



Province of Alberta

The 29th Legislature
Fourth Session

Alberta Hansard

Tuesday morning, November 20, 2018

Day 50

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

Littlewood, Jessica, Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville (NDP)
Loewen, Todd, Grande Prairie-Smoky (UCP)
Loyola, Rod, Edmonton-Ellerslie (NDP)
Luff, Robyn, Calgary-East (Ind)
Malkinson, Hon. Brian, Calgary-Currie (NDP)
Mason, Hon. Brian, Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood (NDP),
Government House Leader
McCuaig-Boyd, Hon. Margaret,
Dunvegan-Central Peace-Notley (NDP)
McIver, Ric, Calgary-Hays (UCP),
Official Opposition Whip
McKitrick, Annie, Sherwood Park (NDP)
McLean, Stephanie V., Calgary-Varsity (NDP)
McPherson, Karen M., Calgary-Mackay-Nose Hill (AP)
Miller, Barb, Red Deer-South (NDP)
Miranda, Hon. Ricardo, Calgary-Cross (NDP)
Nielsen, Christian E., Edmonton-Decore (NDP)
Nixon, Jason, Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre (UCP),
Official Opposition House Leader
Notley, Hon. Rachel, Edmonton-Strathcona (NDP),
Premier
Orr, Ronald, Lacombe-Ponoka (UCP)
Panda, Prasad, Calgary-Foothills (UCP)
Payne, 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)

Party standings:

New Democratic: 53 United Conservative: 26 Alberta Party: 3 Alberta Liberal: 1 Freedom Conservative: 1 Independent: 2 Progressive Conservative: 1

Officers and Officials of the Legislative Assembly

Shannon Dean, Law Clerk and Executive
Director of House Services, and Acting
Clerk, Procedure
Stephanie LeBlanc, Senior Parliamentary
Counsel
Trafton Koenig, Parliamentary Counsel

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

Brian G. Hodgson, Sergeant-at-Arms
Chris Caughell, Deputy Sergeant-at-Arms
Tom Bell, Assistant Sergeant-at-Arms
Paul Link, Assistant Sergeant-at-Arms

Executive Council

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

Parliamentary Secretaries

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

STANDING AND SPECIAL COMMITTEES OF THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ALBERTA

Standing Committee on the Alberta Heritage Savings Trust Fund

Chair: Mr. Coolahan
Deputy Chair: Mrs. Schreiner

Cyr	Luff
Dang	McPherson
Ellis	Turner
Horne	

Standing Committee on Alberta's Economic Future

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

Carson	Littlewood
Connolly	McPherson
Coolahan	Piquette
Dach	Schneider
Fitzpatrick	Starke
Gotfried	Taylor
Horne	

Standing Committee on Families and Communities

Chair: Ms Goehring
Deputy Chair: Mr. Smith

Drever	Orr
Ellis	Renaud
Fraser	Shepherd
Hinkley	Swann
Luff	Woollard
McKitrick	Yao
Miller	

Standing Committee on Legislative Offices

Chair: Mr. Shepherd
Deputy Chair: Mr. Malkinson

Aheer	McKitrick
Gill	Pitt
Horne	van Dijken
Kleinsteuber	Woollard
Littlewood	

Special Standing Committee on Members' Services

Chair: Mr. Wanner
Deputy Chair: Cortes-Vargas

Babcock	Nixon
Cooper	Piquette
Dang	Pitt
Drever	Westhead
McIver	

Standing Committee on Private Bills

Chair: Ms Kazim
Deputy Chair: Connolly

Anderson, W.	Orr
Babcock	Rosendahl
Drever	Stier
Drysdale	Strankman
Hinkley	Sucha
Kleinsteuber	Taylor
McKitrick	

Standing Committee on Privileges and Elections, Standing Orders and Printing

Chair: Ms Fitzpatrick
Deputy Chair: Ms Babcock

Carson	Loyola
Coolahan	Miller
Cooper	Nielsen
Goehring	Nixon
Gotfried	Pitt
Hanson	van Dijken
Kazim	

Standing Committee on Public Accounts

Chair: Mr. Cyr
Deputy Chair: Mr. Dach

Barnes	Malkinson
Carson	Miller
Clark	Nielsen
Gotfried	Panda
Hunter	Renaud
Littlewood	Turner
Luff	

Standing Committee on Resource Stewardship

Chair: Loyola
Deputy Chair: Mr. Drysdale

Babcock	Loewen
Clark	Malkinson
Dang	Nielsen
Fildebrandt	Panda
Hanson	Rosendahl
Kazim	Schreiner
Kleinsteuber	

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

10 a.m.

Tuesday, November 20, 2018

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

The Deputy Speaker: Good morning.

Let us reflect. Today is the Transgender Day of Remembrance. Let's take a moment to reflect and remember all of those who have fought and continue to fight for equality and justice.

Please be seated.

Orders of the Day

Government Bills and Orders Second Reading

Bill 24

An Act to Recognize AMA Representation Rights

[Adjourned debate November 7: Ms Ganley]

The Deputy Speaker: Any member wishing to speak to the bill? The hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Devon.

Mr. Smith: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I rise today to speak to Bill 24, An Act to Recognize AMA Representation Rights. Bill 24 amends both the Alberta Health Care Insurance Act and the Regional Health Authorities Act. The main purpose of this bill is to formalize the relationship between the government and the AMA. This bill ultimately creates a large negotiating body to oversee negotiations between Alberta's doctors and the government of Alberta.

Now, the government and the Alberta Medical Association have had a long relationship together. As a matter of fact, I believe it was 1906 when it was created in its first incarnation, and for over 100 years the Alberta Medical Association has represented and advocated for Alberta's physicians and for their patients. The AMA offers resident physicians and medical students a wide variety of services and benefits and help with both personal and professional financial needs. It's a very important and a good organization for both patients and for doctors.

Based on the comments of the physicians that I talked to in my constituency, two things were stressed in my conversations with them. The first was that doctors were for the most part happy with their relationship with the Alberta Medical Association. Secondly, they believed that the relationship that the AMA has had with the government both historically and presently has been a very positive one, and it would be my hope that we would be able to keep that a positive relationship moving into the future.

Now, Madam Speaker, Alberta physicians have been principally paid through a fee-for-service model in which doctors bill the government a predetermined fee for each service that they perform for patients. The Alberta Medical Association has been the organization that has represented most but not all doctors in Alberta when negotiating the fee-for-service model. Just this past spring a new, two-year funding agreement was signed between the AMA and the government, and the AMA agreed that the doctors would receive no fee increases until 2021. This is estimated to save the government somewhere around \$98 million in health care costs. Part of the deal was an agreement, was a commitment made to introduce legislation that would recognize the AMA as the sole representative of the physicians when negotiating compensation.

Hence, today we find ourselves talking about Bill 24, the bill that is before us today.

Bill 24 is going to change to some degree the relationships that doctors have with the AMA and that the AMA has with the government. Now, prior to Bill 24 the AMA signed agreements with the government and had a significant role in managing the flow of funds to physicians from the physicians' services budget. Under Bill 24 the minister will recognize the AMA as the exclusive representative regarding physicians' compensation matters. It not only formalizes the relationship between the government and the AMA, it establishes the AMA as a negotiating body under which all other professional health organizations must negotiate.

Bill 24 amends current legislation to make the AMA the exclusive representative of physicians on any compensation matter and on any benefit. This will include rates of benefits payable for the provision of insured services by a physician and any funding for physician assistance programs. This legislation will cover both doctors who are employees of Alberta Health Services and physicians who are regulated members of the College of Physicians & Surgeons of Alberta under the Health Professions Act.

Madam Speaker, changes under the Regional Health Authorities Act will include that if a majority of a group expresses to the AMA a wish to be represented by the AMA in the negotiation, renewal, or extension of a particular contract governing the group's service with AHS and both AHS and the AMA agree that they are suitable, it will be recognized that the AMA will be their exclusive representative in all negotiations, renewals, and extensions of that contract. In essence, physicians will lose the ability to negotiate independently or in groups.

Alberta physicians supported the new, two-year agreement this past spring with a vote of 89 per cent. But, Madam Speaker, it's important to note that only 30 per cent of Alberta's member physicians actually voted on this new agreement. Now, I'm not suggesting that the new, two-year agreement that was ratified by this vote is not valid. I am stating a simple fact, that the majority of physicians in Alberta did not participate in the vote to ratify the new agreement, yet Bill 24, a piece of legislation that is the result of that ratified agreement, is going to affect one hundred per cent of the physicians in Alberta. This is a concern.

As a conservative I've always believed that every individual has a right to their own labour. As part of that right to their own labour, they should have the capacity to decide if they want their interests represented by themselves or the collective bargaining unit of their choice. There are some physicians that do not want the AMA to represent them and would like to negotiate on their own.

Today with Bill 24 we find ourselves in the situation that while the AMA has historically represented a large majority of physicians in Alberta, it has not represented every physician, yet because of Bill 24 those few that have not been represented by the AMA will eventually have no choice. In the past physicians not covered by previous AMA agreements could negotiate their own agreements. Now as these agreements end, the physicians cannot be represented by another body or by themselves. Under Bill 24 physicians that had opted out of the AMA will now be compensated based on the agreement between the AMA and the government at the expiry of their previous contract. Physicians will lose, therefore, the ability to negotiate independently or in groups outside of the AMA, and that denies those few physicians the right to control their own labour.

To this point in Alberta history membership in the AMA has always been voluntary. Bill 24 now makes it so that physicians will be represented by them regardless of whether they are a member or not. If a doctor can choose to opt out of representation by the AMA but they are still bound by the collective negotiated agreement,

wouldn't that mean there is no reason to opt out if you're still tied to the agreement?

Historically physicians have had a more flexible model that recognized the interests of a small but nonetheless important group of physicians who wished for something other than a top-down model where it seems to be one size fits all. The UCP would like to offer physicians more, not less, flexibility. It's important that a strong working relationship is established between the AMA, the physicians, and the government.

10:10

The government needs to have a flexible relationship in order to ensure that this bill and future agreements with the AMA work for all Albertans, and their primary focus should be on improving patient care and outcomes. Unfortunately, the government has jeopardized that flexibility by using Bill 24 to limit the bargaining power of the government when negotiating future agreements with the AMA. Bill 24 potentially moves everything from policy into legislation and in the process makes agreement and policy impossible to renegotiate without amending legislation.

Does the government plan on compensating physicians for everything, including vacation, maternity leave, sick leave, et cetera? This would become very expensive for the province and the taxpayer. Bill 24 may even negatively affect doctors' compensation and benefits. If the AMA is the exclusive representative on compensation and benefits, do the physicians lose their ability to act as independent contractors? There are many physicians who operate as contractors to AHS and are small businesses, usually created as professional corporations. Would they lose the tax advantage that these provide? Will physicians be considered an essential service? Bill 24 could prove to be a costly agreement in the future, mitigating any of the temporary savings that have been placed before us today.

It's for these reasons that I will not be supporting Bill 24, not because I do not want to see well-compensated physicians but because I want physicians to have the flexibility to represent themselves if they desire to. I want to see a positive, flexible relationship between the government and the AMA and physicians. This is what we have traditionally had, and I can see where Bill 24 could threaten that relationship.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Questions or comments under Standing Order 29(2)(a)?

Seeing none, are there any other members wishing to speak to the bill? The hon. Member for Calgary-Hays.

Mr. McIver: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I appreciate the opportunity to rise on Bill 24. Now, Bill 24, of course, deals with the relationship between the government of Alberta and the Alberta Medical Association and their representation rights. I think it's not too hard to acknowledge that this is a long-standing relationship and an important one. Certainly, the relationship between the government and doctors and people in the medical profession is an important relationship that's been in place for many years with this government and with previous governments and one that I believe is for the most part a positive one and one that I would like to see maintained in a positive and long-standing relationship as we go forward.

The current legislation in front of us – we'll talk more about that when we get into Committee of the Whole – leaves a few questions that I think need to be answered. Madam Speaker, I'll try to address some of these questions as I make my remarks in the next few minutes here.

We are concerned at the UCP. We need to make sure that physicians have flexibility, and we need to know that the current

legislation will not limit the flexibility that physicians have. I appreciate that we've heard that there was an 89 per cent vote. But, also, I would be interested in clarification from somebody on the government side because what we think we understand at this point – and I'm happy to be corrected – is that the vote was on a different issue and only 30 per cent of the AMA members voted. If we round 89 per cent up to 90 to be generous to the government, even if you do that, 90 per cent of 30 per cent is still only 27 per cent, not the overwhelming majority that the government has represented to us. So we'll look for clarification on that if the government chooses to offer it along the way.

Certainly, we've heard from some physicians that don't agree with the position that the government is taking with this bill, so I think it's important that we get it right. It's important because the relationship, of course, between the government, physicians, and medical professionals is important. But more than that, Madam Speaker, the relationship between Albertans and their doctors is important. When you have an overarching change in the bargaining relationship, well, to be clear, that could lead to a better or a worse relationship. That's why it's worth talking about, and that's why it's worth asking questions about it here this morning.

Madam Speaker, some questions occur to me. The AMA is the exclusive representative on compensation benefits. Do those physicians that currently, now, act as independent contractors lose their ability to do so? I know it sounds like a detail, but it's probably not a detail to those doctors that are in that position right now. It makes me wonder how professional corporations would fit in. Would doctors lose the tax advantage that a professional corporation provides? I would hope not, but it would be nice to hear a little more detail from the government on that. On compensation for things like vacation, maternity leave, sick leave, you know, it would be interesting to hear from the government if there are any changes, additions, subtractions to those pieces of the relationship. These things would be important to know.

If a doctor chose, for example, to opt out of representation, would they still be bound by the collective negotiated agreement? I guess one could ask the question: why opt out if they're still tied to the agreement? Nonetheless, the starting place is actually knowing how that detail would affect the doctors on the ground in their everyday lives, and then, I suppose, the doctors could make an informed decision themselves as they consider their relationship with the government should this piece of legislation pass.

One has to wonder what the motivation for the government was, whether it was to get a better deal for the taxpayers, whether it was a deal, hopefully, intended to get better patient care outcomes, or whether there was some other motivation behind this. Essentially, doctors have been negotiating successfully for a long time with this government and with previous governments, I think it could be said. Of course, in any negotiation I'm sure there's never a hundred per cent agreement, but the negotiations over time have been successful. So one needs to wonder what the government hopes will be better after this relationship happens when the relationships and the negotiations have been successfully carried out up till now.

It would be nice to have clarification from the government, for example, on how this change would affect rural municipalities and what other unexpected consequences might come up.

Having had a chance to look at the legislation, at this point I have more questions than answers. In that spirit, I think I will sit and listen, and maybe I will get some of the answers to the questions I've posed and some of the other things that have not been made clear yet through the draft of the legislation.

Madam Speaker, I appreciate this opportunity to share some of my thoughts on Bill 24. I think there's a reasonably good chance I'll be on my feet again before this is over, but hopefully we'll have

heard a few answers to some questions from the government between now and then. For me, at least, that will help me to make a decision on whether this is a good bill or not and which way we should go on this. So I appreciate this opportunity.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

10:20

The Deputy Speaker: Any questions or comments under Standing Order 29(2)(a)?

Seeing none, any other members wishing to speak to the bill? Chestermere-Rocky View.

Mrs. Aheer: Well, good morning, and thank you for the opportunity to speak to this bill. I wanted to start off with one of the things that is most concerning. The AMA has always been voluntary. It's always been a voluntary situation, and this happens with pharmacists as well. There is an association that you join in order to be able to have people be able to represent you, and it is a voluntary situation. When you create an association that no longer makes it voluntary, it's sending a signal to industry that their voices no longer matter. The question – and this was brought up by the Member for Calgary-Hays, too – is that the government is saying, if I have this correct, that 89 per cent of the members mentioned approval of the current AMA-government agreement, which was not mentioned in the proposed law.

The reality is, to repeat, that only 30 per cent of the AMA members voted. How is it that, with a 30 per cent vote, suddenly the government feels that that is enough of a percentage across a group of doctors? As we all know, doctors run their businesses like corporations. They're responsible for their rent. They're responsible for their equipment. They're responsible for running their offices, the staff they hire. They are little businesses. So how is it that that 30 per cent number in any way is representative of the number of doctors that we have in our province, to be able to say that under that auspices suddenly it's okay, that we have an association that is stating that they represent all doctors when actually the opposite is true, that it doesn't represent all the doctors? How does that work?

The thing is that, especially anybody who knows doctors and offices and all that – they require flexibility to be able to run their businesses. They require flexibility into the future so that they understand how it is that they can run their businesses. And if they're under the auspices of one group that is dictating to them the way that they should run their business, I just can't imagine that doctors, given the opportunity to understand what was going on, would agree to have the AMA being the only thing that makes those decisions for them, especially with only 30 per cent buy-in at this point in time.

When you look at a doctor as an independent contractor, we're looking at very complex situations within each of those. Those offices are all thumbprints. They're unique. Those doctors know their patients. They know what's going on in their lives. These are very, very important relationships between the doctors and their patients. And for an association to come in and be able to dictate to them how they should be running their business, I think we have to consider what that would look like and what that would mean for the doctors.

So when you talk about a piece of legislation formalizing a relationship between the government and the Alberta Medical Association that establishes the AMA as the exclusive negotiating body for professional health unions, what does that mean exactly, and how did you get the permission to do that? Madam Speaker, the question that the government needs to answer to the doctors and physicians in this province is: how did they come to the conclusion

that this was the right decision, to basically formalize that relationship?

Madam Speaker, we've had many, many issues with consultation over the last few years that we've had the privilege of being here. We can talk about Bill 6. We can talk about a lot of the energy bills that we've talked about a lot in this House. But we're talking about a group of people here in Alberta that are health providers, sometimes the very, very first step that people have to their health care. And then all of a sudden they're being thrown into an association that only 30 per cent of them agreed to.

I don't understand how this government is turning the numbers around to say 89 per cent, that they heard that 89 per cent mentioned approval of the current AMA-government agreement, which did not mention the new proposed law. So if only 30 per cent actually understand what's going on, how is it that we justify a change of this magnitude? Has the government actually consulted, Madam Speaker, enough with the doctors to find out whether or not they want this relationship?

Truth be told, when we were given this legislation and then we reached out to our constituents and our doctors, quite frankly, many of the doctors were looking at this legislation and they didn't know that some of these changes were coming down. How is that possible? In Chestermere-Rocky View I sent out the legislation to all of the doctors in our area, and I have yet to receive back a document from any of our doctors saying that they were consulted on this. Not one. I mean, maybe Chestermere-Rocky View is not important right now to the government, what's going on with that area, but our doctors sure were not consulted on this piece of legislation.

When we talk about rural doctors, this is even a bigger issue, about making sure that we are pulling doctors into rural areas, how important that is and how important that relationship is. There is a huge amount of risk for a doctor coming into a rural area and setting up an office. A huge amount of risk.

So when you put a relationship like this between the government of Alberta, the Alberta Medical Association, and the doctors as a negotiating body without having full buy-in from the very people that you've created this association for, this relationship for – and let's be clear. The government is creating this relationship. This isn't a relationship that was brought forward by the doctors. How is it that you justify creating that relationship when you don't have buy-in from the doctors? Again, I'm looking forward to hearing from my constituents and I'm looking forward to hearing from our doctors to find out how this legislation impacts them. The ones that we have heard from, Madam Speaker, weren't consulted.

Chestermere-Rocky View is an interesting place because the riding hugs the entire outside of Calgary, so a lot of people go to Calgary for services. We do have quite a few medical clinics in Chestermere and wellness centres in Langdon as well. These are really, really, super dedicated people, Madam Speaker, very, very dedicated to their community. As I've mentioned in this House before, my doctor is a personal friend after many, many years of going to him. I'm quite certain that when I have these discussions with him, he will not have been consulted on this. So what does the government say to that, when they claim consultation, when they claim that discussions have happened, yet in their own numbers only 30 per cent of the people that understood this legislation responded.

With the current state of our province it is, of course, important to find cost savings given that with the NDP government we've seen our debt grow like never before. The government keeps talking about cost savings. Is this a centralization? Is this what we're talking about for cost savings? I would actually like to have that

answered by the government. What exactly is it that they're trying to accomplish here?

The government is claiming that the legislation will save \$98 million in health care costs since the AMA has agreed. What exactly does that mean, Madam Speaker, \$98 million? Where and how? Is that impacting our doctors? You're talking about cost savings. I would like some clarification on exactly how that's working when an entire new body is being set up, an entire chunk of bureaucracy is being set up to create a relationship between a group of people that are individual little corporations that take all of the risk on. The government is saying that they've bought into this, yet the numbers don't say that. So \$98 million in savings. Okay. Where? How does that work exactly?

10:30

Then the other question is: when doctors are compensated, how is that impacting their compensation? We understand that that compensation needs to happen. In a doctor's office, Madam Speaker, like I was saying before, doctors pay for their equipment, they pay for their staff, and they pay for their overhead. I mean, they are running an actual business there and, on top of that, all of the patients that they have coming in, the paperwork, everything that needs to be dealt with. How is this going to impact that compensation to the doctors?

I'm curious, actually, about: if there are concerns, how will they now be negotiating? The government is saying that they're going to be negotiating through the AMA, but if they haven't actually agreed to be part of the AMA, then how do they negotiate? They're being forced to be part of the AMA. Is that correct? They're being forced into this relationship to force negotiation. Am I understanding that correctly? Because if that's the case, I can pretty much guarantee you that most of the doctors will not agree to this. I'd like some clarification on that as well.

Interestingly, the bill entrenches the agreement framework between the AMA and the Ministry of Health. So the government's hands will be tied in future negotiations, and they must follow the framework laid out unless they change those conditions through legislative changes. Am I to understand, Madam Speaker, that those changes can be made in regulation, and if those are changed in regulation, does that mean that the doctors then are able to help with that negotiation? If the government's hands are tied and it's done just through the AMA, then if a negotiation is done, how does the government change the regulations? Do they just change that in the regulations, or do they change that in a legislative space like this where it can be debated on behalf of the doctors of Alberta?

I actually believe that the way that this is set up, if that body is the only negotiating body and the doctors don't have the ability to have a discussion outside of an association and a relationship that's being forced upon them, then this could be very, very difficult for them to negotiate their needs. Already it sounds to me like the government doesn't quite understand the needs of the doctors. How is it that we make sure that that relationship is actually negotiating on behalf of the doctors in a way that's conducive to how they run their businesses, especially if they're running them like corporations? It seems counterintuitive to their ability to be flexible within their jobs and what it is that they're doing.

I would highly recommend that more consultation be done on this. I really, really think that a decision of this magnitude – when you're creating an overarching body that is going to be responsible for a group of people that take care of our health in this province, you're going to want as much buy-in as possible. Otherwise 30 per cent of the people are making the decisions for the rest of that population.

The legislation makes the AMA the exclusive representative of physicians on any compensation matters – any compensation matters – but also gives the AMA the power to represent any group under the regional health authorities if the majority of that group formally expresses that wish. Now I guess the question needs to be: what does a majority mean? How does the government create a situation where the AMA has to find that majority if at this point in time in the legislation they're not willing to make sure that they've consulted enough to have a majority to buy into the legislation in the first place? How does that happen? How is a majority created? How do they make sure that that majority is there to make sure that they're representing the doctors that they're supposed to?

It says here, and I don't know how you clarify: if the majority of that group formally expresses that wish. How is that negotiated? How do you figure that out? What is that process, Madam Speaker? I think we need some clarification on that as well. What are the doctors saying about that? If you're consulting with people, if anybody on the government side has spoken to any of their doctors, I'd sure like their anecdotal information of what their doctors said about that. How is that majority expressed, and how are they going about doing that if the AMA has the power to represent any group? Then are we pitting groups against each other in terms of negotiations through an association and a relationship that's being forced on them by the government?

Physicians with a pre-existing individual contract may opt out of the AMA. However, they cannot be represented by another body or themselves. Once their contract expires, they must accept the agreement negotiated by the AMA. Madam Speaker, that is the most telling piece of this legislation. Let me read that again. Physicians with a pre-existing individual contract may opt out of the AMA.

The Deputy Speaker: Questions or comments under Standing Order 29(2)(a)? Drayton Valley-Devon.

Mr. Smith: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I want to thank the member for her comments on this piece of legislation. When she was speaking she was talking about a lack of consultation that seems to have occurred with this bill. As we know, the physicians that were members of the AMA did indeed have a vote, an 89 per cent vote, almost 90 per cent, but of that only about 30 per cent of the physicians in the province that are part of the AMA actually took part in that vote.

It was a little bit surprising to me that when I did consult with some of the physicians in my constituency, they had to think about what we were talking about when I brought up Bill 24. It was not something that came readily to their mind. In fact, in one case one of the physicians actually had to go and look it up and read through it and try to figure out what the bill was all about. It wasn't top of mind. I guess that does bring the question: why didn't the government consult with physicians? While there are several things I'd maybe like to ask the hon. member to talk a little bit about, one of them is going to be this whole issue of consultation, if she could expand on that from her constituency's point of view.

Secondly, the cost savings. You brought up the cost savings of \$98 million, supposedly, yet when you're changing a relationship, one that has worked historically very well in the province, the question I've got is: what are going to be some of the circumstances that change, and what does that mean for the long term when it comes to negotiating? I'd love to hear a little more about what she has heard from her constituents and from her physicians about some of the ramifications for whether this is actually going to place the government in a tighter position and at a time when we know we're going to be having and have had large deficits, have created a large

debt, and where governments are going to have to be very, very careful with how they spend their money in the future.

Thirdly, both the hon. member and myself come from rural constituencies, and I'm wondering if she's heard anything from her physicians about whether this bill will disproportionately affect rural communities. We know that all doctors will now fall under this new negotiating model, with the AMA being the sole representative of physicians, so I'm wondering if the hon. member has any capacity to shed some light on whether this will negatively impact the capacity for rural physicians to be attracted to rural areas or for us to be able to attract physicians to rural areas. I'm not sure that there isn't a single rural area in this province that doesn't have problems finding physicians. We've got some amazing doctors in our rural areas, and we've got some amazing groups of citizens that work hard to try to attract doctors to a rural setting. I would definitely be interested in hearing if there are any issues in her constituency that are related to whether they think this will be an issue to attract. It's already a difficult situation, and we don't need to make and have any unintended consequences.

Lastly, you know, there's a series of questions that have gone through my mind, and I'm wondering if they've gone through the hon. member's mind, as to whether or not the government plans on compensating physicians for everything, including vacations, the whole package.

These are some of the things. You know, as we're debating in the House, as we're talking through this bill, we need to be listening to what each side of the House is saying and what our constituents are saying at a local level. That brings to everyone, to all 87 of us, that capacity to be able to listen and to consider and to really make sure that this law that we're going to be passing actually is beneficial to the citizens of this province. You know, we're talking about health care here.

I would be interested if the hon. member – I'll try to leave her at least a couple of minutes here – could speak to one of those issues. Thank you.

10:40

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. member, you have five seconds if you wish to respond.

Mrs. Aheer: Five seconds? I'll say hi. Good morning.

The Deputy Speaker: Any other members wishing to speak to the bill? The hon. Member for Innisfail-Sylvan Lake.

Mr. Dreeshen: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I rise today to speak on Bill 24, An Act to Recognize AMA Representation Rights. Bill 24 amends the Alberta Health Care Insurance Act as well as the Regional Health Authorities Act. The Alberta Medical Association, or AMA, will be established as a negotiating body not only for physicians but for all professional health occupations. The AMA will be the only representative on compensation matter for physicians, as was mentioned earlier. Bill 24 will also give authority to the AMA to negotiate on behalf of any group under the Regional Health Authorities as long as the majority of the members of the group wish to be represented.

Madam Speaker, Bill 24 is a significant piece of legislation. If this bill passes, all health professional unions could potentially be represented by the AMA. This will create an overarching union that will leverage all unions representing smaller professionals that will have to work under the AMA and will be bound by the AMA's agreements. Individual professional medical associations can of course opt out of being represented by the AMA; however, they are still bound by the decisions of the AMA. This appears to be because the government will only negotiate with the AMA in collective

bargaining. This is a problem because one union may not be able to work for the benefit of all professionals under its jurisdiction.

I have concerns that agreements could end up affecting certain medical professions negatively and that these professionals are then stuck with an agreement negotiated by the AMA. An example, Madam Speaker. Jerry Dias, the president of Unifor, who represents 13,000 media employees, last week declared: we will stop Conservatives in the next election. That's just a great example of union abuse. Here you have a large union going into partisan attacks rather than representing their membership, which is what a union is supposed to actually do.

Madam Speaker, another point I can bring up regarding this legislation is that Alberta Health Services is not required to recognize the AMA as the exclusive representative for certain groups. These groups include managerial services, services provided by resident or fellows acting in that capacity, and other services or classes of services prescribed by the regulations. The question arises: did the government properly consult with these stakeholders? Speaking of stakeholders, how do we know that this government went through the proper consultations with stakeholders? We can see and it was discussed here earlier today that 89 per cent of doctors that voted did favour this agreement that ultimately led to this legislation. However, only 30 per cent of physicians actually voted. What happened to the other 70 per cent, the majority of doctors?

I understand that some may not have been interested in voting. Since all of us in this House are here because of elections, we understand that it is difficult to get a large voter turnout. However, when only 30 per cent of those eligible to vote actually cast their ballot, we have to ask the question of whether proper consultation actually occurred for this legislation. Again, Madam Speaker, as was mentioned earlier, this is the same government that created Bill 6, which will, I think, go down in history as this horrible legislation that happened in the last three and a half years from this government not actually consulting with farmers and farm groups.

On the same note, Madam Speaker, some of my colleagues here on the opposition side of this Assembly did reach out to many physicians in this province. Some of these physicians were part of that 30 per cent who did actually vote. However, some of the 30 per cent that actually voted were AMA members and have said that they only voted on an amended agreement and were not actually aware that this bill was even coming. I believe that this fact is cause for concern, and members of this Assembly should be seeking further clarity around this issue.

Other physicians have told us that they don't want to be represented by the Alberta Medical Association. This may be a minority of doctors, but it is still important to take into account their views. These physicians would rather negotiate with AMA or on their own. Bill 24, however, does not give them the freedom to do so anymore.

Madam Speaker, let me raise an additional issue with Bill 24. In other pieces of legislation governing health care such as the medicare act or the Canada Health Act, physicians have been seen as independent contractors. This does not appear to be the case for Bill 24. Previously membership in the AMA has always been voluntary. Doctors could choose whether or not they wanted to be represented by AMA. If this bill passes, physicians who may not be members would be represented in negotiations by AMA regardless. Bill 24, again, through the NDP's socialist dogma, believes that doctors should not have the freedom to choose the representation of their choice, that they're actually forced by a government, against their will, to choose AMA.

Now, Madam Speaker, another question is: does Bill 24 offer enough flexibility for doctors and other health professionals? The

bill as currently written seems to offer more of a top-down approach to union negotiations. Does having a top-down model like this serve the best interests of Alberta doctors? Some physicians may prefer a bottom-up approach or a grassroots membership approach versus top-down union bosses, and I have concern that this bill does not allow for this. Unfortunately, Madam Speaker, Bill 24 creates, in essence, a one-size-fits-all union. Other health professionals outside of physicians may have more difficulty negotiating for issues that are important to their members if they are represented by the AMA. Furthermore, as I previously mentioned, Bill 24 seems to give less power to doctors that don't want to be represented by AMA.

Madam Speaker, something else I would like to bring up is that Bill 24 seems to have little to nothing about patient care. I'm concerned that this legislation will tie the hands of government on how health care money is spent. We need as much money as possible going forward towards front-line services.

This government, since being elected three and a half years ago, has shown again and again that they are terrible managers of the hard-earned tax dollars of taxpayers here in Alberta. We can see that this government will have an estimated deficit of over \$9 billion this year. If this trend continues, our debt will balloon to \$96 billion by 2024. We can also add to this fact that the government is depending on pipelines to balance its budget, pipelines that for years they were actually protesting. However, the government has failed to get Albertans here any critical energy infrastructure projects built, and unfortunately this means that any form of balancing the budget by the NDP just remains a fantasy.

Madam Speaker, I am concerned that Bill 24 also allows for too much money to be tied up, which will affect patient care. In a perfect world the government would be able to allocate money directly to ensure that patient care is at the forefront of how our tax dollars actually are spent. The reality is that most Albertans want to see the money they spend on our health care system directed to the front lines. They want to see their doctors allocated efficiently to allow limited waste in our health care system, because the unfortunate reality is that we have plenty of bureaucratic waste in Alberta's health care system. Does Bill 24 do anything to address that major issue, major budget issue, here in Alberta? I don't believe it does. It may be beyond the scope of this particular bill, however, but it is something that this government should address. On Bill 24, however, I do have a concern with how this ties the hands of government and potential future governments.

Now, the focus of this government should be on patient care and ensuring that Albertans have a health care system that is accessible and available to them. This is a time when wait times for knee, hip, and cataract surgeries are at an all-time high. This should be the focus of this government. When I talk to my constituents – and I'm sure most other members in this Assembly would agree with this – one of the most frequent topics raised in our constituency offices is health care. This can range from access to a family doctor to wait times for major surgeries to seniors' care. The reality is, though, that not many Albertans, when asked about their concerns around the health care system in Alberta, mention the AMA negotiations. Don't get me wrong, Madam Speaker. This issue that Bill 24 seeks to address is very important – these issues are very important – but we need to take the time to give it the proper consideration and acknowledgement. The fact is that doctors are a very important part of the health care system, and their concerns need to actually be taken into account.

10:50

However, there are many big issues in the health care system that Albertans are looking for us as legislators to address. For example, Madam Speaker, I look at the emergency wait times on the Alberta

Health Services website. I looked at it last night. At the Red Deer regional hospital, my regional hospital in central Alberta, which is used by many of my constituents in Innisfail-Sylvan Lake, the wait time for the emergency department was over three hours. Again, the Red Deer regional hospital has a terrible track record that's been ignored by this Minister of Health and this NDP government. The problem of wait times gets even worse when you go to Edmonton. The wait time at the University of Alberta emergency department was shy of just six hours here in the capital. [interjection] Now, Madam Speaker, Albertans find this unacceptable, as does the Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills, but as the MLA representing my constituents, I find this also unacceptable. Does this government see this as unacceptable service to Albertans? This is where the priority should be for government, finding ways to serve Albertans better in the health care system.

Now, regarding the bill before this Assembly, Bill 24, I believe that there are too many questions left unanswered, questions such as: was proper consultation done with the doctors? Does Bill 24 allow for enough flexibility for all health professionals? What are the budgetary implications of passing this bill down the road?

Madam Speaker, a referral amendment was introduced by my colleague from Airdrie where we could look at this bill in depth in the Standing Committee on Families and Communities. Here we could have ensured that proper consultation was conducted, and we would have had the opportunity to hear directly from those affected by this legislation. Albertans would have then also had the opportunity to see publicly the information used to develop this legislation. Unfortunately, the NDP government voted against this amendment, and we are forced to again just trust them, that they got this right. Well, unfortunately, we have not previously seen that we can trust this government to actually get legislation done right. They have lost their trust with Albertans after the Bill 6 fiasco, increasing red tape, and bringing the job-killing carbon tax, that they didn't even campaign on. Why should Albertans trust this government with this piece of legislation when we have seen how badly it has turned out for them in the past?

Now, Madam Speaker, there are too many questions in this legislation for me to support this bill at this time. Maybe if we had the opportunity to study this bill at committee, it would have made me less adversarial to it. Maybe if I could see the consultation that this government actually did, I would think better of this bill. Maybe if I could see all the implications of this bill, I would be more in favour, but at this time I cannot support this bill. My colleagues on this side of the House may decide to propose some amendments to this bill, and I hope that this government does take those improvements into account, as they did in the second week that we came back to this House, when they actually accepted an opposition amendment. However, as this bill is currently written, I will be joining my colleagues in opposition to this bill.

Thank you again, Madam Speaker. With that, I would like to adjourn debate. Thank you.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Bill 23

An Act to Renew Local Democracy in Alberta

[Debate adjourned November 6]

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Livingstone-Macleod.

Mr. Stier: Thank you, Madam Speaker, and good morning, everyone. It is my understanding that I still have approximately seven minutes left in this portion. I would like to start with what I concluded with last week. Basically, I said that with the complexity

of this bill and the importance of the changes to all municipalities, candidates, and Albertans, we expect to deal with this bill very thoroughly as we proceed through the process and especially in Committee of the Whole. We have got a fair number of concerns with this bill.

You know, it's interesting that it appears to us from what we read here and what we've heard that they seem to be limiting the amount an individual can use to campaign with. As we know, municipal elections are nonpartisan, and often the candidate's name recognition is the only key to their success. Nonincumbents often start campaigning well before an election date, sometimes years in advance. By hindering how much an individual can campaign, these changes are likely, in my belief, to further entrench incumbents, who are already having a significant advantage in any election. Further, a spending limit of \$2,000 outside of a campaign period might be possible in small municipalities, but in mid-sized and large municipalities \$2,000 does not go very far.

All of the additional disclosure requirements being placed on candidates as well could either dissuade people from participating in the democratic process or result in accidental violations, we feel. Many municipal candidates are doing everything by themselves. Do we really want to discourage rookies from running for office, Madam Speaker? Why does the government insist in this bill on requiring expense reporting by category? I'm concerned that this is needlessly burdensome. As we all know, municipal politics is often where people first get involved because of the nonpartisan nature. I'm concerned that these changes are onerous and will intimidate potential candidates. This seems like the reverse of where we need to go. This is not the direction that we anticipated to see in this bill. It seems to assume that one size fits all when maybe different rules should be applied to various sizes or categories that better reflect the nature of the municipal campaigns in different size municipalities.

We do support banning union and corporate donations, as we said earlier. Getting big money out of all levels of politics, we feel, is probably a good thing. Under the old rules, unions and corporations had the same donation limits – and this was fair – but we're very concerned that this bill removes donation limits and pushes it over to PACs. We're worried about the amount of influence that may go from the local municipal elections into PACS and therefore become somewhat uncontrollable.

The bill requires also that candidates disclose the names and addresses of everyone who donates more than \$50. We wonder: why the difference between that and the provincial election rules, which set a limit of \$250? We already use that in our provincial schemes. Everybody is used to that. Why set up another confusing rule that doesn't make sense?

Many details, of course, once again are being left to regulation, and none of that is ever debated in this Chamber. The minister again, with that, without having it in this bill, seems to want us to trust him. How can he expect that when the things he said on this bill are not actually in it? In this case I'm referring to the vouching of voters. It does say in there that a person can vouch for someone, but it doesn't seem to say anything about limiting that. We don't understand why that would be missing and why that would be left to regulation. Why not just put it in the bill?

I'm not sure of my time left, Madam Speaker, but at this time, if I could, I would just like to conclude that, again as I said earlier, this is a complex bill. It has a lot of important new rules, donation limits, all kinds of different things that are new for municipalities. In the old days I know that, as a guy in a small municipal world, there weren't a lot of rules, and certainly perhaps something needed to be done there. On the other hand, it seems to us that for some of the small municipalities, having to do as much paperwork on this,

having limits throughout their campaign period that they never had before in accepting donations, and being limited in how long they can campaign seem to be quite a stretch for the ordinary municipal world.

With that, I would like to conclude that we look forward to Committee of the Whole, where we'll be bringing forward several amounts of amendments and trying to make this bill the right thing for Alberta. Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Any questions or comments under Standing Order 29(2)(a)? The hon. Member for Airdrie.

Mrs. Pitt: Yes. Thank you, Madam Speaker. It's actually great to hear from my hon. colleague from Livingstone-Macleod, particularly on this issue, given that he has extensive experience with municipal elections in his area. I know that, you know, my colleagues and myself certainly look up to him and the experience that he brings to the table. My hon. colleague from Calgary-Hays also has extensive experience in the municipal realm.

11:00

I was wondering if my colleague from Livingstone-Macleod might be able to describe to us in this Assembly what particularly the retroactive piece of this legislation might mean to candidates that are currently fundraising for their 2021 campaigns. We know that, particularly in the big cities, let's say Calgary and Edmonton, you know, these aren't campaigns that come out of the blue and out of nowhere and can't just happen on fundraising activities that start to happen just the year of the election. Madam Speaker, we know that these are probably activities that are happening now. Given the experience of my colleague in municipal elections and that retroactive piece of legislation, for those that might already be fundraising for their 2021 campaigns, perhaps he could explain to me some of the challenges, particularly around that clause in this bill.

The Deputy Speaker: Livingstone-Macleod.

Mr. Stier: Well, thank you, Madam Speaker, and thanks for raising that question, hon. Member for Airdrie. You know, it's interesting. At the conclusion of a lot of these bills, they bring in when the bill will be coming into effect, and in that regard I can read to you in some detail here. Where we're talking about these contribution limits and these new contribution rules, donations, et cetera, et cetera, they actually come into force at the first reading of this bill if this bill passes. We've already had first reading several weeks ago. Many of these municipalities and these councillors that may be considering to run or are running already have already incurred some costs. They've been working on a four-year campaign period. That started the day after they were elected a year and a half ago. In any regard this bill is going to have some dramatic impact on some of those people. Suddenly this will change their situations drastically, and they'll have to make some adjustments to their legal work and all of their registration work, et cetera, et cetera, and the reporting is going to be an interesting requirement with that kind of a change.

Thanks for the question. I hope that answer kind of addressed it somewhat, but it is a very complex situation. It's hard to go about that in the next few minutes here without changing and looking at the bill in a little more detail.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Any other questions or comments under 29(2)(a)?

Seeing none, any other members wishing to speak to the bill? The hon. Member for Airdrie.

Mrs. Pitt: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I'm really grateful for the previous opportunity to ask my colleague about that particular retroactivity clause in this Bill 23. Actually, I think there's a case to be made that that sparked maybe a few more questions. Are there penalties, in particular, to a candidate that's already started fundraising? Does he or she just simply give that money back? That's actually a big piece, and I know that many hopeful candidates out there would certainly appreciate the answer to that as these candidates and their campaigns don't want to be incurring fines.

You know, we also know that under this legislation the Election Commissioner has the authority to conduct investigations, Madam Speaker. My understanding is that currently the Election Commissioner office operates under a complaints-based process, and he's currently got a number of complaints under investigation in his office right now. I look forward, actually, to the Standing Committee on Legislative Offices, where we're able to get a better picture of the workload that's happening in that office right now. I mean, I still firmly believe it's a duplication of services from the chief electoral office to the Election Commissioner office, so he's maybe got lots of time. Who knows? But there are lots of questions that need to be answered around that particular piece.

As you know, Bill 23 – I have it right here – is probably the largest piece of legislation in this particular fall sitting. It encompasses so many things. There are sweeping changes here. I find it interesting, Madam Speaker, that the NDP are generally so concerned about dark money that's floating around here when, in fact, because of their legislation, we are in a situation where there is lots of dark money floating around, and they continually put forward pieces of legislation that create more dark spaces, which is exactly what is happening here. This will create and involve PACs, political action committees, in the municipal realm, which is interesting, and unions as well although I don't think that they were ever not involved in municipal elections. It's interesting – and I think it should be particularly pointed out – that the NDP are continually creating spaces where dark money exists. So I would ask the question: who is actually concerned about election financing and transparency? The record shows that that's not the case with this NDP government.

There are a lot of questions that I have around this bill, Madam Speaker. There are some transparency pieces in here. Corporate and union donations, of course, are taken out of direct contributions to a candidate, and there are similar rules to the provincial side, which we've been operating under for the last number of years, in terms of personal donations up to \$4,000. I think it's going to be challenging for some candidates, but I think it's good. I think that that change is a good move.

Madam Speaker, there is nothing that I can see – and, of course, I'm okay to be proven wrong in this. In particular, women and minorities, we know, are underrepresented in municipal politics, and this would have been a great opportunity to maybe address some of those issues and create opportunities, even a conversation around this. I don't think I've heard anybody actually talk about that. We have a number of groups out there: Equal Voice, those types of groups. Of course, the United Conservative Party is very excited to have Rona Ambrose, the former interim leader of the Conservative Party of Canada, and Laureen Harper, our former Prime Minister's wife, leading the She Leads campaign, which is assisting and promoting and championing women in leadership roles in politics in particular. We're real excited to see that. But it would have been interesting, in an Act to Renew Local Democracy in Alberta, to have a piece of that represented in this bill, particularly because this government did create a ministry for the

status of women, and we haven't heard anything in particular on that. I'm sure that's coming in this debate.

As you can see, I just have a number of, you know, sort of top-level questions right now and really need to delve into this piece of legislation.

With that, I would like to move an amendment. I will wait, Madam Speaker, until you give me the go-ahead.

The Deputy Speaker: Go ahead, hon. member.

Mrs. Pitt: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I move that the motion for second reading of Bill 23, An Act to Renew Local Democracy in Alberta, be amended by deleting all of the words after “that” and substituting the following:

Bill 23, An Act to Renew Local Democracy in Alberta, be not now read a second time but that the subject matter of the bill be referred to the Standing Committee on Resource Stewardship in accordance with Standing Order 74.2.

Madam Speaker, for some of the reasons that I've already highlighted prior to moving this amendment, I think that it's imperative that this be a piece of legislation that we get right, that we get right for our democratic institutions at the municipal level. There are a number of challenges with the provincial elections financing act, of course, with the unintended consequences of creating PACs in this province, and we know now, because of that, that that is what is going to happen in our municipal realms as well. That would be something that we should discuss, and maybe there are some loopholes that could be closed up or maybe a different way to do this right.

11:10

Bring in some experts. You know, I'm very fortunate to have two colleagues on my team with extensive municipal political backgrounds. Sorry; three. My colleague from Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills was also an elected . . . [interjections] There are more than three. Sorry. I shouldn't give a definitive number. There's a ton of expertise in my own caucus and – you know what? – in my own community, Madam Speaker.

There are two levels of municipal government in the constituency of Airdrie. The city of Airdrie has a mayor and six councillors. The county of Rocky View works in a different way, of course, but will be subject to these election financing rules. Anyway, a current elections expert who just recently went through an election campaign and probably has some money left over from that realm would be very curious as to what we're going to be doing with this particular piece of legislation. Really, more so, I know they're all going to follow the rules, but they need to know what those rules are. I think that they would appreciate the opportunity to give feedback. There are a number of bank accounts out there with money in them, and I know these guys and gals don't want to be incurring any fines or have an unnecessary headline in a negative way in any way, shape, or form. They're doing important work in our counties and municipalities, and we need to ensure that we're doing what we can to support them. This needs to be a collaborative effort of consultation.

I do know that the city of Airdrie, which I represent at the provincial level, hasn't been asked about this piece of legislation by this government, so that right there tells me why it's so important for this to be discussed in the Standing Committee on Resource Stewardship, Madam Speaker, which is the appropriate committee to have these conversations.

I think it's important that Albertans have a say in this legislation because it's not just the elected officials; it's Albertans, right? The legislation which we pass in this House is for Albertans. We always need to remember that. A committee process is an important piece,

and this will show the public just how transparent and open and accountable this government is. Certainly, the Official Opposition will play a part, as will other members of this Assembly, and we appreciate the opportunity because as legislators that's what we're here to do, to make sure that we are approving and putting forward important legislation in the Alberta Assembly.

Madam Speaker, with that, I urge all members of this Assembly to vote yes on my amendment. I look forward to the fulsome debate and, hopefully, exploration in the Standing Committee on Resource Stewardship.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Questions or comments under Standing Order 29(2)(a)?

Seeing none, any members wishing to speak to the amendment? The hon. Member for Sherwood Park.

Ms McKittrick: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Talking about democracy in elections is very, very serious. It is probably one of the most important things that we can debate in this Legislative Assembly. We're all here because we really believe in elections. We believe in the right of people to have a fair way of exercising their vote and their interest.

Madam Speaker, Albertans have been very clear that they want to get money out of local elections. This was a consultation that happened over the last couple of years. As we all know, the Assembly passed a law around the provincial election, and the minister made it clear that we were also looking at changing the laws for municipal and school board elections. We want to make sure on this side of the House that Albertans have a fairer and more transparent election process.

Last month we all watched the U.S. election and its result. We listened to media reports of how challenging it was for some prospective voters to be registered and the amount of alleged voter suppression that happens and how corporations influence the elections in the U.S. and the way that elected officials have the power to gerrymander polling stations and so on. As someone who's been an international election observer and worked in other countries on the democratic governance – actually, I just came back from Haiti, where I spent a week looking at their democratic processes or the lack of it. I worked for elections at all three levels of government, and I ran for municipal, school board, and of course as an MLA.

I have been appalled at what I've seen of the U.S.-style election. It actually really pains me to think of anyone in Alberta not seeing how U.S. elections are not a good example for the rest of the world. It pains me to see how challenging it is for elected officials and how hard it is in the U.S. to reform the election system. It also pains me to think that Albertans have gone over to the U.S. and supported the election process of the current President.

Anyway, for example, it appears to me that in the U.S. campaign signs are allowed near polling stations. The best thing that I found about the night of the U.S. election was to find out that in the U.S. people started to understand the importance of voting and to have fair and transparent processes, so I'm really hoping that the new elected representatives, governors, and Senators have the guts to reform the system and implement the kinds of changes our government has made. The reason I wanted to talk about the U.S. election is because, fortunately, here in Canada our election systems have been a lot more transparent than there, but also it's because we the people have had the ability to change our systems.

This is why with this bill, An Act to Renew Local Democracy in Alberta, the government is taking important steps to ensure that municipal elections for councillors and school trustees as well as

irrigation districts and Métis settlements are seen as important, fair, and transparent elections the same way that we have made the changes at the provincial level. I'm actually quite proud of how proactive the government has been in changing provincial election laws and now how we are looking at making municipal elections as transparent and to take the influence of corporations and unions out of the elections. I mean, I'm appalled every day when I hear of the influence of the NRA in the U.S. elections.

When I was professionally active in public policy at the municipal level, I used to do this after every election. I used to print out – and it was available on all the municipal sites – the financial declaration of each elected municipal councillor and school trustee. In the jurisdiction that I was a school trustee, like councillors, I was obliged to file a return. These filed financial returns are a really good indication of who hoped to influence or who supported prospective candidates.

An example from the municipality that I'm currently an MLA for might really, I think, bring the issue of why it's important not to have corporation and union donations to municipal and school trustees. An example from the last election: one of the candidates for mayor collected \$88,000, mostly from real estate corporations and individuals affiliated with these real estate corporations. When I calculated it, it was more than \$1 per eligible voter in the municipality. Another candidate for mayor got \$65,000 from similar sources. The actual winner of the election spent \$33,000.

11:20

The Minister of Municipal Affairs moved towards introducing this bill after lengthy consultations with municipalities and school boards. I want to emphasize that because it seems to be something which the members of the opposition have not noticed. If you'll remember, after the provincial bill was introduced, there were a lot of discussions on the need to have a similar bill for municipalities. At that time it was so close to the municipal election that it was decided to continue consulting with municipalities and school boards and then to introduce the bill after the election. I would add at this point that it's very different from their best friend, Doug Ford in Ontario, who did not consult with municipalities and introduced a bill without consultation that definitely changed things in Toronto and not very nicely either.

We chose to really consult with municipalities and school boards, and we also chose to consult with individuals. If you had bothered to look at the numbers in surveys or if you had bothered to find out the feedback that individual Albertans gave to the minister, you would know that there was a lot of interest in seeing this bill brought forward. What is really heartening to me is that Albertans really did care that we needed to change the system for municipal and school board elections to make them fairer, more transparent, and to ensure that big money such as real estate corporations did not influence elections.

There's about 340 municipalities and more than 60 school authorities in Alberta. I could not find a participation rate for the last municipal election, so as an example I'm going to give you the one for Strathcona county. In the last election, in 2017, in Strathcona county only 39.10 per cent of the voters bothered to turn out for the municipal election. In 2013 it was 37.3, in 2010 it was 36.6, in 2007 it was 33.3, in 2004 it was 34 per cent, and in 2001 it was 39 per cent. In 1998 the only time that 50 per cent of the eligible voters in my community bothered to vote was because there was a referendum for a new recreation centre, and it was about the VLTs. Unfortunately, it's impossible to find out what is the percentage of voters who bothered or who elected their democratic right to vote in school board elections because of the way that we really hold

separate elections for Catholic, public, and francophone school boards.

As an MLA and as an Albertan I'm very concerned about the lack of voter involvement in municipal and school board elections. As a former school trustee I think that this is one of the most important things that we should be doing as Albertans, to support our school boards and to vote for great education systems at the local level. Our school trustees are really important, and we should be voting for school trustees. When I realize that only 40 per cent of the constituents in my constituency really understood the importance of voting for the municipal councillors and the mayor, I really think that as a province we really need to do something to make sure that there is a greater involvement of residents in municipal elections.

So how does this bill really help with voting accessibility, accountability, and transparency? I want to reinforce it for the opposition, who may not really have read what this bill does. First of all, we've talked a lot about campaign finance contribution and disclosure. This bill would strengthen the rules around donations. It would ban corporation and union donations. It would limit contributions to \$1,000, which is the same as in the provincial election. It would give regulations around setting campaign spending limits. It would also make sure that fundraising events are subject to contribution limits and disclosure requirements. It would make sure that candidates are nominated before incurring campaign expenses or accepting contributions. And then especially – I think it's really important – it would make sure that campaign finance and contribution disclosure requirements also apply to school board elections. It would also reduce the campaign period from four years to one year, which I think is a really good way of making sure there's a playing field for every single person who seeks to become a municipal councillor, mayor, or school trustee.

It also would really – and I think this is really an important thing that maybe the opposition may not have paid attention to. It would really increase voter accessibility. I just pointed out the fact that in most municipalities less than 50 per cent of voters bothered to turn out for the election. This bill would make sure that there would be mandatory advance votes for municipalities and school divisions with greater than 5,000 population, so if you can't vote on election day, then there are going to be alternate ways for you to vote. It would also, like we did with provincial, remove the six months' Alberta resident requirement, and it would extend vouching provisions.

The Member for Airdrie talked about access for women and minorities. You see, I'm really concerned about these issues of accessibility and ability of voters to exercise their democratic right, so I think this bill is going to encourage and remove barriers for people who may be living in poverty, who may not have access to transportation on election day, because they can do advance polling. It's going to encourage municipalities to have more mobile polls. So maybe not only will we see a greater percentage of Albertans exercise their voting right, but we might see more people who have disabilities, who live in poverty, who come from minority groups have the ability to exercise their vote.

The part that I think is really important – that's why I started this speech with a discussion of what happens in the U.S. This bill is going to create greater accountability and transparency by aligning and restricting third-party advertisers and restricting campaign activities at polling stations to unduly influence voters. I want to talk about that, because as the municipal clerk in one election here I have seen, with the lack of clear guidelines, scrutineers for a particular mayoral candidate influence voters at the polling station. When I reported that to the clerk in charge at the polling station, she said: well, there's no mechanism to deal with this issue. I'm really glad that this act will empower the Alberta Election Commissioner

to enforce rules, and this will ensure that violations in municipal elections are properly investigated.

If there's one thing that this act does that is going to really make a difference around the ability of voters to know that their vote counts and is democratic and properly transparent, it's the fact that they know that if there is an infraction in the rules, if there are campaign signs near the polling station, if people talk to voters that shouldn't be talking to voters in the polling station, there's going to be a way for those issues to be investigated and dealt with.

I want to reassure the member of the opposition that if he read the bill correctly, he would find out that the minister very much understands that you have big municipalities like Edmonton and you have small municipalities like Tilley, which may have 300 people, so he's already building within the bill some discussion of municipal size.

I also want to . . .

The Deputy Speaker: Questions or comments under Standing Order 29(2)(a)? The hon. Member for Banff-Cochrane.

Mr. Westhead: Yeah. Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. The member has a really strong background in this field, and it sounds like she has a little bit more to share with us, so I just wondered if she might like to elaborate on some of the things that she was speaking about in her speech there.

11:30

Ms McKittrick: Thank you. Yes, I really do. I've talked about enforcement. What I wanted to make a comment about is the Member for Airdrie, who felt that the bill should do something about the number of women involved in municipal elections. Now, we all share a concern around the lack of women, and actually I share a concern over the lack of women in the opposition ranks. But – you know what? – the best thing we can do about engaging people in municipal elections is to make sure we have a fair and transparent system and that we limit corporate donations because that is what's going to make women participate in the system.

I wanted to talk a little bit about, really, the importance of voting for school trustee. I want to do that not only because I'm the parliamentary secretary to the Minister of Education, but I want to really think of why it's important that we engage in the democratic governance in school trustees. It is not just because if you have children in the school system, you should be involved. It's because what happens at the schools, at the school board is important for all Albertans. It is important that we support what our children learn. It's really important that we understand that the education system is one of the tools that we use around economic wealth and economic outcomes of our province. So I would like to take this moment by encouraging everyone to always vote for their school trustee.

I want to address the issue, Madam Speaker, of the referral. I'm really sorry, members of the opposition, but I think you need to realize that this bill has been actively consulted with school boards, with municipalities, with Albertans, that it comes out of a deep desire of Albertans to take corporation money out of the school system, and that the bill is the result of careful consideration of everything, that the government has been listening to Albertans. So I'm really sorry, Member for Airdrie, but there is no way that I could vote for an amendment to refer this bill.

I think it's important that we pass this bill in a timely manner to prepare everyone for holding the elections in three years. I really appreciated how the Minister of Municipal Affairs did not present this bill last year because we were in a municipal election, unlike the friend of the opposition Mr. Doug Ford. So I think the

consultation has happened. Everybody wants to see this bill passed. Candidates want to know how to prepare for the next election, and this bill is going to allow municipal elections, school trustee elections, Métis settlement and irrigation elections to be done in the most open, transparent way that we have ever seen in this province.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Any further questions or comments under Standing Order 29(2)(a)?

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Excellent comments from the member. If you're concerned about corporate and other major donations, why does this bill not exclude corporate and union donations to the PACs, from even out of the province? I mean, people from around the world could be contributing to these PACs.

The Deputy Speaker: Sherwood Park, do you wish to respond?

Under 29(2)(a) any further questions or comments? Innisfail-Sylvan Lake.

Mr. Dreesen: Thank you, Madam Speaker. The member opposite mentioned my international election experience. I believe it was a reference towards me. Actually, I'm very proud of my two international election observer missions that I did in Ukraine, with the presidential election that eventually saw President Poroshenko get elected and the parliamentary election. There were two different years I went over to Ukraine, into central and eastern Ukraine, and the member talked about her experience in Haiti. I was just wondering what influences from her experience in Haiti are actually found in Bill 23.

The Deputy Speaker: On the amendment, the hon. Member for Calgary-Elbow.

Mr. Clark: Thank you, Madam Speaker. One of the nice things about being in the front row is that it's a little easier to catch your eye. This is ideal. You could continue to move along the front row and perhaps over to the other side.

I will talk about this bill and the proposed amendment. I have some sympathy for where the Member for Airdrie is coming from in proposing this amendment because I'm left with a lot of questions about Bill 23. I will acknowledge that the government certainly has done some extensive consultation. I've talked with a number of municipal councillors from Calgary but also from smaller communities, and I don't want to suggest that there's any sort of consensus either in opposition to the bill or, frankly, in support of the bill. There are a lot of questions that I think could benefit from a review by the Standing Committee on Resource Stewardship, as the member has proposed.

You know, I have to say that the question of electoral finance reform and elections generally is the second-most commonly legislated topic by this government since they came into power three and a half years ago. This is the seventh bill that they have presented before this House that has to do with elections or election financing. Just the sheer volume of changes that they have brought forward, I think, gives us pause and questions as to why that is and what exactly they are trying to achieve through these changes. I've got to say that it seems that every time that one of these election finance bills comes up, there are unintended consequences.

The Member for Calgary-Mountain View raised the question of PACs. One of the challenges in regulating PACs, if I can be so bold as to try to answer your question, Member – it's not a challenge. It's a tremendous benefit of the society in which we live. It is a free and democratic society. We have freedom of association. We have freedom of speech. Given that, it's very, very difficult and, frankly,

dangerous for government to constrain that ability for any individual or group of people or corporation from participating in the democratic process, from putting together a group of people who share a certain view and want to propose a certain opinion. The courts have been very clear and very narrowly interpreted what governments are able to do in restricting the ability of individuals, of corporations, of unions from getting together, putting together an organization, and speaking publicly about whatever that organization's views are. I think we have to be very careful if we want to go down a path of restricting freedom of speech.

How then do we ensure that there is not undue influence on the political process, on the municipal election process and the provincial process, from these organizations? I think the answer is to make sure that we don't accidentally, if I'm being generous, or perhaps deliberately stack the deck in favour of a certain way of operating that might benefit a certain viewpoint or might benefit a certain government provincially. I think that's what the NDP was trying to do when they originally eliminated corporate and union donations and dramatically reduced the individual contribution levels and also put all sorts of constraints on the provincial political process, and these constraints, which look like they're now under Bill 23, are going to be applied to municipal campaign processes.

All of this is creating the shadow organizations, because people will always have an opinion. They will always have a view and want to express that opinion. They can either do it through an open process, through the democratic electoral process, through, in the provincial case, political parties or through, in the municipal case, individual candidates that represent those views, and do so transparently so we know where it's coming from, or they're going to create shadow organizations because they have been forbidden from participating in the open process. That's why we see the rise of PACs.

Now I think we need, clearly, some controls and some constraints. I think that as time moves on, it's going to be increasingly difficult actually even to implement the constraints that exist now. I think that, based on my reading of some of the court rulings, it's very difficult to actually hold these organizations from spending whatever they want, even right up to election day. That's a problem. When you're constraining it too much, you create these shadow organizations. That's certainly one big, big, big concern that I have with the particular changes that we see in Bill 23.

11:40

Some of the other concerns that have been mentioned, which I share, are that the changes that have been made to municipal campaign processes create barriers for nonincumbent people to try to challenge a sitting councillor or trustee. I actually struggle with this one, again a reason why I think that perhaps we should send this to committee so we can actually do some deeper analysis on how this will play out in real life.

On one hand, you would think, you know, that if no one can raise money until January 1 before an election, that's an advantage to those who are incumbents because if you're an incumbent, from the day after the election for the next four years, if you're fund raising every month, every day, then very likely you're going to generate a big war chest, and it's going to be very difficult for anyone who's not the incumbent to overcome that. The flip side is: what are the chances on January 1 of election year, based on all the groundwork that's been laid by that incumbent, that an avalanche of money comes in in the first 10 days of January in support of the re-election of that particular councillor or trustee? Now, these are issues that are probably more acute in the large urban areas, probably not entirely an issue outside. Probably this is an issue of a little more acuity in the big cities, but I think it applies broadly.

Again, another question that I haven't had an adequate answer to from the government side is: how does that break down between smaller rural centres, between counties, and between the large municipalities? I haven't seen that. Again, another reason, I think, for us to have this run through a committee. How do municipalities monitor who has donated and to whom and when? I understand that there is some kind of provincial system.

But when talking about barriers, in addition to just the simple fundraising barrier, one of the things I found most offensive, frankly, in the changes that were made on the provincial front was that when any Albertan simply utters the words, "I think I'd like to seek a nomination; I think I'd like to participate in democracy," you have to put your name on a government list. The government needs to make sure that you've identified yourself as someone who dare take advantage or action, who dare participate in democracy. That in itself I have real trouble with.

It also creates barriers for people who may not know the complexities of Elections Alberta rules, the complexities of whatever process will be put in place on the municipal side. While on the provincial side we have political parties that have some weight and some administrative ability to help nomination candidates and to help nominated candidates ensure that they're complying with the rules, very often, in fact, in the vast majority of cases that doesn't exist on the municipal side. So now we're creating these barriers for people who I think would want to participate in democracy but may not have the sophistication. The very people, I think, that I would suspect the NDP would like to see more actively participating in democracy are now less likely to because there are additional administrative barriers being put in their way, and if they fail to meet those administrative burdens, now they're subject to personal fines, which we didn't have before. I think we should be making it easier for Albertans to participate in democracy, not more difficult.

I've yet to hear an explanation from this government about what problem exactly it is that we are trying to solve. Can you quantify the problem? Can you tell us? In all of the rural districts and counties, how often this is a problem? Is this a problem only in Edmonton and Calgary? Is this a problem in mid-sized cities? If it is, I'd like to know how you quantify what that problem is. Again, I think that's a good reason for us to be sending this off to committees.

The other piece of concern that I have is just the overall administrative burden on municipalities themselves, the opportunity or risk, then, that we're going to have a variety of interpretations, different municipalities interpreting the same set of rules slightly differently, where you cross a county boundary and all of a sudden there's a slightly different interpretation of these rules. It's a large, multipage – I don't even know how many pages this bill is; 89 pages – nearly 100-page bill that creates an opportunity or risk that interpretations will be different across different municipalities.

The other strong recommendation that I've heard coming from municipal councillors that I've talked with: why is it that municipal campaign donations – if we're going to take corporate and union money out, will we still need to run campaigns? Why is it that municipal campaigns are not eligible for tax receipts? Why is it that we in the provincial sphere get to take advantage of a very, very generous – very, very, very generous – tax deduction for any donation that comes to a registered political party but municipal councillors cannot? We're constraining their ability perhaps too much to raise money that they need to run campaigns. So, again, I would like to see an analysis of what the impact of that may be.

With that, I would really encourage all members to vote in favour of this amendment. I think it's a reasonable one that we see this bill reviewed at committee.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Under Standing Order 29(2)(a), Calgary-Mountain View.

Dr. Swann: Thanks very much, Madam Speaker. Well, I'd like to hear more from the member about what he considers to be the barriers to local participation as a result of registering as a candidate.

Mr. Clark: Well, thank you, Member, for that question. You know, one thing I've observed as we go through the process of nominating candidates here for the upcoming spring election – I believe we're going to have an election in the spring. I'd love to hear the government get on the record and actually confirm that we're going to stick to the fixed election date. The Elections Alberta forms themselves are not overwhelmingly complex, but the consequences of getting it wrong, especially with the new Election Commissioner, are actually fairly dramatic. If all of a sudden you have not created a bank account properly or you haven't filed on time, then there is some risk of personal fines, especially when we're talking about simply being part of the process from a candidate nomination perspective.

I've seen candidates that I would want to participate in the process reconsider their participation in democracy because the administrative burden is too high. They're confused by the forms they have to fill in, and that's especially true of indigenous people, of people who perhaps live in poverty, and these are voices that I think we don't hear nearly enough in the democratic process, certainly at the provincial level. This is where we as provincial parties have some ability to help these candidates bridge that gap and fill in the forms, but on a municipal basis, if you're someone living in poverty, then your ability to manage the paperwork that's almost certain to be generated by this process I think creates a pretty significant barrier to participating in democracy, which I would think would run counter to what this government in particular would want and certainly what I would like to see. I think it should be made easier to run, not more complicated.

The Deputy Speaker: Calgary-Mountain View.

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I'll speak to the amendment.

The Deputy Speaker: You didn't want another question under 29(2)(a)?

Any further questions under 29(2)(a)?

On the amendment, yes, I have to say that this member was first in my memory of the speaking list. Go ahead, Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills.

Mr. Cooper: Why, thank you, Madam Speaker, and with apologies to one of the greats, I might add, around here.

Dr. Swann: Obviously not a threat anymore.

Mr. Cooper: Yes. That's exactly right.

It's a pleasure, I suppose, to rise and speak to Bill 23, An Act to Renew Local Democracy in Alberta. What a noble name it is, a noble name in a title: An Act to Renew Local Democracy in Alberta. Perhaps the bill should more appropriately be named the Local Authorities Election Amendment Act, 2018, but since this government is in a very unique path and track record of renaming

pieces of legislation to fit their political agenda, we see that again here in Bill 23.

Now, I might just add, Madam Speaker, that there are significant portions of this legislation that I think are well intentioned, but like so many things that this government has done since the last election, they have been meaning well, but the results of what they delivered have been anything but what their intention was. I think that is why we've seen similar pieces of legislation come before the Assembly not one, not two, not three, not four, not five, not six but now the seventh time in just a couple of years. In fact, I think you'll recall . . .

11:50

Mr. McIver: It's a charm.

Mr. Cooper: Seven times. That's exactly right. Seven times are a charm. Yeah. I think it's actually three times is a charm, but in this case it takes the government twice plus one extra to actually get to where they're headed.

The very sad thing, Madam Speaker, and the exact reason why we should be referring this to committee – my hon. colleague from Airdrie and soon to be Airdrie-East recommended that we send this to committee – is that we are actually here to help and prevent us from having to come back an eighth time to correct all of the challenges that are going to be in place because of Bill 23.

Now, we've heard from the hon. Member for Sherwood Park, talking about the extensive amounts of consultation that have taken place on this particular piece of legislation. Well, Madam Speaker, what the truth is is that the minister and others have talked to a lot of municipal politicians and perhaps even Albertans about some of what their ideas might be that they might like to see in a piece of legislation. Now what we need to do is make sure that the government got it right. I can tell you that they haven't, and that's because I've heard from a lot of folks, from all across the province, actually, who have brought a number of concerns to my attention.

A lot of those things surround the fact that the intention of the legislation, which is to get corporate and union donations out of the process, is a good one, one that we've supported, one that we campaigned on, one that we have always voted in favour of, but the net result of what they're doing is that, yes, it will get corporate and union money out of municipal politics in the form that they can donate directly to the candidates, but it is going to create a whole other series of problems as a result of the way that they have legislated in Bill 23.

One of the things that's particularly interesting to me and another reason why I think we should send it to committee is the fact that not only have they said that there's going to be a donation limit to municipal politicians – and they have set that the same as at the provincial level – but they've said that municipal politicians are slightly less important than provincial politicians. They're only allowed to do that one time in a four-year election process whereas provincial politicians, slightly bigger fish, if you will – and maybe I'm paraphrasing – can fund raise year over year over year during the election process.

The government says that they're trying to make the rules the same provincially as they are municipally, yet we see in a number of cases in Bill 23 that they're actually creating two sets of similar rules that are, in fact, different. When you limit municipal politicians from being able to fund raise year over year over year, not only are you giving the incumbent a significant advantage, which is, again, the opposite of what they say will happen, but in fact you will be giving the incumbent an advantage. You also limit free speech of candidates outside of that four-year period.

One of two things is going to happen. We're going to create PACs at the municipal level or provincial politics are going to creep

more and more into the municipal level, and if you ask me, Madam Speaker, I believe that that's one of the intentions of the NDP in this legislation, to get more municipal politicians actively campaigning alongside the NDP government. There are going to be unintended consequences from this piece of legislation, and preventing people's right to free speech and their ability to spend money to promote their ideas outside of that period of time I actually believe will be found to be unconstitutional. But if the goal is to create the same set of rules, they're not even doing that.

So I would guess that we should talk about this at committee, and when the government chooses not to do that, I would suggest – my intention in this is actually to make sure that we have a good piece of legislation that doesn't end up being worse off for Albertans than better for Albertans. I intend to send the Minister of Municipal Affairs a couple of amendments so that he has plenty of time to think about why he's not going to support them, but the goal is to create a better piece of legislation.

Another perfect example. My hon. colleague from Livingstone-Macleod said that for municipal politicians the cap after which a donation needs to be declared is \$50. For PACs, it's \$250; for provincial politicians, it's \$250. Is it that this government doesn't trust municipal politicians like they trust themselves, or is it just an oversight? I don't know, but it's a continued example of the government saying one thing and doing another. We've seen it time and time and time again.

Another perfect reason to send this bill to committee – and I look forward to debating this bill at some length over the next number of days – is that now we're going to require additional paperwork and recording of finances, which I don't have a problem with. But what I'd like to know is what the costs associated with that are. There are quite likely going to be over 5,000 people across the province that run in the next municipal election. This government just hired an Election Commissioner and now have piled on a significant piece of work to that role.

I'd like to know this from the minister. My guess is – if we've seen this once, we've seen it a thousand times – that they're going to be coming back to the House to ask for more money for this. This government legislates first and then figures out the consequences after. It is a classic example of them saying one thing and doing another.

Mr. McIver: No.

Mr. Cooper: I know. It's hard to believe. I think that this couldn't have been more clear.

Another reason why we need to send this to committee is that last week the Minister of Municipal Affairs was on a radio program in the city of Calgary talking about how he was going to save democracy in Alberta with this piece of legislation, and he also made some statements that were devoid of facts. One was around this issue of vouching for people that don't have ID on the list. This particular government wants to open it wide so that one person can vouch for many people many times in any polling location. Let me be clear. The vast majority of people want to do the right thing when it comes to elections, but not every person wants to do the right thing when it comes to elections. That's exactly why we need to put some reasonable frameworks around what that looks like. Perhaps you can vouch for four or five or six people, but an unlimited number doesn't seem reasonable. It's exactly why we should be talking about this at committee.

Now, I know the government says that they've consulted, but the other question that I have is: have they consulted with politicians who have lost? This particular piece of legislation is going to

empower incumbents to an even greater extent, which is outrageous, Madam Speaker.

The other thing in this particular piece of legislation that we should be sending to committee so that we can talk about it is around some of the issues of transparency. The minister just the other day on the radio said that every municipality will have a voters list at the polling stations for people to be held accountable, but there's nowhere – there's nowhere – in Bill 23 that gives any

indication that it is his intention that a voters list is required at all municipal elections. It may be that he doesn't want that.

The Deputy Speaker: I hesitate to interrupt, hon. member, but pursuant to Standing Order 4(2.1) the House stands adjourned until 1:30 this afternoon.

[The Assembly adjourned at 12 p.m.]

Table of Contents

Prayers.....	1969
Orders of the Day	1969
Government Bills and Orders	
Second Reading	
Bill 24 An Act to Recognize AMA Representation Rights	1969
Bill 23 An Act to Renew Local Democracy in Alberta	1974

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

For inquiries contact:

Managing Editor

Alberta Hansard

3rd Floor, 9820 – 107 St

EDMONTON, AB T5K 1E7

Telephone: 780.427.1875