: There were only two? We'll have to move on.

Any other members wishing to speak? The hon. Minister of Service Alberta.

Ms McLean: Thank you, Madam Chair. I have an amendment for the House. I'm pleased to continue debate on Bill 31, A Better Deal for Consumers and Businesses Act. This bill will be creating strong new protections for Albertans who buy tickets, to ensure that they have a fair shot at seeing their favourite team or performers. To that end, I would like to propose a House amendment to Bill 31. This amendment respects the requirement in section 57.3(4) for primary ticket sellers to exercise reasonable diligence in determining if tickets have been purchased by bots and to cancel those tickets.

This amendment will introduce a regulation-making power to allow us to exempt certain primary sellers from the requirement in section 57.3(4). On further reflection we've determined that this may be necessary for smaller primary sellers like theatres and concert halls that sell tickets on their own website but that don't necessarily have the technology to determine if bots are buying their tickets nor the wherewithal to be able to procure that technology. Since these smaller ticket sellers may not be able to comply with

this requirement, this amendment will allow us to exempt them in regulation upon further consultation.

We'll do this by amending section 1(10) of the bill to add clause (b.1) to section 57.6, that reads:

(b.1) respecting the exemption of a primary seller or a class of primary sellers from the application of all or part of section 57.3(4).

The second part of this amendment will make section 57.3(4) an offence. It was always our intention to make this provision an offence, but it was inadvertently omitted from the bill in drafting. This amendment will simply remedy that omission by amending subsection (21) in the proposed section 161(e.1) by striking out "57.3(1) and (3)" and substituting "57.3(1), (3) and (4)."

Thank you.

10:20

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. minister. Your amendment will be referred to as A3.

Are there any members wishing to speak to amendment A3?

Mr. Cyr: I'd just like to note that because we're rushing through this so fast, we're now having government amending government bills. If this had gone to a committee, like we had first requested, this would have been caught in the committee process. Very disappointing to see that we've got the government amending the bill.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other members wishing to speak to amendment A3?

Seeing none, we'll call the question.

[Motion on amendment A3 carried]

The Deputy Chair: Any other members wishing to speak? The hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake.

Mr. Cyr: Yes. Madam Chair, I too see that there are some significant struggles when it comes to the fact that we are including AMVIC within this legislation. I'd like to move an amendment, and I will wait for the chair to receive it before I continue.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Your amendment will be referred to as A4. Please proceed.

Mr. Cyr: Thank you, Madam Chair. The amendment is striking out subsections (15), (16), and (17).

I'd like to state for the record here that it's very disappointing to see that we have the minister moving AMVIC within the government's authority. The fact is that we had George Cuff do up a report in December 2016, a year ago, on how to address some of the concerns that consumers, the government, and the opposition even had with AMVIC. They came forward with 23 recommendations, and the minister accepted all 23 of the recommendations.

Now, what's going on here is that we need to recognize that the government moved an expensive piece of a review on to AMVIC, and then what they did was to more or less disregard the report that was done. Now we see them being rolled into government. This is very disappointing. I believe what we should have seen was that if Bill 31 had moved to committee, we might have been able to discuss how to best deal with the concerns the minister may have with AMVIC.

Now I'd like to read a few things from the Cuff report because I believe that this is important. I did table this report for the

Assembly, so please keep that in mind. In the Cuff report, page 218, 8.10:

While this comprehensive Review has focused largely on issues which were brought to our attention in the course of our study, we would be remiss if we did not point [out the] very important "bottom line": there is a need for AMVIC as a delegated regulatory organization functioning on behalf of consumers and industry alike. The fact that it has this two-fold audience means that it will always experience some degree of friction and perhaps strife. Very few people appreciate being regulated by someone else or something else. And yet, this regulation is needed so that [the] society is afforded protection from abuses by those who have difficulty living up to an acceptable standard.

The role of Government is that of oversight and protection of the well-being of . . . society. It does this in a multitude of ways: through laws, regulations, management oversight, checks and balances and through delegating some of that responsibility to others along with the clout/authority to operate and the responsibility to report and account for decisions made.

It is our view that AMVIC, with the enhancements noted, has the ability and capacity to fulfill its role.

This minister is choosing to ignore the very independent review that was put forward.

This is one thing that we continue to hear in this House. Let's talk about the boundaries commission. We say: well, it was an independent commission that did it; therefore, we need to give this an important focus, and then we need to accept it out of hand. Yet when we do this review – we've spent lots of Alberta's taxpayers' money on this review – the government doesn't like what they see, so they wait a year and do what they want anyway. It's very disappointing.

I think that the government should consider accepting this amendment. Then what happens, if the government chooses to continue down this road, is: put it forward to committee.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other members wishing to speak to amendment A4? The hon. Minister of Service Alberta.

Ms McLean: Thank you, Madam Chair, and I certainly thank the member for his work, as always. However, I certainly will not be supporting this amendment.

Madam Chair, the prior critic for the Service Alberta portfolio certainly had some comments when the last changes were made to the Fair Trading Act in 2016, that permitted us to be able to get the investigation done by Mr. Cuff. He stated – and this was in *Hansard* – at that time:

While Wildrose is committed to the principles of the free market, we know that the key to successful industry is consumer confidence and trust.

And I would agree with the prior critic there.

Consumers deserve to know that they are protected by a properly functioning regulatory body, and we believe the proposed legislation does just that. Albertans understand that the former government used this government's agencies, boards, and commissions to reward their friends and donors. It was wrong then, and it's still wrong today.

I agree, certainly, with the member's comments at that time, when he was a member of the Wildrose Party. Perhaps things have changed since they have amalgamated with the Conservatives, who, as the member stated at that time, used the agencies, boards, and commissions to reward their friends and donors.

That being said, I will continue with what he had to say.

Wildrose will continue to watch these organizations closely to ensure that such practices do not continue under government's watch.

I also agree with those comments, and that's why I continue to watch the situation, read very thoroughly Mr. Cuff's report, met with Mr. Cuff in relation to the report, and discussed it with him at length.

The prior critic also said, on May 5, 2016:

Wildrose has long had concerns with the operation of AMVIC, and it's now our hope that following the passage of this bill, the minister will act quickly to conduct a review of the Alberta Motor Vehicle Industry Council.

We did that. We acted quickly.

We do hope this measure allows AMVIC to function more effectively for the consumers it was created to protect.

So I'm happy to stand with both members in government and my opposition colleagues in full support of this bill.

He then also went on to make further comments in response to the Cuff report once it was issued. He stated:

We are disappointed the recommendations released today does not take more decisive action for consumers or taxpayers . . .

Albertans paid for that fund through a levy on car sales. It is supposed to be there to protect consumers from illegal activity but it obviously isn't working . . .

When Albertans are getting defrauded by licensed businesses they should have access to the fund, but the rules are so restrictive that AMVIC is stockpiling cash rather than compensating consumers.

Again, I agree with the former critic for Service Alberta on all of those comments, but it seems to me that since the amalgamation with the UCP the tone has changed.

10:30

Regardless, however, of that shift in position, it is the government's responsibility to ensure that consumers are protected, which the prior critic agreed with, and we want to do that, Madam Chair. On review of the Cuff report, I agreed it was clear that in the scope of the structure of AMVIC, the current structure, simply the recommendations which were done within the context of that structure, how to make things better in that context, would not be able to give the decisive action for consumers or taxpayers that the prior critic was disappointed the recommendations did not address. I agreed with him. So I have taken more decisive action, and I would have hoped that that Wildrose perspective that previously existed would still be there. Unfortunately, it is clear to me that in the amalgamation some things have changed.

But, Madam Chair, I digress. I would now like to talk about what this does do. AMVIC's role is to protect the interests of the consumer and to ensure integrity in the automotive industry. Upon passing the proposed changes, it will ensure stronger public oversight of AMVIC by transitioning from an industry-controlled to a public member controlled board. One of the recommendations of the Cuff report was to change the makeup of that board to do just this. It would mean that AMVIC would be subject to the wider rules for ABCs. Transparency: also within the spirit of Mr. Cuff's recommendations and which is good for the public and which, I will remind my new critic, the prior critic certainly was in favour of.

It will also enable the minister responsible to set the composition of AMVIC, which, again, was one of the recommendations in the Cuff report. It will regulate the appointment of specific roles. Again, one of the recommendations in the Cuff report was that the board chair have specific duties and tasks assigned and a greater role. It will also establish governance rules: conduct of board meetings, decision-making by the board.

The proposed improvements to AMVIC operations will benefit consumers and businesses in the auto sector. Consumers will have greater confidence that rights are protected by AMVIC and respected by industry. Business will benefit from enhanced regulatory oversight in ensuring a level playing field. We've heard from industry that there is a broken relationship between them and the current state of AMVIC. We are going to be actively repairing that. Businesses will benefit from responsible operations throughout the industry and from consistency from the regulator.

AMVIC board members agree with this approach, and they have stated as much. Bill Burnett, the current chair of the AMVIC Board of Directors, stated:

I am very excited about the announcement of Bill 31, A Better Deal for Consumers and Businesses Act. It is a very important step to support AMVIC's mandate of consumer protection in Alberta. Thank you to the Government of Alberta for their leadership and commitment to consumer protection in Alberta.

Madam Chair, not only are these changes supported by the previous comments of my prior critic from the prior Wildrose, but they are also supported by the very chair of the AMVIC board.

Madam Chair, I absolutely cannot support this amendment. I want to make stronger protections in this area. I want to ensure that the regulator is acting well, that it is trusted by the public, and so does the AMVIC board, and so did, at least, the prior critic for Service Alberta and the prior Wildrose party.

Madam Chair, I want to ensure that the compensation fund works for Albertans. These changes will allow us to ensure that that is the case. So we will not be supporting this amendment. I encourage all members to vote against it.

Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. minister.

Are there any other members wishing to speak to amendment A4?

Seeing none, I will call the question.

[Motion on amendment A4 lost]

The Deputy Chair: We are now back on the bill. Are there any other comments, questions, or amendments? The hon. Member for Calgary-Mackay-Nose Hill, followed by the hon. Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster.

Ms McPherson: Thank you, Madam Chair. I rise today to propose an amendment to Bill 31, A Better Deal for Consumers and Businesses Act, and I'll wait for the amendment to circulate before proceeding.

The Deputy Chair: Hon. member, do you happen to have the original with you?

Ms McPherson: I do, yes.

The Deputy Chair: We'll trade.

Ms McPherson: Sorry. It's my first amendment.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member. Your amendment will be referred to as A5. Please continue.

Ms McPherson: Okay. Thank you, Madam Chair. I'd like to move that Bill 31, A Better Deal for Consumers and Businesses Act, be amended in section 1(8) in the proposed section 6.1(4) by adding "for a period of no less than 180 days from the date of the consumer's request" after "or make it accessible online."

Bill 31 proposes to add protections for consumers who sign agreements to receive services, including a requirement that

suppliers make copies of agreements available to consumers in written or electronic format. Having the option to receive and provide contracts online is a great idea. It can save paper, it can make things more searchable, and it can be great for access on mobile devices.

One of the challenges people experience: when suppliers send us an e-mail about new or updated contracts, it is with the URL of some website without the actual contract or agreement as an attachment. When the e-mail is fresh, the link to the contract on the website works, but how about a few weeks later, when the company has redesigned its website, rebranded, merged, or otherwise changed how it provides information to consumers? Our amendment to section 1(8) on page 5 of Bill 31 would require that if a supplier provides a consumer with an e-mailed or texted link to a copy of a contract on a website, the supplier must ensure that the contract is available at that link for a reasonable period of time after the consumer receives the link. We've suggested approximately six months after the consumer has requested the contract, but we're open to other time periods as well.

This amendment is a practical action that we can take in this House to make the bill work better for Alberta's many consumers. I'd love to have a constructive conversation about the idea and how we can work together to make it better. I'm certainly open to any suggestions that other hon. members may be able to provide. I'd ask that we all vote in favour of this common-sense amendment to make lives better for Albertans.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other members wishing to speak to amendment A5?

Seeing none, I will call the question.

[Motion on amendment A5 carried]

The Deputy Chair: Are there any other members wishing to speak to the bill? The hon. Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster.

10:40

Dr. Starke: Well, thank you, Madam Chair. I have an amendment that I will provide to the pages.

Madam Chair, now that the Chamber has decided that the Veterinary Profession Act should come under the purview of this, I'm going to try to become somewhat more surgical in my approach. As opposed to trying to cut the cancer out entirely, I'll now try to remove as much of this cancer as can be removed and at least apply some judicious chemotherapy to what's left. What we're going to do here is that we're going to discuss a little bit about the process of self-regulation and self-governance.

Now, earlier during debate I read out a couple of quotes from Mr. James Casey, who is a world authority on self-regulating professional bodies in Canada and world-wide. He has literally written the book on self-regulation. Mr. Casey has provided his opinion that this bill is a massive overreach that is unprecedented in our province, a massive overreach into the affairs of a self-regulating profession which, as I've stated in the House before, has been doing this for 111 years. Our province was less than one year old when the first veterinary professions act was passed, and that veterinary professions act provided for self-regulation of the veterinary profession.

What was interesting, though, was that the earliest veterinary professions act and all of the ones that came after, let's say, had a clause that indicated that the Lieutenant Governor in Council, in other words cabinet, had the final approving authority on any changes to the act. Now, that's really important. The veterinary association cannot change its regulations, its bylaws, or anything in

the Veterinary Profession Act without cabinet approval. So cabinet has always had the final say on things involving the veterinary profession.

I don't have a problem with that. I think that's actually good. But what is interesting is that that is a greater degree of control than a number of other professions in Alberta have. A lot of the other self-regulating professions don't have that check and balance. If they make a change to their regulation or their bylaws, it's just changed. They don't have to get cabinet approval, but we do, and I'm okay with that. I'm okay with that. I'm okay with a body of elected officials taking a look at it.

Where I have a problem and where I have a problem in Bill 31 is with what Bill 31 does in terms of self-regulating professions, specifically, obviously, the veterinary profession. I refer to page 25 of the bill, under Regulations, section 48.3(1), and I'll read it slowly.

The Lieutenant Governor in Council, after consultation with the Council, may make regulations respecting fees and authorization for veterinary medicine, including, without limitation, regulations.

Then it goes on to (a) through (h) on the scope of what those regulations could entail.

Now, what exactly does all that mean? Well, the Lieutenant Governor in Council is cabinet. The 21 individuals who have been appointed to Executive Council are cabinet, and when this bill passes, it will be cabinet that will have the power to make regulations for the veterinary profession. Cabinet will have that power.

What will that power include? Well, that power will include regulations respecting fees and authorization for veterinary medicine. Cabinet will have the power to decide the fees of the veterinary association. That is an unbelievable level of power and interference with a private business. If cabinet decides that the current fee for an examination of a dog, which is \$89.50 in the fee guide – but in polling six veterinary clinics from across Alberta, the range was \$76.50 to \$85. Not a single one charges as much as the fee guide. A member of cabinet, for example my friend the hon. Government House Leader, says: "That's unreasonable. Veterinarians aren't that smart, and \$89 is just gouging the public. That should be worth 22 bucks." He could say that. He would have the power to say that.

Mr. Mason: Point of order.

The Deputy Chair: A point of order has been called.

Point of Order Allegations against a Member

Mr. Mason: Perhaps the hon. member would like to clarify that he is speaking hypothetically and not attempt to put words in my mouth.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. minister.

Dr. Starke: Well, Madam Chair, I'm happy to do that for my friend the Government House Leader. I would never suppose to put words in his mouth. I think that'd be impossible, and it'd also be kind of pointless because he has lots of words in his own mouth, and there'd be hardly any room.

Debate Continued

Dr. Starke: Madam Chair, what I am saying is that cabinet would have the power to make the decision as to what fee should be

charged if this were to pass, and fees could be set at a level that is unreasonably low and would render veterinary practices unprofitable, or they could be set at a level that is unreasonably high and mean that there could be no access to veterinary services by the general public.

The people that I think understand best what sort of fees are appropriate are the people who own the businesses that provide the service. I guess my question is: what's next? If you're going to regulate the fees of veterinarians, what's next on the agenda?

My amendment, Madam Chair, is actually a fairly simple one. I won't read through all of it because it's not really necessary to read through all of it. I move that Bill 31, A Better Deal for Consumers and Businesses Act, be amended in section 2(2) by striking out the proposed section 48.3 and substituting the following:

Regulations

And here's the key difference.

48.3(1) The Council may make regulations . . .

Then it goes (a) through (h), which is the same wording as in the bill. Then, finally:

(2) A regulation under subsection (1) does not come into force unless it has been approved by the Lieutenant Governor in Council.

So the exact wording that is in the bill remains. All of the powers that were to be given to cabinet remain, and cabinet will still have the final say on all of those regulations. But the concern that we have as a profession – and it is a concern that has been heightened since the totally inadequate consultation that went on with regard to this bill – is that the current bill says: “The Lieutenant Governor in Council, after consultation with the Council.” Now, that council is the council of the Alberta Veterinary Medical Association. After consultation they have all these powers.

We're also quite concerned with the insertion of the phrase “including, without limitation.” If that's in the bill, this cabinet has power to write in any regulation it wants. That, to me, is a level of control being handed over to an albeit well-meaning group of people that I'm sure want to do what's best for Alberta but a group of people that I'm not sure always necessarily understand the nuances of running a veterinary practice and why a practice has to be profitable, why a practice has to replace its equipment – and medical equipment is very expensive, veterinary equipment specifically so – and why we have to do things like pay our staff at a level that is commensurate with their experience and allows them to have a good living.

Madam Chair, this is the concern that we as veterinarians have. We do not want to see our association be the first, possibly, in a line of professional organizations to lose its power to self-regulate, but that's what this bill does. Make no mistake. This bill writes in that we lose the power of self-regulation, and that's something that veterinarians really don't want to lose. We feel that we have discharged the responsibility, the privilege of self-regulation in very good faith. And, in my opinion at least, if we are trusted professionals, we haven't done anything to deserve having that privilege taken away from us.

So I'm moving this amendment to suggest that the normal course of events for the making of regulations is where the ABVMA council in consultation with the membership as a whole comes up with a regulation, has those changes to the regulations ratified at an AGM of the Alberta Veterinary Medical Association, and then those regulations are approved by cabinet, which is what has always been in place. If we come up with something that cabinet doesn't like, well, they have the power to turn it down and say: go back to the drawing board. They still have the final say. We're not taking that out of here.

10:50

But I have a problem when the course of events and how things are done and have been done for 111 years are suddenly reversed by this government, by this minister without demonstrating that it will be better for the general public of Alberta, for the animals of Alberta, or for veterinarians. That has not been shown to me, that putting it in the hands of cabinet will result in an improvement.

Unless it can be proven to me that cabinet is a better safekeeper of the veterinary profession than the elected council of the veterinary profession, I can't support the bill that includes giving these wide-ranging, vague, and sweeping powers to cabinet. I can't, you know, approve that because, quite frankly, it's putting the control of the regulation of the profession in the hands of people that – although, again, they may be well-meaning, I just simply don't know that they have the information that is required in order to make the decisions to regulate our profession.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

The amendment is referred to as A6.

Are there any other members wishing to speak to the amendment?

Seeing none, I will call the question.

[Motion on amendment A6 lost]

The Deputy Chair: Are there any other members wishing to speak? The hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake.

Mr. Cyr: Thank you, Madam Chair. I've heard the hon. Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster, and, you know, I have to say that he's very passionate on this. Now we've heard that the government isn't willing to remove the legislation that is revolving around our veterinarians, and they're not willing to discuss the fact that they're taking on the regulation part of the veterinarians. If we know this is a route that we're taking, then it seems reasonable that we would give the veterinarians time to be able to work with government so that it doesn't actually have to reel like it has with this legislation coming forward, out of nowhere, blindsided if you will. So I would like to propose an amendment.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member. Your amendment will be referred to as A7.

Please go ahead.

Mr. Cyr: Thank you. The amendment is: Mr. Cyr to move that Bill 31, a Better Deal for Consumers and Businesses Act, be amended in section 2(2) in the proposed section 48.3(3), by striking out “Proclamation” and substituting “January 1, 2020.”

What this is essentially doing is saying that when we vote on Bill 31, we are going to give some time to the veterinarians to be able to work with the minister and see where she's going. I believe that that is reasonable. I believe a two-year time frame is a reasonable amount of time that we can give the veterinarians across Alberta to be able to discuss where the minister would like to see this legislation or where she's taking this legislation.

I'd also like to point out that it doesn't seem to be a move that the government seems to really put into action when it comes to consultation. So what I am trying to do here is to give the minister the time that she needs to be able to actually consult with veterinarians. She needs that time. They need that time. The veterinarian association, the regulatory body, needs that time. They all need that time to come up with a working plan, not be dictated to.

I would encourage everybody to give the veterinarians the time that they need to be able to consult with the minister before we make massive changes to their industry without any input from them.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other members wishing to speak to the amendment A7? Seeing none, I will call the question.

[Motion on amendment A7 lost]

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-Mackay-Nose Hill.

Ms McPherson: Thank you, Madam Chair. I rise today to propose an amendment – and I'm going to be better at it this time – to Bill 31, A Better Deal for Consumers and Businesses Act. I will wait for that to circulate.

The Deputy Chair: Hon. member, your amendment will be referred to as A8. Please go ahead.

Ms McPherson: Thank you. I'd like to move that Bill 31, A Better Deal for Consumers and Businesses Act, be amended in section 1(8) in the proposed section 6.2 as follows: (a) in subsection (1) by striking out "a written notice of cancellation" and substituting "a notice of cancellation in same manner in which the consumer entered into the ongoing consumer transaction" and (b) in subsection (2) by striking out "sent" and substituting "provided."

Madam Chair, Bill 31 proposes to improve consumers' ability to cancel contracts for ongoing transactions if and when suppliers change those contracts. What we're proposing to do with this amendment to the proposed section 6.2 on page 6 of the bill is to enable a consumer to cancel the contract in at least the same way that they used to sign up for the contract.

Madam Chair, if a consumer signs up for a service online, they shouldn't be forced to go to a physical location to cancel the contract. A consumer who signed up by phone shouldn't be forced to look for and send a letter to a physical mailing address to cancel an ongoing service contract. If a vendor is confident enough to sign up a customer with a particular method, whether that's online, by phone, by text, or another method, the vendor should trust that method to allow a customer to cancel a subscription.

This amendment will make it easier for businesses that offer great customer service and suppliers who compete on the quality of their products and services to prevail. It also sends a clear message to suppliers who do not want to do business fairly and to suppliers who make it deliberately difficult for customers to walk away from bad service. Consumers deserve better.

This amendment is a practical action that we can take in this House to make this bill work better for Alberta consumers. I would ask that we all vote in favour of this common-sense amendment to make lives better for all of us.

Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other members wishing to speak to the amendment A8?

Seeing none, I will call the question on amendment A8 as proposed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Mackay-Nose Hill.

[Motion on amendment A8 lost]

The Deputy Chair: We are now back on the original bill. Are there any other members wishing to speak? The hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake.

Mr. Cyr: Well, thank you, Madam Chair. I would like to move another amendment. I will wait for the chair to give me permission to speak.

The Deputy Chair: Hon. member, your amendment will be referred to as A9. Please go ahead.

11:00

Mr. Cyr: Thank you, Madam Chair. The intent of this amendment is an actual problem that I as an accountant have run into in my career. What it is is that you put a corporation between illegal activity, if you will, and what happens is that the directors or those that are individuals associated with that corporation draw the money out of that corporation. Then what happens is that there's no recourse for individuals to be able to get back, say, the money that they're owed by the government in this legislation.

What I would like to do is move an amendment that

any director, officer, employee or agent of a corporation who directed or authorized an activity that led to a contravention by the corporation of section 57.3(1) or (3) may be made a defendant to an action against the corporation under subsection (1) and on order of the Court may be made jointly and severally liable together with the corporation for an order of restitution of damages under subsection (2)(a) or (b).

I'm sorry that this is very, very technical, but I will tell you that what happens here is that if the government was to actually catch an individual doing this selling of tickets through these bots and then go for legal recourse against that individual, they would be prevented by the fact that there's a corporation between them. This is, unfortunately, a very common practice, and it's important that we need to recognize that people shouldn't be able to profit on other people's backs.

This is reasonable, and I encourage everyone to vote for this amendment because, in the end, I believe this strengthens the legislation. This is something we can work together on to ensure that profits that are illegally taken don't end up in the criminal's hands, if you will, but back into the victim's hands. We need to ensure that victims are able to have the legal recourse, and we need to be able to breach something called the corporate veil.

Thank you very much.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other members wishing to speak to amendment A9?

Seeing none, I will call the question.

[Motion on amendment A9 lost]

The Deputy Chair: We are now back on the original bill. The hon. Member for Calgary-Mackay-Nose Hill.

Ms McPherson: Thank you, Madam Chair. I'm getting better at it. I rise today to propose an amendment to Bill 31, A Better Deal for Consumers and Businesses Act. I'll wait for the amendment to circulate before proceeding.

The Deputy Chair: Hon. member, your amendment will be referred to as A10. Please go ahead.

Ms McPherson: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. I'd like to move that Bill 31, A Better Deal for Consumers and Businesses Act, be amended in section 1(10) in the proposed section 57.3 by adding the following after subsection (4): "A primary seller may retain a portion of the ticket price for a ticket cancelled under subsection (4)(b) for the purposes of off-setting administrative costs incurred by the primary seller to cancel that ticket."

Bill 31 proposes to reduce the burden on ticket vendors who are victimized by those who purchase tickets with bots. As members of this House and members of the public may already know, cancelling or refunding a credit or debit card transaction costs time and money for a legitimate ticket vendor who unwillingly sold tickets to an automated ticket-purchasing bot. Bots can buy hundreds or thousands of tickets at a time, all of which the ticket seller would have to cancel under this bill. Refunding card transactions also costs them money through higher merchant fees and commissions. The 2 to 3 per cent commissions charged by a vendor with few refunds and transaction disputes might rise to 4 or 5 per cent, raising costs for consumers, businesses, employees, or all.

We're proposing to allow the primary ticket seller to be able to recover their direct costs of cancelling those tickets so that the operators of the ticket bot would pay for the unnecessary costs they generate. This amendment to proposed section 57.3 on page 9 of the bill is a practical action that we can take in this House to make the bill work better for Alberta's many consumers and entrepreneurs. By requiring the ticket bot operators to pay, regular consumers won't be exposed to higher ticket prices due to costs that legitimate ticket sellers would incur when dealing with ticket bots that break the rules.

I would like all of us to vote in favour of this common-sense amendment to make life better for Alberta's legitimate ticket buyers and vendors. Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other members wishing to speak to amendment A10?

Seeing none, I will call the question.

[Motion on amendment A10 lost]

The Deputy Chair: We are now back on the original bill. I will now recognize the hon. Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster.

Dr. Starke: Well, thank you very much, Madam Chair. I have an amendment. I'm sensing that some hon. members opposite are saying: "You know, why is he doing this? Why is he bothering with these amendments that we are consistently and repeatedly defeating? Isn't it obvious that we're going to defeat this one, too?" That may well happen, but it is the prerogative of every member of this Assembly to put on the public record statements that are important to that member or to groups that he represents or to constituents. I was very proud, when receiving input from my constituents, that I received input from both veterinarians as well as clients of veterinary clinics, and it had specific regard to the provisions on fee advertising.

Now, I know the minister has said a number of things about that, that fee advertising won't be a disaster, won't be a bad thing, that it's been done in other places, and that it hasn't been a problem. But, once again, Madam Chair, I think that it's important that we have the sort of perspective of someone who has sort of been, if you will, in the trenches.

I move that Bill 31, A Better Deal for Consumers and Businesses Act, be amended in section 2(2) by (a) striking out the proposed section 48.2 and (b) in the proposed section 48.3 by striking out clause (f) and (g).

The effect of these amendments, Madam Chair, is essentially to remove from the bill the allowance or the permission for veterinarians to advertise their fees. Now, I know the minister has stated why she thinks that that's a good idea, and I have countered with many, many arguments as to why it's not a good idea, why it does not serve the public interest, why it does not result in a

decrease in fees, if that is indeed what the goal is here. The decrease in fees that, you know, one would ostensibly think would have happened in Ontario because they're allowed to advertise their fees: I just showed it didn't happen.

You know what was interesting, Madam Chair? I went and I polled six veterinary practices from all across Alberta. I asked them: if you were presented during regular hours with a dog with abdominal discomfort and you performed a physical examination on that dog and you decided to draw blood and do a complete blood cell count with a differential count, to run a full chemistry panel with electrolytes on that patient and then also take two abdominal X-rays, what would the charge to the client be? I also consulted our recommended 2017 ABVMA small-animal fee guide. The small-animal fee guide recommends a total fee for those procedures of \$539.60 for what's being done, that basket of procedures: the examination, blood testing, and X-rays.

11:10

Then I polled my colleagues. My colleagues reported back to me, and the range of prices from these six clinics from all different parts of the province was, actually, to me surprisingly narrow. The lowest price was \$435 and the highest price was \$515, a total difference in price of roughly \$80, on procedures that may seem standard but, in fact, require a fair bit of expertise. X-ray equipment is not cheap. X-ray equipment has to be certified and kept up on a regular basis.

Most veterinarians that I know have moved from what we used to do, and that was X-ray patients with film and have to run that film through dip tanks and hold it up to the light. Then if it wasn't quite the right positioning or if the animal had moved or something or it wasn't properly exposed, we had to do it all over again, and we had to expose ourselves to chemicals like developer and fixer. It was the way things used to be done.

Today the vast majority of veterinary practices in Alberta have digital radiography. They have a PAC system, where they can share these images with specialists in an instant and have those radiographs analyzed by a diagnostic imaging specialist anywhere in the world. It is incredible how far we've come, and we can share those images seamlessly and easily and I would suggest more easily than our medical counterparts in Alberta can.

The total charge that is recommended for that basket of procedures was \$539. Now, for interest's sake, I said: well, how would that compare to what would be charged to a human walking into one of our health care facilities in Alberta? I went to the fee guide that is on the Alberta Health site, and let me tell you that if you want to try to interpret that fee guide, you have to either be a United Nations translator or maybe C-3PO, because I can tell you that it is such a convoluted set of codes and riders and additional things that could be added or subtracted. To the best of our ability, although we're not quite one hundred per cent sure, the charge of what that costs Alberta health care is somewhere between \$404 and \$1,785, a range of almost four times, whereas the veterinary range was about \$80. From \$400 to \$1,700 in human medicine.

I'll tell you one other thing that I'm very proud of. Chances are pretty good that in most veterinary clinics in Alberta when you brought that dog in that needed a blood sample, that needed X-rays, you would have the answer from the veterinarian within the hour. Within the hour. When was the last time you went to your general practitioner, to your family doctor and he handed you a script or a requisition to go get bloodwork done, handed you another piece of paper and said, "Here; go to the radiology laboratory"? So you make an appointment and get your blood drawn. You make another appointment and go get your radiographs done. Then you have to make an appointment with your physician to have another

appointment in order to discuss and consult on the results of the bloodwork and the X-rays.

In veterinary medicine, in most veterinary practices in Alberta, that is done on-site within the hour. I think that's pretty good medicine. I think that is a pretty high standard of care. In fact, I would stack up our standard of care against what is provided to the two-legged humans in this province any time. Any time. I'm not saying that the people who work in health care aren't professional. They are; no question about it. But in terms of getting a rapid turnaround and a rapid answer on a patient, we veterinarians do a pretty good job. I'll tell you that if it was on an emergency service and I was on call, we could turn that whole thing around in less than half an hour. That's how good our equipment is, and that's how efficient we've become in terms of being able to diagnose.

What all goes into fees? Well, a lot of things go into fees, not just the professional training of the veterinarian and the registered veterinary technologist. There's the lease on the building, the maintaining of inventory within the clinic. There's a lot of overhead, obviously, insurance and that sort of thing. But the reason why it is difficult to quote a specific price is that every patient is different, and we've had this discussion already. If you just state a flat price and advertise that, and then the patient comes in and it's: oh, my goodness.

Let's say, for example, you advertise that to spay a dog is \$425, and then the dog comes in. It's eight years old, it's obese, it's had several litters of puppies, and it's a Rottweiler. That changes the procedure. Spaying an 80- or 90- or 100-pound obese Rottweiler that's had several litters of puppies and is maybe seven or eight years old is a whole different ball of wax from spaying a six-month-old Labrador retriever who's never had a heat cycle. They're two completely different things.

Yet the expectation here is that we're supposed to quote a flat price and put it up on the Internet. It's ridiculous. Animals are individuals. To suggest that we can, you know, say one price and then be held to that price, recognizing the vast differences in the patients we treat, is unreasonable, simply unreasonable.

You know, Madam Chair, I received a number of communications on this issue from my colleagues. One is from a veterinarian in Calgary, and she writes:

As a veterinarian I went to school for 8 years to obtain my professional degree. Our services require payment to pay for the equipment, the buildings we practice in, and the staff that we hire. Only by being able to have a fully stocked facility with highly trained employees can I provide quality health care. Perhaps you would trust a shady black-market option for your own health care if you had to pay for it but don't force us to lower our standards and not be able to pay our staff or ourselves in the interests of providing 'cheap' medicine. Cutting corners invariably leads to more problems long term both for us but mostly for the health of the patients we work so hard to help.

You know, Madam Chair, in that quote really lies part of the challenge that we have not just in veterinary medicine, but we have it in governing our province. We don't know what health care costs. Well, we know that it costs \$20 billion and it costs roughly – what is it? – \$157 million a day. But we don't know. When you go to the doctor and the doctor orders those blood tests, those X-rays, the ultrasound, whatever, we have no clue what the cost of that is. We have no idea. We're proud of the fact that we have, like, medicare. We have a system that means that you're not paying out of pocket for your own health care. I'm fully in favour of that. Trust me. I was actually surprised to hear the hon. minister sort of advocating – it sounded like she was advocating – the American style of health care, with the advertising that the doctors do in the States. Surely to

goodness that's not what the NDP is advocating here. It sounded like it, but perhaps she can clarify.

The reason that some veterinary fees can seem high is because we are insulated from the true costs of our own health care. I had an incident once in practice, Madam Chair, where I did roughly what I just described: examination, CBC, chemistry, a couple of X-rays, and I think we did one other thing. The total bill was roughly around \$500. I had gone over that with the owner, and she knew what the charges were. She came in to pick up the dog, and she says, "That is just so expensive." I said, "Well, did you not sort of understand what the quote was?" She said: "Oh, no. I understood the quote, and I'm okay, you know, that you kept to the quote. But that is so expensive." I said to her: "Well, you're a nurse. You're a nurse. What do you think this would cost in the human medical system?" She said: "Well, it's free. It's free. It doesn't cost anything."

Therein, Madam Chair, is one of our challenges not just as veterinarians but as a society. We don't know what our medical care costs us, and we don't know, when we're sent for yet another ultrasound or a repeat X-ray or we have diagnostic tests that we run again and again and again, how much that is actually costing the system. That's a problem. That's a problem.

Now, I have actually recommended that we at least go back to some kind of a system whereby – we don't mail out the statements like they used to. I actually kind of liked that system, but I understand that that's costly and that's another layer of bureaucracy that needs to do that. But why can't we access online our own medical chart and click on the dollar sign and say, "This is what you cost Alberta health care in the past year"? I think that would be extremely instructive. I think it would be very useful information. I tell you that it would sure help veterinarians because then people would realize the kind of absolute value they are getting at a veterinary hospital for services that in the human system would cost way, way more.

11:20

No, Madam Chair, advertising of fees, while it sounds like it would be a good deal for consumers, in the long run is not. You know, I've received many, many communications on this. This, for example, from a registered veterinary technologist:

We choose not to advertise, to eliminate clinics trying to battle with each other. By simply listing a price for a service, we are unable to advise our clients on what that price covers and whether that service is the best choice for that patient. We're not talking about buying a TV. There are a lot of factors that go into the treatment plan that cannot be listed on a billboard of fees. Our prices are not a secret. All a client needs to do is to call, and we will happily explain the costs and options.

That, Madam Chair, is why we simply don't put a price up on the Internet or publish a price schedule like a garage would, you know, in terms of this much for an oil change and this much for a brake job and that sort of thing. It's because our patients are living, breathing entities and each of them has to be dealt with on an individualized basis.

Madam Chair, again, my purpose here is not just to move what would be an amendment that would improve this bill, but my purpose here is to address something that I think is a very common misconception. In fact, a recent survey showed that 98 per cent of pet owners surveyed underestimated the lifetime medical costs of having a pet. Ninety-eight per cent. A large reason for that is because, again, we're insulated from what the medical costs are in the human medical system.

Madam Chair, I would ask for support for this amendment because I do think it removes one of the most egregious elements from within Bill 31. Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other members wishing to speak to amendment A11?

Seeing none, I will call the question.

[Motion on amendment A11 lost]

The Deputy Chair: Are there any other members wishing to speak? The hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake, followed by the hon. Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster.

Mr. Cyr: Okay. I'd like to move an amendment.

The Deputy Chair: Hon. member, if you could wait till I have the original, then you can proceed. Your amendment will be referred to as A12. Please proceed.

Mr. Cyr: Thank you, Madam Chair. This amendment is around the high-cost credit businesses. I would see that it's reasonable to expect that these high-cost credit businesses have physical locations within Alberta.

I think this is fairly self-explanatory. I believe that in the end, with the ability to be able to have high-credit business options, you should have the ability to be able to speak with the people face to face if a concern is brought forward. So I would hope that everybody would vote for this because I think that it's an important amendment.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other members wishing to speak to amendment A12?

Seeing none, I will call the question.

[Motion on amendment A12 lost]

The Deputy Chair: We are now back on the bill. Are there any other members wishing to speak? The hon. Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster.

Dr. Starke: Well, thank you, Madam Chair. I have an amendment, and I'll pass it to the pages. The original is on top there, and the rest are in there. Thank you.

Madam Chair, during the course of debate on this issue we've had some confusion creep into this vis-à-vis the scope of this bill. It specifically has to do with the scope of the species in question. Now, there's been some conflicting back and forth on this, and it's concerning to me, and it's concerning to a lot of my colleagues because, at the very least, they want clarification. Now, the bill states that it's domestic animals and those designated in regulation. I'll just find that here.

The Deputy Chair: Hon. member, I just want to let you know that your amendment will be referred to as A13.

Dr. Starke: Thank you. I'll actually read it into the record here in a moment.

It's starting with 48.1(1)(a): "in respect of a domestic cat or dog or other specified type of domestic animal." Then it continues. You know, in various other sections there's this – and it's interesting because the minister, in one of the debates that we've had, said: well, the bill is very specific; it's dealing with household pets. Well, if that's the intent – and that's fine, that it would be limited to household pets – again, "household pets" is not a real strong term. I would say: let's bring it down to specific species because household pets can include a number of different species of birds, guinea pigs, ferrets, gerbils, hamsters, snakes, lizards, water

spiders, you name it. There's a wide variety of species, and this bill is unclear.

Furthermore, the domestic animal thing. They said: well, not food-producing animals. I've had a lot of questions from horse owners saying: "Well, where does that leave horses? I mean, my horse is my pet. It doesn't happen to be in the house. It's not a household pet, but it is my pet."

The purpose of this amendment is to try to get some clarity with regard to exactly what animals are involved. I move that Bill 31, A Better Deal for Consumers and Businesses Act, be amended in section 2(2) as follows: (a) in the proposed section 48.1(1) by striking out "or other specified type of domestic animal"; (b) in the proposed 48.2 in subsection (2) by striking out "and prescribed types of domestic animals" and in subsection (3) by striking out "and other specified types of domestic animals;" (c) in the proposed section 48.3(1) by striking out clause (a), in clause (d) by striking out "and other types of domestic animals," and in clauses (f) and (g) by striking out "and specified types of domestic animals."

Now, Madam Chair, while some of our other amendments have fallen on the rocky shoals of government resistance, shall we say, this one should be easy because this one basically is putting the language into the bill that the minister says is in the bill or should be in the bill or was her intent to have in the bill, yet it's not what the bill says. There may be an argument: well, if the minister said it in the House, it's in *Hansard*, and *Hansard's* part of the public record, and therefore it's official. Well, I'll tell you that most veterinarians I know don't tote around copies of *Hansard* to know exactly which species are referred to in this bill. They might carry around a piece of the legislation, a copy of Bill 31, but they're not going to be toting around *Hansard*. So we need clarity on this. If the intent of the government is to restrict this bill only to dogs and cats, then say so. It's fairly simple and straightforward.

I'll give you yet another reason why it's important. Now, this is from a colleague of mine, and this colleague has got a very impressive list of qualifications. She holds a bachelor of science in agriculture, a doctor of veterinary medicine, a master's degree in avian health and medicine, and she is a diplomat on the American College of Poultry Veterinarians. She is also the director of national veterinary services and quality assurance for a large national food production company in Canada, and she's a member of the ABVMA. She writes:

As a food animal veterinarian working solely in the poultry industry, I am additionally concerned that the proposed amendments to the VPA are unclear in relation to food animals. Despite numerous industry standards in place for poultry, swine, cattle, and dairy industries, producers still occasionally switch between veterinarians to obtain either the answer or the medication they are seeking. Often this comes with food safety consequences the alternative veterinarian is not fully aware of due to lack of complete historical knowledge of the client.

11:30

One such example is the medication of poultry flocks for Salmonella Enteritidis and other Salmonella species, an action which can mask the true health status of a flock. While treatment can reduce the rate of bacterial shedding it can also increase the risk of antimicrobial resistance; furthermore, since treatment does not cease shedding it means Salmonella bacteria will remain a risk to food safety for as long as the flock remains in production. By promoting clients switching veterinarians, situations as these where food safety concerns are obscured or ineffectively dealt with will only increase the number, putting at risk the health of our consumers as well as our ability to meet regulatory standards for the export of livestock products.

The proposed amendments to the VPA within Bill 31 and the process taken to incorporate them are gravely concerning. I

urge you to withdraw them as soon as possible to protect the integrity of self-governance in Alberta, the health of our patients, and the safety of our food supply.

You see, Madam Chair, the inclusion of a vague definition of which animals are actually involved in this bill creates concerns. It creates considerable concern because there's no real clarity as to whether we're talking about food-producing animals, domestic animals, or who it is that we're talking about.

Now, the minister has stated – and she stated publicly – that this is for household pets. Then let's have the bill language match what the minister's intent is. I cannot understand why you would leave the current language in place, which is vague and open ended and could result in inclusion of additional species, when the intent is to have it for dogs and cats. If that is the case, then the passage of this amendment, whatever it is now – A13 – would result in getting rid of that ambiguity and would result in clarity on this issue, which I think is extremely important that we have for the sake of not just the consuming public but also for the sake of the veterinary profession.

I would ask for support on the amendment.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other members wishing to speak to amendment A13?

Seeing none, I will call the question.

[Motion on amendment A13 lost]

The Deputy Chair: Are there any other members wishing to speak to the bill?

Seeing none, I will call the question.

[The remaining clauses of Bill 31 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

The Deputy Chair: Shall the bill be reported? Are you agreed?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Deputy Chair: Opposed? Carried.

The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Mason: Yes. Madam Chair, I will move that the committee rise and report.

[Motion carried]

[Ms Sweet in the chair]

Mr. Hinkley: Madam Speaker, the Committee of the Whole has had under consideration a certain bill. The committee reports the following bill: Bill 31. I wish to table copies of all amendments considered by the Committee of the Whole on this date for the official records of the Assembly.

The Acting Speaker: Does the Assembly concur in the report?

Hon. Members: Aye.

The Acting Speaker: Opposed? So ordered.

Government Bills and Orders Third Reading

Bill 31

A Better Deal for Consumers and Businesses Act

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Minister of Service Alberta.

Ms McLean: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I rise a final time to speak about Bill 31, A Better Deal for Consumers and Businesses Act. Over the past few weeks I've outlined the many ways this bill will help to protect Alberta consumers. Not only do these measures protect hard-working Albertans; these measures help promote a level playing field among businesses. They provide the government with the tools we need to ensure individual businesses do not get ahead by breaking the rules. This will lead to increased consumer confidence, which we know is good for businesses and the economy.

This is far from the end of the conversation, however. Many of our initiatives require well-crafted regulations to be fully effective. My ministry will keep these discussions going, continue consultation, and over the coming months make these stronger consumer protections a reality.

Madam Speaker, I'm proud of our government's record on consumer issues, from payday loans to condominiums. I'm pleased to move Bill 31 for a third time and add to this legacy.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

Are there any other members wishing to speak to third reading?
The hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake.

Mr. Cyr: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Well, we're into third reading here, and it's disappointing to see that we've rushed this bill through the House so fast. We've requested that this bill be referred to committee and have our fine committees put to work so that they can actually improve this bill. I myself have moved several amendments on this bill on some of the areas of concern, both from industry and the fact that there's been a lack of clear consultation when it comes to Bill 31.

Now, it's upsetting to see that we have four big pieces of legislation moving through this House. I know that for myself – and I have to commend Parliamentary Counsel on their hard work. [some applause] Yes. Vermilion-Lloydminster is clapping on his desk, which he should because, I'll tell you, they worked darn hard, and they got those amendments ready for us. We threw a ton all at once, and this is the problem with rushing through so much legislation at the very end of a session. We are more or less ensuring that this legislation is going to be flawed, potentially, because of the fact that the opposition doesn't have the time to be able to go through these pieces of legislation in the detail that they need to. We don't have the time to be able to reach out to the stakeholders we need to.

A lot of this we had, more or less, the minister speaking on out in the public, saying that something was coming, but we weren't sure about all of these pieces. We hear about dark money or dirty money or shadow parties. We hear about how the boundaries commission put out a flawed report. We are hearing that there are some significant challenges when it comes to ensuring that Albertans have their voice inside of the Legislature. I guess that when we hear all of this, it's very disappointing that the government has done this.

I myself have spent a lot of time reading over the documents that stakeholders have been sending to my office, saying: "Please make sure you get this onto the record. In that way, when something does happen, we have the ability to go back and show the minister that we warned the minister about the fact that we weren't consulted on this."

Now, moving on, I'd like to talk about AMVIC. I will be the first to acknowledge that AMVIC has had its struggles. There's no delicate way of putting that. I myself was very disappointed with some of the things that were coming out, so I do understand that the

minister wanted to more or less take AMVIC forward and say: this needs to get better; we need to get better at this.

11:40

The minister went out to an independent body, George B. Cuff & Associates Ltd. They are management consultants. This is what they do. This is the stuff that they are trained to review and go into. To hear from them that the Alberta Motor Vehicle Industry Council, AMVIC, has a purpose outside of the fact that government shouldn't be in control of it, that there should be protections put in place – it came up with that there should be an equal number of industry as well as public representatives appointed by the minister, with the chair being appointed by the minister.

Right now, if there is, let's say, a conflict between the public members appointed by the minister and the industry representatives, the government has the ability to more or less move the decision in the best course that the government sees fit. Again, it is very disappointing that we set up this structure and that as soon as all of these members were appointed by the minister, suddenly we've got the entire AMVIC moving towards government governance.

Now, moving on to veterinarians, I can say that AMVIC has had its issues – that's clear – but I have not seen or heard the same issues with our veterinarian community. If anything, I see them as of the highest calibre, some of the most trustworthy people within Alberta, people that I consider to be my friends. I think that all of us can say that when it comes to veterinarians, they are people within our communities that are the highest respected – the highest respected – so when we hear that the industry for both AMVIC and the profession of veterinarians have not been consulted on these moves that are in Bill 31, we need to ask: are we moving this stuff too fast? We need to make sure we get this right.

I moved reasonable – reasonable – amendments for both AMVIC and the veterinarians, trying to ensure that their voices are heard. To my disappointment – and I'm sure many of my colleagues were disappointed as well – the government voted against those reasonable amendments. The fact is that whenever we've got a profession that is under attack – and I believe that veterinarians specifically are for some reason being targeted by this government – that is disappointing.

They use old complaints. Now, the one complaint that I have heard being used in one of the newspaper articles was by a woman that was very unhappy with the price of a procedure provided by the veterinarians. When I sat with the veterinarians' association, they said that that specific individual did not put a complaint forward. How do we fix this when the complaints aren't moving forward? Is it just that she didn't feel comfortable, or is it just the fact that somehow we have to expect that with every profession, whether it is government regulated or industry regulated, there are going to be, I guess, some people unhappy with the services that they've gotten or with the prices that they've paid. I believe that that same individual would have had the same experience under a government-regulated board. The fact that she didn't feel that she potentially had the opportunity to speak out about this is distressing. But I will say that the examples the minister has given for justification against our veterinarian community are examples that will happen under government-regulated boards as well. These things do not go away.

If this is going to exist, it makes sense that – if this profession is working just fine, why are we using an iron fist on them? It makes no sense. It also doesn't make sense that we are actually telling people right now that the government has clearly consulted because they haven't. They haven't consulted with industry, either AMVIC or the veterinarians.

Now moving on to other parts of the bill, we see that some of this stuff actually is troublesome, and I actually applaud that the minister is trying to correct some of that. So not all of this bill is bad. That's why committee is so important.

I would hope that this Chamber votes this bill down and the minister comes back with something that is more palatable to everybody that's involved.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Mason: Yes, Madam Speaker. I would request complete support in the House, unanimous consent, for a one-minute bell on third reading of Bill 31.

[Unanimous consent granted]

The Acting Speaker: Are there any other members wishing to speak? The hon. Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster.

Dr. Starke: Well, thank you, Madam Speaker, very, very much. I guess this is our last opportunity to address this. I don't like using the term "kick at the cat" because veterinarians don't use that phrase.

Hon. Madam Speaker and my hon. colleagues, I do want to put into the public record a number of other statements that I've received from my colleagues. I think that perhaps everyone in the House has heard enough from me on this, and if that's the case, well, I'm sorry. But I do want to put into the public record some of the, again, hundreds of statements I've received from my colleagues, impassioned pleas to not go ahead with this poorly crafted, poorly consulted, and poorly executed piece of legislation, specifically with regard to the veterinary profession.

From an ABVMA member and past president of the association:

Unfortunately, Honorable Minister, you have made a great error in overstepping your duties to alter legislation of a self-regulated profession without due care, consideration, and consultation with the very professionals that the legislation deals with. We kindly request that you remove any reference to changes to the Veterinary Profession Act in this bill. Obviously, if this goes ahead, future election polls will dictate our final say. It will reflect our feelings toward you and your cowardly approach to modifying legislation without the courage to meet face-to-face with the very professionals you are affecting. This will be our final say as to how you treated us.

From a veterinarian in Calgary, who runs a very large pet hospital in south Calgary:

The Bill being discussed was poorly researched with little to no consultation with [the] profession and will result in a negative impact on us and ultimately on our clients, their pets and their bottom line.

11:50

Veterinary medicine is not a job. Veterinary medicine is not a money making venture. It is a passion. My husband and I both work here and our kids grew up in the clinic.

So did my sons.

... This commitment is true of all of our staff! I cannot tell you the amount of time that my staff stays late, work extra shifts and give their heart and soul to their clients and their pets. All this overtime and above and beyond care is never billed to the client. This is a profession based [on] compassion and love of our clients [and our patients]. I told you yesterday, but it is 100% true that my clinic's reputation is based on word of mouth and trust ... it is not about fees. When I first meet a new client I am often on my knees getting to know their dog. Can you imagine the detriment

that discussing fees first would have on this relationship? This negative conversation will downgrade the relationships between vets and their clients.

People choose their veterinarian for many reasons. They keep their veterinarian because they trust them. This Bill degrades client veterinary relationships and will ultimately do way more harm than good.

From a veterinarian in Edmonton:

This is a very important issue. In Bill 31, the Veterinary Profession is being lumped in with dishonest ticket scalpers, loan sharking outlets, and other dishonest scammers. Veterinarians are often rated as among the most highly trusted professions in many opinion polls, far above lawyers and politicians, yet your government has decided to use this Bill to launch an assault upon the Veterinary Profession in Alberta.

Albertans are taking note. Veterinarians serve millions of Albertans and the vast majority of our clients trust us implicitly. We work hard to earn and maintain this trust, and our clients know it and value it. Albertans will not forget your government's lack of fair consultation and how you treat hard working, highly trusted professionals.

This is weak, mis-informed and insulting legislation, and the government must withdraw it or amend it.

From a registered veterinary technologist in Edmonton:

Being that Albertans pay out-of-pocket for veterinary care for their pets, I do believe that it is important for them to be regulated independently. This allows veterinarians to truly practice medicine that is best for each unique situation, tailored to the pet, their owner and what they are willing and able to do for their pet. And veterinarians in turn support the community – every veterinary practice I've worked at has some form of emergency fund that is opened up for the clients who truly need it. Every practice has a [family pet who is taken in from someone] who was no longer able to care for the pet. And let's not forget what it truly means to be Albertan – Come Hell or High Water. Having lived through the flood in Calgary, I saw the enormous impact that veterinary clinics had on people's ability to survive through the flood. Knowing that their beloved pet was being safely cared for allowed them to worry about their own safety. The rescue efforts during the Fort McMurray fires are another example of the thousands of animals that were rescued and cared for by teams of volunteer veterinary medical professionals.

This is what Alberta means to me. This is what self-regulated veterinary medicine does for this province. I thought that the NDP understood this and that is why I voted for you in the last provincial election. Unfortunately, I am seriously regretting my decision. Your Government has tabled Bill 31 in the Legislature that is nothing short of insulting to the entire veterinary profession. I am severely disappointed in the way my profession has been misrepresented in the most appalling way. All the consultative processes have been thrown by the wayside. Veterinary medicine is not a consumer commodity; it is a medical field, filled with highly trained medical professionals who have dedicated their lives to be a voice for the voiceless. The Association (ABVMA) that we have elected to represent us has been completely shut out – the President of which is forced to sit in the gallery during sittings to learn what is being dictated to the profession. To be completely removed from what is supposed to be a two-way relationship is undemocratic. The proposed amendments to Bill 31 are insulting to my profession; they have come about in a way that is abusive to the very people who have devoted their lives to this profession and should be completely removed from Bill 31.

Madam Speaker, the final two quotes, one from a veterinarian in Calgary:

The changes that Bill 31 proposes show a complete lack of respect and understanding on the part of the current government of the veterinary profession. The proposed changes will deteriorate the high standards of care that the Alberta Veterinary Medical Association currently ensures, resulting in disastrous effects for business owners like myself and a deterioration of the human-animal bond and the commodification of care for animals. It's clear that the veterinary community in Alberta has lost trust in the current government over this issue, and I personally look forward to supporting a new government in 2019.

The final quote, and this is a personal one, Madam Speaker. In 2001, when I was living in Germany, I attended a veterinary orthopedics course. I met a young veterinarian at that course, and I found out that he was a graduate of the Karl Marx University in Leipzig. He was born in East Germany. In the fall of 1989 he was in his first year of veterinary school, and he participated in the Monday night demonstrations in Leipzig that eventually led to the fall of the Berlin Wall. He went to the Nikolai Kirche, and he grabbed a candle, and he participated in those. All of his classmates that participated were threatened with expulsion if they participated in those marches, and he said: no; this is too important. And in 1989, when the wall came down, this gentleman was there. This veterinary student was in Berlin when they opened up Checkpoint Charlie.

In 2003 I got a call from this veterinarian. He wanted to come to Canada, and I said: "I'll help you out. I'll see if I can find, you know, somebody that was looking for a veterinarian." He came to Canada. He has established his own practice in Grande Prairie. He's been very successful. He married a gal from northern Alberta.

He writes:

I was born and raised in East Germany and came to Canada in 2003. I was in Berlin the night they opened Checkpoint Charlie and the German reunification became a reality. My dream had always been to move to Canada and do what was never possible in East Germany – run my own Veterinary business.

I had watched my Dad struggle as an "employed veterinarian" in one of the biggest co-op's in East Germany. Already then, I had told myself I would like to go somewhere where honest, hard work pays off. Fast forward to Alberta, Canada December 2017. Here I am trying to understand why a provincial government is infiltrating and undermining my private business which I have worked so hard to build. No consultation with the ABVMA regarding this bill is bizarre and clearly indicates a government vindictive and attacking.

Madam Speaker, this doctor has now practised in Canada for 14 years, and I'm proud to call him my friend, I'm proud to call him a colleague, and I think he's made things better. But when I talked to him about this bill, he said: "That's exactly why I left East Germany, because the government, you know, couldn't and wouldn't stay out of people's business. What is happening? Why is this happening in this way?"

Madam Speaker, I'm opposed to this. I have been all along. I've been pretty consistent on that. I urge members to maybe finally now change your minds and vote this terrible piece of legislation down.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other members wishing to speak?

Would the hon. minister like to close debate? No? Okay.

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

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 11:58 a.m.]

[One minute having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

[Ms Sweet in the chair]

For the motion:

| | | |
|---------------|--------------|------------|
| Anderson, S. | Feehan | McKittrick |
| Babcock | Fitzpatrick | McLean |
| Carlier | Hinkley | Miller |
| Carson | Horne | Miranda |
| Ceci | Jansen | Piquette |
| Connolly | Kazim | Rosendahl |
| Coolahan | Kleinstauber | Schreiner |
| Cortes-Vargas | Larivee | Shepherd |
| Dach | Littlewood | Sucha |
| Dang | Luff | Westhead |
| Drever | Malkinson | Woollard |
| Eggen | Mason | |

12:00

Against the motion:

| | | |
|----------|-----------|--------------|
| Barnes | Hanson | Pitt |
| Clark | Hunter | Schneider |
| Cooper | Loewen | Smith |
| Cyr | McIver | Starke |
| Drysdale | McPherson | Strankman |
| Gill | Orr | van Dijken |
| Gotfried | Panda | |
| Totals: | For – 35 | Against – 20 |

[Motion carried; Bill 31 read a third time]

The Acting Speaker: Hon. members, pursuant to Standing Order 4(2.1) the Assembly will stand adjourned until 1:30 this afternoon.

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

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