



Province of Alberta

The 30th Legislature
First Session

Alberta Hansard

Thursday morning, November 21, 2019

Day 45

The Honourable Nathan M. Cooper, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta
The 30th Legislature

First Session

Cooper, Hon. Nathan M., Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills (UCP), Speaker
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Milliken, Nicholas, Calgary-Currie (UCP), Deputy Chair of Committees

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Allard, Tracy L., Grande Prairie (UCP)
Amery, Mickey K., Calgary-Cross (UCP)
Armstrong-Homeniuk, Jackie,
Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville (UCP)
Barnes, Drew, Cypress-Medicine Hat (UCP)
Bilous, Deron, Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview (NDP),
Official Opposition House Leader
Carson, Jonathon, Edmonton-West Henday (NDP)
Ceci, Joe, Calgary-Buffalo (NDP)
Copping, Hon. Jason C., Calgary-Varsity (UCP)
Dach, Lorne, Edmonton-McClung (NDP)
Dang, Thomas, Edmonton-South (NDP)
Deol, Jasvir, Edmonton-Meadows (NDP)
Dreeshen, Hon. Devin, Innisfail-Sylvan Lake (UCP)
Eggen, David, Edmonton-North West (NDP),
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Fir, Hon. Tanya, Calgary-Peigan (UCP)
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Glasgo, Michaela L., Brooks-Medicine Hat (UCP)
Glubish, Hon. Nate, Strathcona-Sherwood Park (UCP)
Goehring, Nicole, Edmonton-Castle Downs (NDP)
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Gotfried, Richard, Calgary-Fish Creek (UCP)
Gray, Christina, Edmonton-Mill Woods (NDP)
Guthrie, Peter F., Airdrie-Cochrane (UCP)
Hanson, David B., Bonnyville-Cold Lake-St. Paul (UCP)
Hoffman, Sarah, Edmonton-Glenora (NDP)
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Hunter, Hon. Grant R., Taber-Warner (UCP)
Irwin, Janis, Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood (NDP),
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Issik, Whitney, Calgary-Glenmore (UCP)
Jones, Matt, Calgary-South East (UCP)
Kenney, Hon. Jason, PC, Calgary-Lougheed (UCP),
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LaGrange, Hon. Adriana, Red Deer-North (UCP)
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Long, Martin M., West Yellowhead (UCP)
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Loyola, Rod, Edmonton-Ellerslie (NDP)
Luan, Hon. Jason, Calgary-Foothills (UCP)
Madu, Hon. Kaycee, Edmonton-South West (UCP)
McIver, Hon. Ric, Calgary-Hays (UCP),
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Nally, Hon. Dale, Morinville-St. Albert (UCP)
Neudorf, Nathan T., Lethbridge-East (UCP)
Nicolaidis, Hon. Demetrios, Calgary-Bow (UCP)
Nielsen, Christian E., Edmonton-Decore (NDP)
Nixon, Hon. Jason, Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre
(UCP), Government House Leader
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Notley, Rachel, Edmonton-Strathcona (NDP),
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Orr, Ronald, Lacombe-Ponoka (UCP)
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Panda, Hon. Prasad, Calgary-Edgemont (UCP)
Phillips, Shannon, Lethbridge-West (NDP)
Pon, Hon. Josephine, Calgary-Beddington (UCP)
Rehn, Pat, Lesser Slave Lake (UCP)
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Sabir, Irfan, Calgary-McCall (NDP)
Savage, Hon. Sonya, Calgary-North West (UCP),
Deputy Government House Leader
Sawhney, Hon. Rajan, Calgary-North East (UCP)
Schmidt, Marlin, Edmonton-Gold Bar (NDP)
Schow, Joseph R., Cardston-Siksika (UCP),
Deputy Government Whip
Schulz, Hon. Rebecca, Calgary-Shaw (UCP)
Schweitzer, Hon. Doug, Calgary-Elbow (UCP),
Deputy Government House Leader
Shandro, Hon. Tyler, Calgary-Acadia (UCP)
Shepherd, David, Edmonton-City Centre (NDP)
Sigurdson, Lori, Edmonton-Riverview (NDP)
Sigurdson, R.J., Highwood (UCP)
Singh, Peter, Calgary-East (UCP)
Smith, Mark W., Drayton Valley-Devon (UCP)
Stephan, Jason, Red Deer-South (UCP)
Sweet, Heather, Edmonton-Manning (NDP),
Official Opposition Deputy House Leader
Toews, Hon. Travis, Grande Prairie-Wapiti (UCP)
Toor, Devinder, Calgary-Falconridge (UCP)
Turton, Searle, Spruce Grove-Stony Plain (UCP)
van Dijken, Glenn, Athabasca-Barrhead-Westlock (UCP)
Walker, Jordan, Sherwood Park (UCP)
Williams, Dan D.A., Peace River (UCP)
Wilson, Hon. Rick D., Maskwacis-Wetaskiwin (UCP)
Yao, Tany, Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo (UCP)
Yaseen, Muhammad, Calgary-North (UCP)

Party standings:

United Conservative: 63

New Democrat: 24

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Walker
Yao

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Deol
Goehring
Goodridge
Gotfried
Long
Neudorf
Sweet
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Standing Committee on Private Bills and Private Members' Public Bills

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Glasgo
Horner
Irwin
Neudorf
Nielsen
Nixon, Jeremy
Pancholi
Sigurdson, L.
Sigurdson, R.J.

Standing Committee on Privileges and Elections, Standing Orders and Printing

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Ganley
Horner
Issik
Jones
Loyola
Neudorf
Rehn
Reid
Renaud
Turton
Yao

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Dach
Feehan
Guthrie
Hoffman
Nixon, Jeremy
Renaud
Rosin
Rowswell
Stephan
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Standing Committee on Resource Stewardship

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Sigurdson, R.J.
Singh
Smith
Turton
Yaseen

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

9 a.m.

Thursday, November 21, 2019

[The Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

The Speaker: Hon. members, the prayer. Lord, the God of righteousness and truth, grant to our Queen and her government, to Members of the Legislative Assembly, and to all in positions of responsibility the guidance of Your spirit. May they never lead the province wrongly through love of power, desire to please, or unworthy ideas but, laying aside all private interests and prejudice, keep in mind their responsibility to seek to improve the condition of all.

Please be seated.

Ordres du jour.

Orders of the Day

Government Bills and Orders Third Reading

Bill 22

Reform of Agencies, Boards and Commissions and Government Enterprises Act, 2019

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader on behalf of the Minister of Finance and President of Treasury Board.

Mr. Jason Nixon: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's good to see you. It feels like I only saw you just a few short hours ago. It's my pleasure today to rise on behalf of the President of Treasury Board and Minister of Finance to move third reading of Bill 22, the Reform of Agencies, Boards and Commissions and Government Enterprises Act, 2019.

As you know, this is the third and final budget implementation bill along with bills 20 and 21 and is aimed squarely on getting Alberta's finances back on track. Bill 22 accomplishes this by improving the efficiency and the oversights of public agencies and eliminating needless government spending.

It will require the Alberta teachers' retirement fund, the ATRF, to exclusively use AIMCo to manage its investments. The ATRF currently manages its investments in-house, with assets of around \$16.5 billion as of August 31, 2018. Shifting management of these funds to AIMCo is expected to save .25 per cent on administrative fees when the changes are fully implemented. This may seem insignificant, but because of the scale of these investments it equates to an annual savings of \$41 million for the ATRF, or almost \$500 annually for each teacher that contributes to the fund. Mr. Speaker, I would assume that you would agree that that is not insignificant. Under these changes the ATRF board would retain control of how the pension fund is invested at a strategic level as well as retain ownership of the plan's assets. Most importantly, it will have no negative impact on teachers' pensions. In fact, it is likely the contribution rates to the fund will be able to decrease over time because of the economies of scale. It's a winning scenario for those with pension benefits under the ATRF and for Albertans as a whole.

Similarly, Bill 22 will require Alberta Health Services and the Workers' Compensation Board to use AIMCo to manage their investments and endowments. Again, this will enhance AIMCo's economies of scale, Mr. Speaker, reducing investment costs and

contributing to higher expected investment returns. There will be no changes to the workers' compensation benefit or employers' cost. For the WCB these savings are approximately .4 per cent annually on administrative costs, which equates to about \$15 million a year. In total it's estimated that moving management of these funds to AIMCo will contribute to an overall annual savings of \$91 million for AIMCo's investment management costs. This is all through leveraging economies of scale and getting the best outcome for taxpayers.

In addition, Bill 22 will consolidate the office of the Election Commissioner into the office of the Chief Electoral Officer, as has been the situation inside this province for over a century. The Chief Electoral Officer will have the full authority, Mr. Speaker, to continue or initiate any investigation currently being pursued by the commissioner in line with the existing Alberta law, despite what the opposition continues to tell Albertans. This administrative change will not affect the oversight or the investigatory powers under any relevant act.

Bill 22 would also dissolve and make board changes to support the reform of Alberta agencies, boards, and commissions throughout many areas.

At the end of the day, Mr. Speaker, Bill 22 will be able to help the Alberta government implement a budget, that they promised Albertans they would bring forward, that would help to get our finances back on track inside this province as we continue to fix the astronomical mess that was made by the former NDP government when it comes to their mismanagement of the financial situation in this province.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I move to adjourn debate.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Government Motions

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Time Allocation on Bill 22

37. Mr. Jason Nixon moved:

Be it resolved that when further consideration of Bill 22, Reform of Agencies, Boards and Commissions and Government Enterprises Act, 2019, is resumed, not more than one hour shall be allotted to any further consideration of the bill in third reading, at which time every question necessary for the disposal of the bill at this stage shall be put forthwith.

Mr. Jason Nixon: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my duty to move this motion on behalf of the government. It is important that we continue to maintain pace through the Legislature to be able to accomplish all the goals that Albertans have asked us to be able to accomplish inside this place.

Mr. Speaker, last night we talked at length about Bill 22. In fact, I think it's important to note that Bill 22 has already passed the length of any other bill that has been debated inside this sitting of this session by quite a bit. In fact, we are well over 10 hours already of debate on this legislation and have been debating it since Tuesday inside this Chamber, using basically the majority of time that this Chamber has this week on this bill, and we'll continue to debate it this morning. At the end of it, it appears that Bill 22 will have had the most debate of any bill that goes through this sitting of this session inside this Chamber.

Now, the other issue that I think is important to note as we discuss this is that last night the opposition only had one amendment to Bill 22. I do appreciate that they brought it forward. That is a great sign that the hon. Finance minister has drafted an excellent bill. I have

very rarely seen on any contentious bill the opposition only have one amendment. I do appreciate them taking the time to bring that amendment forward, but clearly there's not much else to say on the bill if they only have one amendment when it came to this important piece of legislation, Mr. Speaker.

The reality is that we have mechanisms within this Chamber to be able to keep the pace going through the House. House leaders often negotiate speaking times. We use critics to speak to certain things. We use ministers to speak to certain things. We limit certain members from being able to speak to be able to keep the pace going through the House, Mr. Speaker. If we did not do that, we would end up in situations where we would only pass two or three pieces of legislations in a sitting, something that is unacceptable to Albertans. There are also two other mechanisms: one, which I am using today, is time allocation, and second is a standing order where we can move the previous question. These are all tools that are used to be able to keep legislation moving through the Chamber.

I do encourage members to utilize the remaining time on Bill 22 to make sure that we have a good discussion and ultimately are able to get this legislation out of the House in a way that is good for Albertans, Mr. Speaker. With that, I ask all of my colleagues to support this important piece of legislation.

The Speaker: Hon. members, the Government House Leader has moved Government Motion 37. Is there anyone in the opposition that would like to respond? The hon. the Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Ms Ganley: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I think the conversation that we're having is a bit not on point. I think that when the Government House Leader rises to say that this bill has had more debate than any bill in the House – this is a bill that was introduced on Monday. We are speaking today, Thursday. In fact, that's less than three complete days that this bill has been in the public. I hasten to remind the members that when we talk about the amount of debate that a bill has had, it's not really just about us. It isn't just about us. It's about the public. It's about the public's ability to engage with the bill. It's about the public's ability to understand what's happened. It's about the media's ability to ask questions about the bill. It's about our ability to have an actual dialogue back and forth.

9:10

Mr. Speaker, the Government House Leader also references the fact that we didn't raise a sufficient number of amendments. I mean, this bill is no good from beginning to end. How are you supposed to amend a bill that removes pension rights from people, that fires an Election Commissioner in the middle of an active investigation?

On that note, this sort of long diatribe about the fact that the investigation will continue – you know, if we read a story about another country and we heard that the king in that country was discontinuing an investigation but he was only discontinuing it so that he could allow it to continue at his discretion, how would we respond to that? This idea that at the government's discretion the investigation can be allowed to continue: well, that's the entire problem. That's the point, that we are all supposed to be subject to the same laws.

Those laws are meant to be investigated and enforced by independent branches. Mr. Speaker, we have heard the hon. Minister of Justice rise in this House how many times and say that he has no impact at all on the Crown prosecution service, that he has no impact at all on the police, that those investigations need to be completely independent. Apparently, the same does not go for this particular investigation. The idea that it's impossible for the

minister to impact Crown policy, that it's impossible for the minister to name the special prosecutor who is involved in the investigation of these same charges or this same matter under RCMP investigation, while meanwhile the government is able to come in and remove the Election Commissioner in the middle of an investigation: I think that that's absurd.

I think the idea that we have debated this for too long or it has had too much time – we're talking, Mr. Speaker, about the fundamental underpinnings of our democracy. We are talking about a person whose job it is to investigate whether or not the democratic rules we have all collectively selected to govern ourselves ought to be enforced. The question we're having here isn't about how things should be enforced; it's whether those rules ought to be enforced at all. I think that the public should be deeply concerned about that, and I think that they deserve time to respond to that.

This is an enormous piece of omnibus legislation. I can remember, Mr. Speaker, several members from the then opposition, now government, who used to complain when we put two related statutes together, the labour code and the Employment Standards Code. Both deal with the same thing, employer-employee relations, in different areas, whether unionized or non-unionized areas, and the now government members, then opposition members, were incredibly up in arms about that. This amends far more than just two statutes, so I think the idea that we've had sufficient debate – we're still finding things in this bill.

You know, certainly one of the other things that's in this bill is the ability of two political parties to merge. That wasn't an ability that existed before, and what this essentially does is to allow the United Conservative Party access to funds donated to the former Wildrose Party and the former Progressive Conservative Party. Honestly, Mr. Speaker, seeing the way the United Conservative Party is now behaving, seeing the return to Tory land, I feel like there are at least a few people who donated to the old Wildrose Party who wouldn't be really happy to have their money transferred over.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I would urge all members to vote against this motion.

[The voice vote indicated that Government Motion 37 carried]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 9:14 a.m.]

[Fifteen minutes having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

[The Speaker in the chair]

For the motion:

Allard	Long	Schow
Armstrong-Homeniuk	McIver	Schweitzer
Copping	Neudorf	Shandro
Getson	Nicolaides	Stephan
Goodridge	Nixon, Jeremy	Toews
Guthrie	Panda	Turton
Hanson	Reid	van Dijken
Hunter	Rutherford	Walker
Jones	Savage	Yao
LaGrange	Sawhney	Yaseen
Loewen		

9:30

Against the motion:

Carson	Hoffman	Sabir
Eggen	Pancholi	Schmidt
Ganley	Phillips	Sigurdson, L.

Totals: For – 31 Against – 9

[Government Motion 37 carried]

Government Bills and Orders
Third Reading
(continued)

Bill 22
Reform of Agencies, Boards and Commissions and
Government Enterprises Act, 2019

[Adjourned debate November 21: Mr. Jason Nixon]

The Speaker: Hon. members, we're at third reading of Bill 22, and I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora has risen.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I want to take a few minutes just to counter some of the things that the Government House Leader said very recently. One, he said that this bill has had more time given to it than any other bill. Well, again, it was introduced Monday late afternoon, and here we are, Thursday morning. The government has brought in time allocation, so around about 59 minutes from now they expect to be able to ram this through.

The Premier has not addressed this bill even once in this place, and I think that that is shameful. I think that if you want to bring forward a bill to fire the guy who's investing fraud, forgery, and bribery in your own party, you should at least stand in this place and defend that, but the Premier has refused to stand in this place and speak to this bill in any way or fashion. I think that if the Prime Minister would have done that in the SNC-Lavalin case and then fired the investigator in the middle of the case, there would have been even more outrage than Canadians rightfully expressed.

I think that when the House leader talks about economies of scale at the same time his Premier is talking about pulling out of the CPP, it definitely seems to be an attempt to speak out of both sides of the mouth at the same time. You know, the CPP isn't good enough for the Premier. The Premier thinks that we need to create our own Alberta-based pension. Then here we have teachers, who've had their own pension, and they've had joint governance. They've had the ability to make decisions about their own money, their own future, and their own contributions since 1939, and here we're going to tear that all up in less than four days. I think it smacks of hypocrisy.

I think that that definitely doesn't reflect the things that I hear when I'm talking to folks in Edmonton-Glenora. They want fair, respectful, transparent government. They want a government that respects law enforcement, doesn't fire them in the middle of an investigation and certainly one where there are 800 open files and more than \$200,000 in fines levied against the party that is indeed bringing forward this legislation to fire the law enforcement that's been tasked with enforcing fair elections in this province.

I also have to say that the folks that I've talked to in regard to ATRF and this heavy-handed attempt to take away any kind of say that teachers have over their own pensions and other public service workers as well, of course, definitely don't feel that this has been well canvassed or that it reflects their values or that it reflects anything that was campaigned for in the very recent election, an election where a lot of people said: "Oh, don't worry. It's fear and smear from the NDP. Nothing to worry about here."

I'll tell you who else doesn't think this is fair or well canvassed, Michael O'Neill. You may not have had a chance to meet him. He's booked four days to protest on the front steps of the Leg. He comes to us from Myrnam, Alberta, not necessarily known as the socialist

democracy of the north, but he certainly begs this government and all members of this Assembly to respect him, to respect his pension, and to give him at least due consideration. He booked four days to protest because he assumed that there would be at least four days of debate, but here we are, ramming this through in such an expeditious fashion that totally disrespects the will of folks who own those pensions.

As well, I would have expected – you know, a party that likes to talk tough on crime sure seems very eager to fire the people who are tasked with actually investigating those crimes and making sure that people are held to account and that we have fair and open elections in this province. I would say that not only is this disrespectful to future democracies in this province; I think it's disrespectful of everyone's current mandate as well. The fact that here we are, more than \$200,000 in fines, and we're firing the person who's tasked with upholding that law: I think it's blatant disrespect to every democracy in the developed world, and I think it also is disrespectful to our own duty and responsibility.

Certainly, when the Speaker, multiple times a day, reminds us through the prayer of the day that we have an obligation not to do things that are self-interested, to work to improve the condition for all and at the same time we're firing somebody whose very task it is to ensure fairness, I think that that is only self-serving. I think it's incredibly disrespectful, and I think it speaks to the arrogance that has evolved so quickly. Somebody – they're a math teacher – said to me: you know, when you add two fractions, which we saw through two previous parties, you have to have a common denominator. It seems that the lowest common denominator has been achieved here, one where we have extreme arrogance in terms of thinking that we're above law enforcement, and we also are attacking important public services and those who provide them, like the folks who are very rightfully worried about their pensions.

The last thing I want to say on this matter. Folks who were here in the 2015 Assembly have heard me talk about my dad and how he was a principal in northern Alberta and how frustrated he was when he was forced to lay off so many staff, forced to cut so many services in his school, and then also forced to take a rollback. The part I didn't mention is that in his dying days he talked about how that rollback that was forced upon him not only attacked his earnings for those years; it attacked his pension, and it also impacted what he was able to leave my mom because, of course, she would receive his pension after he died. That very pension was attacked through changes to his compensation, and now that very pension is being attacked through this change to the ATRF. I think it's shameful. It's incredibly disrespectful.

I think that every child in this province who should be able to look at their parents and think that they are engaged in the public service and that the public and the government, as the representatives of that public, respect the work that their parents do – I think that this is not what any person in this Assembly ran to do, and if they did, I think that they should give their head a shake because I think that this definitely isn't what they canvassed on at the doors when they were asking to be the representatives of the public and to work for all of those teachers, to work for all of those students, to work for every single person who lives in our individual ridings.

That's what I have to say about that. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Hon. members, are there others wishing to join the debate? This would be on the main bill, not on 29(a)(a) as it's not available. The hon. Member for Cardston-Siksika.

Mr. Schow: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the opportunity to rise and speak on Bill 22, a bill that I wholeheartedly support, the Reform of Agencies, Boards and Commissions and Government Enterprises Act, 2019. I have sat in this Chamber and listened to quite a bit of debate. You know, it's been robust. I think it's been a good opportunity to hear what other members of this Chamber think of this piece of legislation, a good piece of legislation, in my opinion, but there have been a couple of things that I do take a little bit of issue with, and I wanted to address that in my remarks. I did speak on this in second reading, but having heard more, I think that there's more to respond to.

The first was a comment made by the Member for Calgary-Mountain View regarding a king, a king who would ultimately fire one investigator and control the investigation under his own purview. I don't think that that is an accurate description of what has happened here in the slightest. The reality here is that the office of the Election Commissioner has been moved under the purview of the Chief Electoral Officer. These investigations are going to continue, which, I believe, is the most important point here, the fact that these investigations will continue.

9:40

What I found most frustrating, though, was the insinuation by the Member for Calgary-Mountain View that now that things will be moved into the purview of the Chief Electoral Officer if this bill passes – I would hate to presume the outcome of a vote – somehow that means that the Chief Electoral Officer, Mr. Glen Resler, operates at the discretion of the Premier or Executive Council. How arrogant is that, for the Member for Calgary-Mountain View to suggest that we control what Mr. Resler does? His is an independent office, and one that must be respected and not passed around this Chamber like a political football. I would caution the Member for Calgary-Mountain View about that.

Also, something that the Member for Edmonton-Glenora had mentioned in her remarks here was that the Premier has yet to speak on this. Well, the reality is that our hon. Premier is currently in Texas doing what the previous . . .

Mr. Eggen: Point of order.

Point of Order Referring to the Absence of Members

Mr. Schow: I do retract that. I recognize that that was out of order, and I apologize.

The Speaker: You might wait until I call the point of order, but you are correct. Referring to the presence or the absence of a member would be a point of order, and I appreciate your apology.

Mr. Schow: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I apologize for that point.

Debate Continued

Mr. Schow: Our Premier is doing what the previous government failed to do, which was to attract investment to this province. Investment was driven away by the billions of dollars, Mr. Speaker, over the last four years, and we are now putting measures in place to ensure that the message is sent across the country, across the world that we are indeed open for business. But that's not just going to happen itself. The Premier has made many visits across different provinces, different countries, and his job is to ensure that we can have a prosperous province here, that people recognize that Alberta has a distinct advantage, especially with some of the new pieces of legislation that are being passed. So it is a bit ironic that the hon.

member opposite would say something like that because we do believe that what the Premier is doing is well within the job description that Albertans gave him on April 16.

But the truth here is that this bill is an attempt to make government lean, to make government operate more efficiently, and to improve economies of scale. Currently AIMCo manages \$110 billion. The ATRF moving into AIMCo has no impact – no impact – on teachers' pensions. I don't know how many times that's been repeated in this Chamber, but that is the reality there. The second thing is that there is no impact on the ATRF board's control over said pensions. The board still sets the investments. I would see this as a net positive because we are improving economies of scale. The same thing goes with WCB and AHS moving into long-term investments, moving into AIMCo: \$10.7 billion with WCB, and \$2.3 billion with AHS. The discretion over the funds has not and will not change. These moves alone, Mr. Speaker, add an extra \$30 billion to AIMCo.

Now, the member opposite also talked about moving Alberta pensions back here and doing an Alberta pension plan. I would see that, again, as a positive move. One, it does send a message that Alberta is certainly looking to have more control over the money within its jurisdiction. But so does – that brings back \$40 billion into AIMCo's investment, which again improves economies of scale, gives AIMCo more ability to invest.

I don't try to venture into trying to understand the logic of the members opposite, and I'm not looking to venture into personal attacks because that's not appropriate in this Chamber. But I don't know where the financial literacy side comes into this on the opposite side.

We've also had a move to move the Alberta Sport Connection programs into the ministry, dissolve Alberta Historical Resources Foundation, the historical resources fund. The mental health review panel is moving from four to three members. We dissolved the Alberta Competitiveness Council and repealed the Alberta Competitiveness Act. Like, the list goes on and on and on here of moves that this government is making to achieve its ultimate goal of becoming more lean. It's what Albertans asked us to do. It's what our boss has asked us to do. Anybody in this Chamber on this side of the House who listens to their constituents would know that when you knock on those doors, when you talk to your constituents, when you read the correspondence, which we do, the message continues to come in, floods in: please continue along the path of restoring Alberta's advantage, restoring Alberta to a province that is a beacon of hope and opportunity. What this means for Albertans is that we are again returning to a place that they can be proud of, a place that I can be proud of.

Now, I love this province. It is a place that my parents grew up in. It's a place my grandparents grew up in and their parents before them. There is a lot riding on what we are doing here, and that's why I believe so strongly that we are on the right path. The path that we were moving on under the previous government I argue was not the correct one. I argue that there was mismanagement of the province's finances, and I believe that we are now stuck in a situation where we have to make some difficult decisions.

Mr. Speaker, I don't intend to take up a lot of time, but I did want to quickly respond to comments from the Member for Edmonton-Glenora and the Member for Calgary-Mountain View. I look forward to further debate.

The Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available. Under 29(2)(a), the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. Schmidt: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure for me to be able to respond to some of the statements that the Member for

Cardston-Siksika made and some of the things that have been raised in debate in third reading of this bill.

Certainly, what I've heard from all members who have spoken so far is that we've had a lot of correspondence from our constituents about this piece of legislation. Indeed, our office in Edmonton-Gold Bar has been flooded with e-mails from constituents, not just my own but also of the members opposite. They've made it quite clear in their e-mails to my office that members opposite are not listening to their own constituents, which is shameful.

You know, I've had people like David and Rosemarie and Gerry and Dorothy and Val write to us about the undemocratic actions of this government and express deep concern about the move to take teachers' pensions away from teachers and move them into AIMCo. Honestly, Mr. Speaker, in the four and a half years that I've been elected, I've had more letters on this particular piece of legislation than anything else that has gone on in provincial or federal politics over the last four and a half years, which is remarkable.

What's also remarkable, Mr. Speaker, is who hasn't written to my office. You know who hasn't written to my office? The CEO of Suncor, the billionaire owner of Husky Energy, Cenovus, EnCana. None of the CEOs or shareholders of those companies have written to my office. They're more than happy to sit back and let the most antidemocratic and corrupt government consolidate power with this legislation because they know that the gravy train is going to keep on rolling. They've been given a \$4.7 billion corporate giveaway, they've been given tax relief at the municipal level, they've got a \$30 million propaganda machine that's being run out of the Energy minister's office and the environment minister's office, and they keep asking for more. Now they want CN Rail workers to be forced back to work so that the oil can keep on flowing and their profits can keep on rolling in while CN workers struggle for the right to fair wages and safe working conditions. Of course big business in Alberta is not going to raise a voice. They're not going to lift a finger to do anything to prevent this government from consolidating power because they have billions and billions of dollars at stake.

Mr. Panda: They were your friends until yesterday.

Mr. Schmidt: The member for wherever the hell he's from, the Minister of Infrastructure . . .

The Speaker: Hon. member, we are very familiar with what is and what isn't parliamentary language inside the Chamber, and I think that we can apologize and withdraw for the use of unparliamentary language.

9:50

Mr. Schmidt: Absolutely, Mr. Speaker. I apologize for not remembering the constituency that the Minister of Infrastructure represents and using unparliamentary language to express that. But I am incredibly passionate – and so are the people of Alberta – about what's going on here today.

You know, there was a recent poll out, released earlier in November, that said that 70 per cent of Albertans think that big corporations have way too much power in this province – and that was before this bill was introduced – and now that power is being consolidated in the hands of this group, who dare to call themselves a government. They've consolidated power and moved so quickly that Vladimir Putin would blush at the gall that these people have in crushing democracy.

You know, back to the issue of corporate power, it's not just about crushing the Election Commissioner's investigation into their potentially fraudulent activities in the UCP leadership race. It's also about getting their greasy, fat little fingers on teachers' pensions and using that money to prop up an oil industry that can't get

investment from anywhere else. The central bank of Sweden won't invest in it, right?

Anyway, Mr. Speaker, I oppose this legislation and everything that the members opposite have said about it to date.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

I would like to just be clear. I have no concern with anyone's passion, and I encourage passion inside the Chamber. I only ask that we do it through the use of parliamentary language. We all know that that swath is very wide, as we just saw in your remarks.

We are on the main bill, Bill 22. I see the hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Ms Ganley: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to move an amendment to this bill, and I will await its arrival.

The Speaker: Hon. members, this amendment will be referred to as HA1.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Ms Ganley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I move that the motion for third reading of Bill 22, Reform of Agencies, Boards and Commissions and Government Enterprises Act, 2019, be amended by deleting the words after "that" and substituting the following: "Bill 22, Reform of Agencies, Boards and Commissions and Government Enterprises Act, 2019, be not now read a third time but be read a third time this day six months hence." This, Mr. Speaker, as you will be familiar, is commonly known as a hoist. The hope is to pitch this bill forward into the future.

Mr. Speaker, I think that if ever there has been a bill that could use some additional time to contemplate, it is this. We have heard repeatedly from members of the government benches how much time there has been to debate this. I point out again that this was introduced Monday afternoon. We are now at almost 10 o'clock on Thursday morning. In terms of enormous lengths of time, I feel that if your employer were to tell you to analyze and speak to and get a public debate going on 80 pages worth of material in less than 72 hours, normally you would find that a bit onerous.

I really think that the time for debate of this has been insufficient, and I think that the time for the public to engage in this has been insufficient. That is the main thing. It is the public here that has been affronted. Certainly, we in the opposition are offended by this action, absolutely, but it is the public whose rights are ultimately being undermined in this case. It is the public who has that concern in ensuring that each and every member of our society is held subject to the same laws and that those laws are investigated fairly, that they are investigated impartially, and that they are investigated in the absence of political interference. That is a basic principle of our system.

Even more so, this is a person who's investigating offences against our democratic principles. So it's not just the rule of law; it's actually democracy itself that has been called into question here. I think the public has a really sincere interest in this. As members of the public, we pride ourselves on the fact that we are governed democratically. If we allow it to be the case that that democracy can essentially be for sale, that big money can come in and can purchase power and voice in this place – and not just purchase democratic power but purchase democratic power that then puts it above the rule of law, that then puts it in a position to undermine the very laws that are in place to protect our democracy – I think that's just incredible.

Mr. Speaker, there are so many things that are wrong with this bill. Opting out people who are part-time – and we know Conservatives are famous for leaving average working people with part-time, tenuous work so that they are not in a position to speak

up for themselves, so that they are not in a position to be able to feed their families, so that all of their energy is dedicated to meeting their basic needs – this is another step along that way. They are taking control of people's pensions. This is people's life savings, that they've worked for. They're relying on those pensions.

There is so much that is wrong with this bill, but primarily I think the thing that I would say is most wrong with it is that fundamentally it is an attack on justice, democracy, and the rule of law.

With that, I will end my comments.

The Speaker: Hon. members, Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available. Seeing none, on the bill, the hon. Member for Lethbridge-West.

Ms Phillips: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise to speak against Bill 22. On this historic day we have the first time ever . . .

The Speaker: My sincerest apologies. It's on the amendment, not on the bill. I'm sure that you don't mind. I just wanted to make sure that we're all talking about the same thing.

Ms Phillips: Thank you. That was part of the confusion but, I'm sure, not all of it. Mostly mine, Mr. Speaker.

It's a pleasure to rise on this historic day. This bill needs to be stopped. Certainly, this is one of the fastest bills to ever move through the Alberta Legislature. Also, today we're hearing, down south in impeachment hearings, about corruption and obstruction of justice. Today the Israeli Prime Minister, Benjamin Netanyahu, will be charged with bribery, the first time in Israeli history. So we have examples of places where justice has been obstructed, where power has been abused, where democratic norms have been subverted, and on this day I rise in Alberta to provide comments on exactly the same thing.

Now, the pink slips are raining down, particularly in Calgary, where 250 people have lost their jobs at the University of Calgary, with 300 layoffs at the Calgary board of education, 125 at Alberta Innovates. This is on top of many private-sector layoffs. People are losing their livelihoods right before Christmas. What happens is that this government then moves forward with a cover-up. No one voted for this. They didn't vote for the pink slips. They didn't vote for the cover-up, either, of the investigations that are ongoing.

Now, Mr. Speaker, I've spent a lot of time knocking on doors in Lethbridge. I'm quite certain that nobody in Lethbridge, in that entire city, voted for a cover-up. They didn't vote for fraud. People in Lethbridge didn't vote for self-dealing arrogance or obstruction of justice. People in Lethbridge did not vote for making excuses or trying to cover up bribery, forgery, abuse of power, entitlement, destruction of democratic norms. They did not vote for anyone to ally themselves with a Premier who has been variously now described as a strongman and tone deaf on democratic norms. They did not vote for \$211,000 worth of fines for breaking elections laws. They didn't vote for rigging elections. They didn't vote for people that would make laws that would only benefit themselves. I know that what I am doing here today on this historic day is voting against those kinds of abuses of power.

10:00

It is regrettable that not everyone in this House shares that commitment to democracy. It's actually not that hard. There are basic rule of law principles that are being violated here by this government's actions and by this bill. This is to say nothing of the attack on pensions. This is to say nothing of taking away the power of working people to decide how their retirement security is going to be invested. This is to say nothing of the 741 e-mails that I have,

at last checking, received from constituents who are worried about their retirement security and their own savings, the future of their own money.

Mr. Speaker, I am dismayed that this government and these government members, these backbench members, are voting for things that no one should endorse. I am dismayed at the principles at work here and at the willingness to sell out those basic principles that brought us to this Chamber in the first place. It is profoundly disappointing on a personal level that some members of this Chamber – I thought they were better than this, and that is disappointing to me. We will continue to work for people to uphold the rule of law, to advocate for basic democratic norms, to ensure that obstruction of justice does not go unchallenged because ultimately that's what the people from Lethbridge who sent me here asked me to do, and that's what all Albertans have asked every single UCP MLA to do.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Hon. members, Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available. Anyone else wishing to speak to 29(2)(a)?

On the amendment, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Whitemud.

Ms Pancholi: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise today to speak because despite the assurances that have been made repeatedly by the Government House Leader that there has been plenty of time for debate, this is actually my first opportunity to stand to speak to Bill 22, and we're already running out the clock on that. The reason it's my first time is not – I've been in the House every single day, all day, all night Monday night, all day Tuesday, all day Wednesday, but guess what? This government scheduled debate of Bill 22 for the dead of night on the two nights, yeah, when I was not scheduled to work. And guess what? This is not a fulsome debate. This is not a lot of time to discuss something that goes to the very heart of our democratic institutions. This is absolutely an intention to stifle debate. We've seen this government do it over and over again, but now we're seeing them do it on a bill that goes to the heart of our democratic institutions and chips away at it. Actually, more than chips away at it; cuts at it.

I'm actually going to take this time and say that I'm pleased to be able to speak because I have an obligation to speak on behalf of my constituents and on behalf of the numerous Albertans who have flooded my constituency office with outrage with respect to Bill 22. This bill was introduced Monday afternoon. In less than 48 hours I had over 400 e-mails alone, not to count letters that have been coming in and phone calls but e-mails alone, over 400 from constituents who are outraged about Bill 22. I have an obligation to stand right now even though the government is doing their best to stifle opportunity for debate, to stifle the opportunity for Albertans to be heard in this Chamber.

[Mr. Hanson in the chair]

I'm taking that opportunity to say that I am incredibly disappointed and disheartened. I am a new member to this Assembly, and when I decided to run for office, it was because I profoundly believed in the institution of democracy. I believed that we had a system, that we had checks and balances in place to make sure that the voices of all Albertans could be heard. I remember in the first session watching the government caucus and particularly the Premier swing around their big mandate based on their platform because they were bringing in legislation. Well, of course, I don't agree with what was in their platform because I didn't run for the UCP. I ran for a party that has principles. While they swung that big mandate around, we had to say: "Okay. You know what? That was in your platform. You're bringing in legislation to bring in your

platform. All right. We don't agree with it, but that is what has happened." However, we have now far deviated from that platform.

Albertans did not vote for a cover-up of an investigation into this Premier and into this caucus and into this party. I certainly don't think that the constituents for all of the members across the way in the government – all of their constituents, did they vote for a cover-up? I don't think they did. I'm actually quite surprised. I should actually say that I'm quite disappointed to see how few government members are actually there to represent their constituents, to actually stand up and say: "You know what? I have a problem with this. I have a problem with supporting a bill that is going to terminate the Election Commissioner who is there and is actively investigating 800 complaints into violations of the Election Act." Eight hundred.

[The Speaker in the chair]

Let's be clear. A significant amount of that so far, at least based on the fines that have been levied, are with respect to this Premier's leadership race. What is the first thing that this government does? We actually talked about it. We actually mentioned it in spring session. We said: how long – how long – until this Premier fires the Election Commissioner? Oh, and everybody stood up on the government side: fear and smear, fearmongering; it's outrageous. Of course, they'd never do that. Of course, they never did it. Guess what? They did it.

Not only did they do it, but the Premier has not had the courage to stand up and defend why he's done it. In fact, what he's had is the House leader – quite frankly, this morning I was quite impressed by how sober and quiet the House leader was when defending Bill 22 because normally when he stands up in the House, particularly in the evenings, he's a lot more spirited. But this morning he was very sober and calm and gave his presentation about why he believed this was just an administrative change, just going to combine two bodies into one, and it'll save the government \$220,000 approximately. That's according to the Finance minister, which is interesting because they didn't seem to have a problem throwing around \$16,000 on pancake plane parties or \$18,000 on secret missions to the U.K. Oh, but \$200,000: that's enough to justify gutting our democracy. So it's interesting that the Premier hasn't had the courage to stand up and say that in this House; however, he's having his members do that for them.

Well, all I can say is that I am standing up here to defend democracy and to stand up for what I've been hearing not only my constituents but from what I know that constituents across Alberta have been saying, which is that to fire an Election Commissioner who is in the middle of investigating and has already levied hundreds of thousands of dollars of fines against other people who were involved with the UCP leadership race is outrageous. To fire that investigator and to do it with such speed, to do it with such force, to invoke closure, to close debate, and to force it through in less than three days after the bill was introduced, well, that suggests to me that this government is in a rush to hide something. Guess what? They're not fooling Albertans. Based on my inbox, based on what I'm seeing across social media, across the institutional media, a media who, actually, by the way, have typically been very supportive of the government caucus, they're all saying: what is the rush to hide?

Well, I guess, if the government gets their way, which they will because they have their numbers and they're forcing this through, we'll never know what they have to hide. That to me is an affront to democracy. It's an affront to why we are here today, and every single member in this Assembly that is going to vote in favour of Bill 22 should be ashamed of themselves. They should be ashamed

that they are not standing up for their constituents, who did not vote for this.

I'm glad that I had an opportunity to speak because the government has sure done its hardest and its best to deprive the opportunity for Albertans and the opposition to speak on this. I'm glad I had the moment to do it here. I think it's absolutely outrageous that we even have to have this debate. I think the government has really done their best to really undermine the trust of Albertans in them, and it will be them who will have to pay the price for that the next time there's an election.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Hon members, Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available. Is there anyone wishing to add a brief question or comment?

Seeing none, on the amendment, is there anyone else that would like to speak? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

Ms Sigurdson: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to speak on this amendment to Bill 22. Certainly, I'm standing in favour of it. Like my hon. colleagues on this side of the House, certainly – you know, there is a significant issue with Bill 22. We know that for government to operate in a fair and just manner, there are three branches of government. There is the executive, the legislative, and the judicial, and currently this bill is actually interfering with that process that creates fairness and justice in our system. The executive branch is really messing up with the legislative branch here, very heavy-handedly moving in to terminate the Election Commissioner.

You know, one of the reasons that I ran politically was because I was disheartened by some of the things that were happening and the decisions that, you know, different political leaders were making, and I wanted this system to be respected, as you do, Mr. Speaker, to make sure that the people who are governing our province are doing so in a fair and just way, that our systems are respected, that there's accountability, that the rule of law is being respected, that there is citizen participation. These are all sort of tenets of a democracy.

10:10

Like many members, sometimes when I knock on the door of a constituent, they tell me: "I'm not voting." They tell me: "I'm not voting." They say: "Oh, you know, everybody is interested in their own interests, and I don't trust that system. What's the point? It doesn't matter what I say." I'm always wanting to encourage them and convince them that: "No, no. It's so important for you to be involved, to have your voice heard. Each Albertan who's eligible to vote, each has equal power to do that." But you know what? When this kind of stuff happens, it's shaky ground I'm standing on because people will point to this, and they'll say: "Come on. Look what happened just now. Look what happened. The Election Commissioner was doing an investigation into the leadership of the UCP, and they are firing him through legislation."

I have very shaky ground to stand on when, you know, our government is doing this kind of disrespectful action that interferes with the different branches of government. Albertans have the right to be outraged, really, by this. It's not okay what this government is doing. I know they have argued: "Oh, it's just administrative. It's not a big deal. It's up to the CEO of Elections Alberta, who can just hire this fellow back." I mean, come on. We're not so naive to see that that's really happening. If that was true, then why go through this whole process? I mean, the economic issues: I think the \$200,000 a year that will be saved is like a drop in the bucket. There must be another reason.

Certainly, we're hearing from, you know, many students or professors of politics that there must be an underlying reason. Certainly, Duane Bratt, a political scientist from Mount Royal University, is saying that it's a cover-up; it's black and white. Keith Gerein, the journalist for the *Edmonton Journal* – it was this morning that I read his column – said: hey; the UCP is using up its political capital pretty quickly.

I mean, the election wasn't that long ago, and there have been many egregious things that have happened: chartering a plane with Conservative Premiers and their wives, sending staff over to the U.K. on the taxpayers' dime. I mean, these are all things that certainly are not fair or just, and Albertans have the right to be outraged. The government, frankly, should be listening to them instead of, first of all, giving notice of closure and then denying that: "Oh, no, no. We've already debated it four times. We didn't do that." But it's so clear that they had a plan in place so that they could rush this bill through. It's just disingenuous to sort of suggest that having done that, they were open to debate. The government is not open to debate on this. They're going to push it through in whatever way they possibly can. Certainly, on this side of the House we are extremely concerned about that because we see this as just another aspect of not respecting our democratic process here, and it's not okay.

This bill amends or alters 31 statutes. I mean, this is the biggest piece of it, the firing of the Election Commissioner, but of course, we know of moving the Alberta teachers' retirement fund over to AIMCo. That doesn't even fit with Conservative principles. What is the political expedience there? It isn't about, certainly, fairness at all. The fact of self-determination: teachers have had their own pension plan, they've had excellent returns, they've managed it themselves, and then arbitrarily the government just says: oh, we're moving it over here. I don't know. My understanding of Conservatives is they want to not muck around in things so much. Let things run as they do. It's certainly a pretty heavy hand of government that is taking the Alberta teachers' retirement fund and moving it over to AIMCo. I mean, I don't know. If I was sitting on that side of the House, I would really be wondering: what's the rationale for that? It certainly doesn't seem to fit with what I understand of Conservative principles, so there is some political expedience that's going on here and, I feel like, an erosion of values, really, on the government side.

Those two aspects of this bill are certainly very egregious, and our side of the House stands very much against them. Certainly, we stand very strongly with teachers, that they have the right to manage their own retirement funds. Certainly, they've done that very well for many years.

With making those two strong points, I will now take my seat. Thank you.

The Speaker: Hon. members, Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available. Is there anyone wishing to add a brief question or comment?

Seeing none, is there anyone else wishing to speak to the amendment? The hon. Member for Calgary-McCall.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to speak to the third reading of Bill 22. Let me start by saying that it's a defining moment for this Legislature and for this province. The reason I'm saying this – and we have been saying it, Albertans have been saying it, it's everywhere – is that nobody believes that the change government is suggesting, the firing of the Election Commissioner – the government wants us to believe it is just a simple administrative consolidation. Nobody is buying it, and there are very clear reasons that everyone should be able to understand why they are not buying that.

A reason for that is that this very Election Commissioner is investigating somewhere around 800 cases. Among those, there is one case that relates to this governing party, its leadership in 2017. That's a matter of public record. It's also a matter of public record that from this governing party, if I start from one corner, the Minister of Justice has been reached out to by law enforcement in relation to this investigation, the Minister of Infrastructure has been reached out to by law enforcement in relation to this investigation, the minister of culture and status of women has been reached out to in relation to this investigation, the Minister of Seniors and Housing has been reached out to in relation to this investigation, and the MLA for Calgary-East has been reached out to in relation to this investigation. No one, even from that side, can deny that there is an investigation that's ongoing.

In a democratic society, when there is some investigation that's ongoing, we don't use and abuse power to interfere with that investigation. That's rule of law, and that's fundamental to our democracy. What we are seeing in this bill is that that fundamental principle of rule of law has been attacked, and our democracy has been attacked. Every member of this House, on both sides, should take a moment and think about how they will go down, how their stance on this bill will go down in history. Will you be standing on the side of this bill, that is attacking rule of law, that is attacking democracy?

10:20

That is just an attempt to get rid of the commissioner who is investigating some of the things that your party may be involved in. There may be some consequences for the governing party. That's how you want to be remembered? It's a serious obligation. The bill was just introduced Monday, last Monday.

Ms Hoffman: This Monday. Yeah.

Mr. Sabir: This Monday.

If nothing else, take some time. Go to your constituencies over the weekend and ask Albertans what they think about it. Ask the people who you represent. Ask them whether they want you to stand for this cover-up or whether they want you to stand with democracy and the rule of law. You have not consulted anyone on this. The public is skeptical of the motives behind this bill.

Anybody who knows that the Election Commissioner was investigating the UCP leadership, they have questions about it, whether it's real or perceived. I think for the sake of rule of law, for the sake of democracy, you can leave this aside and bring the other 30 changes that you're bringing through this legislation. Once that investigation is concluded – I guess somebody may buy that, that you're now consolidating their office, but so far I have not met a single person who thinks that this is an administrative consolidation. Political scientists, academia, political commentators, columnists, journalists, everybody. They're saying one thing, that it's a cover-up, that it's an attempt to stop the investigation into the UCP leadership race.

Many of you have spoken on this bill. Not a single person touched on this investigation. Acknowledge there is an investigation that involves your members, people from your front bench. Acknowledge that. It's out there. It's public record and has been confirmed many times. Acknowledge that it's an ongoing investigation and then tell the public that you're firing that commissioner who is in charge of that investigation and see whether they buy your argument or not.

It's clearly an attack on our democracy, on our institutions, on our principles like rule of law, and on every one of us. If government is doing it, it's the obligation of private members on

that side as well to think about it. They were elected to represent Albertans. We were all elected to represent our constituents, not the party. Especially when you all know that there is an investigation and your party is implicated in it and that's the commissioner who is investigating it, firing that commissioner doesn't send a good message for anyone in this province, in this country.

This is a serious, serious issue. Everyone in this Chamber has a responsibility to rise above the party lines and think about the consequences for this House, for the rule of law, for our democracy, for our independent officers. It will erode public confidence in our institution of democracy, that you can win an election, use your majority, abuse your power, and do things that otherwise would not be allowed in any democratic society.

I urge all members of this House to vote down this piece of legislation and vote against the firing of the Election Commissioner, who is investigating your party. That's the least you can do for democracy and for the rule of law.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Hon. members, Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available. Is there anyone wishing to bring a brief question or comment?

Seeing none, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora on the amendment.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. For everyone's awareness we are considering an amendment to Bill 22, the bill that has been referred to as a bill to cover up investigations and charges related to fraud, forgery, and bribery in the UCP, just to be clear, the party, specifically. More than \$200,000 in fines have been levied, members of this very House have been under investigation, and there are significant concerns that the Premier has failed to even stand in this House and defend this piece of legislation.

The amendment here is that it be amended by essentially referring this to come back to the House six months from now to give everyone the time to prove that this isn't about shutting down investigations, that this isn't about firing law enforcement in the middle of their investigations. Law enforcement, you know, is supposed to be about making sure that we uphold the law, that we have a place that enforces democracy in all of our pillars that make us proud to be Canadian and to live in a democratic society, one where people who are elected don't have the ability to act as though they are above the law, that we have a law that is fair and just for all. I am deeply concerned that what we have here is a government that continues to push forward with their own interests, their own self-interests as the guiding force.

We wrote to the Ethics Commissioner after this bill was introduced. And just to remind everyone again, this bill wasn't introduced until Monday afternoon. The Premier has not stood to defend this legislation in any way in question period, in bill debate in any way. The Premier has failed to defend it. That's why it's only fair that we have the ability to delay this and return six months from now.

We wrote the Ethics Commission about our deep concerns with this legislation, the fact that there are people in this House that plan on voting on it, and the commissioner has said that she absolutely does not have sufficient time – she responded to us just a few moments ago – or ability to be able to review this and determine if members of this House rightfully deserve to be able to vote on this bill or not. The letter is here, Mr. Speaker. I'll be happy to table it at a time that I am able to. The Ethics Commissioner said that she requires more time, which I think that the only right and fair thing for us to be able to do, then, is to move to adjourn this bill so that we can review the Ethics Commissioner letter and be able to make sure that any member of this House is voting with the proper

authority and support of the Ethics Commissioner before they put themselves in further risk. They've already been under investigation for fraud, forgery, and bribery. They certainly shouldn't be causing the Ethics Commissioner in this place – and that is essentially what she says in this letter.

I move that we adjourn debate, Mr. Speaker.

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

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 10:30 a.m.]

[Fifteen minutes having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

[The Speaker in the chair]

For the motion:

Carson	Hoffman	Shepherd
Dang	Nielsen	Sigurdson, L.
Ganley	Phillips	Sweet
Goehring	Sabir	

Against the motion:

Allard	Hunter	Rutherford
Amery	Issik	Savage
Armstrong-Homeniuk	Jones	Schow
Barnes	Loewen	Stephan
Copping	Long	Toews
Getson	Madu	Toor
Goodridge	McIver	Turton
Gotfried	Neudorf	van Dijken
Guthrie	Nicolaides	Walker
Hanson	Pitt	Yao
Horner	Reid	Yaseen

Totals: For – 11 Against – 33

[Motion to adjourn debate lost]

The Speaker: Pursuant to Government Motion 37 every question necessary for the disposal of Bill 22 will now be put.

[The voice vote indicated that the motion on amendment HA1 lost]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 10:47 a.m.]

[Fifteen minutes having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

[The Speaker in the chair]

For the motion:

Carson	Gray	Sabir
Dach	Hoffman	Shepherd
Dang	Nielsen	Sigurdson, L.
Deol	Phillips	Sweet
Goehring		

Against the motion:

Allard	Jones	Savage
Amery	Loewen	Schow
Armstrong-Homeniuk	Long	Schweitzer
Copping	Madu	Stephan
Getson	McIver	Toews
Goodridge	Neudorf	Toor
Guthrie	Nicolaides	Turton
Hanson	Nixon, Jeremy	van Dijken
Horner	Pitt	Walker
Hunter	Reid	Yao
Issik	Rutherford	Yaseen

Totals: For – 13 Against – 33

[Motion on amendment HA1 lost]

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

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 11:05 a.m.]

[Fifteen minutes having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

For the motion:

Allard	Loewen	Schow
Amery	Long	Schweitzer
Armstrong-Homeniuk	Lovely	Shandro
Copping	McIver	Stephan
Getson	Neudorf	Toews
Goodridge	Nicolaides	Toor
Guthrie	Nixon, Jeremy	Turton
Hanson	Orr	van Dijken
Horner	Reid	Walker
Hunter	Rutherford	Yao
Issik	Savage	Yaseen
Jones		

11:20

Against the motion:

Carson	Gray	Sabir
Dach	Hoffman	Shepherd
Dang	Nielsen	Sigurdson, L.
Deol	Phillips	Sweet
Goehring		

Totals: For – 34 Against – 13

[Motion carried; Bill 22 read a third time]

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Minister of Justice.

Mr. Schweitzer: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I rise to ask for unanimous consent to shorten the division bells to one-minute intervals, including all votes in Committee of the Whole, notwithstanding Standing Order 32(3), for the remainder of the morning sitting.

[Unanimous consent denied]

Government Bills and Orders Committee of the Whole

[Mrs. Pitt in the chair]

The Chair: Hon. members, I would like to call the Committee of the Whole to order.

Bill 24 Appropriation Act, 2019

The Chair: Are there any speakers to the bill? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. Certainly, this continues the frustration that I think many Albertans have been feeling, particularly when it comes to the Appropriation Act and a number of the clauses in it. This budget is a direct attack on the things that the Premier and his entire caucus said they weren't going to be attacking. The Appropriation Act certainly doesn't reflect

what they said, that they were going to maintain or increase education funding.

Just yesterday over a hundred teachers in the Calgary board of education, that's one public school district in one city, received termination notices. Probably like me, Madam Chair, you have spent time on social media hearing from families and hearing from students and hearing from those teachers who are directly impacted about how difficult it is to think about how to finish off this current calendar year knowing that they won't be there to support these kids in the upcoming months. For those parents who are finding out about these teachers being laid off, St. Albert is another example. St. Albert full-day kindergarten is being eliminated, kids partway through their school year being moved into different classrooms with different classmates and different instructors. For anyone who has loved a five-year-old . . . [interjections]

The Chair: Hon. members, could you just turn the volume down on your chit-chat, please, so that the hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora can be heard.

Please proceed.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you so much, Madam Chair. For anyone who knows and has loved a five-year-old or can remember when they were five themselves – I know it's challenging, but some can challenge their memory to go back that far. Starting school that first official year of kindergarten is a scary enough time as it is. You spend a lot of the year trying to develop routines and learn to love learning and just appreciate being at school. I know that for the five-year-olds in my life, their teacher is a big part of that, their teacher and their classmates. That's what determines whether or not they're excited about going to school.

When they have layoffs mid-year, which of course were inevitable because the government chose to bring in their austerity budget mid-year because they were too busy campaigning on the federal election and not wanting to impact outcomes of that election to bring it in prior to the commencement of the school year, which would have been bad enough. If that budget would have been brought forward in June and schools would have been given their targets in June, which normally happens, even the one year – people often go back to: well, the NDP didn't pass a budget until the fall when they were first elected. We were elected around the same time. That is true; we didn't pass a budget until the fall, but what we did do is that we gave schools their targets. We said to schools: "This is how much your per-pupil funding is going to be. This is how much we're going to invest in the class size initiative fund. This is how much we're going to invest in the small schools by necessity grant. From that you can extrapolate and do your best to estimate what your funds will be." We did that so that staff could staff appropriately. In fact, in 2015 it meant many more teachers were hired because, of course, our school districts were growing.

The UCP government, however, decided that they were going to refuse to do that, refuse to bring forward those targets. Instead they would have messaging, and this was referred to often in the House: our messaging has been clear; we are going to fund enrolment growth. That's what was said in this House. As a result, teachers had their contracts either extended or new ones were hired. That's what was done because that's what was said in this place. That's what was said in the House.

Now here we are a few months later, and of course what happened instead is the shell game of the century. All those little pots of money that were hidden underneath these shells got cut. A number of grants were completely eliminated, like the class size initiative or classroom improvement fund or the bill to reduce school fees for parents. Some money was put into new enrolment

but not as much money as was taken away – right? – not as much money as was taken away. Some money was put into new students but not as much as was taken away.

Here we are months into the school year when these young children have developed their routines, understand their classroom conditions, understand what they need to do to be successful, and boards are left with no choice. Now that the budget has actually been given down and they find out that they are losing tens of millions, some even more, in funding, they're left to lay off staff. This isn't just in Calgary public, as I've mentioned, or St. Albert, as I've mentioned. Maybe two weeks ago now a letter surfaced from Sturgeon school division. It goes on in great detail to say, you know: we voted for this government in large numbers. Quite a significant mandate in that riding in particular, for example. They said: we voted in this government based on the promises that they made, the promises that they made in the spring about maintaining or increasing education. Instead what they've been given is multimillion-dollar cuts. They said: this is going to mean real impacts in every single one of our schools; there will be staff reductions. They go on to say: we will also have to consider increases to school fees.

When we're talking about appropriating the budget, these are the kinds of things that we are being asked to go ahead and authorize. Go ahead and authorize the breaking of a major campaign commitment. I get why that commitment was made in 2019. It's because in 2015 when the PC government said, "Oh, we're not going to increase funding even though there will be an increase in the number of students," that set off a massive chain reaction that cost the PCs a number of seats, I would say. Arrogance and entitlement, that was definitely part of it, a culture of . . .

Mr. Schow: Vote splitting.

Ms Hoffman: Vote splitting? Maybe. Maybe people chose to vote for a different Conservative party because they thought that the one that was there was too arrogant and entitled and had definitely strayed from its original values system. I think that people who voted for the, quote, United Conservatives this time didn't think they were voting to bring corruption back or at least not quite as quickly as it seemed to have been. It definitely united votes. It also united them around what clearly seems to be voting on things that, even when the Ethics Commissioner, as yet another independent officer of this Leg, says that you shouldn't be voting on – it doesn't seem to be slowing down the expeditious nature with which this United Conservative Party has decided to move forward.

11:30

Back to 2015. There was definitely a campaign to not fund enrolment growth, and we know that a lot of Albertans thought that that was completely wrong. I think that's one of the reasons why the now leader of the UCP in the election said: we will fund education; we'll either maintain or increase. Then in the spring in this Legislature, when the Finance minister that day was answering questions on behalf of the Education minister, the Finance minister said: we will absolutely fund enrolment growth.

I guess, you know, today we have the Education minister saying that, well, she's completely blindsided that because she cut education funding, teachers are being fired when that is absolutely what everyone was saying, since the 2015 election presumably, would happen if you cut education funding and a budget area where the significant lion's share – last I heard it was about 80 per cent of education funding – is for front-line staff. These are the custodians in your school that keep your school safe and warm and clean. This morning I was dropping my niece and nephew off. The custodian is

out there with a backpack clearing the walkway so kids can get to school, so that kids can have a good day and they can be safe when they're there.

The admin assistant at the front desk who makes sure that when kids don't show up, their parents and guardians immediately get notified so that they can be safe, they can be accounted for, and they can either confirm that they are at home or they can make sure that that person knows that they're not there and finds a way to get them there; the educational assistant who spends time one on one with students, working through many, many students with complex learning needs, that have continued to grow over the years, to get the appropriate support and attention that they need to learn in the classroom as well as other basic human dignities – like, there are students who require support in the washroom and students who require support in social settings – making sure that they can have a fully inclusive educational opportunity; the principal who makes sure that leadership is provided to that school system, that timetabling is done appropriately, that when there are behaviour challenges, they're addressed, that when parents need a voice, they are heard through the school council or one-on-one meeting opportunities: all of these front-line folks account for about 80 per cent of the education budget.

When you cut the education budget and you're surprised that these folks are losing their jobs, either I don't buy it, or I think it shows gross incompetence. Either I think you knew what you were doing, or you were in way over your head, and either way I think it's highly problematic.

The good news is that we as members of this Assembly have an opportunity to right the path. We don't have to just rubber-stamp what gets proposed; we actually get an opportunity to engage with the real consequences, engage with the constituents, our bosses, in our ridings and right across this province to make sure that we move forward with something that we are proud of and that we know will actually result in improving the condition for all, something that we literally say a prayer for multiple times a day in this House: improve the condition for all. Undoubtedly, this budget that we are considering does no such thing. It very clearly is an attack on the condition for our most vulnerable, including people who I mentioned, students.

Let's also talk about seniors for a moment. I was door-knocking again last Thursday when I stumbled across a door, and one of the seniors said to me, "Am I personally going to see any difference in the way my life is today?" He said: "Of course, if I go to a hospital, I will. Like, that would be really difficult, if these kinds of impacts, cutting \$100 million from registered nurses, for example – I don't want to see that negative impact. But on my day to day, if I'm not at a time of crisis where I really need public services, am I going to feel it?" And I had to say, "You know, I'm really sorry to tell you this, but the government is considering deindexing, which means taking away the increase that you are currently entitled to for your seniors' benefit." He said, "Holy man, that's money out of my own pocket." And I said, "Yeah, it is, but that's one of the things that they're doing right now."

He said: "But they said that they were going to balance the budget. Are they doing that?" I said: "No. Actually, this year the deficit is about \$2 billion more than it would have been under the plan that we were proposing during the election." Then he said that he was appalled by that.

Then he said: "But, clearly, they're going to help municipalities, right? They're going to help fix the potholes on my street. They're going to help make sure that the services that I rely on – you know, I'm starting to use DATS occasionally. That's going to be better, right?" I had to say: "No. Unfortunately, they're talking about cutting municipal funding." He said, "Oh, but they wouldn't touch

police officers, would they?" I said: "Well, municipal police grants are definitely one of the areas that we've heard there are significant reductions in. You know, the city of Calgary's chief of police, who I think is a very worthy authority on this, has talked about the reductions there." He was quite rightfully appalled.

As well as downloading all of this – not all of this; a significant amount – onto individuals, there's also downloading onto municipalities. The regular grants that they count on to ensure that they can maintain their services, their infrastructure, and the local supports they provide to their communities are also being attacked in this current budget.

He said: "Now, I've heard this 4.7 number. What is that?" I said: "Well, it's on page 144 of the actual fiscal plan of the budget. It says that there will be \$4.7 billion less collected from corporations. That's essentially giving that money to corporations." He said, "But they must have to create some jobs to go along with that, right?" "No. No, they don't." He said, "So Husky, who, you know, just announced that they're downsizing, gets to keep all of this money?" "The truth is: yes."

You know, these kinds of conversations are happening right across our province. Again, the truth is that we don't have to just come into this place and rubber-stamp things that somebody has told you to rubber-stamp. We all were sent here to represent folks like that gentleman I was talking to on his front step that snowy Thursday. We are sent here to make sure that we are standing up for every Albertan.

Let's mention folks who are on AISH, the assured income for the severely handicapped. I'm sure you all know somebody who is on AISH; I know I do. I know a lot of people who are on AISH who scrimp and save and pull together from their little bit that remains once they pay for their accommodations and once they have copays and those types of things that are required with regard to their health care plans, who scrimp and save to have a little money to spend in their local economies. You know, they're not socking away big amounts of money to send to private offshore savings accounts or even buy things on the Internet, like others might do. They are spending their money in their very local economies. For the vast majority, if there is any additional money once those immediate expenses are gone, it's spent in the local economy.

Oh, I should tell you about Sam. I'm 90 per cent sure that's his name. He wears this jacket, and I joke that he's almost like the Neighbourhood Watch in Dovercourt, one of the communities that I represent, because he spends so much of the day walking the street, checking in on things, making sure that everything is safe. He lives on AISH. I saw him the other day at one of my friends' houses. He rang the doorbell, and he said, "Hey, can I have some sugar?," which is a very neighbourly thing to do, to ask for a cup of sugar. I said, "Yeah." While my friend was getting the sugar, I said, "Oh, are you baking something?" He said: "No. It's for my coffee." I said, "Oh, did you just run out?" He said: "It's \$6.75 at Rexall, it's \$6.75 at Safeway, it's \$6.75 everywhere I shop. I can't afford to buy sugar anymore, so I knock on my neighbours' doors, and good thing they give me some sugar." We're literally taking somebody who's living on AISH and taking \$30 that he is entitled right now to have but, once this bill is passed, will not. As a result, he literally has to beg his neighbours for some charity, for some sugar for his coffee. You know, this isn't what I thought we were sent to this place to do.

For that reason and so many others, I will be voting against this appropriation act, because I think it's important that we have a government that represents all and fights for all, not just a \$4.7 billion no-jobs corporate handout to those who, arguably, will move from one of the lowest taxed jurisdictions in North America to by

far – I think that only a few, like, less than 10, will be lower taxed. You know, it doesn't seem to reflect the values of the folks that I represent in Edmonton-Glenora, and I doubt it reflects the values of many of the folks that we represent in this fine province.

I'll be standing up for students, those living on AISH, seniors, and ordinary families who rely on the government to put their needs above their own personal interests, desire for power, and other things that we say the prayer in opposition to, every single day in this House.

Thank you very much for your consideration, Madam Chair.

11:40

The Chair: All right. Are there any other members wishing to speak? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. Schmidt: Thank you, Madam Chair. I want to thank my hon. colleague from Edmonton-Glenora for her comments. I do have some questions about this bill, and I'm wondering if anybody from the Treasury benches can answer this. Before we vote on this bill – and, of course, Committee of the Whole is our opportunity to amend these kinds of things – I note that we are voting to spend \$2,021,000 on the office of the Election Commissioner. I'm wondering if anybody from Executive Council could tell us where that money is going to go now that this House has just voted to dismantle the office of the Election Commissioner. I'm wondering if anybody from Executive Council can inform this House where the money that's slated for the office of the Election Commissioner is going to go.

The Chair: Any members wishing to speak?

Seeing none, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

Ms Hoffman: Yeah. I think that's a very fair question. Thank you very much to the member for asking it. I think that when you're passing a budget and at the same time you're abolishing an office, it makes sense to ask that fine question.

Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. Schmidt: Thank you, Madam Chair. Well, it's a real shame that we can't get an answer from any member of Executive Council on where this \$2,021,000 is going to go, especially since the stated reason for dismantling the office of the Election Commissioner is to save \$1 million over the next five years. Now we're voting in favour of a \$2 million expenditure on an office that legally no longer exists. I think that's rather odd, and it's concerning to me that nobody from Executive Council is willing to answer the question.

I'm also concerned, Madam Chair, about the amount of money that's allotted for the office of the Ethics Commissioner. I see that we only have \$945,000 allotted to her office for the work that she's going to do in this fiscal year. Given the fact that we've seen the result of the vote on Bill 22, we know that we have at least 33 UCP MLAs who are probably going to be under investigation by the office of the Ethics Commissioner. I don't know exactly how much each investigation costs, but conducting at least 33 investigations is not going to be a cheap endeavour. I expect that the office of the Ethics Commissioner is going to need significantly more than \$945,000 to carry out that work unless, of course, it's the Executive Council's plan to scrap the office of the Ethics Commissioner as well once she launches her investigations. But I guess that remains to be seen.

You know, there are a number of concerns, as my colleague from Edmonton-Glenora has outlined, with the overall outlays of the

budget and the fact that big corporations here in Alberta are getting a \$4.7 billion windfall while folks on AISH, seniors, and students are getting far less. For those reasons and the fact that Executive Council can't even answer a simple question about the budget of the office of the Election Commissioner, that doesn't even exist anymore, I can't support this budget.

Mr. Schweitzer: Madam Chair, I move we rise and report progress.

[Motion carried]

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake-St. Paul.

Mr. Hanson: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. The Committee of the Whole has had under consideration a certain bill. The committee reports progress on the following bill: Bill 24.

The Deputy Speaker: Does the Assembly concur in the report? All those in favour, please say aye.

Hon. Members: Aye.

The Deputy Speaker: Any opposed, please say no. So carried.

Mr. Schweitzer: Madam Speaker, take two: I rise to ask for unanimous consent to shorten the division bells to one-minute intervals, including all votes in Committee of the Whole, notwithstanding Standing Order 32(3), for the remainder of the morning sitting.

[Unanimous consent granted]

Government Bills and Orders
Committee of the Whole
(continued)

[Mrs. Pitt in the chair]

The Chair: Hon. members, I would call the Committee of the Whole to order.

Bill 24
Appropriation Act, 2019
(continued)

The Chair: Are there any speakers to the bill?

[The clauses of Bill 24 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

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

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Chair: Any opposed?

[The voice vote indicated that the request to report Bill 24 carried]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 11:47 a.m.]

[One minute having elapsed, the committee divided]

[Mrs. Pitt in the chair]

For:

Amery	Jones	Schow
Armstrong-Homeniuk	Loewen	Schweitzer
Getson	Long	Stephan
Goodridge	Lovely	Toor
Guthrie	Neudorf	Turton
Hanson	Nicolaides	van Dijken
Horner	Nixon, Jeremy	Walker
Hunter	Reid	Yao
Issik	Rutherford	Yaseen

11:50

Against:

Carson	Goehring	Phillips
Dach	Gray	Renaud
Dang	Hoffman	Sabir
Deol	Irwin	Schmidt
Eggen	Loyola	Shepherd
Feehan	Nielsen	Sigurdson, L.
Ganley	Pancholi	

Totals:	For – 27	Against – 20
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[Request to report Bill 24 carried]

Mr. Schweitzer: Madam Chair, I move that we rise and report.

[Motion carried]

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

Mr. Hanson: Well, hello again, Madam Speaker. The Committee of the Whole has had under consideration a certain bill. The committee reports the following bill: Bill 24.

The Deputy Speaker: Does the Assembly concur in the report? All those in favour, please say aye.

Hon. Members: Aye.

The Deputy Speaker: Any opposed, please say no. So carried.
The hon. Minister of Justice.

Mr. Schweitzer: Thank you, Madam Speaker. We've made some excellent progress this morning. I move that we adjourn the House until 1:30 p.m.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 11:53 a.m.]

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