



Province of Alberta

The 29th Legislature
Fourth Session

Alberta Hansard

Tuesday evening, May 1, 2018

Day 22

The Honourable Robert E. Wanner, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta The 29th Legislature

Fourth Session

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

Aheer, Leela Sharon, Chestermere-Rocky View (UCP),
Deputy Leader of the Official Opposition
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Anderson, Wayne, Highwood (UCP)
Babcock, Erin D., Stony Plain (NDP)
Barnes, Drew, Cypress-Medicine Hat (UCP)
Bilous, Hon. Deron, Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview (NDP)
Carlier, Hon. Oneil, Whitecourt-St. Anne (NDP)
Carson, Jonathon, Edmonton-Meadowlark (NDP)
Ceci, Hon. Joe, Calgary-Fort (NDP)
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Connolly, Michael R.D., Calgary-Hawwood (NDP)
Coolahan, Craig, Calgary-Klein (NDP)
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Dang, Thomas, Edmonton-South West (NDP)
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Eggen, Hon. David, Edmonton-Calder (NDP)
Ellis, Mike, Calgary-West (UCP)
Feehan, Hon. Richard, Edmonton-Rutherford (NDP),
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Fitzpatrick, Maria M., Lethbridge-East (NDP)
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Deputy Government House Leader
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Gray, Hon. Christina, Edmonton-Mill Woods (NDP)
Hanson, David B., Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills (UCP)
Hinkley, Bruce, Wetaskiwin-Camrose (NDP)
Hoffman, Hon. Sarah, Edmonton-Glenora (NDP)
Horne, Trevor A.R., Spruce Grove-St. Albert (NDP)
Hunter, Grant R., Cardston-Taber-Warner (UCP)
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Payne, Hon. Brandy, Calgary-Acadia (NDP)
Phillips, Hon. Shannon, Lethbridge-West (NDP)
Piquette, Colin, Athabasca-Sturgeon-Redwater (NDP)
Pitt, Angela D., Airdrie (UCP),
Official Opposition Deputy House Leader
Renaud, Marie F., St. Albert (NDP)
Rosendahl, Eric, West Yellowhead (NDP)
Sabir, Hon. Irfan, Calgary-McCall (NDP)
Schmidt, Hon. Marlin, Edmonton-Gold Bar (NDP)
Schneider, David A., Little Bow (UCP)
Schreiner, Kim, Red Deer-North (NDP)
Shepherd, David, Edmonton-Centre (NDP)
Sigurdson, Hon. Lori, Edmonton-Riverview (NDP)
Smith, Mark W., Drayton Valley-Devon (UCP)
Starke, Dr. Richard, Vermilion-Lloydminster (PC)
Stier, Pat, Livingstone-Macleod (UCP)
Strankman, Rick, Drumheller-Stettler (UCP)
Sucha, Graham, Calgary-Shaw (NDP)
Swann, Dr. David, Calgary-Mountain View (AL)
Taylor, Wes, Battle River-Wainwright (UCP)
Turner, Dr. A. Robert, Edmonton-Whitemud (NDP)
van Dijken, Glenn, Barrhead-Morinville-Westlock (UCP)
Westhead, Cameron, Banff-Cochrane (NDP),
Deputy Government Whip
Woollard, Denise, Edmonton-Mill Creek (NDP)
Yao, Tany, Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo (UCP)
Vacant, Fort McMurray-Conklin
Vacant, Innisfail-Sylvan Lake

Party standings:

New Democratic: 54 United Conservative: 25 Alberta Party: 3 Alberta Liberal: 1 Progressive Conservative: 1 Independent Conservative: 1 Vacant: 2

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Standing Committee on Alberta's Economic Future

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Coolahan	Miller
Cooper	Nielsen
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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

7:30 p.m.

Tuesday, May 1, 2018

[The Speaker in the chair]

The Speaker: Good evening. Please be seated.

Government Motions

Election Commissioner Appointment

16. Mr. Feehan moved on behalf of Mr. Mason:
Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly concur in the report of the Standing Committee on Legislative Offices tabled on April 10, 2018, Sessional Paper 67/2018, and recommend to the Lieutenant Governor in Council that Mr. Lorne Gibson be appointed as Election Commissioner for a term of five years commencing May 15, 2018.

The Speaker: The Minister of Indigenous Relations.

Mr. Feehan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. At its April 5, 2018, meeting the Standing Committee on Legislative Offices passed a motion recommending that Mr. Lorne Gibson be appointed as this province's first Election Commissioner. I understand that Mr. Gibson has considerable experience and knowledge of elections and of election finance rules. He has previously served as Alberta's Chief Electoral Officer as well as having had a role in overseeing elections in other provinces and indeed outside of Canada.

I encourage all members to support this appointment. Thank you.

The Speaker: Hon. members, anyone wish to speak to the resolution? The Member for Barrhead-Morinville-Westlock.

Mr. van Dijken: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to speak to the motion that's before us. I'd like to start out with a quote from Senator Blanche Lincoln: voters must have faith in the electoral process for our democracy to succeed.

Mr. Speaker, on April 5, 2018, the NDP members of the Standing Committee on Leg. Offices voted to appoint an individual as Election Commissioner who did not have all-party support. I've been involved in a number of the search committees that we've put in place over the last couple of years, with a very good working relationship during search committee meetings, and we were able to come to unanimous support in all committees. But from the outset of this committee in December it became very apparent that the members from the governing party were prepared to move forward in a way that I would consider to be somewhat haphazard, a little bit reckless.

We have long been disappointed in how members of the government caucus chose to conduct themselves throughout the entire search process. It became evident at our first meeting, at the end of December, that government MLAs were determined to proceed in a reckless fashion by forcing the Legislative Assembly Office to compose a job posting and a position profile for a brand new position in less than 48 hours and then, on top of that, deciding to open the competition during the Christmas holidays, including a costly run of print advertisements that required an LAO employee to come into the office on their holidays to make certain deadlines despite the Official Opposition's strong advice that this would be a waste of money and put undue strain on our support staff.

You know, Mr. Speaker, in December it started to become very evident that the members of the Legislative Offices Committee were preparing to move forward in a very reckless manner from the fact that we were starting with a new position – a new job

description was necessary – and that even upon recommendation not to advertise during the holiday season for this position, the members of the governing party on that committee decided that, yeah, we will proceed in that manner.

Then in January the committee was asked to spend an additional \$20,000 for a second run of print advertisements because not enough applications had been received at that point, which is exactly what members from the Official Opposition had pointed out in our December meeting, that it would be a terrible time to advertise, during the Christmas holidays, during the Christmas break, and that we should probably ensure that we get job descriptions put together in a reasonable manner that gives the LAO the time necessary to do a proper job on that. But then we went ahead in January, and the committee needed to approve another \$20,000 for advertising because the first round was not effective.

We also took issue with being strong-armed by government MLAs who would declare that a consensus had been reached on issues in camera and would try to force votes with little to no discussion when we returned to the record. Perhaps it wasn't surprising that when it came time to select a candidate, instead of an openness to hear the concerns from the Official Opposition, government members used their majority to confirm a candidate who, while qualified – and I must reiterate that, Mr. Speaker. Official Opposition members on the committee did not feel that the individual was not qualified, but there were other outstanding issues that gave us pause for concern, and we felt that those issues were enough to cause question for Albertans on whether or not this was the right choice for Election Commissioner.

Government members used their majority to confirm a candidate who, while qualified, has a long and adversarial history with the Legislative Assembly here in Alberta. We felt there were a number of other strong, qualified candidates, yet the government members chose a candidate that did not have unanimous support of the committee. The selection of an Election Commissioner should not be a partisan exercise, and indeed there was an opportunity to confirm a consensus candidate. However, the government members of the committee have chosen to act in a partisan manner, which is certainly not in the best interests, I would say, of Albertans.

Mr. Speaker, it should concern all Albertans when a committee is charged with the search for the position of Election Commissioner, a new position within our electoral system. The position was established, essentially, through I believe it was Bill 32, An Act to Strengthen and Protect Democracy in Alberta. Yet when the search committee moves in this manner, it gives me great concern that we are possibly seeing a government working not necessarily in the best interests of democracy, accountability, transparency within our democratic system but moving in a somewhat reckless fashion to appoint an individual that appeared to be high on their radar right from the start.

I say again that I do not believe that any of the members from the Official Opposition that were members of the committee ever put into question this individual's ability and qualifications with regard to elections, but we did have concern with regard to the history of this individual and the government of Alberta. We see an individual here who, although having served as Chief Electoral Officer in the past in Alberta – committee members from all parties had concerns on the 2008 election and the performance of that election, and the individual was dismissed. The individual decided to sue the government, failed in successfully suing the government. So we have a situation here that there's a tarnished history that should concern all Albertans on whether or not this individual can move forward in a manner that is free from any stigma or baggage from past.

I believe that I will not be supporting this motion, as in committee. I was not in support of the motion to begin with.

7:40

I believe that all Members of the Legislative Assembly should take a close look at the process that was put in place and how it played out and possibly take a second look at: is this the right individual for the position of Election Commissioner, the right individual that would give confidence to all Albertans that we are in fact protecting and strengthening democracy in Alberta?

With that, I do have an amendment I would like to move at this time. Do you wish me to proceed, Mr. Speaker?

The Speaker: Yes.

Mr. van Dijken: I move that Government Motion 16 be amended by adding the following after “May 15, 2018”:

and be it further resolved that following the passage of this motion, the Election Commissioner’s salary be posted publicly on the website of the Standing Committee on Legislative Offices.

Mr. Speaker, we did have considerable discussion within committee to look at the possibility of posting the salary publicly. If we take a look at the advertisement that was put forward – there was a range; I’m trying to find it here – we had a range advertised that would put this individual in a salary class that would qualify for the sunshine list.

Appointment will be made for a term . . . with provision for reappointment.

The salary for the position is \$152,818 to \$212,801.

I believe it’s important for Albertans to be able to see what the individuals that are hired for public positions are paid over and above what would be considered the limit on the sunshine list.

What’s interesting with this is that if we wait for the process to play out the way it traditionally would, Albertans will not be able to understand what the Election Commissioner position is being paid until June 2019. I think it’s prudent for this Assembly to disclose this information, and I think that if there’s nothing that the government is trying to hide with regard to this position, they would agree that it is prudent to disclose this information. It’s going to be public information in June 2019 regardless. I believe that it’s an important part of the information and that accountability and transparency of this government could be called into question if this is not disclosed at this time.

I would encourage all members to support this amendment motion, and I look forward to hearing more discussion on that possibility.

The Speaker: Hon. member, the amendment you proposed is, I believe, A1 and has been circulated.

Are there members who wish to speak to the amendment? The Member for Airdrie.

Mrs. Pitt: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It’s a pleasure to rise today to speak to the amendment to Government Motion 16 moved by my colleague the hon. Member for Barrhead-Morinville-Westlock. This is a very important amendment that we have in front of us here today. This is an amendment about transparency in this House and to the public, specifically in regard to elections and the election system and the way that we police and investigate election law here in Alberta. I know that transparency is important to every single member of this House. I’ve heard it a number of times from members on the government side, repeatedly, over and over again, in many different circumstances, so I know that the government is certainly in support of a motion like this, that shows transparency to the people of this province.

The amendment reads that the new “Election Commissioner’s salary be posted publicly on the website” so that the public can see. This new position, of course, was created through a piece of

legislation that was passed in this House by the government members to create a redundant position, so to speak. Those are not necessarily my words, although I agree with them, but the words of the Chief Electoral Officer in this province, Mr. Speaker, who many hold in high regard, who has acted in an extremely ethical manner throughout the course of his career. When asked to present to the Standing Committee on Legislative Offices in regard to election investigations, he spoke very candidly and very honestly and actually had no issues handling current complaints that came into his office in regard to investigations.

So it’s interesting that we’re here in the first place, but we are, and this committee had undertaken a search process to hire and fill this new Election Commissioner position regardless of its redundancy. Here we are, and I think that in the interest of full disclosure to the public, it’s important that this salary, in accordance with other sunshine rules, be posted on the website.

Mr. Speaker, as you know, we’re only one year away – as we think, we are only one year away from the next general election. There’s lots of work to be done and lots of information to get out there by members of the government side. Of course, the Official Opposition is trying to get lots of information out to the people so they can make an informed decision when it comes to choosing their next government. The salaries, as most Albertans would agree, especially within quite a high range – I would argue that probably the top 1 per cent of citizens in this province make this kind of salary. The top 1 per cent. That’s just within the salary range that’s been publicly posted on the search on the website for this commissioner. So the top 1 per cent of Albertans make a salary like this. There’s quite a range, and I think that Albertans would more specifically be interested in how much the government members of this committee have agreed to pay this individual that sits in the Election Commissioner chair.

Like I’ve said before and like we’ve discussed before, this certainly is a matter of transparency. I know that members of the United Conservative caucus think that transparency is one of the most important things in our democratic system, and many Albertans would certainly agree with us, Mr. Speaker. That’s why this motion, put forward by my honourable colleague, is extremely important. Surely, the government would agree that, you know, this is not anything unusual in regard to any other independent office of the Legislature position. It’s not at all.

7:50

I don’t think the government wants to hide anything. Certainly, I know that it’s not the intent of this government to not be transparent. I don’t think this government wants to be sneaky. I don’t think they want to, you know, pull the wool over the voters’ eyes. I don’t think that’s the intent of this government, Mr. Speaker. So, surely, this would be an amendment to the government motion that would pass. In my heart of hearts – and I hope I’m safe to assume that in the government’s heart of hearts, they believe that a government should be transparent. This is exactly the kind of motion that they should move.

In closing, I would like to urge all members of this Assembly – the government side of the House, members of the Official Opposition, independent members, members of the third party – to vote in favour of transparency here today. It’s an easy thing to do, Mr. Speaker. I can’t possibly see any reason why any member would think that it wouldn’t be in the public’s best interest. After all, that’s what we’re here to do: act on behalf of the public, their best interest. It is an extremely interesting thing to know just how much the new Election Commissioner is to be paid, so let’s pass this motion unanimously. Let’s post the salary of the new Election Commissioner on the website and show and prove to the people of

Alberta that we in this Legislature are transparent and that we hold the interest of the public in such a high regard.

Again I urge you to pass this amendment to the motion. I will certainly be supporting it. Thank you.

The Speaker: Any questions under 29(2)(a) to the Member for Airdrie? Go ahead, hon. member.

Mr. Strankman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I know that the Member for Airdrie is proud and respectful and responsible regarding the democratic process, and I know she was involved in this committee, so I'd like to have her further describe her heartfelt belief in the actual requirement that these people have to publicly disclose their wages and that they be responsible to the people that they serve.

Mrs. Pitt: Well, thank you to my hon. colleague from Drumheller-Stettler. You know, my thoughts are with the people in his constituency as they experience some flooding events in the area.

To answer the question that the members asks, in my experience in this role as the MLA representative of the people of Airdrie, I know that when I was sent here almost three years ago – in four days it actually is three years ago, Mr. Speaker – the people of Airdrie gave me a very clear mandate as I was talking to them, knocking on their doors, and they wanted the sun to shine. This is certainly an example of just that. There are so many people frustrated by the way in which the speed of government moves, so when presented with an opportunity, given the mandate that the people have given me in Airdrie to let the sun shine and to do it quickly, I for one will always jump at that opportunity. That is exactly the opportunity that is presented here today with this amendment to this government motion. I couldn't think of a better way to represent the people than by letting the sun shine and doing it quickly.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Any other questions under 29(2)(a)? The hon. member.

Mr. Hanson: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Not having had the benefit of sitting on the committee, I'd just like some clarification if possible. Let me get this straight. We've got an individual that was accused of something during the election. My understanding is that even the current Premier had issues in her riding during the 2008 election with this individual. The accusations were found to be serious enough that the government actually fired the individual.

The Speaker: Hon. member, I want to remind you that you're speaking to the amendment now.

Mr. Hanson: Yeah. I'm getting to that. I'm just trying to get clarification here because we're talking about the high rate of pay for an individual, and we want to post it.

So then the individual sues the government of Alberta unsuccessfully, and now the government members of the committee are all in favour of ramrodding and hiring this individual again for some reason, and we have to debate whether we want to disclose how much money we're going to pay this individual. I'm just a little shocked. Could you please clarify? Am I correct in what I was saying here?

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mrs. Pitt: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The candidate that we're referring to was not fired in 2008. He was actually not rehired by

the committee for numerous reasons, which I'm sure we'll get into during the course of this debate here this evening.

There are a number of curiousnesses around the appointment of this new Election Commissioner, certainly, but the government has an opportunity here today to help shed some light on this situation and an opportunity to show that they're not hiding anything. I don't think they are. I really don't think they are. I think they're going to vote in favour of this because it makes sense. It's common sense. The people in their ridings are certainly going to want to know, as many of their constituents ...

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

The Member for Edmonton-Centre on amendment A1.

Mr. Shepherd: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have the distinct honour of serving as the chair of the Standing Committee on Legislative Offices, which means, then, that I also have the opportunity and the honour of serving on behalf of the people of Alberta as the chair of the select special search committees when we are conducting search processes for officers of the Legislature. I endeavour in that work to remain neutral, as the chair should, and I think all members of the committee have generally expressed that I have conducted myself in such a manner in this work.

Now, on this particular issue I've had the opportunity to chair three committees now: for the Ombudsman who was appointed last year; for the new Auditor General, who was just sworn in this week; and then, of course, for the Election Commissioner, Mr. Gibson, who we're discussing here tonight. In each of those processes we have followed the due process which is set out under legislation as to the disclosure of salary, that being that under legislation the legislated process is that after an individual has earned their salary, in the following year that salary is posted online and made available for disclosure to the people of Alberta. That is true for all individuals, Mr. Speaker, all public servants who are above the threshold that is set out on the sunshine list and are therefore required to have their salary disclosed. That is the appropriate practice. That is the practice that has occurred on the two previous search committees, and indeed I would suggest that is the appropriate practice which should take place here.

I say this, Mr. Speaker, as the chair of the Standing Committee on Legislative Offices, where it is our due purpose to work with and to oversee the budgets and business plans of the officers of the Legislature and to indeed uphold the work that they do with the utmost respect, as it should be, on behalf of the Legislature and the people of Alberta. To suggest that in this situation because members of the opposition may have some discomfort with this particular candidate, for reasons which they have partially explained but that they have the opportunity to explain further if they wish tonight – those concerns do not to me suggest that there is any reason that we should be abrogating the due process set out in legislation, that is expected by all officers of our Legislature, indeed by all members of the public service to whom the sunshine list applies.

8:00

Should we choose to make an exception this evening, Mr. Speaker, and target this particular individual for reasons which the members opposite can only explain – to single him out for special treatment, indeed, I believe, would cast a chill and a pall over our other officers of the Legislature and our public service. Should they not have the expectation of the due process of the law? Should they not expect that members of this House would treat them with the due respect of their position and that they should be able to have the expectation that members of this House are not going to attempt to

circumvent or abrogate the law for whatever particular personal purpose they might have?

Indeed, as I look forward to having the opportunity to explain, there are things that have occurred in this House in the treatment of officers of the Legislature which have suggested that. Indeed, in my view, that is disturbing. It has been called out in the press. It was called out by members of this House who were in opposition at the time, including our Premier. Mr. Speaker, this motion that is before us, I dare say, approaches an insult to the officers of the Legislature.

We are not abrogating transparency. Our government is the one that brought forward the legislation which extended the sunshine list in this province. This was not something that occurred under the previous government, who instead appointed many people to agencies, boards, and commissions at salaries far above the range that is set out for Mr. Gibson – far above – almost approaching four times the amount. Those individuals were not particularly targeted. They also were afforded the due process of the law.

Setting aside any comment on the qualifications of Mr. Gibson, how anyone feels about his appointment, about whether or not people have any particular concerns, there is a due process that is in place. There is legislation that is in place. If members opposite feel that that legislation is inadequate, then by all means I suggest they may consider a private member's bill. Perhaps they would wish to include that as part of their party platform and can advocate for that at their policy conference this coming weekend.

But, Mr. Speaker, I do not believe it is appropriate in this context to try to introduce a motion that circumvents that law and indeed would treat our officers, our public servants with disrespect and call into question whether any future person who was hired above that threshold that is set out in the sunshine list could have trust that they would be afforded the due process of the expectation that legislation would be upheld on their behalf.

For that reason, Mr. Speaker, I will be voting against this amendment.

The Speaker: Any questions or comments under 29(2)(a) to the Member for Edmonton-Centre? The Member for Chestermere-Rocky View.

Mrs. Aheer: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I actually want to thank the Member for Edmonton-Centre. He did an absolutely spectacular job of chairing this committee. Things got very passionate at times, and he did an excellent job of keeping things under control. I want to thank you personally for your efforts and for the work that you did on this committee. It's no wonder that you've been used to chair other committees, because you did a great job.

I wanted to talk a little bit about due process versus law, for one thing. You're using those words interchangeably, Mr. Speaker, and I think that maybe that's something we need to talk about. If we're talking about due process, due process for us in this House is actually what we do for Albertans, not for people that we hire here, especially in this particular situation. This is a redundant position, a position that was not required, and it was specifically told to us in this Legislature that the position need not happen.

Now we have a person who's been hired in a position that is within the sunshine list, a position that the election officer said didn't need to happen, that he was completely capable of handling on his own. Now the government is choosing to spend taxpayer dollars on another person to do this job and questions why we're asking to have this dollar amount brought forward: because, first of all, as they know, we don't think that this position was necessary, with all due respect to Mr. Lorne Gibson, who's very qualified; also, because, actually, due process is here for Albertans. If we're asking you to look at it differently, the reason is because we believe

that due process needs to be looked at in terms of the people who are actually paying for us to be here. That's actually what matters, especially because this person that has been hired, Mr. Lorne Gibson, is going to be interacting with every single person who is working towards being in this Legislature and all of the families and volunteers and everybody else that may have issues with coming forward.

The reason why this amendment was brought forward was to make sure that we're doing exactly what we said to do. The whole reason that this person was supposedly hired was for transparency and accountability, but at the same time, due process is the reason for not having transparency and accountability. I'm confused. So I think maybe it's time to ask the question.

The Speaker: Your question is addressed to the Member for Edmonton-Centre?

Mrs. Aheer: Yes.

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Once again, I understand that the members feel that this position was not necessary. I understand that they did not want to see an Election Commissioner in the first place. They had the opportunity to raise those concerns when we debated Bill 32. They made those concerns quite clear, and indeed they had the opportunity to make those clear once again on the record when we discussed this at the committee.

But that is irrelevant, Mr. Speaker, to the motion that is in front of us. The motion that is front of us is attempting to circumvent and go around the tenets that are laid out in legislation about how the sunshine list in the province of Alberta operates. It has nothing to do with whether or not they like the candidate, with whether or not they feel that creating this position under Bill 32 was appropriate. That has nothing to do with whether or not the salary of the Election Commissioner should be made available before the time that it is duly appointed to be done under legislation, under the law.

Again, to choose to go around that and target this individual simply because they dislike the legislation which created his position, simply because they do not want this particular individual as the candidate to hold this position, to target him for that reason for exceptional targeting, to reveal his salary, to me, Mr. Speaker, seems highly inappropriate. That suggests to any future candidate that puts their name forward to be an officer of this Legislature that if members of this House, for whatever reason, decide that they don't like them, they can target them for an exception to the law. That is not a message I want to communicate to people who serve this House and, indeed, all.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

The hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills.

Mr. Cooper: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise today and speak to amendment A1, moved by my colleague from the wonderful constituency of Barrhead-Morinville-Westlock. This is an amendment to get some additional transparency and openness around the salary of the Election Commissioner.

You know, I heard the Member for Edmonton-Centre, and I, too, would like to thank him for his work as the chair of the committee.

Having said that, I don't sit on the committee – Mr. Speaker, you would know that – but I have had the pleasure of hearing the debate this evening as well as having some discussion. I also had the opportunity to read the minority report from my colleagues about some of the things and the concerns that they highlighted in that, particularly around the process that took place with respect to this particular hiring.

8:10

I'd like to just point out to the Member for Edmonton-Centre, who aptly highlighted the fact that he's overseen three of these processes, that I know that there have certainly been some irregularities, or certainly the process took place at different speeds from the other hirings; for example, the Auditor General as well as the Ombudsman and others. I know that I had the opportunity to review some of the meeting dates in terms of the speed at which the government members on the committee were insistent on it happening. We actually heard the Minister of Transportation today talk about the appointment of the MSA, how it's been over seven months that that seat has been vacant. His response was needing to follow the process and making sure we take time to get it right. But, Mr. Speaker, you'll know that the legislation was rushed through this House, and then the government members got together and rushed this process to get to the result where we are today. So there have been a number of challenges around exactly how this has taken place.

The Member for Edmonton-Centre – and, again, I appreciate the good work that he's done on this as well as some of the other recruitment committees that he has overseen – talked about the fact that he, in fact, has done this three times now and that he has stayed independent in that process, and I also believe that he has. But one of the big differences between this process and the last process or the other processes – and, Mr. Speaker, you'll remember that we sat on a selection committee together where we selected the Clerk of this Assembly, and that was also done in a unanimous fashion.

But this is very different. This we see: the government members insisting on one thing and the opposition expressing some serious concern around the selection of that particular individual. Also, along the road, the process that was followed in terms of it was rushed, and it seemed very clear that there was a need to get this finished by a certain period of time. In fact, I asked the question here in the House about that, and they talked at some length about wanting to have it finished in the spring and that sort of thing.

Now we see a situation where the salary is not going to be disclosed, and we all know, Mr. Speaker, that, in fact, it will be disclosed at the end of next year. I heard the Member for Edmonton-Centre speak about how any future candidates will know that their salary is going to be released and that that will put a chill on the application process. Well, I couldn't disagree more because the reality is that the salary will be disclosed.

I think it's important that when we have the opportunity to provide as much information to the public as possible – and I also would submit that he's right in situations like this with respect to previous legislation. It should have been done like this in the first place. It doesn't preclude us from being able to do what we're asking to do today. While I understand that the chair would prefer that the normal process take place, it doesn't prevent us from doing this. All candidates that apply to be a legislative officer, you'll know, Mr. Speaker, are fully aware of the fact that their salary will be released, so this in turn would not have a chilling effect in any capacity. It also allows for openness and transparency, for all Albertans to know just exactly what that salary is.

Mr. Speaker, you'll know that I wasn't on the committee, so I don't know the salary that this particular individual is going to get, but what I am very, very, very interested to find out – and hopefully the members opposite will vote in favour of this amendment so that we can all find out sooner than later.

But what I'm very interested to find out is if, in fact, the Election Commissioner, who, you know, some would argue, isn't nearly as robust a position as the Chief Electoral Officer in terms of the total people that they oversee, the total number of tasks that they have to

accomplish – you'll know, Mr. Speaker, that the Election Commissioner has a very prescriptive role that is quite narrow in its scope and that the Chief Electoral Officer has a very broad role, that is very broad in scope. I'm very interested to find out – and hopefully that's this evening, but if not, then when the salary is released – if it will or will not, in fact, be higher than that of the Chief Electoral Officer. I look forward to having that information. I think that it's fair that Albertans would know those sorts of things in advance of that date that is so far away in the future.

These are the types of things that Albertans have come to expect of government. What we see is a say one thing, do another government from this NDP. They say that they want to be open and transparent, and then when they're provided the opportunity to be open and transparent, they duck and cover behind process. They use process when it's beneficial to them all sorts of times. We heard the Minister of Transportation say that they've taken seven months, Mr. Speaker, to ensure that there is an individual that's overseeing the market surveillance agency – I believe that's the name of it – that is heavily involved in the electricity industry, but fewer, I believe, than 90 days to rush this process through and make sure that the Election Commissioner is appointed. Now they're using process of a different form to hide behind releasing the salary number.

It is a very, very, very reasonable amendment. There are all sorts of good reasons for every member in the Assembly to vote in favour of this particular amendment, and I would encourage all members of the Assembly to do just that.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie under 29(2)(a).

Mr. Malkinson: That's correct, Mr. Speaker. It was great listening to the hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills, who, of course, you know, on the opposition benches is perhaps the strongest member when it comes to his understanding of the procedures in this House. I've heard him go many times toe to toe with our House leader, often unsuccessfully. But he has, I would say, probably about the best batting average of anyone.

He was going on and saying that this amendment is important, that there are serious concerns. Well, Mr. Speaker, I wonder what those serious concerns are. Is the reason that, you know, we need to know this wage right away because we're worried about the office budget for the new commissioner? Well, that's already been approved by the committee. Is he worried about it becoming public? Well, as my hon. colleague from Edmonton-Centre already explained earlier in debate in great detail, in fact there is legislation called the sunshine list that will have that information become public in its due time, like for all other officers of the Legislature whose wage is at a level that requires disclosure.

Now, he says, you know, that we are a say one thing, do another government. I disagree with that. I would say that we are a say one thing and do what we mean government. We passed, Mr. Speaker, Bill 32, which triggered the search committee, which was there to get big money out of politics, which was to ensure our elections were fair. We decided to pick a candidate, Mr. Gibson. With the debate that's gone on so far, it seems to be that individual members of the opposition are trying to make hay out of this issue, which is, frankly, contrary to any HR practice I have ever seen, whether in this House or whether in the private sector.

8:20

You know, the Member for Airdrie claims that disclosing a salary before the new officer is even in the position is somehow normal, that it's usual. I would say that it is, in fact, very unusual. I would say that the hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills, again, being one of the more knowledgeable members on parliamentary

procedure and how this House works, ought to know that, Mr. Speaker. He ought to know that.

So I disagree with this assertion that this amendment is needed, that it's required. I would say that this amendment is, I would perhaps suggest, of a purpose to attempt to cast shade over a new officer of the Legislature and is unnecessary and counter to the good parliamentary procedure of this House.

Mr. Gibson is well known throughout Canada for his expertise in elections. It is sought out by the government of Canada. He has been working with the conservative government of Saskatchewan over the last number of years. With that, I think his knowledge is truly – without a doubt he was the best person for the job. That is why a majority of the members on the committee voted to recommend Mr. Gibson.

I believe that this particular amendment is not helpful. I think we should vote on this. I will encourage all members of this House to vote against this amendment. It is against normal practice. It is not helpful to having Mr. Gibson start setting up the office, and it is unnecessary.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Cooper: I would like to publicly disclose the payment of \$20 for your generous comments.

The Speaker: Hon. members, every day is a surprise in here. That is the first one I've seen. I'm not sure if that's in order or not. [interjections] I didn't think it was. I'm sure you were jesting – right? – hon. member.

Mr. Cooper: Of course.

The Speaker: Of course.

Might I just remind all of you: it's not a science, but it is a bit of an art form. Standing Order 29(2)(a) is intended to address questions and additional enlightenment to the House rather than consuming all of the five minutes yourself. I urge you all to rethink that as we move forward.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Hays.

Mr. McIver: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On behalf of my colleague from Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills he apologizes for that. Although it was in jest, he didn't want to disrupt the dignity of the House. That's what I'll say about that although I will say that I'm sure that in the next election, when he puts on his brochure that he's the favourite UCP member as voted on by the NDP, that will not help his re-election prospects at all. I'm just saying. I thought it was appropriate to do that.

Mr. Speaker, as I understand it, Leg. Offices used to disclose at one point all of the salaries of the officers, but be that as it may, it's a little rich for the government members to talk the way they do. Listen, I don't have a beef with them taking great interest in talking about the salaries of the agencies, boards, and commissions. They did their very best to make political hay out of that with no regard for the individuals involved, and that's fine. Actually, I'm okay with that. I'm okay with that because that's part of their job in the same way it's part of our job to talk about the salaries of people that the taxpayers are paying for. It's the way it goes.

I also note that the minister of postsecondary didn't seem to have a problem with disclosing I think it was the salary of the president of the University of Alberta. I'm not sure that that was normal. Nonetheless, he did it, in my view, for political expediency at one point and, I think, irritated the individual whose salary he disclosed. But it's not about irritating people; it's about transparency, Mr. Speaker. It's about: if you're paying somebody's salary, especially

in a key position, you have the right to know how much salary you are paying for that person in the key position. It's fair ball.

I heard some comments from the Member for Edmonton-Centre about: it's the law. Well, Mr. Speaker, I don't disagree with him, but this is the place where we make the law. That's why we come here. That's what we do here. When you want to stop making law, then maybe you want to stop coming here, as I would say to any member.

It's a little rich for the government to go on at length time after time after time and on issue after issue after issue and claim to be in favour of transparency and be in favour of being open to disclosure and to all of a sudden, when it suits their – I don't know what their political purpose is. That's what's really funny. You would think that the folks on the other side would be lining up and jumping in front of each other to say: of course we'll let the taxpayers know what they're paying for the services of an independent officer of the Legislative Assembly. I believe that they know what all the other independent officers of the Assembly are making.

This is not really out of the realm of what's ordinary except that they seem to have some motive – and I don't know what it is – to not disclose this particular salary. It's very unusual that they're this emotional and this upset and this wound up – wound up, I would say – about protecting one piece of information when so many other similar pieces of information are already available. You know, I could tell also because even the Government House Leader can't wait to get on his feet. He's just been not quiet for two seconds while this has been going on though he hasn't yet been recognized by the chair, which is interesting. It tells me that we're on the right track in asking for this, Mr. Speaker, when we get the most accomplished and experienced members on the government side that can't contain themselves at all.

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Mason: I'm sorry. I can contain myself no longer, Mr. Speaker. The hon. member is making suggestions about what I'm saying in this House which are simply untrue. I'm just sitting here. I made, you know, one little comment, under my breath, I might add. He's just carrying on and simply being rather distant from the truth in this matter.

The Speaker: Hon. member, I wonder. I'm just looking. Do you have something in your eye?

Mr. McIver: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Point made. That was skilfully done.

I would say to you that when you have the most accomplished members of the other side of the House unable to contain themselves, it's a pretty good sign that as opposition we're on something that has made the government very uncomfortable in their skin. That's usually a sign that the government is second-guessing their own position on an issue. It's a good sign that the government is second-guessing their position on this issue because it's a position they ought to be uncomfortable with. It's a position against transparency. It's a position against openness. It's a position against what's in the taxpayers' interest. It's a position which is against what I believe is in the best interests of Albertans.

You know what, Mr. Speaker? If you had an employee, you would probably know about what you're paying them. If you had a big business and you had a thousand employees, you might not know what you're paying every one of them, but I can assure you that you would know pretty close what you're paying to your key employees in the key positions of influence. This is one of those situations where an employee is being considered to be hired in a

key position of influence. The government wants to hide the salary. It doesn't make sense. It's inconsistent with transparency. It's inconsistent with accountability. It's inconsistent with openness. It's inconsistent with everything the government claims – and "claims" is the key word – to support.

8:30

Of course, when it suits their purposes, they're very keen to jump up and disclose salaries of people on every agency, board, and commission, the University of Alberta, senior executives, you know, by the minister, but for some reason – for some reason – the government is so secretive and protective about this one number, which will become public at some point anyways. It really ought to cause the voters and the taxpayers of Alberta to say: what is it that the government is trying to hide? I don't know what it could be. It's a number.

Everybody deserves to get paid when they go to work. Nobody should be troubled that if this person gets hired, they get paid to go to work. It's the way the world works. I would submit to you, Mr. Speaker, that – well, I'd have to test my own resolve – many members of this House may not show up next week if they stopped getting paid. On the other hand, I give credit to members of this House, on all sides for the record, the government side and the opposition side, that many of us might actually show up next week because this is such a privileged place to be even if we didn't get paid.

However, what's interesting is that the government seems so reluctant to disclose this one particular number for this one particular key potential employee of the taxpayers. It really begs the question: why? It begs the question: why? It begs the question of why they get on their high horse and try to talk as if they're above the issue when this isn't an issue that you want to be above. This is an issue where, like the opposition, you want to be on the same level as the taxpayers and the citizens of Alberta, protecting their interests, not above them saying: "Oh, no; you couldn't possibly. This information is okay for us, but it's not okay for you." That's what the government is saying. The opposition is saying: "We're like you. We're like you, Albertans. We should all know that it's not a big deal." The government is saying: "No. We're above you. We're allowed to know, and you're not." It's inconsistent.

Now, the government can still save themselves at this point just by voting for this amendment, in which case the public might say: "Okay. The Member for Calgary-Hays might not have gotten it right. He might have been too hard on those nice government people in accusing them of being above the public and not giving the public information that they can have." But so far it hasn't happened. So far I haven't seen an indication that the government is prepared, as the opposition is, to be on the same level as Alberta taxpayers, as Alberta voters and say: you're potentially going to pay this person.

Listen, all work – first, let me say this, Mr. Speaker; it's important to say this – is valuable, all work has dignity, and all work matters. There's no such thing as unimportant work. In fairness to all of the public servants, I think it's more important for the public to know the salary of a key player in the civil service than it is for them to know the salary of every rank-and-file employee in every important job that matters to Alberta citizens that is out there. This is a different matter.

Mr. Speaker, it goes even beyond that. It goes to democracy. What is the salary of someone that may have a key role in major decisions that may decide the next election of Alberta? Now the issue gains great importance. The issue really comes to the confidence of Albertans in the democratic process, and that's really at the nub of what we're talking about here.

If you were actually talking about an individual that might have a role in deciding one or more seats in the next provincial election, the next time that the voters and taxpayers get to go to the polls in Alberta and decide who they want to lead their province, and the government is saying, "Oh, no; you can't have key information about those people that can make these decisions, that could turn one or more seats in the next election" – I don't know. I think that if I was an Albertan at home watching this, I'd say, "I'm uncomfortable with the government's position." In fact, I'm pretty sure I'd say, "I'm really comfortable with the opposition's position," because when I vote for somebody, I want it to be – listen, I'm not saying that it's going to happen, but I'm going to say that it gives confidence to the public that the interests that affect them will be dealt with in a balanced way when key pieces of information about key players are open to the public. Simple as that. I think that now we're talking at a level that all Albertans, from every walk of life, could understand and appreciate.

Actually, I think the government appreciates it while they're hearing this now, and I'm not sure that they thought about it in the way that I'm talking about it before now. Maybe they did. But I'm kind of hoping, Mr. Speaker, that they're thinking now, "Well, when I go back to my constituency on the weekend, I don't want people stopping me in the grocery store and in the park and wherever else I go," because we all get stopped everywhere we go, "and saying . . ."

Mr. Mason: Slow down.

Mr. McIver: There we go. The Government House Leader, Mr. Speaker, has got something in his eye again, I think.

I don't think that they want to be saying, "Why are you hiding a key piece of information about a key player that might have a key role in deciding some of the seats in the next election?" I'm thinking to myself that they might say: "I don't know. I might actually be prone to supporting a party that would share that information with me as opposed to a party that would hide that information from me."

But, Mr. Speaker, the government has this decision to make. The opposition has provided them a wonderful opportunity to say to the people of Alberta: "We're equal with you. We're not above you. We trust you to have key pieces of information about people that could affect how your vote is considered in the next election and who it's considered for." I would think that the government members might actually be more comfortable with their answer in the grocery store or at the park next weekend when they can say: "Yeah, I believe in transparency. It's not just something we said and then ignored. It's something we said and stood behind, and when the opposition brought this forward, of course we supported it. Of course we did. Of course we trust you to have this information, voters and members of the public of Alberta, because we are equal with you, not above you. We believe that you're entitled to this piece of information as much as we are because you have a direct interest. It potentially could affect you and your family, the decisions that this particular key player could make, and consequently we are okay with having transparency about that." I still remain hopeful that the government members will look at this and say, "Yes, we are equal to the voters, not above them, and we are going to support this amendment."

The Speaker: Any questions under 29(2)(a) to the Member for Calgary-Hays? The Minister of Advanced Education.

Mr. Schmidt: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for kindly recognizing me. I'm sure that that's something you would afford the Government House Leader from time to time as well when he gets up to speak.

I just wanted to offer some points of clarification for the Member for Calgary-Hays. He mentioned me a couple of times, Mr. Speaker, and I'm very flattered that he's paying so much attention to me this evening. He suggested, perhaps, that I revealed the salary of the University of Alberta president for political purposes, and I have to just stand up and say how deeply offended I am that he would make such a suggestion. Far be it from me or anyone on this side to deal in public-sector salaries for purely political purposes. You know, normally I would ask the member to offer an apology for making such deeply offensive statements, but I know that they are often too busy asking me to apologize for the things that I say about them. So in the spirit of generosity – I'm letting the milk of human kindness flow through my veins here – we'll just call it even on that point.

8:40

But I do want to just remind the member opposite, because he seems to be so keen on promoting transparency, that in fact one of the reasons that he finds himself on the opposition benches today is because his government refused to offer that kind of transparency when offered the chance prior to 2015. In fact, the reason that the public knows the president of the University of Alberta's salary, among all of the other presidents' salaries, is because of legislation that this government passed. We extended the sunshine list to cover all public-sector employees in all agencies, boards, and commissions, something that the member opposite refused to do when he had the chance, when he was in government, Mr. Speaker. So, you know, it wasn't me who personally, secretly revealed the contract that the president of the University of Alberta had signed with the board of governors. It was legislation that let the sunshine in and let all of the people of Alberta know the salaries that every university president was taking.

Like I said, I will offer my forgiveness pre-emptively to the Member for Calgary-Hays so that he doesn't have to, you know, go through the process of apologizing to me for making suggestions that I would be revealing this information for political purposes.

The Speaker: Hon. member, you have used half the time already, so you're getting to my discussion earlier about 29(2)(a). I'm waiting with bated breath to hear you move.

Mr. Schmidt: Mr. Speaker, please forgive me. I'm a little bit clouded at this late hour. It's taking me longer than normal to get to my point.

I do have a question, Mr. Speaker, for the Member for Calgary-Hays, because he's very keen to know the salary that this official is going to be paid. I know that that party opposite is campaigning on tax cuts for rich people. They really love to give tax cuts to people who make, you know, salaries that are in the range that they're talking about. I'm wondering if the member opposite is so keen to learn this person's salary so that he knows whether or not they're going to be offering him a tax cut in the next election and if that would perhaps change the member's opinion, because I know that they really like rich people. They seem to have something against this particular person. I'd just like the member opposite to tell us, knowing that he is a rich person, that the parties opposite are particularly fond of favouring, if that would change his opinion of this particular . . .

The Speaker: Hon. member, let's give the hon. member a chance to respond.

Mr. McIver: Mr. Speaker, since the hon. minister was so gracious, far be it from me to be less than gracious at this point.

But I would say, as an answer, that unlike the hon. minister's party, we're interested in giving tax cuts to all Albertans, rich and

poor. Should we be blessed with the opportunity to be the government and Bill 1 ditches the carbon tax, every Albertan will get a tax cut, rich or poor, on that important day, and we can't wait to deliver on that promise. But we need to be humble. We need to work hard. We need to earn every vote. We need to actually earn the trust of Albertans. We should never take it for granted. [interjections] Mr. Speaker, with all due respect, I'm answering the hon. minister's question. So, yes, we will be happy to offer that tax cut to all Albertans, rich and poor.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo.

Mr. Yao: Why, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to speak on the hon. Member for Barrhead-Morinville-Westlock's motion.

Mr. van Dijken: BMW.

Mr. Yao: BMW.

"Be it further resolved that following the passage of this motion, the Election Commissioner's salary be posted publicly on the website." Mr. Speaker, transparency and accountability: two words that are not in the New Democratic dictionary. I'm actually very concerned here because we have to look at what the question is, what is being asked. What is being asked for is the salary of a public servant being posted. Now, there is that technicality that he hasn't been paid for it yet, but I would question that. At any job people have an expectation as to what their salary is and should know it, especially if it is a salary that is paid for by taxpayers. Perhaps the public should know what they're paying and what they're paying for.

Mr. Speaker, believe it or not, your salary – and you are in one of the highest positions in the province of Alberta, sir. Your job is to herd cats. Your job is to make sure that all of these politicians toe the line and maintain a certain level of . . .

An Hon. Member: Decorum.

Mr. Yao: . . . decorum. Thank you for that.

So when you look at what we're asking . . .

The Speaker: I'm going to take that as a compliment.

Mr. Yao: Yes, sir. It is, absolutely.

But, I mean, in the scheme of things, we've got to think about what we're asking. We're asking for a salary to be disclosed so that the public knows. I wish there were some media here, and maybe they're listening. Maybe they could do a poll in one of their newspapers asking the question: should the Election Commissioner's salary be disclosed? Do you not think the public would like to know? I hope that if there are any media listening, they consider polling their readers, their viewers, all, and asking that question.

Furthermore, sir, I am surprised at the comments from the Member for Edmonton-Centre. He talks about the fact that it is a disturbing situation that we are asking for a salary to be disclosed, that it is insulting to somebody that the salary be disclosed, that it may not be appropriate practice to disclose the salary of this public servant who is an Election Commissioner, which, as has been expressed by my colleagues, is a new position. Someone mentioned it's redundant, like many of the members over there.

Mr. Speaker, there is a concern about transparency and accountability and about the salary being disclosed. It is about ensuring that everything is on the up and up, that everything is being treated fairly. It'd be surprising to find out after the salary is

disclosed that, say, perhaps he makes more than the Chief Electoral Officer – wouldn't that be something? – or is paid an outrageous sum of money, even above and beyond what the Premier makes. Wouldn't that be something? Hidden until June 2019, right after the election, well, the anticipated time of the election: it makes a person wonder what they are hiding and why.

Both sides talk about publishing salaries of public servants, and we all agree, because for everyone in here, our salaries are disclosed. Every single expense is scrutinized. We all have to go visit the Ethics Commissioner to ensure that even our personal dealings do not conflict with our government or legislated elected positions. That's why I am appalled – appalled – sir. I'm appalled that they wouldn't want to disclose this salary. You know, it's very disappointing. I had higher hopes for the group over here. For them to fight this one aspect of this bill, to disclose a salary, is disheartening to many out there.

I guess, in the end, sir, I think it would be appropriate practice to disclose his salary. His position is no more important than anyone else in this House and in the higher levels of government. It's disappointing. It's unfortunate, especially for a redundant position.

I know this government understands redundant positions because in, like, the Ministry of Health, as per the Auditor General, there is duplication of the administration at the highest levels. I wonder if the Health minister has spent time in the last three years taking a look at any of those positions that the Auditor General talked about and has looked at any of that duplication and if she has even considered some of the comments he made about how this duplication of bureaucracy at the highest levels of Alberta Health is actually impairing our health system. At the very least, you wonder if they couldn't eliminate some of that duplication of administration at the highest levels and route some of that money down to the front-line services. Certainly, that's how we would ensure there are front-line services.

Again, Mr. Speaker, this is disappointing. It truly is. We're asking for a salary to be disclosed, a single salary of a new position. When you put out the ads for this job, did you actually advertise a salary range in there? Did you demonstrate anything? If we know the range, why not identify how much exactly this person is being paid? How much was the deal that was settled upon, that this individual will get X number of dollars?

8:50

Mr. Malkinson: It'll be disclosed.

Mr. Yao: Yes, disclosed in June 2019, long after – well, ideally for them after – the next election, because I think that perhaps they feel the salary that this fellow is getting might be a detriment to the next election. That's all I can think of for why they would want to hide this. It's disappointing. If it's legislated, they also have the ability to repair that, to fix that, to ensure that this salary is disclosed.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I do express my concerns as to why they're fighting this, and I would be disappointed should they not vote in favour of this amendment provided by my hon. colleague, which is a reasonable amendment. It is just unfortunate, sir. It's very disappointing. I'm sure that the people of Alberta will see this and have the same questions as we do as to why they wouldn't disclose a single salary, yet we live in an environment where salaries are disclosed, where we talk about transparency and accountability.

With that, sir, I thank you for your time, and good luck.

The Speaker: Under 29(2)(a), the Member for Calgary-Currie.

Mr. Malkinson: That is correct, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Five minutes.

Mr. Malkinson: Also correct, Mr. Speaker. Otherwise, I may be trading bills with the Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills.

Listening to the hon. member's comments, you know, there were definitely some names being called over there that we are redundant. The hon. member seems to be very confident that he is going to be on this side of the House, and I would perhaps suggest that my takeaway from that is that I should be investing in tinfoil stock.

Specifically, to provide an answer to some of the member's questions, yes, in fact, the Election Commissioner's wages will indeed be disclosed. He asked if the range is public, and yes, indeed, it is because there were ads that went out for it. You know, the hon. member did go on at length to say that this position is redundant. Bill 32 specifically created the Election Commissioner. The Chief Electoral Officer would be responsible for the administration of the electoral process, but the new Election Commissioner's job would be to ensure that our democracy runs smoothly, Mr. Speaker, both inside and outside of the election period. A similar system is already in place federally as well as in Manitoba and has been very successful in ensuring fairness and accountability in those jurisdictions.

My question for the hon. member. Ensuring electoral fairness, accountability, and to make sure that nothing nefarious is happening in our elections: how is that redundant? Mr. Speaker, that is my question for the member.

Mr. Yao: Mr. Speaker, he just explained the role of the Chief Electoral Officer. Again, all those things are right in there. The Election Commissioner is a new position. It is redundant. You can look at the job description. It's pretty straightforward. I do understand, again, how this government would create this new position and enjoys building the bureaucracy. Again, when we look at the Ministry of Health, we see that duplication. We see that heavy administration.

It's just so unfortunate that they would not consider providing the salary of this. I mean, the question, sir, is: what are they hiding, why are they hiding it, and to what extent would they want to hide it till June 2019? They have the ability to ensure that this information is provided. They have the ability to ensure that the people of Alberta, citizens that are paying their salaries and that are paying the salary of this Election Commissioner, have comfort knowing that they're paying a fair price for this. It'd be interesting to find out afterwards if it was an outrageous salary. I'd be interested to see the backlash of it.

You know, maybe you're building this second position because you had no trust in the electoral process. Certainly, everyone wonders how the government got into place in the first place, don't they? I mean, maybe there was some suspicious stuff.

The Speaker: Careful. Careful. [interjections]

Keep it down, folks. Keep it down.

Mr. Yao: Why, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I do appreciate when you shut down the government side once in a while there because their heckling is harsh, sir. Their heckling is harsh. All we hear is heckling from that side all the time. That's just their way, sir. I'm not going to fault them for it. It's just the way they are.

Now, back to transparency and accountability, sir. Again, what are they hiding? Why are they trying to discourage us, why are they trying to bully us over here from asking these questions about what the salary is? It is interesting. You know what? Ultimately, the citizens of Alberta will find out, and they'll understand, the sooner the better, the repercussions of holding something out from the people that pay you. Then, you know, there will be – there are always repercussions, sir. There are always repercussions.

Mr. Mason: A day of reckoning.

Mr. Yao: A day of reckoning, yes, sir. Minister of Transportation, I agree wholeheartedly. A day of reckoning.

The Speaker: The Member for Drayton Valley-Devon on amendment A1.

Mr. Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am pleased to be able to stand up and speak to amendment A1 from the hon. Member for Barrhead-Morinville-Westlock. I would like to get into a conversation that I had last night, that I think speaks to the amendment that's before us today. I had the opportunity to meet with five or six people last night in my constituency, all of them businesspeople. All of them were wondering how they were going to meet the taxation demands that are being placed on them. Prices are rising. Taxes are rising. Their companies have faced very hard times and difficult times over the last three years. One company has gone from a company of 40, 50 people down to literally a family of four or five individuals.

These are the people that are wondering how our tax dollars are being spent. They're suffering. So when we come in here and we do not take the finances of this province seriously, they get very frustrated. They're wondering why we cannot find the savings that are necessary to be able to balance budgets and to be able to live within our means. When we focus in on the issue that's being addressed here for amendment A1, they would want to know what this individual, this Election Commissioner, is going to be paid.

Part of the problem that I've heard tonight is that this committee that has recommended the appointment of this individual did not function in a fashion that was expected, I think, by either the people of Alberta or that the people of that committee should have expected. When we are appointing somebody to a position that's as important as an Election Commissioner, there should be a nonpartisan atmosphere and a co-operation amongst the members of that committee, and when that has not occurred, then the trust tends to be broken. When that trust is broken, then the opposition must do its job. The opposition must begin asking questions. The opposition must begin asking questions that maybe the government isn't going to feel comfortable with. Some of those questions will revolve around the salaries that we pay the individuals in government.

9:00

I'm sure this Election Commissioner is very qualified – I've heard people say that in the House today – but I also know that this individual is not without controversy and that one of the questions that the opposition has brought forward is: why would we be willing to spend significant amounts of taxpayers' dollars on an individual when there is some controversy behind that individual? So asking, I believe, for the salary of this individual prior to June 2019 is not an unreasonable thing.

I believe that everybody in this House must remember – and sometimes we have to be reminded – that our bosses are the people of Alberta. They're the ones that elect us. They're the ones that place their trust in us. We, I believe, quite wisely as a Legislature have made the decision that we will have a sunshine list, and we have placed ourselves on that sunshine list. I believe it's a good decision. I believe that we had all-party support with that decision. I also believe that because the people of Alberta are our bosses, they should have the right to know, when this individual is hired, what they are going to be paying this individual.

I don't buy the line that this will put a chill on the hiring of future bureaucrats into the government of Alberta. That doesn't sound

right to me, and here's why. Anybody that places their name into the realm of asking to be hired by the citizens of Alberta through their Legislature understands that their salary, assuming that it reaches the threshold, will be made public. Because they understand that before they ever place their hat in the ring, it will not be a shock to them, and it should not be an issue when it comes to the Election Commissioner.

We understand that in this Legislature we have a rare privilege of being able to make the rules and the laws of this province. We can decide in this Legislature whether we will publish the salary and expect that salary to be made known prior to the hiring of this individual. We have that capacity. I believe that the people of Alberta would support that, and I believe that if we came together in this House tonight in a nonpartisan fashion in support of this amendment, we would be doing the job that this committee obviously had a tough time doing. We are talking about a foundation stone in our province of Alberta. It's the democratic political system that we all support in this House. It must be run on a nonpartisan basis, where there is openness and transparency at every level.

I see, Mr. Speaker, that this amendment A1 is a reasonable amendment. It, I believe, respects the taxpayers of Alberta. It respects the voters of Alberta. It creates an openness and transparency that will provide confidence to the people of Alberta that with whoever is being hired, they are getting good value and fair value for their money. We know that this has created problems for governments all over this country and, in the past, in this province. When we find out that the people that are working on our behalf are receiving compensation that is not fair value, where they are being overcompensated – as a matter of fact, I'm sure that probably most of us, if we stay in this job long enough, will probably have somebody come up to us and say that we are overcompensated.

You know, I think that the process that we're going through here tonight is a valuable one, but I would hope that the government and the people on the government benches would be listening and considering the people of Alberta and their need and their desire to be able to be sure that the people that work on their behalf, the people that serve them, that an Election Commissioner, that is supposed to be serving the people of Alberta, is receiving fair compensation for the job that they will be performing.

I would ask that this House would consider supporting this amendment. I believe that it would be the first step in a process that has been far too partisan, that would become far easier for us to be able to explain to the people of Alberta if, when we meet in this House, we can do so beyond partisanship in a way that actually reflects the needs and the desires and the wishes of the people of this province.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Are there any questions under 29(2)(a) to the Member for Drayton Valley-Devon?

Seeing and hearing none, the Member for Chestermere-Rocky View.

Mrs. Aheer: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again, it's always such a privilege to be able to rise and speak to, well, pretty much, I mean, anything. It's just a privilege to be here all the time. This is especially important.

The Speaker: You're not under 29(2)(a)?

Mrs. Aheer: No, sir. I'm talking to the amendment. Thank you.

I just wanted to say, Mr. Speaker, that I'm going to cover a few points that have already been covered, but I think it's worth while

saying it again. There have been many comments from the government with respect to the chilling effect of releasing the salary – I just can't imagine why – that it's highly inappropriate, that we're targeting Mr. Gibson, a whole bunch of different things along those lines.

I just wanted to read – and I will happily table this tomorrow – from the *StarMetro Edmonton*. Just to be clear, as we know, there was a range, so declaring the salary is really not that big a deal because, interestingly enough, the Election Commissioner is going to be somewhere within that range. This comes from this particular article. "The election commissioner, when appointed, could earn up to \$212,801 in annual salary for a period of five years." That's actually stated in the newspaper. It's no surprise. There's no chilling effect. There's transparency there, and it gives a fairly solid idea of where we might end up as a possibility at the top end. What is actually disclosed in that newspaper: that's the top salary for the most years. We're talking about a person who comes to us with a tremendous amount of baggage, to be truthful – not to say that he's not qualified; he certainly is – and potential stigma that actually will not rest with us. It will rest with the government.

To be clear, the part that I think is the most confusing, sir, is that this will be disclosed. There is pretty much a very, very strong idea of what that might be in a newspaper that's already been revealed, and truthfully the member's amendment gives the government the ability for full transparency before it's done. Talk about stepping above and beyond on behalf of Albertans. I mean, as you know, Mr. Speaker, in Bill 32 we adamantly opposed the appointment of this person. Adamantly, very vocally we did. So to the credit of the member, the member is giving the government, actually, the opportunity to clarify the need for this person to justify their salary to Albertans and especially when it was very clear on this side that this person, we felt – I mean, I'll read again from this article. We "questioned the need for an elections commissioner, arguing Chief Electoral Officer Glen Resler is more than capable of handling such investigations as part of his existing role." We didn't just make that up.

9:10

It's quite interesting to me that already in the newspaper – I mean, maybe the government already spoke with the folks in the media and gave them an understanding, which is interesting. If you're not going to disclose it to Albertans, how would the media get that? It's not like they're giving the range in there: "when appointed, could earn up to \$212,801 in annual salary for a period of five years."

Here's the interesting thing, Mr. Speaker. We're simply giving the government the opportunity to do the right thing. I understand that it's not the normal process. I understand that it's not the way things have been done before, but again this is a fairly controversial appointment. It's not like it was just something that happened, that a person was appointed. You know the most amazing part about this? We actually had an opportunity for consensus. Given that and given that there is an obvious concern here, an obvious concern for transparency and accountability, what a wonderful way for the government to start off on this, because this is their choice. This person is their designated person to take on this role. What a wonderful way to start it off.

Instead of using the processes, the reason, or that Mr. Gibson is being targeted or that there is a chill or that it is highly inappropriate, they would have the opportunity to be highly appropriate to remove all of the language from it and give the opportunity for Albertans to see the government be transparent with their hard-earned dollars. Remember that this is not our money. This is Albertans' money, and every Albertan who volunteers,

participates, tries to be elected, works in any capacity for any politician will be impacted by this person.

The truth is that if the government was willing to share that information, it might add some credibility to their decision. I think it was a wonderful opportunity, brought forward by the member, for the government to actually be able to do that. I don't know why that language is being used in a different way in order to cloud the idea of allowing people to know what that disclosure is, that dollar amount, when we all know that it will be disclosed eventually. It makes absolutely no sense to suggest that in any way that would change Mr. Gibson's decision to be here or come here. He's already made the decision. He knows what he's getting paid. He knows how long his term is for. I'm sure – I'm fairly certain – that he's probably told people. I'm sure they've asked.

Is he under the same rules and regulations? He's not allowed to disclose what he's making? Is he not allowed to tell anybody? Is he under those same rules? Does he have to follow that process, Mr. Speaker? I'm just curious, because that would be interesting. If he doesn't have to follow the process and isn't under the same rules and regulations, as was said by Edmonton-Centre, of the due process, are there any concerns or things that we need to be worried about should he disclose what he's doing?

We had just an amazing group of folks that applied for this position, and Mr. Gibson was definitely well qualified, no doubt, but for the government to be able to justify this decision for this person – you know, I wanted to bring up a couple of other things just to give you some ideas about why we were concerned on this side. The year that this happened, in 2008, it was the lowest voter turnout. It was deemed as being poorly organized. A couple of the things that were really major issues, Mr. Speaker, were around voter lists and polls. People did not know where to poll, and they were getting the wrong information as to where to vote, and on top of that, they weren't on voter lists. Every single constituency reported this back.

Now, my understanding is that for whatever reason that was part of this particular issue and part of the reason why Lorne Gibson did not have his contract renewed in the first place. It's interesting, because people will say that he was fired, that he was let go. None of those things, Mr. Speaker. In fact, he just didn't have his contract renewed. So he comes with that stigma. He comes with that baggage. Why not pass an amendment that begins with clarity . . .

The Speaker: Hon. member, I'll just remind you: speak to the amendment. Keep to the amendment.

Mrs. Aheer: Yes, sir.

Why not acknowledge this amendment that gives credibility to the government, that has chosen a controversial figure, and start everything off on the right foot? Albertans are going to know. They're going to research. They're going to find out. They're not going to be pleased about this decision. I can guarantee you that if partisanship in any way shows its face in this, the government will wear that. So why not start off on the right foot, show transparency and accountability, show Albertans that you care about their hard-earned tax dollars? That is actually our responsibility up here. Give them the privilege of understanding what we are privileged to understand in here. Allow them to understand that the government feels that this is a necessary step in making sure – again, to quote from the article First Election Commissioner Tasked with Rooting out "Dark Money," that's his goal. That's one of the reasons he's being hired. If that is the goal of this government, if that's what they're wanting to do, why not use this member's amendment to start off on the right foot? If that's the reason, that would resonate with Albertans, I'm sure.

But they've chosen a person who has a history here, who has a history with previous governments. They're not willing to disclose what he makes, and then, on top of that, they say that we're targeting him. Well, no, we're not. We didn't agree with this appointment in the first place. We're not targeting any person. We're targeting the fact that the office exists at all, and therefore, based on that conclusion, we believe that Albertans also deserve to understand how much we are paying for a person that this side of the House did not believe was a necessary requirement, especially given the fact, Mr. Speaker, that Mr. Resler himself had said that he's quite capable of handling the work within his office.

Like I said, I'll happily table this tomorrow.

I believe sincerely that the most important thing that we can do as legislators, Mr. Speaker, is to provide Albertans with clarity and understanding about the decisions and the choices that we make. We've made it very clear that we're not thrilled with the decision that was made on this particular person, but the government can give back to Albertans by justifying their choice and letting Albertans know what the cost is for this person. There's going to need to be a justification for that as we go forward because this person will be hired soon.

Mr. Gibson will be coming on soon, and he will be performing his duties very soon, and Albertans are going to want to know how much he is being paid for this job. The member across the way had mentioned that we'd said that the government is redundant. No. We believe this position is redundant. If you're going to justify having this position and you're going to pay, potentially, as much as \$212,000, well, almost \$213,000 in annual salary for a five-year period, I think you owe that – because that's not a small amount of money.

9:20

If that is what the final decision is going to be by this government, I think you owe it to Albertans to let them know what they're getting, the value for their dollar, in a person that is going to be very involved with every part of the election campaigns at a very grassroots and in a lot of places, Mr. Speaker, a family level. A lot of us have our families, our aunts and uncles, brothers and sisters, and everybody working on our campaigns. I'm sure that everybody in this House has had the support of their family, and all of them will be scrutinized, potentially, by this person. So I think that, just with respect to that, they have a right to know how much he is being paid and that they are going to receive value for the dollars that they work so hard to give us to use in appropriate ways in this House.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Any questions to the Member for Chestermere-Rocky View under 29(2)(a)?

Any other members who would like to speak to the amendment? The Government House Leader.

Mr. Mason: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Of course, I will not be supporting the amendment. It's very interesting that the entreaties that we get from the other side about behaving in a nonpartisan fashion seem to be comprised primarily of agreeing with the Official Opposition, and that is a nonpartisan move, but what they are doing is, of course, in their view, nonpartisan. But, quite frankly, there's a disagreement on this issue. It's clear that the Official Opposition has disagreement with the creation of this position, and they made that clear during the debate on the bill, but that's now the law of the land. And it's clear that they don't particularly want this particular individual in that position. They've made that clear. Nevertheless, the disclosure has been provided for under legislation, and it will be followed by – and the public will know in due course – what the salary is.* We're going to proceed

in accordance with the law and not in accordance with the whims of the Official Opposition, who are clearly operating out of a fit of pique at not getting their way with respect to this matter.

So, Mr. Speaker, you know, I think that we should not be supporting this motion. But as the hour grows late and we have other business to attend to, I am proposing that we adjourn debate on this government motion and move on to other business.

[The voice vote indicated that the motion to adjourn debate on amendment A1 carried]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 9:23 p.m.]

[Fifteen minutes having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

[The Speaker in the chair]

For the motion:

Anderson, S.	Feehan	Miller
Babcock	Fitzpatrick	Miranda
Bilous	Goehring	Payne
Carlier	Hinkley	Phillips
Carson	Hoffman	Piquette
Ceci	Horne	Rosendahl
Connolly	Kazim	Schmidt
Coolahan	Kleinstauber	Schreiner
Dach	Loyola	Shepherd
Dang	Luff	Sucha
Drever	Malkinson	Westhead
Eggen	Mason	Woollard

Against the motion:

Aheer	Loewen	Strankman
Gill	McIver	van Dijken
Gotfried	Pitt	Yao
Hanson	Smith	

Totals: For – 36 Against – 11

[Motion to adjourn debate on amendment A1 carried]

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Mason: Mr. Speaker, I think we should call the bill.

9:40

Government Bills and Orders Second Reading

Bill 2 Growth and Diversification Act

[Debate adjourned April 4]

The Speaker: The Member for Grande Prairie-Smoky.

Mr. Loewen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise today and speak to Bill 2, the Growth and Diversification Act. This bill is yet another example of classic NDP economic philosophy. This government and their ideological allies believe that every problem arising in economics and society can be solved with the meddling hands of government. I can tell you that I support growth and I support diversification, but I'm not sure that this bill will effectively promote either. For the three years we have seen this government in action, what we have seen is the exact opposite of what this bill claims to promote.

Mr. Speaker, what promotes growth? I would argue that it is lower taxes, less regulation, and a government which doesn't treat wealth-creating private enterprise like the enemy.

*See page 879, right column, paragraph 2

How about diversification? I would suggest that diversification will only come when innovators and entrepreneurs have access to capital, and it is well apparent that much of what this government has done has sent both domestic and international investors fleeing for other jurisdictions. With Alberta business reeling from the destructive policies of the NDP, what have they decided to do? To grace us with yet another government program to try and reverse some of the damage that they have caused.

Mr. Speaker, I would encourage the government, if they truly want growth and diversification, to reverse their antigrowth and antidiversification policies, scrap the carbon tax, reverse their 20 per cent increase in corporate tax, and remove the shackles of regulation that they have placed on free enterprise in this province. Albertans have already suffered the consequences of NDP legislation that was not completely thought through. We look at the legislation that they've brought forward with electricity, how with the first bill dealing with electricity they've created the problem with the Balancing Pool, with companies turning back their contracts, that, of course, the government had to bail out. So we see time and time again this government meddling in business and with contracts that they know nothing about, creating more and more problems that they have to create more legislation to solve. Electricity was a classic example. Of course, their response to the contracts turning back was to sue Alberta companies, costing more money of taxpayers.

I'm worried that this legislation will be yet another example in this worrying trend. Mr. Speaker, I would also like to point out that this isn't the NDP's first shot at this. In 2016 they passed the Investing in a Diversified Alberta Economy Act. While that legislation may have its merits, it certainly hasn't performed the economic miracles that the NDP might have expected it to.

Now, I do just want to take a brief moment in order to comment on something I think this bill gets right, the move to add 3,000 new tech spaces in Alberta postsecondary institutions. I think that is a correct one. In a modern economy the market demands new and changing skill sets, and it is important for our public universities to reflect the skills that are needed by Alberta employers.

Moving on and diving a little deeper into the details, I just want to spend some time to explore some of the ideas this legislation promotes in terms of tax credits. Mr. Speaker, Ronald Reagan has a famous saying on economic policies of the left-wing governments like this one: "If it moves, tax it. If it keeps moving, regulate it. And if it stops moving, subsidize it." He wasn't talking about Alberta's NDP, but if he was, it would have been entirely accurate. This NDP government came to power, and the first approach they took was to tax our industries to death. Between their increase in corporate taxes and their job-killing carbon taxes it was tantamount to an outright attack on the wealth creators of Alberta.

Now, we all know that Albertans and our businesses are resilient, and despite NDP tax increases Albertans kept working to better our province. Just as the saying goes, the regulations came in droves, from Bill 6 attacking farmers and ranchers to overbearing labour legislation on job creators to the premature shutdown of our coal communities. The NDP may have chosen orange as their official colour, but there is certainly no colour they like better than that of red tape or red ink.

Mr. Speaker, that brings me back to tax credits. After the NDP had launched their first bunch of tax increases and their second of overregulation, then they started to notice when our industry stopped moving. It is a shame they didn't notice before their policies contributed to the closure of thousands of businesses and elimination of hundreds of thousands of jobs. We warned this government about this legislation and the damaging effects it would have. We told them what would happen. We told them that there

would be downgrades to the economy and there would be job losses, there would be loss of investment in Alberta, but of course this government didn't listen. They kept on going ahead with their ideology and their plans to destroy our economy. They wouldn't listen to any common-sense ideas that we brought forward.

Now that that has all happened, the NDP has taken to subsidy by tax credit. Mr. Speaker, just as NDP policies have failed in the past, I have no more confidence that they won't fail now as well. A large part of this bill rests on support for industry through tax credits. Tax credits can incent economic activity, but I would question whether they will come anywhere close to making up for the disincentives created by the NDP's other policies. You see, the NDP bring about legislation that kills the economy, and then of course they try to bring in legislation to correct it, where if they had just left a lot of these things alone, we wouldn't have the problems that we have right now.

I would also question the wisdom of the sector-specific credits that this bill extols. When we start handing out favours to specific people and specific industries, we start picking winners and losers. Mr. Speaker, quite often government gets it wrong, and they pick losers. They put money into companies that couldn't make it on their own, and the only way to keep them going is to keep giving them subsidies. That isn't the best use of taxpayers' money.

If you want diversification, you should let the market decide which areas to diversify in, not the government. If you want to use tax credits, then let's have them available to a variety and range of sectors, not just those that the front bench opposite happens to grace with their favour on any particular day. This kind of narrow targeting has been the ongoing strategy of this government, and it is immensely unfair. Not only does it effectively penalize those in industries which do not receive support through tax credits, but it also serves to distort market allocations of investment and resources, something we know to produce the most effective and efficient economic activity in the vast majority of circumstances.

We also need to look back at the way tax credit programs have performed in Alberta in the past. Were the objectives of past legislation met? Did the relief get to those who needed it the most? What kind of returns did we see? Before we utilize the power of government, we should see if these industries can attract private capital and succeed on their own.

The point has been raised by the government that some of the tax credits addressed by this bill, particularly the digital media tax credit, these targeted tax credits, exist in other provinces, and Alberta needs to offer them in order to be competitive. Mr. Speaker, just because another province does something doesn't mean Alberta needs to follow suit. In fact, our province has a long history of going its own way. For decades this meant, because of our free-market policies, Alberta was not only the most competitive place to do business in Canada but one of the top places in North America and the world.

Mr. Speaker, you know, while I'm standing here talking and listening to some of the comments from the government side, I'm kind of reminded of the government's Bill 1. That was supposed to create jobs. Lots of money available; created one job, the job for the minister. He's the one that's beaking off the most right now. We'll let him keep talking, and we'll let the facts lay where they may, a complete failure, Bill 1. That's the minister's responsibility right there, so keep talking, Minister.

Meanwhile, Ontario and Quebec, which have policies similar to this, have seen fleeting investment and a poor business atmosphere for years. Now, the government certainly has a disconnect with the average Albertan, but I can guarantee that if you asked the people on the main streets of this province, they will take the Alberta way over the alternative.

9:50

Also, looking at the implementation of the Alberta investor tax credit, which was introduced last year and offers many similarities to what is being proposed, we can see that there were critical problems in that process. There are no assurances that this new tax credit would not run into the same troubles. We don't even have access to program and application details for this proposed credit, details that would be necessary to facilitate a proper and fulsome debate on it.

Mr. Speaker, there was a day not too long ago in this province when the Alberta advantage gave our companies a leg up against those in other jurisdictions. That is all that Albertans and our businesses want. They want a chance to make something without the government getting in the way. They want a fair playing field, a reasonable regime of limited taxation and regulation. They want to stop the outflow of investment dollars and talented people. They want, instead, to make sure the things leaving our borders are our economic products, whether it be oil and gas or anything else.

Mr. Speaker, we had a chance to discuss some of this in estimates, where we've seen this government's regulations stopping billions of dollars of investment coming into this province. Now you can hear the government members beaking off over there, talking and sniping, comments back and forth here, but obviously they can't understand the failure of what they've done. They don't understand the failure of their meddling in the electricity market. They don't understand how regulations are stopping business in Alberta.

Now, obviously, time and time again we've told this government: "Don't do this. Don't do that. It's going to hurt the economy." What do they do? They keep going that same direction. We've seen the same thing with pipelines, where we told them a long time ago and the B.C. government told them a long time ago that there were going to be problems with this. And what did they do? They did nothing. They sat on their hands and waited and waited and waited until it was too late. [interjections]

The Speaker: Hon. member.

Keep going.

Mr. Loewen: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate that.

This is the fundamental misunderstanding of the NDP when it comes to this kind of diversification legislation. In the period between 1985 and 2013, when Alberta was absent of socialist government, the energy sector as a percentage of GDP went from more than 36 per cent to less than 25 per cent. This wasn't a result of weakness in our energy industry, nor the result of diversification handouts or boutique tax credits; it was the result of a competitive marketplace and a government that generally knew how to keep its nose out of private industry.

So, Mr. Speaker, this government, again, doesn't seem to be able to understand how to diversify the economy. They don't understand that what industry wants, what companies want, what investors want is an opportunity to come into a jurisdiction and to be able to set up business in a reasonable amount of time, in a reasonable cost factor, and to be able to create wealth based on that. But this government seems to think that the only way that that will ever happen is if they take tax dollars from Albertans, for instance the carbon tax, and give it to people to come in to invest in Alberta.

But people have been investing in Alberta for years and years and years. Billions and billions of dollars of investment have come into Alberta from industries, from investors from all over the world. Why? Because they had an opportunity to make a return on their investment. They saw opportunities; they came in to invest. Why did billions of dollars flee Alberta in the last three years? Because

they saw this government in place creating a lack of opportunity for investment, uncertainty in the market. That kind of uncertainty drives away investment.

That's the problem with this government, Mr. Speaker. They continue down the same road that's failed. The NDP have failed in every province in Canada, and this government continues down the same road. That's the problem that we have in Alberta today, billions of dollars of lost investment.

We had a situation south of Grande Prairie where there was a group that had multibillion-dollar corporations that wanted to come in and set up shop south of Grande Prairie. Because of government regulation and not being able to respond quickly enough to these companies, they took their investment dollars and went elsewhere. They didn't just not spend the money. They just took the money and spent it somewhere else, where they didn't have to go through years and years of approval process and everything. These people, when they look at an opportunity to invest, they think of multiple things. They think of return on investment and how long before they get to that return of investment.

We have a situation right now with the pipeline, Mr. Speaker, where this company has spent over a billion dollars and spent four and a half years fighting to get to build a 7 and a half billion dollar pipeline. It's this regulation that binds these companies down. It costs them money, and pretty soon they walk. This is happening in Alberta right now.

The Speaker: Okay. Under 29(2)(a) a question to the Member for Grande Prairie-Smoky. The Minister of Advanced Education.

Mr. Schmidt: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure for me to offer some comments on the statement that we heard from the Member for Grande Prairie-Smoky. In fact, as one of the members of cabinet whose ministry is touched by this bill, I feel the need to dispel some of the myths and some of the points that the Member for Grande Prairie-Smoky made.

In fact, the purpose, of course, of creating this legislation was to support the economic diversification here in Alberta. I think the need for that was really highlighted by Amazon's decision to not locate its second headquarters in Calgary. Certainly, we heard from Calgary Economic Development that it was a lack of tech talent and access to high-technology workers that was part of the reason that Amazon made that decision. It's interesting, Mr. Speaker, because I noticed that yesterday Amazon actually made a decision about where they're going to locate another headquarters. It turns out that it's in Vancouver, British Columbia. Now, our bill is actually modelled on similar measures that the British Columbia government took in enhancing tech-related education spaces in its postsecondary education system.

I'm very pleased that the Member for Grande Prairie-Smoky actually supports that initiative. I just wish that he had actually voted for the budget that actually allows us to take action on that initiative. I find it troubling that we have this repeated pattern from the opposition. They say that they want to take action on something, but they refuse to actually put up the money to do that. We saw that with rural crime. We're seeing that now with the development of tech spaces in our postsecondary education system. Perhaps one day, you know, our opposition members will realize that in order for government to function and to do the good things that they want to do, we actually need to pay for it, and we can't actually pay for it by giving tax cuts to millionaires and billionaires like they want to do.

The repeated claim from the side opposite is that it's tax rates. Because we increased corporate taxes, because we increased personal

taxes, and because we implemented a carbon tax, we are scaring investment away, scaring it away to places like Vancouver, British Columbia. So while I was listening to the Member for Grande Prairie-Smoky, I actually investigated what the tax rates in British Columbia happen to be. What is the carbon tax rate that they pay in British Columbia? Mr. Speaker, you would be surprised to know that it's \$30 a tonne, just like it is here in Alberta. My mind was blown. My mind was blown. You would also be surprised to hear what the provincial corporate tax rate in British Columbia is. It's 12 per cent, just like it is here in Alberta. And if you looked at personal income taxes, personal income taxes for people who earn more than \$90,000 a year are higher in British Columbia than they are here in Alberta. So it's really quite shocking to me that if the theory that the member opposite is proposing is that high taxes drive away investments, why did Vancouver end up being the second headquarters for Amazon?

I'd like the member opposite to address a couple of these issues. I'd like him to tell the House why he thinks that a \$30 carbon tax scares away investment in Alberta but attracts it to B.C. Why does he think a corporate tax rate of 12 per cent in Alberta scares away investment but attracts it to B.C.?

The Speaker: Let's give him an opportunity to answer that.

10:00

Mr. Loewen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd be happy to answer that question. The first thing he talked about was myths. I tell you what. Six credit downgrades: that's no myth. That's reality.

Now, Mr. Speaker, he likes to talk about Amazon. He picks one company that didn't come to Alberta and went to Vancouver instead, went to B.C. If you can't compete against B.C. with its high taxes, then there's obviously something wrong here in Alberta. I can tell you what's wrong. It's this government. [interjections] I did say very clearly that there were a myriad of reasons why companies won't set up here and why investment is fleeing Alberta. It's not always just taxes; it's regulations and what it takes to build and do business here in Alberta. This government has made it more expensive to do business here.

Now, we talked about how we didn't vote for a budget. [Mr. Loewen's speaking time expired]

Mr. Mason: Mr. Speaker, I move that we adjourn debate.

[The voice vote indicated that the motion to adjourn debate carried]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 10:01 p.m.]

[Fifteen minutes having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

[The Speaker in the chair]

For the motion:

Anderson, S.	Feehan	Miller
Babcock	Fitzpatrick	Miranda
Bilous	Goehring	Payne
Carlier	Hinkley	Phillips
Carson	Hoffman	Piquette
Ceci	Horne	Rosendahl
Connolly	Kazim	Schmidt
Coolahan	Kleinsteinuber	Schreiner
Dach	Loyola	Shepherd
Dang	Luff	Sucha
Drever	Malkinson	Westhead
Eggen	Mason	Woollard

Against the motion:

Gotfried	McIver	Strankman
Hanson	Pitt	Yao
Loewen	Smith	

Totals:	For – 36	Against – 8
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[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

The Speaker: The House stands adjourned until – no?

Some Hon. Members: Adjourned debate.

The Speaker: Adjourned debate. It's getting late.

The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Mason: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. You are anticipating my next move, so it is with some trepidation that I move that we adjourn the House until 9 o'clock tomorrow morning.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 10:18 p.m.]

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