



Province of Alberta

The 30th Legislature
First Session

Alberta Hansard

Monday evening, November 25, 2019

Day 46

The Honourable Nathan M. Cooper, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta The 30th Legislature

First Session

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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

7:30 p.m.

Monday, November 25, 2019

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

The Deputy Speaker: Good evening, hon. members. Please take your seats.

Government Bills and Orders Third Reading

Bill 24 Appropriation Act, 2019

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Jason Nixon: Well, thank you, Madam Speaker. I move on behalf of the hon. Minister of Finance and President of Treasury Board Bill 24, the Appropriation Act, 2019, for third reading.

Madam Speaker, it's pretty exciting that this government's first budget is here, a transformational budget. I'm sure all members of the Chamber certainly agree with that. I know that my side of the aisle, or the government side of the aisle, is excited to be able to fulfill promises that were made to Albertans along the lines of getting our fiscal house in order with this important piece of legislation and starting the path forward to fix the absolute catastrophic damage that was done to this province financially by the NDP in their time in government.

With that said, Madam Speaker, I move to adjourn debate.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Government Bills and Orders Second Reading

Bill 28 Opioid Damages and Health Care Costs Recovery Act

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Associate Minister of Mental Health and Addictions.

Mr. Luan: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I rise on behalf of the Minister of Health to move second reading of Bill 28, the Opioid Damages and Health Care Costs Recovery Act.

Madam Speaker, it's a privilege to rise to speak about this important piece of legislation. It's my hope that Bill 28 will gain the support of all members of this Assembly. I think it is important before we talk about Bill 28 that we take a step back and look at the situations Albertans find ourselves in in regard to opioids and addiction. Alberta continues to see the lasting effect of the overprescription of opioids, with an average of two Albertans who fatally overdose every day. The situation is far from resolved. The opioid crisis has touched Albertans in all corners of the province, of all backgrounds.

In 2016 alone 37.2 per cent of opioid overdose deaths were related to prescription opioids. This is in large part because of the overprescription of highly addictive opioid medication, including drugs like OxyContin, hydromorphone, and prescription fentanyl. The opioid manufacturers' and wholesalers' aggressive marketing efforts lead to this overprescription. These efforts included spending hundreds of millions of dollars to educate doctors on the use of opioids for treating chronic pain over the long term and stating that the risk of addiction was less than 1 per cent.

Unfortunately, Madam Speaker, we will never be able to bring back those who we have lost. We pray for the families who lost

their loved ones as a result of those actions. We're working to strengthen a system of care that gives families avenues to access support and to heal. There are also many more Albertans who find themselves in the grips of addiction, battling a disease that is left untreated. The untreated one is only leading them to a fatal and progressive illness. That being said, there are a large number of Albertans who have found recovery from addiction and who live lives in recovery every day.

Our government recognizes that recovery is possible and recovery works. That is why we are focused on developing and expanding access to treatment and recovery resources so that all Albertans who face addiction have an opportunity to recover. We believe in Albertans, we believe in their resiliency, and we believe in their ability to recover. We have committed \$40 million over the next four years specifically for opioid response and an additional \$100 million over four years to improve access to recovery-oriented mental health and addiction services. Every Albertan deserves the opportunity to recover and to live a life of health, wellness, and positive, engaged citizenship.

Madam Speaker, with all that being said, Alberta taxpayers have been on the hook for the health care costs that have been incurred as a result of opioid manufacturers' and wholesalers' unlawful actions. The Opioid Damages and Health Care Costs Recovery Act is the first step in our efforts to recover those costs. Not only have Albertans had to pay with their extra tax dollars, they have had to pay with their communities. The actions of those companies have led to heartache, loss, and death while also leading to enormous costs to the health care system as a whole.

Let me give you some examples here. In 2014 the total cost of substance use to the Alberta economy was estimated at \$5.5 billion. Of that, approximately \$52 million was spent in 2016 on health care costs related to opioid use. This is according to the Canadian Centre on Substance Use and Addiction. We estimate that since then opioid-related health care costs have increased significantly with the subsequent growth of the opioid epidemic. The aim of the proposed action is to recover health care costs and other damages caused by the defendants' unlawful actions, including their aggressive marketing efforts. These efforts led to the overprescription of highly addictive opioid medications. These medications, as I mentioned earlier, have caused many to experience heartache and pain, and a great many more lost their lives.

Alberta has experienced many costs at a system-wide level as a result of those actions. This legislation would allow the use of statistical and population-based evidence to establish causation and quantify health care costs and other damages caused that can be attributed to the opioid-related wrong actions here. It would allow Alberta to recover costs on an aggregate basis rather than on the individual it incurred on a personal basis. It would also allow the recovery of health care costs regardless of when the damage occurred. If the directors and officers of a corporate defendant are implicated in opioid-related wrongs, this legislation would make them jointly and severely liable with their corporations. Bill 28 would also demonstrate to the defendants in a proposed national class action that Alberta has the tools in place to proceed with litigation, should that be necessary. This all means that Alberta would be able to participate in the national class action in the most practical and efficient manner.

Madam Speaker, we are committed to holding opioid manufacturers and wholesalers to account for the opioid damage and health care costs that they have contributed to. This legislation will enable us to try to recover most of those costs that Alberta taxpayers contributed to. Our priority is to reinvest any damage awarded back into our health care system to strengthen the health

care system that has taken on so many costs as a result of this issue and to ensure that all Albertans have access to a recovery-oriented system of care that encourages health, wellness, and a positively engaged citizenship.

Madam Speaker, I encourage all Members of this Legislative Assembly to support the second reading of Bill 28.

Thank you very much.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. members, are there any other members wishing to speak? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning.

Ms Sweet: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It's an honour to rise and to speak to Bill 28. First off, I just want to start by saying that we will be supporting this bill.

Mr. Jason Nixon: Hear, hear.

Ms Sweet: Yeah. We can work across the aisle. I know, shocking.

This is something that obviously is important to all Albertans, when we're looking at the issues around the opioid crisis and the significant impact that it's had on all Albertans across the province, the family members, the friends that have been lost unfortunately because of the crisis, and, of course, the ongoing issues that continue to happen with the use of fentanyl. Now with it being laced, obviously, with other drugs on the streets, we're seeing an even more significant increase. Of course, this is extremely important.

I think it's important to recognize that although this bill doesn't address the supports and services that can be provided to Albertans, it does speak to looking at holding individuals accountable for the responsibility that they have around ensuring that when drugs are being created, they are being distributed and used in an appropriate way. I also recognize that it's important that, as other provinces are doing – and I'm glad to see us joining other provinces in this lawsuit – we're looking at what this means for the impact on the resources for health care front-line workers, treatments, emergency services, as well as our overall health care system.

7:40

In saying that, the one thing that I did notice in the bill, that I know the minister and I will probably continue to chat a little bit about, is just where the money will go. As we know, typically when issues like this occur and there are lawsuits on behalf of the Crown, the money automatically goes back into general revenue. Then once it's in general revenue, as the Minister of Finance would know, he gets to kind of decide where it goes from there and if it goes back into Health or if it gets allotted to just paying down deficits or different things like that. One of the things that I would like us to be able to have a chat about, and would be interested to hear from the government side at some point, is that there be a commitment that a portion of the dollars that are returned to the Crown at some point, whenever this lawsuit occurs, would be allocated to ensure that it's going directly to supports for mental health and addiction and that it's not just being put in general revenue to then be allocated wherever it may be.

I recognize that – and I do want to thank the associate minister for being open to having a dialogue with me – of course, some of the concerns around this are that it's not just about treatment and mental health and addiction services completely. It's also about the overall health costs that are associated when supporting someone with opioid addiction. Of course, there needs to be some supports and financial returns to the Ministry of Health around emergency services, around health care services for individuals that have been hospitalized due to struggling with their addictions, so I recognize that not all of the money that would be coming back through this

lawsuit can go directly to Mental Health and Addictions. Although I would love it all to go to treatment, I recognize that there needs to be some ability to return the funds to areas where support services have been provided. Of course, I recognize that, and as we continue through the stages of this debate, I'm looking forward to hearing from the associate minister or the Minister of Health around what those options might look like or if there have been conversations on the government side around how some of that can happen.

Another thing that I do want to just quickly chat about is, of course, that there is a little bit of a difference in the bill when it comes to Ontario and B.C. It's just a question that at some point, again, over the debate I would like clarity around. In Bill 28, section 8 is different from the B.C. bill, which excludes certain officers and directors from liability. I'm assuming that's something that the government of Alberta has learned from the B.C. lawsuit so they're just trying to strengthen the ability to look at other, bigger jurisdictions or making sure that there's a broader ability to look at more directors and officers than just what B.C. was able to do. I think that's great if that's what's happening. I think it's extremely beneficial to learn from what other jurisdictions are doing and be able to strengthen our bill to be able to do that.

Also, there have been some pieces added to this bill, which I think is also probably learning from other jurisdictions, about making sure that we're using aggregated data and, obviously, being able to use that information and taking that forward so that we can actually demonstrate in court the measurements that are being used. I appreciate also in this bill that although this is going to be happening on behalf of all Albertans, Albertans' health information doesn't actually have to be shared. There is information within the bill that says that you can talk about a group of individuals instead of having to look into identifying individuals that may have been impacted. I think it's important, given that this is a very sensitive topic for Albertans, that we're protecting as much personal information as we can. Again, I see that that's happening in the bill – again, I support the government in this and acknowledge that the bill has been written quite well – and that's great.

I also want to of course – why not? – just mention that this was something that was also in our platform. I mean, it's always nice to see that both sides of this House can agree on something. Even though it was in our platform, it was also something that was important to the government side, so there are some things that, obviously, both sides of this House can agree on.

I think I'll just leave it at that. Again, I just want to say that we will be supporting the bill, of course with some questions as we move forward. I'm sure the associate minister and I can chat a little bit, and he'll be able to answer my questions in the future.

Thank you. [some applause]

The Deputy Speaker: Oh, the things that happen in this House.

Are there any other members wishing to speak? I see the hon. Member for St. Albert.

Ms Renaud: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise and speak to Bill 28, Opioid Damages and Health Care Costs Recovery Act. I just wanted to reiterate what my colleague just said, that it is quite interesting that the government chose to take a piece from our platform, and I'm actually quite happy that they did. Obviously, it was our intent to go forward with – I don't know that the bill would have looked identical to this, but I am happy to see that this is happening.

I think that before I speak to some pieces of this, I would like to just be clear and put on the record some of the actions we had taken and some of the investments that we made that were particularly important. The reason I say that, as I said even earlier today, is that

this is a tool, a great tool, a tool to try to mitigate and recoup some of the damages and some of the costs. But, of course, some of the most serious damages we'll never be able to recoup. We've lost too many people because of opioid addiction and other addictions, actually, and that is a very sad piece. But, again, this is a useful tool.

I do want to focus and I will focus a little bit on prevention. Although this is the end result of trying to recoup some of the costs of these very damaging opioid addictions, it is really important to focus energy and resources on preventing this in the first place. Of course, we will support this legislation.

Some of the investments that we made in 2018-19 were that we directed \$63 million to address the opioid crisis. The breakdown of that was \$39 million for the 2018-19 opioid response budget, which was dedicated to the implementation of the Minister's Opioid Emergency Response Commission's recommendations and continuing to fund initiatives that were previously recommended. There was a \$4 million investment for community and addiction beds in Alberta Health Services. For anybody that has worked on the front lines and had to assist someone into an acute-care facility, I'm sure that you will attest to the fact that beds are scarce. The wait is often very, very long, and it is a difficult process. So that was a welcome investment. Also, there were \$10.4 million for opioid treatment, \$9 million for opioid medication coverage, with GOA Health and supplementary benefits.

Again, some of the more specific key investments were just over \$14 million in start-up and operational funding for safe consumption sites – I certainly hope that we have more of an opportunity to discuss the merits of these sites; I think we hear on a regular basis just how much benefit there is in terms of life-saving benefit, actually lives that are saved, because of these sites – \$9 million in funding for Suboxone and methadone; \$4.3 million to establish the virtual opioid dependency program. I've not actually looked into that or talked to anybody that has used that, but it certainly seems like a good investment.

7:50

This was really important: almost \$3 million to improve access to opioid treatment in primary care, again going back to the number of addiction beds available through Alberta Health Services. For anybody that has ever supported somebody to try to get primary care treatment for an opioid addiction or even an opioid overdose, it actually can be quite challenging.

Let's move on here. There was a \$1.3 million investment to develop an injectable opioid therapy program, \$1 million for a community-based naloxone program. You know, I would say that if any members in this place have not had any training around this or, you know, even just gotten a kit for your office, it's not a bad idea. I know we did a couple of years ago. Thankfully, we've not had to use it, and we've not had to give it out. But it is there, and we do use it as a bit of a teaching tool for anyone that comes in that has access to the public or that maybe finds themselves in a situation where it would be useful. We talk about that, how to get it, and then how to use it.

We also made a significant investment in needle debris mitigation, which I think is important, and there were some other initiatives.

I think it's really useful for us to talk about just how many naloxone kits were distributed between January 2017 and December 2018. It's actually a staggering number; 124,000 naloxone kits were distributed, saving – and these were self-reported reversals – 7,700 lives. I think that is an amazing investment.

As of October 2018 six safe consumption sites are operational in Alberta. There are four in Edmonton, one in Calgary, and one in

Lethbridge, and the first hospital-based safe consumption site in North America is at the Royal Alex. Again, it is worth mentioning that from January to September 2018 there were a total of 122,497 visits to the Lethbridge, Calgary, and Edmonton community-based safe consumption sites. A total of 1,316 overdoses were attended to, and there were no deaths on the sites. I think, you know, that if we're going to talk about what a successful program looks like, that would be it.

Again, I will support this bill, certainly, but I think it is really important to emphasize again and again that this is a tool. Once is too late for many people. It's a tool to recoup some of the costs, some of the loss, but I think the biggest opportunity we have is to prevent this from ever happening.

How do you prevent addiction? Well, there are a lot of thoughts on that, but there are some very straightforward things that we as legislators can do to do our best to legislate, to do everything we can to prevent this. There are a few things that we know for sure contribute to the prevention of addiction, and one of those things is poverty eradication. Although it's a simple phrase, it's an incredibly complex action that requires a focus on the work, and it requires dedication of resources.

I guess it's a few months now that we've been in this place debating pieces of legislation and certainly the budget, and what I have seen – I've heard again and again, you know, that it's about sustainability, that it's about, I guess, giving tax breaks to large corporations and then hoping that that trickles down to everybody else. But there has not been, in my opinion, a consistent, focused effort on poverty eradication.

That requires a lot of work on multiple fronts. [interjection] Yes, it does require jobs, but it also requires good-paying jobs at the very lowest end. That means low-income earners. That means young people that earn the minimum wage trying to save for school, of course now trying to save for school with slightly higher tuition. That means people on income support. That means people that are unable to work for a variety of reasons, some of those reasons being addiction, mental health. That means people being on income support and knowing that that income will be indexed, at the very least. These are grinding poverty wages, but at the very least this was a little bit of a hand up.

Poverty eradication requires investment in safe and affordable housing. It requires investment in access to medication, access to therapy, access to all of these things that people living in poverty cannot afford. You know, it's not surprising when you hear somebody that has lived their life in poverty talk about the path that led them to the place where addiction was the result. You can see very clearly all along the way the failure of whatever systems we've set up in terms of poverty.

As legislators there's not a lot that we can do to help individual people from this place, but what we can do is introduce and support legislation that does everything we can to ensure that we address poverty.

You know, I talked a little bit about the therapies that are required. I don't know if you've ever supported somebody who doesn't have any disposable income. They're trying to live on under \$900 a month. If you've ever tried to do that, it's virtually impossible. Every month that goes by, you are further and further in the hole. Then someone will say to this person who is living in poverty: "Well, you really need some therapy. You should really go see a therapist. You should go see a counsellor. You should go to this group. You should try this." But in real time that means maybe having a bus pass or being able to afford a bus pass or being able to afford your portion of the counselling fee, any of those things, or being able to afford child care or having a home.

All of these things are interrelated, and I understand that this piece of legislation is not focused on eradicating poverty. In fact, it's more about lawsuits. I understand that completely. But I just want to continuously remind this government that we have more tools to use. There are more things that we can do, and you have to know that any investment you make to eradicate poverty has a direct result on addiction. We know that. I think that the science is pretty clear. We've known it for a while, yet I don't know why – I guess it requires a lot of attention and resources. But we do know what the answers are, and they are prevention and investment.

Again, I do understand opening the doors to have producers of this product, very much like cigarettes, be responsible for what they have done and what they have created and what has been misused. I support that, and I agree with that. I don't always agree with all class-action lawsuits. With this one I actually would, because I do think that ultimately, as a class of people that are represented together to seek damages, they are harmed, and I think that in this environment and in this day and age we see these types of lawsuits more and more frequently. We have seen it with survivors, I think, of the '60s scoop. That was a class-action lawsuit.

More and more these days we see – and, again, I don't mean to skirt my responsibility to be loyal to certain sectors of this province – that the reality is that in our world, in North America in particular, there are more and more people coming together to look towards producers in certain sectors, sometimes oil and gas, that are saying that they want class-action litigation because of the implications or the ramifications of what different sectors have created, for lack of a better word. I don't always agree with every piece of litigation or every action. However, I do understand that it is a tool to use with producers and people that have reaped enormous benefit, not just a little bit but enormous benefit, from producing things like opioids and other things.

Again, I just want to reiterate that I am supportive of this legislation. I think it would have been quite lovely to have other pieces of legislation that addressed prevention so that we would never get here. Ultimately, of course, that is the goal, that we don't get here. I would have liked to see that. I would like to see that in the future, because I think that if we're just constantly trying to put a Band-Aid on a gaping wound, we're not really going to get very far.

On that note, I will take my seat. Thank you.

8:00

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. members, Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available. Are there any members wishing to speak?

Seeing none, are there any members wishing to speak to the bill? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs.

Ms Goehring: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I rise today to also support Bill 28, the Opioid Damages and Health Care Costs Recovery Act. I think this is a good step in supporting those with addictions. I would have liked to see it do a little bit more, but I'm happy to rise and talk about things that we can do as a government to support those that are struggling with opioid addiction.

We know that Albertans need this government to take action. Action: what does that mean? I think that means making sure that there are resources available for our health care and front-line support being put in place, expanding treatment and wraparound supports that are already in place, providing more for those that offer support and services to those struggling with opioid addiction.

We hear the countless heartbreaking stories of those that have died because of opioid use. When you sit down with a family and talk about the loss of their loved one, it's heartbreaking. You hear from families that if only there were more supports within the

system, if only their child, their spouse, their grandchild was able to access more resources, more supports, perhaps this person wouldn't have died from an opioid overdose. Madam Speaker, I can tell you that I've heard these stories too many times from friends who have family members who are struggling with opioid addiction and just feeling completely helpless to what they can do.

I have a very good friend whose sibling suffers from an opioid addiction. He is a parent. He's now a grandparent. He lives in rural Alberta and really, really struggles to find resources, to find a physician that fully understands the needs that he has rather than writing another prescription for an alternative medication. He's struggling with opioids, and he's turned to the streets to find these drugs because the physicians have stopped providing the prescriptions, but they're not providing an alternative. They're not providing him services, addictions treatment that would perhaps save his life, and he has begged for some of these services. He has told me that he doesn't want to live this life, that it's something that he's embarrassed by. He makes promises to family that he's going to stop but can't. I know that in my friend's efforts she's met with addictions counsellors to try to get some resources, what they can do as a family to try and support him. The thing with addictions is that the majority of the services that are available, unless the addicts themselves want to get help and services, are not able to provide supports.

So knowing that we're making a step forward with supporting those suffering is a good thing, Madam Speaker. I think that hearing from Albertans about their concern about this crisis is essential, and we've heard that supports and resources are absolutely essential when we look at ways that we can support those suffering from addictions.

Our government, like we heard the Member for St. Albert talk about, made significant investments in ensuring that supports were available for those that were suffering. We made sure that community and addictions beds were funded, that specific opioid treatments through Alberta Health Services were funded. We increased access to things like naloxone, making sure that our first responders had them because we know that when someone is using and they are overdosing, naloxone will save their life. We know that safe consumption sites save lives. These are the types of steps that we took as a government to assist those struggling with opioid addictions.

It's not so much looking at the crisis but how did we get here, looking at prevention for those even starting on opioids. We heard the member talk about things like poverty having an impact. We know that for those that are struggling, that are dealing with job loss, that are dealing with threats of potential job loss, that are dealing with financial barriers, employment barriers, those are major stressors in peoples' lives, and they might then turn to ways to numb that. Right now it is a crisis of opioid use, and that's very tragic because people are dying. It's something that you can use once and overdose.

I've heard stories of parents whose children are struggling. Hearing a parent talk about the acknowledgement that they need to go and get a naloxone kit because it could save their lives – the terrified look on their faces is heartbreaking, knowing that they need to access a drug that potentially might save their child's life in the event of an overdose. Then trying to educate their child about the importance of safety: risk management, when you're working with people that are struggling, having that conversation; not using alone, making sure that you're around people that are aware that you are using opioids. Then how to administer naloxone, should that happen, is part of that conversation that we're trying to educate people with.

It's absolutely essential that we keep talking about this because without funding and without providing essential resources into our

health care system, people are going to continue to die. I think that having a bill that is talking about that and looks at ways that we can start supporting people is something that's really, really important. Like I said before, this is something that doesn't go, I think, far enough, but it's a good first step. I know that it's something that I'm proud to stand in the House and talk about.

I know that the Royal Alex here in Edmonton was the first hospital that had a safe consumption site in North America. I know that that's a hospital that my constituents access. It's somewhere that my constituents go. You hear the stories about people in the community that are using in that area, so it's a logical, natural place to put a safe consumption site. If that's the community where people are using, it only makes sense that that's also a community where they're going to use the safe consumption site.

I have statistics here. From January to September 2018 there was a total of 122,497 visits to the Lethbridge, Calgary, and Edmonton community-based safe consumption sites. A total of 1,316 overdoses were attended to, and there were no deaths on these sites. We know that investing in services that help people, that meet people where they're at, saves lives.

Talking about this opioid crisis is so important. I'm happy to stand in the House and just say that this is something that I know was in our platform in supporting the opioid crisis, and I'm glad that this government has taken that leadership that we provided and is making a piece of legislation that is moving in the right direction. We know that we need to continue to improve access to opioid-dependency treatment facilities: perhaps opening clinics, opening more services, doing more education.

Making sure that our indigenous communities are properly funded: that's something that is very important. We took that to heart in our government. We heard from indigenous communities that this is something that they needed, so we invested. We put an additional \$4 million in funding to support their own opioid-related initiatives in their communities. They have practices in their communities that they work through with treatment, and we said: "We want to support you. You come up with your program, and we will help fund it. It's your community. You're asking for this, and we want to support it."

8:10

Continuing to provide public awareness, like I talked about, initiatives within communities where they're self-identifying that they're struggling, listening to the community because they're the ones who see those that are struggling with addictions, believing in them, and making sure that they have the resources to support the community – we need to make sure that we're continuing to raise awareness and reduce stigma around opioid use. Like I said, if someone is using and they have shame and embarrassment about that use, they're more likely to use alone, in isolation, and overdose. If we're talking about it and acknowledging that someone is struggling, we can then provide services and support to that person that could perhaps save their life.

Madam Speaker, I again say that I rise today to support Bill 28, and I look forward to further debate and discussion on this as we move through this legislation. I just want to say thank you for giving me the opportunity to speak to this.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. members, Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available. Are there any members wishing to speak?

Seeing none, are there any other members wishing to speak to the bill?

Seeing none, would any minister like to close debate?

Hon. Members: Question.

[Motion carried; Bill 28 read a second time]

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 20 Fiscal Measures and Taxation Act, 2019

The Chair: Are there any members wishing to speak to the bill? The hon. Member for Edmonton-South.

Mr. Dang: Thank you, Madam Chair. It's a pleasure to rise today and speak to Bill 20, the Fiscal Measures and Taxation Act, 2019. I mean, I think it's a bill that's caused quite a bit of debate in this House already, but it's always important to go back and look at what the consequences of the bill will be and how it will affect our families, our communities, and our neighbours.

Obviously, this bill makes every single Albertan pay more, right? It uses a sneaky measure, which the Premier himself railed against and called bracket creep when he was on the CTF, Canadian Taxpayers Federation, to do a tax grab and make every single family pay more in personal income taxes. That's something that is in black and white in this bill, and it's something that I think members of the House need to be aware of when they vote for or against this bill. I mean, we also think that there are going to be higher property taxes.

We think that investors are going to be moving their capital to other places. Indeed, we've already seen quite a few losses in the film and television industry. We've seen investment and jobs leaving this province and moving to other jurisdictions. We're also seeing things like tech jobs disappear because many of the investor tax credits and the digital media tax credits and the capital investment tax credits that were important in bringing technology, gave companies like BioWare the ability to double the size of their staff here in Edmonton, and attracted investment in jobs and technology jobs here to Alberta – they are now looking elsewhere. They're moving to other jurisdictions. They're moving to the United States. They're moving to other parts of Canada like Vancouver or Toronto.

It's something that I think is disappointing to see in this bill. It's disappointing to see that this bill basically takes a program that was diversifying our economy, that was investing in communities, making good new jobs, that supported things like oil and gas and also had the opportunity to diversify away from oil and gas, to do both of those things at the same time – we had these targeted investments to start bringing new corporations and new companies and start-ups and innovation here to Alberta. Instead, what we see is a \$4.7 billion handout to the wealthiest corporations, that doesn't create any jobs and isn't effective at spurring innovation or helping start-ups because, Madam Chair, as we know, start-ups don't benefit from this \$4.7 billion corporate handout; only wealthy, profitable corporations do, and that's something that I think is disappointing to see.

We think that there are going to be things like property tax hikes. We can see that money is going to be diverted from things like community organizations when we see the lottery fund being brought into general revenue. We can see that different funds that support cancer research are being abolished, and environmental protection and enhancement are being abolished. Those are all very disappointing things. It's the type of values that this government has. They don't think it's important to have these separate funds that are targeted to supporting our communities, supporting our

communities in specific ways. The values show that they think it's better in general revenue, that this government knows better, that this government doesn't need direction on these funds, and I think that's something that's disappointing.

It's disappointing that this bill also attacks things like light rail transit. We know that the green line is now in jeopardy in Calgary. We know that the west LRT is now in jeopardy in Edmonton. It's really shocking, the attack on municipalities and the inability for the province to have actually gone to the table and negotiated some of these changes with municipalities. Instead, the government decided that they're going to tell cities what to do, that they know better, that that's their job. That's the government's prerogative. I think it's disappointing. I think cities are disappointed, I think municipalities are disappointed, and I think Albertans are disappointed. It's something that's shocking, and it's shocking because – I've listed this laundry list of changes that are coming that are going to hurt families, that are going to hurt communities, that are going to hurt Albertans, Madam Chair.

But you'll note something, that not a lot of them are quite that related, Madam Chair. It's interesting because it speaks to this government's direction for the Legislature. It speaks to how this government wants to treat the Legislature. What's happening is that this government is trying to Americanize this Legislature. They're bringing in an omnibus bill, a bill that changes, I believe, something like 20-some things at once. That's something that we've seen happen in American Legislatures, the Congress in the United States, the Senate in the United States, where they do these big omnibus bills and try to tack on as many things as possible so that it's hard for the opposition to understand, it's hard for the opposition to debate effectively, and it's hard to really narrow down what the intent of each single bill is, because it has multiple intents. That's something that's disappointing.

I don't think it's what we want to see here in the Legislature. I don't think we want to see an Americanization of our democracy. I don't think that we should Americanize how we do things in this province. I think Albertans are proud that we have our own way, that we can do things in a respectful manner, and that we don't have to try to use underhanded tactics like omnibus legislation to try and hide what's going on.

If the government indeed was proud of what they were doing and if they thought that Albertans supported what they were doing, they would know that they didn't have to do this, that they didn't have to try and wrap it all up and ram it through the House in one big package. They would know that they could bring each piece of the bill individually and debate it to its full merits. If they believed that Albertans supported it and they believed that that was something that they were proud to present, they wouldn't have tried to bundle it all up and try and hide it in one package to make it as complicated as possible and address almost every single ministry in this House. I think it's something that's short-sighted, I think it's ideological, and I think it's something that's going to hurt Alberta's prosperity. When we look at this clear partisanship, this pure ideology, and this pure changing of how we want to do things in Alberta to be more like the Americans, I think that's something that Albertans aren't going to be very happy about.

I'm going to go back and talk a little bit about some of these broken promises. We can see in this bill – again, Madam Chair, it's an omnibus bill, so I have to be all over the place here – that the dollars that were promised and the multiyear agreements for charters, for example, that were in the UCP platform are simply not being followed through with. The platform is actually just being broken. The promises are being broken by the government. It's in black and white, and perhaps that's why they tried to bury it in a 102-page-long bill.

Perhaps they didn't think that people would notice, Madam Chair, but we noticed. We noticed that on page 77 of the UCP platform it says, "Maintain dollars promised to municipalities for 2019-20, as well as the multi-year agreement in the Bill 32 Charters for Calgary and Edmonton." That's the quote from the UCP platform. Instead, what we see is basically a complete broken promise here. Instead, they're going to tear up the contracts. Instead, they're going to dictate to the cities how they want to move forward. Instead, they're going to dictate the terms of the agreements that are going to be negotiated moving forward, so they're not really negotiations. It's bad faith. I think this government knows a couple of things about bad-faith negotiations. This just again plays to that narrative and shows that they don't respect actually talking about how things should be done.

8:20

Again, from page 81 of the UCP platform, Madam Chair, they also said that they would "consult with stakeholders in the film, television and digital media industries to create an optimal tax credit designed to attract large productions and series." Again, given that the industry basically hates this tax credit – indeed, by cancelling the other film production grants and the former digital media tax credit, basically it's going to cost jobs right here in this province, it's going to cost people their livelihoods, it's going to cost families the ability just to make a living. Given that this is what this bill is doing and that the type of things they are doing directly affects the pocketbooks of Albertans and directly puts Albertans out of work, contrary to what their platform had intended to do, contrary to what they promised Albertans, given that they are directly, intentionally putting Albertans out of work – I think that's something that's very disappointing. I think it's something that all members of this House should be concerned about, that members of the opposition are particularly concerned about.

I think it's disappointing because we're seeing that when they give \$4.7 billion away to big corporations, there are no returns and there are no jobs and there's no investment here in Alberta. In fact, we're actually seeing companies take their money and take it somewhere else. A big example is the United States. EnCana is walking away, and they actually said that they're taking \$55 million additionally as profits as a result of the Premier's wealthy gift to profitable corporations. The Premier promised that his giveaway to big corporations would create jobs, but instead what we're seeing is that we're losing 27,000 jobs. That's something that's disappointing. We're seeing that this government's \$4.7 billion giveaway to wealthy corporations, profitable corporations, is doing absolutely nothing to fill office towers. It's doing nothing to provide relief for out-of-work oil workers. It's doing nothing to provide relief for the economy.

In fact, as people continue to struggle and jobs continue to be lost, the types of cuts that are being brought in in this bill, the types of cuts that make life more expensive for every single Albertan, the increase in personal income taxes: all these things basically show that this government is standing up for wealthy corporations instead of for everyday Albertans. That's something that's very disappointing. It's something that's very disappointing, that we're seeing these types of cuts, because the investment tax credits and the capital investment tax credits and the digital media tax credit and all of the types of credits that were targeted and actually working are now just being removed. They're actually just being taken away, right? They were creating jobs, and families depended on them for their jobs.

As we can also see, this government's reckless cuts to the public service and this government's reckless cuts to innovation are now resulting in another 25 per cent layoff of the entire Alberta

Innovates Corporation staff, Madam Chair. Alberta Innovates is an organization that helps spur innovators, helps spur start-ups in particular and other organizations to do diversification – for example, they do things like oil field technologies; they do things like agricultural development – all across the spectrum. Instead of supporting innovation, instead of supporting these new jobs and diversifying our economy, instead of supporting these organizations and start-ups and job creators, what the government is doing is they said: we're going to remove all your grants, and then we're going to cut the actual branch that is there to support you.

Again and again this government is not standing up for small businesses, this government is not standing up for Albertans, it's not standing up for jobs. Instead, they're giving money away to their friends and donors and the wealthiest corporations.

I think it's something that's very disappointing because we're also seeing that on one hand, while they're making life harder – they're taking jobs away; they're removing funding from things that were creating jobs – they're slashing and burning the benefits that Albertans rely on as well. I mean, the new Alberta child and family benefit will reduce benefits for, I think, about 165,000 Albertans. That's something that means 165,000 Albertans will basically have less in their pocket at the end of every single month. That's not what this government ran on. I don't think this government intended to try and hurt this many families. Out of those 165,000, 55,000 of those Albertans will lose the benefit entirely, so there are 55,000 Albertans that are completely losing the child and family benefit tax credit. That's something that's very shocking to me because basically they've made 55,000 Albertans' lives harder – right? – 55,000 people in this province. Their lives are undeniably harder. They will have less money in their pockets at the end of the month because of the changes that this government wants to bring in this bill.

I think it's something that's disappointing. I think that this government should speak to it and explain to those 55,000 families why they think it's okay to take money out of their pockets without asking, why it's okay to take money out of their pockets without consulting at all. I know that the Premier and this government have spoken to how they wanted to move without consultation. I think that's very reckless. I think it's something that is going to hurt a lot of families, and it's going to make a lot of families suffer. I think that that's something that nobody in this House wants. When we see the government moving forward with these reckless cuts, these reckless attacks on basically every facet of our province, it is really shameful, and I think it's really disappointing.

We can also see that pretty clearly the government doesn't care at all about postsecondary students and their families. They're raiding financial supports for students. Tuition is going to go up by as much as 23 per cent, Madam Chair. Student loan rates are going up, so basically if you had a student loan, good luck, because now you're paying more. It works out to thousands of dollars per loan, something that is being used basically to pay for the \$4.7 billion giveaway to profitable corporations.

If we're looking at postsecondary and we're looking at how people keep diversifying and how people get back to work and how people try to support themselves, well, postsecondary is one of the best ways to do it, to go back to school, whether it's another trade or some other form of postsecondary, and try to learn other things and try to be able to be useful in the workforce and have other opportunities in the workforce.

But instead of actually giving those opportunities to people that are out of work and young people, this government has decided that they're going to cut that and give \$4.7 billion away to profitable corporations, that are going to lay off workers, lay off thousands of

workers, and then move out of the country and take the money out of the country because they're just pocketing those profits, and I think that that's something that's very concerning. I think it's something that this government should be concerned about, but it appears that they either don't understand the impact or they don't care, Madam Chair, and that's something that's pretty disappointing.

I mean, I think I've spoken a lot about how basically this omnibus bill, this American-style omnibus bill, that attacks so many Albertans and attacks basically every facet of our community, is shameful and it hurts communities and families, but I want to hear from some of my other colleagues here as well, so I'm going to make sure we give some time for that.

I encourage every single member to actually read the impacts of this bill, to actually look at the bill and say that there are 165,000 families that you're taking child benefits away from. There are 55,000 families that you're actually taking the child and family benefit completely away from. I want every single member to think about that because what you're doing is that you're reaching into those households and you're telling them that they deserve less and that they shouldn't have support and that it's going to hurt and that you're okay with that if you support that.

That's just food for thought, Madam Chair, but I look forward to hearing from the rest of my colleagues.

The Chair: Are there any other members wishing to speak? The hon. Member for Edmonton-North West.

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Madam Chair. I appreciate the opportunity to speak and perhaps offer some constructive changes to Bill 20. As my colleagues have said before in the media and the general public, these omnibus bills are problematic because of the scope and the breadth of what they try to cover. Perhaps, you know, totally unrelated, different topics sometimes can be both confusing and maybe not focusing in exactly how it should be.

I am this evening going to propose a specific change to a section. This section is 24, and it's talking about postsecondary education specifically, which is, of course, my responsibility as critic for the Official Opposition. What my amendment will try to address is issues around enrolment. Quite frankly, it took me a while to even sort of get my head around this one. I figured that if I was the critic, then I should know better, and I do, but for the general public and for others, you know, we need to cast some clearer light on this.

Maybe what I'll do, Madam Chair, with your consent, is to pass this amendment around, and then I will make some comments on it, okay?

The Chair: Awesome. Thank you.

Hon. member, do you have the original copy?

8:30

Mr. Eggen: Yeah. Sorry.

The Chair: Okay. Hon. members, this will be known as amendment A3. I'll just give the member a minute to get a copy back.

Hon. member, please proceed.

Mr. Eggen: Okay. Great. Thank you very much. This amendment, I think, has to do, like I said, with enrolment. The amendment should do the following things, right? When the minister wants to change enrolment targets, he or she must consult with the faculties or institutions in question. I think that making that explicit is pretty much a prerequisite for any changes to enrolment. You know that we want to make the best, efficient use of the positions in the

faculties that we have around the province or the trades colleges or what have you – apprenticeship programs, let's say – and it's important to have conversations with the people on the ground that know best what's going on.

Second of all, if enrolment targets would affect a regulated profession, then the minister would have to consult with those responsible bodies as well. Again, I know from experience – you know, speaking to the teachers, for example, or with the licensed practical nurses' regulatory body, with the doctors – that this is all absolutely essential. We know that, let's say, for example, enrolment is quite explicitly determined in trades colleges like NAIT and SAIT in consultation with industry. They can give a pretty good idea. That's how places like NAIT and SAIT end up with an 80 or 90 per cent job success rate for their graduates in the trades, because they have an explicit conversation setting enrolment spaces with industry. That's worked really well for many years, and I think we need to continue with that.

Thirdly, the minister would have to ensure that enrolment targets are not adversely affecting completion rates of Alberta high school students, including First Nations, Métis, and Inuit high school students. Again, we want to make every effort to increase our graduation rates here in the province of Alberta. I know that, for myself as a minister, we employed a "Where is there room for most improvement?" sort of model in trying to improve high school graduation rates, and where there's room for most improvement is definitely with First Nations, Métis, and Inuit students. So we want to make sure that we are creating an environment where kids can look to graduate from high school with a purpose, that purpose being that there are postsecondary positions and opportunities for them to look forward to, to move to after they get their high school graduation completed.

I mean, that's, I think, a very practical and friendly change to this section of the bill that I believe will benefit lots of students. I'm doing this just to avoid, perhaps, unintended consequences – right? – down the road, because we don't want to limit the opportunities or possibilities of students, especially students that otherwise maybe don't normally go to a trades college or university or something like that, and just to keep the doors open fully for everybody.

These enrolment targets can be a signal to students and to institutions, and we want to make sure that we're sending the right message, not the wrong message. Setting the wrong enrolment target could lead to a number of challenges for institutions that may not be able to meet arbitrary targets, or they may just not be able to make sense of them at all, right? Again, you want to make sure it's something that people can live with, can live with in their planning. You know, one of the strengths of our postsecondary system here in the province of Alberta is its diversity. We have smaller colleges like Lakeland or Portage or Keyano, let's say, that provide very targeted regional programming and know what their students and what their clients and what their potential students are and how they could reach them in the future.

I noted, when I visited Concordia college here in Edmonton a couple of weeks ago, how their long-term planning was very specific to their college and I think offered an insight that is unique to their ability to see where their students had been coming from and where they will be coming from in the future. Indeed, they were super successful. They've, you know, doubled their enrolment in a very short period of time. They're growing. They need capital investment, just as a little hint to the hon. minister that they are growing and that they will come, and we need both the capital investment and the teachers' support to make that happen. That's just one of our 28 or so colleges across the province, and many others are in the same situation.

We want to build. That's my point, Madam Chair, that we want to build growth based on being creative and responsive to the regions, and we want to make sure that if we are setting targets and so forth, we're doing that in a responsible and fully open and consultative manner. I think this amendment does the job. It's a pretty fine, fine amendment if I do say so myself, and I would encourage constructive reflection and criticism of it, perhaps with the idea that we would pass it and make an amendment to Bill 20.

Thank you.

The Chair: Are there any members wishing to speak to the amendment? The hon. Member for Edmonton-West Henday.

Mr. Carson: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. It's an honour to rise to speak to this amendment, which I do plan on supporting. I thank the Member for Edmonton-North West for bringing it forward. I think it's important that we do support it.

Once again, looking at the legislation as it currently is stated, the minister may establish an enrolment target for a public postsecondary institution. Now, this amendment would change that to seek consultations of no less than six months before allowing a minister to establish such an enrolment target. I'm very concerned with the legislation as it's originally stated in Bill 20, with the fact that the minister now wants to further meddle in the postsecondary institutions within our province. We've heard this minister stand up day in and day out and say, you know, things like, "We need to get the politics out of postsecondary education" and "We need to let them be independent of the minister," yet here we have in Bill 20, in black and white, that the minister actually wants to further meddle in their ability to offer programming. So that's very concerning to me.

Once again, the philosophy of this UCP government on one hand says that they want to get out of the way of organizations like postsecondary institutions, yet in this legislation they're trying to do the exact opposite, which is very concerning. Really, the amendment is very reasonable in the fact that it asks that the minister provide six months of consultation with these institutions before making these arbitrary enrolment targets, and I think that it's the right thing to do.

8:40

This government talks day in and day out – their actions speak louder than their words, of course, but they talk about consultation very often. I would be interested to find out who they consulted with that brought these concerns about enrolment targets being enforced by the minister. I'd be very interested to hear from that minister how this came into Bill 20 in the first place.

We have many concerns. Once again, we look at Bill 20 talking about getting rid of these very important tax credits, which I will speak more to later. Their reasoning is that we need to get out of the way of politicians making decisions about where money should be moved. Well, of course, we will talk about the \$4.7 billion that they are planning to move outside of the province, which is very concerning. On one hand they're getting rid of these very important tax credits which align us with other provinces in terms of the ability of the government to support industries like the digital media industry among others. Unfortunately, they are trying to get into the politics of deciding where students should go to school.

Once again, I thank the Member for Edmonton-North West for bringing this forward. I do plan on supporting it. The role of consultation in our democracy and as we create legislation is incredibly important. I would hate to see this section of Bill 20, which will, I imagine, hastily be moved through this Legislature, just like the previous bill was, and have wide, sweeping changes to

the way that we do business and the way that we interact with our postsecondary institutions – that's very concerning to me, Madam Chair.

Once again, I don't think that the government should be in the business of deciding where students go to school or what they are doing in school, and I think that students who are in high school right now and thinking about what they want to do will be very offended that now we have a minister trying to pass legislation that may, without consultation, dictate how they are receiving their education in postsecondary or what education they are getting in the first place.

Of course, postsecondary institutions, as has been discussed, offer a wide array of programming, whether it be bachelor studies or – for myself, when I went, I first obtained a certificate in radio-television broadcasting, a two-year diploma. Then I returned for my electrical apprenticeship. I think that people should be able to study whatever they want to study. With this Bill 20, if it weren't to accept these amendments, that may change, and that's very concerning, especially when we consider the funding that these postsecondary institutions receive from the minister and from the Ministry of Advanced Education. If a postsecondary institution decided that they wouldn't in fact listen to the minister in how they would provide programming or establish enrolment targets, there's concern that the minister might come back and, you know, hold funding as a dangling carrot over these institutions. That's very concerning to me.

Once again, I hope all members will support this amendment to Bill 20. I think it's common sense. I think it's the right thing to do. Consultation is always the right thing to do, and rarely is there enough consultation. I think this strikes the right balance.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Chair: Hon. members, are there any more speakers to the amendment? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

Ms Sigurdson: Well, thank you very much, Madam Chair. I'd like to speak in favour of this amendment. Certainly, you know, this omnibus bill that we're discussing right now, Bill 20, needs a lot of improvement. This goes partway to creating some improvement, so I appreciate my hon. colleague's amendment to shift things to make sure that students are able to access programs as they need to. I mean, one of the things that we know about this legislation that is proposed before us is that it is challenging students, absolutely, to make sure that they have the support that they should have in a province that's rich like Alberta, that should be supporting students to access postsecondary education.

There are other aspects of the bill that certainly are, you know, really – one of the questions I've posed in this House before is that when you look at legislation, when you look at policies, it's really important to ask: who benefits? Who benefits from this? Then you can tell whether – that goes a long way in terms of the assessment of that policy. There are many people who are not going to benefit from this legislation. Certainly, you know, two big players in our province are the big cities, both Edmonton and Calgary. Both of our mayors have come out very strongly against Bill 20. Quite frankly, they've been kind of shocked. Of course, I know that it's very important to this government to recite repeatedly, "Promise made, promise kept," but in terms of the city charters it's: promise made, promise broken. Both big-city mayors have talked about them scrapping the city charters fiscal framework, going from a \$500 million plan that we, when we were government, worked very long and very hard on and really did our due diligence on to support really progressive, positive wins for both the province and those big cities. Of course, they need a bit of a different setup than the other

centres that are smaller. The big cities have sort of unique needs and demands, so we worked very closely with both Mayor Iveson here in Edmonton and Mayor Nenshi in Calgary.

Mayor Iveson said that he was very disappointed because he was not expecting this change and that the province broke their commitment. He said: it was completely blindsiding to us that that's been reneged on as a campaign promise and as a piece of legislation that the UCP themselves voted for. This is also confusing because I know that the government likes to talk about making commitments and fulfilling their promises, but here's a clear one where they absolutely didn't. Certainly, Mayor Iveson has talked about, you know, the impact that it's going to have on the city of Edmonton and said: we're going to have to make some cuts, and they're going to hurt, and I'm going to explain to Edmontonians why the government of Alberta's broken promises are making life harder for Edmontonians. A direct quote from the mayor: projects like the LRT expansion will be delayed as funds aren't coming until later.

Mayor Nenshi also said, you know, understanding certainly that it was a part of the platform that this would be continuing, that the City Charters Fiscal Framework Act would continue: the United Conservative caucus voted for it in the fall Legislature sitting and will respect the multiyear funding in that agreement. Nenshi said: that's a black-and-white promise. With that, Nenshi crumpled up the piece of paper he was holding and threw it away because it meant nothing. The commitment dissolved right before him.

Certainly, the big cities are not benefiting, and much more is expected of them from this government. That's a pretty – I don't know – damning situation, I would say, because I think that any government wants to have integrity. I'm just confused by this omnibus bill where they clearly have ripped up those agreements with the big cities.

Besides that, there's just, you know, unrelated – really, as we know, it's an omnibus bill; it has all sorts of things thrown together in one. It makes it kind of difficult to make any coherence out of it. There are many funds that are going to be cancelled, and whatever reserves are left in them will just be transferred to general revenue. For example, with the access to the future fund, about \$58 million will be transferred; with the environmental protection and enhancement fund, \$150 million will be transferred just to general revenue; with the Alberta cancer prevention legacy fund, \$451 million; and then with the Alberta lottery fund, \$52 million. These organizations that are being disbanded by this omnibus bill provided some valuable contributions to our province.

8:50

One of them that I'd like to talk about a little bit is the Alberta cancer prevention legacy fund. Certainly, this organization supported society to have awareness about cancer, how to prevent it. You know, certainly, we know that cancers are linked to how we live. Some cancers are; some cancers aren't. Things such as what we eat and how much alcohol we drink, whether we're active or up to date with our screening tests: these are all important things. And this Alberta cancer prevention legacy fund would actually do education programs, support Albertans to understand: what are some things that we can do to take care of ourselves? You know, having a cancer diagnosis can create a huge difficulty for a family.

I mean, we know there is a tremendous amount that can be done to overcome a cancer diagnosis. I'm living proof of that. I have had treatment for leukemia, and I am doing quite well now. I'm being followed for the next year and a half or something, and then, they tell me, I'll be cured if things go well. I'm so grateful for the tremendous work that this group has done with all sorts of different kinds of cancers.

One of the things they did was that they did reach out all over Alberta, to many different towns and cities and people living on-reserve, and actually helped them to understand what are some things they could do to overcome the challenges, you know, to make sure that they were healthy and living well.

Here in Edmonton the Alberta cancer prevention legacy fund actually funded the Kids on Track Association of Edmonton. That helps kids who live in low income, new Canadians, ethnically and culturally diverse, and marginalized families who may be socially isolated and face barriers to inclusion. They were given a grant to increase operational capacity to provide more opportunities for the families that they worked with. That's just one of them. I have, like, several pages.

Up in Fort MacKay they had an outdoor community garden project to build on the success they'd seen with the indoor tower garden. This garden will become a community hub and create a sense of community and togetherness for residents and community members.

The Samson Cree First Nation was partnering with a number of community agencies to engage youth in a new health program, Cree youth cooking skills, and it'll focus on promoting a healthier lifestyle through an improved understanding of healthy eating, cooking skills, and cultural teachings.

The Boys & Girls Clubs of Calgary received a grant; Jasper Place Wellness Centre, Food4Good received a grant; the North Peace Youth Support Association in Fairview and the Alexander First Nation and the Viking Community Wellness Society received a grant. You know, I hope I'm making myself clear in that I'm explaining that all over our province people benefited from this program, and now it seems that our current government no longer thinks that this is important and has just put the excess revenues, I guess, into general revenue.

We also know that with the access to the future fund, Alberta Advanced Education, there was \$58 million in that. That helped our advanced education system be innovative, supported them to develop excellence in Alberta's advanced learning system. I mean, that's one of the key words, it seems, maybe a buzzword that this government likes to use, "innovation." You know, innovative things are going to happen so that magically programs can go on without funding, just through innovation somehow. But innovation actually needs funding. It needs support, and it needs money. This is a program that was already set up that, unfortunately, is no longer going to be served. Are we going to be able to continue to have that innovation in the advanced ed system?

One of the areas that I'm certainly quite concerned about is just, you know, what this government has done to the film and video industry in cancelling grants and replacing them with tax credits. The issue is kind of twofold. One is that the grants that have been cut have been replaced by tax credits. You know, some people have low budgets, and because of that, they can't really claim anything. They need those grants. They can't go ahead with a project without those grants.

When the cuts to the grants were made, the film industry and the video industry were, you know, strongly impacted. I met with representatives from the film and video association, FAVA, here in Edmonton. Their office is located in my riding, in the Orange Hub, which is sort of a building that has many nonprofits. They said that they're just overwhelmed with the changes and that so many projects are now in limbo. Projects can't go ahead with the smaller creative artists trying to do these projects because the grants have been cut, and the tax credits just aren't enough. There's actually a whole year in there, because of just the way this government has changed the rules on when you can apply and when you can't, that they won't have funding.

You know, when I talked to the staff there, they said: I don't want to move out of Alberta, but I feel like this change in how we're going to be funded is actually forcing me to. They're looking at places like Manitoba, possibly, having to move projects out of the province. This is just tragic because the industry was really building and growing and had some momentum. To have almost a year of funding not come through really has stymied so many projects. It's really very sad because a lot of the work that they're doing is local. It's about Alberta. There are a lot of projects focused on, you know, indigenous Albertans. These projects may be lost or moved somewhere else because this government is not supporting our film and video industry. That is very troubling. It's a creative industry that was really beginning to thrive, and we're very sad to see that happen.

You know, other aspects that I'm concerned about, too – again, it seems almost illogical that we're talking about the film industry, talking about those funds, talking about the city charters, and now I'm going to talk to you about indexing tax brackets, yet this is all in one bill. This is in this omnibus bill. It's very clear that this government just wants to ram things through without us really having the time to understand and clearly debate fairly.

Now I'm going to talk about indexing tax brackets. It's the first time since 2001 – that's, you know, 19 years ago – that tax brackets have not been indexed. Even though this government's narrative is that, "No, we're not raising taxes," they absolutely are because their neglecting to do this has meant that all Albertans will be paying more, \$600 million more in taxes over this term. That is a concern, absolutely, for our opposition here. We are not in support of that. Each year, we know, the cost of living goes up. Those kinds of things are just done, and this government is just trying to grab money from individuals. Despite them saying that for sure they're not going to raise taxes, it's a clear indication that they are.

You know, in moving to do so many different things with this bill, it's confusing for regular Albertans to even understand what this government is doing, but I think that perhaps that's part of the plan. The plan is: we're just going to try to ram as much through, and Albertans won't really understand, so they can't actually be concerned about it. Certainly, on this side of the House we are concerned, and we are doing our best to identify these things that this government is doing that are hurting Albertans. It's not as rosy as it was presented during the campaign and what they said in their platform. There are clear broken promises, and I've identified some of them right now: not indexing tax brackets, breaking the commitment regarding the city charters. These are things that are hurting Albertans, hurting Albertans here in the big cities . . .

9:00

Mr. Ellis: Point of order.

Ms Sigurdson: . . . and certainly also . . .

The Chair: Sorry, hon. member. A point of order has been called.

Point of Order Relevance

Mr. Ellis: I apologize. I hesitate to interrupt. I'm sorry. I was certainly listening intently to what the member was saying. I rise under 23(b):

speaks to matters other than

(i) the question under discussion.

I certainly appreciate the member's opposition to the bill itself, but we are talking about the amendment here, postsecondary enrolment targets. I appreciate the fact that the member has talked about everything in the bill with the exception of postsecondary

enrolment targets, but I certainly ask the chair to try and bring this under the amendment on which we are talking.

Thank you.

The Chair: Hon. member, I would tend to agree with this point of order. You have about three minutes left, which I'm sure you will use to talk about the amendment. Please proceed.

Debate Continued

Ms Sigurdson: Well, thank you, Madam Chair. I will focus now more closely on the amendment. Certainly, the amendment is to Bill 20, and that was my focus. But I understand that this is – I just want to again reiterate that I certainly am concerned about many things in Bill 20, and this sort of amendment does go some of the way to improving the legislation before us and making sure that students are supported.

With that, Madam Chair, I think I'll take my seat.

The Chair: Are there any members wishing to speak to amendment A3? The hon. Minister of Advanced Education.

Mr. Nicolaides: Well, thank you, Madam Chair. Happy to rise to speak to the amendment before us. You know, I'll be voting against the motion, and I'll be encouraging them to do the same. I find the amendment quite prescriptive in what it's seeking to achieve here. I mean, it's absolutely important that as we look at moving forward and we look at developing enrolment targets with our postsecondary institutions, we do that in a collaborative and a consultative way, as we have been, as I have been with our institutions thus far in terms of fulfilling our campaign commitments that we made to Albertans as they relate to postsecondary education. We've been doing that with a lot of very thoughtful discussion, very thoughtful debate and deliberation with our postsecondary stakeholders, our university administrators, our faculty representatives, our student leaders. There's definitely a very strong desire and a very strong history already from our side in terms of active consultation with our postsecondary institutions, and we will absolutely be continuing that as we look at developing enrolment targets for our postsecondary institutions.

The bill already makes it clear, on page 64 here if you're following along, in that it says, "The Minister, in consultation with public post-secondary institutions, may identify and establish enrolment targets." It's a little redundant and too prescriptive. I think it's important that we do have consultation with our postsecondary institutions, which is already proposed in Bill 20 here for us to be able to do that. Again, I find the amendment quite prescriptive, and it may result in many unforeseen problems and challenges. There are specific timelines in here, a requirement for six months of consultation for enrolment targets, and other prescriptive elements such as competitive admission requirements and that it cannot change more than 5 per cent from the previous year. I think we absolutely have to be very careful and diligent about how we establish enrolment corridors. There's no question about it. We have to be very thoughtful, and that'll be done in consultation with our postsecondary institutions in the right way.

I know that the Associate Minister of Red Tape Reduction would agree with me when it comes to this amendment as well. This has been a recurring theme that we've seen over the past few years, and our institutions are really looking to us to follow through and fulfill our campaign commitment of removing onerous red tape. There's been a lot of that which has been imposed by the former government. We believe it's important that our institutions have the ability and the time and the resources to engage in those activities

that are central to their mandate – pursuing research objectives, innovating, providing high-quality education to the young people of Alberta – not filling in needless reports and onerous administrative requirements, a lot of which have been imposed on them by the former government.

So I encourage my colleagues to not support the amendment that we have before us for the time being. Again, I believe that it's too prescriptive. I do believe, again, it is important that we do work in consultation, in collaboration with our institutions. They certainly know that that's my preference moving forward. That's the relationship that we've cultivated.

I'll yield the rest of my time to you, Madam Chair. Thank you.

The Chair: Are there any other members on amendment A3? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. Schmidt: Thank you, Madam Chair. I want to thank my friend the Member for Edmonton-North West for bringing forward this amendment and my friends the members for Edmonton-West Henday and Edmonton-Riverview for speaking so thoughtfully to the amendment, and I also want to thank the Member for Calgary-Bow for actually getting up and speaking to the amendment. It has certainly not been the habit of members of Executive Council to debate in any way the amendments that the opposition has brought forward, so I do appreciate the fact that the Member for Calgary-Bow has at least engaged in the debate. However, I do take issue with a number of the points that he raised.

First of all, you know, I think it's important for us to establish that here in the NDP caucus we believe that access to higher education is a right and that every student in Alberta should have a fair shot at going to the university or college of his or her choice. That's why we're bringing forward this amendment, Madam Chair. First of all, the first section talks about making sure that the enrolment targets that are set don't adversely affect student completion rates or negatively affect competitive admission rates. One of the things that we've seen already in the postsecondary sector here in Alberta is skyrocketing admission requirements because of the lack of spaces available in postsecondary programs. That's across all programs. It's not just limited to medicine and nursing, business, those high-demand programs. Even for programs that in other jurisdictions see falling enrolments – and I'm thinking about a basic science degree, for example – enrolment admissions for those kinds of programs have skyrocketed.

I've got a number of young people in my life who were in the process of enrolling in university or college over the past year, and even though these people had averages in their grade 12 years in the high 80s and low 90s, they couldn't get a space in a basic science program at the University of Alberta. That's the case at many universities all across the province. We heard, when I was Minister of Advanced Education, from a number of parents, particularly in Calgary, that their students who were high achievers – by any standard, they were high achievers – couldn't get into the programs of their choice, Madam Chair. That speaks to the lack of accessibility in postsecondary education in this province, an issue that will only get worse under the policies of this government. You can't cut government grants to every college and university by 5 per cent or more and increase accessibility to those programs.

I would be curious to see what's going to happen at the University of Calgary, who just announced that they're laying off approximately 350 staff. What is that going to do to the enrolment requirements in basic arts and sciences programs at that university, when you've got 350 fewer people to deliver those programs to the students?

9:10

That's going to be the case at every university and college because we know that all of the layoffs are not being announced yet, but we anticipate that with the massive reductions in the government grants that we have seen under this UCP government, we can anticipate far more layoffs of that magnitude all across the sector.

I would just note that it's interesting that the government presented in its full-time equivalent estimates in the fiscal plan that there were only going to be 300 layoffs in the entire postsecondary sector with the government grant reductions that the government brought forward, and I would hope that perhaps the Minister of Advanced Education would at least ask the Minister of Finance and Treasury Board to revise those numbers so that they more accurately reflect the number of layoffs that we have seen already. They've already exceeded their targets, and that's only one institution that's announced layoffs, and there are far more to come, but that's a side note.

We also want to make sure that, you know, the minister and the department are engaging in consultation, and in section (2) of this amendment that we're bringing forward, we specifically list students because students are often left out of the consultation processes that take place in the postsecondary sector.

Under our government we were quite proactive in making sure that students had a seat at the table. We were engaged in a number of consultations. We engaged in student mental health improvements, and we had students engaged in the consultation process around how to improve the delivery of student mental health programs on campuses all across Alberta. We engaged in a tuition review and a funding model review. We made sure that students were at the table when we were consulting on those issues.

We also had a tech seat enrolment increase plan, and we had student representatives involved with those consultations as well. It's important, I think, that we establish the legal requirement, then, that students be included in making sure that consultations happen with their voices heard because we certainly don't want the people who are going to be most affected by the minister's decision to monkey around with enrolment targets to negatively affect students and not have their voices involved in the process before the minister engages in those kinds of decision-making efforts.

I think that, you know, the one aspect that the Member for Calgary-Bow raised in his opposition to this amendment was the fact that we're prescribing a target for a period of not less than six months on the proposed enrolment target, and I think that that's only fair and reasonable given the speed at which changes in the postsecondary sector have been imposed by this government. It came way too quickly, completely by surprise. There was nothing about any of the changes, other than the adoption of the Chicago principles, that was in the UCP campaign platform, and the system can only handle so much change at once. So if the minister engages in this enrolment target project, we need to make sure that it's done in a thoughtful and timely manner, and I think that a period of not less than six months to engage in those kinds of consultations is reasonable given the sudden shocks that have been applied to the postsecondary system already by this government and the need to engage in any further changes in a thoughtful and reasonable manner.

The Member for Calgary-Bow well knows how difficult it is to make change in the postsecondary world, and I think that all of the stakeholders who are involved in the postsecondary world would welcome and appreciate a six-month time frame for consultations around proposed enrolment targets.

You know, the enrolment targets, of course, with respect to including members of the regulated profession: I think most universities and colleges who do provide programming for students

who are going into professions that are regulated already have some kind of mechanism to consult with those professions. But I think that in these cases it's even more important that those representatives be at the table, particularly given the fact that this government is waging an all-out assault on members of the public sector. Regulated professions who will be working in the public sector will be significantly and negatively affected by this government's decisions to kick a number of public-sector employees to the curb, and we want to make sure that we're not imposing enrolment targets on those kinds of programs and then graduating students who don't have a possibility of a job because this government refuses to fund an adequate number of spaces in the public sector.

You know, it's interesting. In his response to this amendment the Member for Calgary-Bow has complained on the one hand about it being too prescriptive yet on the other hand complains that he's the great laissez-faire, hands-off government, and of course nothing could be further from the truth. This accessibility and affordability clause was nowhere to be found in the Post-secondary Learning Act, and enrolment targets are an entirely new thing in the postsecondary sector, that the Member for Calgary-Bow seems to want to impose on the system with no good justification.

Now, I will say that we did fund targeted program growth in the postsecondary sector under my watch, but that was a response both to our government's desire to diversify the economy of Alberta away from oil and gas, something that this current government has completely abandoned, much to the detriment of future generations of Albertans, I'm sure, but also to the demand from the growing tech sectors in the cities of Edmonton and Calgary and other places where that sector is growing. They told us that in order to attract investment and to create growth in that industry, we needed to graduate people with technical skills that would allow them to be employable right away upon graduation. That's why we funded those enrolment growths.

You know, it's interesting that the government has moved away from that. We had set aside \$50 million to create 3,000 new tech spaces in the postsecondary sector over the next five years, and the government has completely removed the funding available for that. It's interesting that the minister is so eager to impose enrolment targets, yet any funding that was made available for creating enrolment targets has been removed from this budget.

I also want to express some concerns with the fact that the Member for Calgary-Bow seemed so reluctant to include students in the consultation requirements, as this amendment does. I want to warn him against just listening to the voices of university administrators, who, I can tell you, don't always have the best interests of students at heart. They are considering a wide number of factors when they make their decisions. Students are certainly one of them, but it's not always the overriding factor. In a climate where government grants are drying up pretty quickly, you know, university and college administrators are focusing more and more on what's best for the bottom line and making sure that students' concerns are not addressed as the top priority.

9:20

The minister is going to be approached with fantastic-sounding programs, you know, a new certificate in synergy or a diploma in interdisciplinary studies or a master's degree in business for engineers or I don't know what other kinds of things. The price tag for those kinds of programs is going to be extremely high because any time a university or college introduces a new program, that is an opportunity for that university or college to also set a new tuition rate. They're going to recommend the creation of a bunch of fantastic-sounding programs that are going to cost an arm and a leg and that will only provide access to the absolutely wealthiest of the

students here in Alberta and will do nothing to increase access for the people who are disadvantaged due to social, economic, geographic, or cultural factors.

That's why it's really important, Madam Chair, to have students at the table, because they understand what it's like to struggle to get into a university or college, and they act as an effective counterbalance to the voices of administrators, who are definitely not shy about creating very expensive programs that cater to only the wealthiest in the province and do nothing to enhance the accessibility or affordability of the postsecondary sector here in the province.

You know, I would encourage the Member for Calgary-Bow and the other members of the UCP caucus to give this amendment careful consideration. I think it would be wise for everyone to vote in favour of this amendment because we want to make sure that the enrolment targets that are set by this government do not negatively impact students in this province, which, if left unchecked and left only to the desires of the minister alone in consultation with postsecondary-sector administrators, would probably not happen.

I'm sure that all members want to go back to their constituencies and tell the young people in their constituencies that there will be a place for them in the university or college of their choice and that they voted in favour of this amendment to make sure that those spaces were provided, so I hope that all members here in this House will vote in favour of this amendment.

The Chair: Any other members wishing to speak to amendment A3? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

Mr. Feehan: Thank you, Madam Chair. I welcome the opportunity to speak to this amendment. As many of you will know, I have been an instructor at the University of Calgary for many years and, in fact, continue to hold tenure at the University of Calgary in the Faculty of Social Work.

You know, some of the considerations in this particular section of this, well, simply ridiculous compilation in Bill 20 of unrelated phenomena are of concern. We know it's of concern because whenever you're trying to bury things in a pile of other things, you know you're trying to hide them. I am very concerned about what the intention is and what direction we're going with here. The underlying concern for me is the difference between myself and the members of the government in terms of our attitude toward university and other postsecondary institutions in terms of their purpose and their value in society.

Now, the thing that concerns me is that in this section of Bill 20 that is being amended by the amendment we're discussing right now, it's trying to introduce into the Post-secondary Learning Act some increased influence by the minister on the decisions of the institutions which are provided with the responsibility of educating our citizenry. That concerns me a great deal. One of the important aspects of a democracy is that we have people who have a variety of backgrounds and experiences all being given the opportunity to bring their talents and understandings and their skill sets to make decisions on behalf of that section of society for which they are responsible. Now, sometimes that feels a little bit mucky. Sometimes it feels like there are a number of different people making decisions for different reasons.

If we were talking about business, for example, the government members would be very happy about that. They would say that government should stay out of the way and allow businesses to compete against each other and do things. From that organic process, then, good things will rise, and because of the competitive nature of the marketplace, things that are not successful will fall away over time.

Here we have a section of Bill 20 where the government is doing exactly the opposite, so there's inconsistency in their fundamental understanding of what they believe about the nature of society. In this case they're trying to insert the government into the discussion on what institutions will do in order to ensure enrolment in particular areas. That's of great concern because, again, like almost every bill that has been brought forward by this government, it's a centralization of power and decision-making into the hands of a few. We'll literally be in a place where 24 members of cabinet will be making decisions that used to be made by thousands of people around the province of Alberta. When you do that, when you create this small oligarchy of power, then we are in danger of having only a very narrow philosophical range being pursued in terms of our education of our citizenry.

That's of deep concern to me. I'm very concerned that the underlying intention of this act which we're trying to amend here is to bring it into a small group so that they can push particular ideological notions about: what is a valuable piece of learning, what is a valuable pursuit at a postsecondary level versus a nonvaluable? As soon as you have government deciding that these things are valuable – we'll support them, and we're going to increase enrolment in these areas, but we will not do that in these other areas – then we have centralized control, which I think is problematic and even dangerous.

I can tell you that I know that the government very often has a very simplistic view of what education is about, that somehow education needs to be specifically and concretely directed toward a particular form of employment; that is, if one goes into a university or NAIT or one of the academic postsecondary institutions, the government is saying that they should only be going in there because they have the ultimate ideal of obtaining employment in that particular area. I think that that's a very dangerous concept in a democracy.

In fact, we know that in universities a significant number of the students in any program will never actually be involved in the profession for which they're being trained. If you go to an average law school, for example, you'll find that it's almost 50 per cent of students that never actually end up practising law beyond a very brief time after they've gone to law school. Instead, they use it as a kickoff place to move into places such as politics, very common for people with legal training, or go into business, where, while they may bring some of their legal knowledge, they're not actually acting as a lawyer or solicitor in any way but, rather, acting as an executive within that operation. We know that students do that. Every professor will tell you that a significant portion of their students are not going in the direction of the employment to which the government would like them to be trained.

9:30

We think that's okay, and we think that it's okay because our understanding and our value for university education goes much beyond the practicalities of being trained for a particular function in society. Those other things that students learn are fundamentally important in a wide range of things in society. The ability to analyze situations and to engage in complex problem solving is fundamentally important in almost anything you do, not just your business or your occupation but, rather, your whole engagement in society.

We talk often here about the fact that we're very concerned about the undermining of democracy that's been going on in this Legislature over the last number of weeks. One of the things that a good postsecondary education does is provide people with the tools to effectively participate in that democracy, to not just simply vote for whatever is going to give my job, my profession the greatest

outcome – how am I going to personally gain from this? – but to think in a more community-oriented, publicly oriented manner so that they are pursuing not just the simplistic demands of their own wants and needs but, rather, looking at: how do we create a society in which the greatest number of people will benefit and that all people will have opportunities to enjoy participation in?

It's that kind of thinking that has led us to the place where we can now say that compared to 100 years ago or 150 years ago, people have an ability to participate in the benefits of society in a way that was not true 150 years ago. In Canada 150 years ago and before that in England and other places from which many of our people came to settle here in Canada, they didn't have opportunities. If you were born into the wrong class, you simply would never have an opportunity to move out of that class and participate in society in a new way. It was completely unlikely that if you were born into a poor family, you would ever become a doctor, you would ever become a lawyer, or you would ever become an academic.

It's because we believe in the values inherent in all people that we believe that all people should have the opportunity to move from whatever circumstance they happen to be born into into the circumstance that would allow them to express their greatest abilities and to contribute the most to the larger society, not just for themselves but for all people. For some people, we know that their contribution will be affected by the barriers that they experience, whether it happens to be poverty, whether it happens to be disability, whether it happens to be, you know, family trauma, all of those kinds of things. Our desire is to understand those barriers and to move beyond those barriers so that we can help all people to step over the barriers and move into a place where they would not have been unless we had created the opportunity for them to do that. That's what happens at a university, at a postsecondary institution like a technical institution, not just simply training for the job.

So it's really important that when we start to look at the issue of enrolment targets, we have to be very cautious about the limited philosophical point of view we have about a university and the danger of using an act like the Post-secondary Learning Act to pursue that limited philosophical perspective. Instead, what we want to do is that we want to look at those broad, grand ideas that have helped us to rise above the chaos of our life, the kind of life that has been described as short and nasty and difficult by philosophers, to a life in which people can be celebrated for their talents, whatever they may be, and for their opportunity to contribute those talents to the larger society.

[Mr. Milliken in the chair]

That's the kind of thing that we're getting at here when we talk about amending this section of Bill 20, and that is that we want to ensure that none of the decisions that are being made by the minister are going to stop us from engaging in those grand philosophical ideas that have led to us having the best standard of living in western democracies that the world has ever seen, the least amount of violence that history has ever seen comparatively to what it would have been like 300 years ago, the greatest amount of opportunity to change your socioeconomic status, the greatest opportunity for you to travel and to see greater parts of the world and to participate in the governance of your own society through a democratic process that requires that you have knowledge and the ability to engage in analysis and thoughtful decision-making in terms of that participation. Those are the kinds of things we need to protect if we're going to move forward here.

If we suddenly revert to, "We need more doctors, so we're going to try to increase the number of doctors, but we don't really care whether or not they have a broad education; we simply want people

to perform a function," then we're going to find ourselves going backwards in terms of what we have achieved as a society, and that's really not acceptable. That's true of any profession. If we say that we want more lawyers – God forbid; I come from a family of many, many lawyers – but we didn't ask them to think broadly beyond their own profession, then we would find ourselves in trouble. There is no profession that by itself completes society. We need all professions. We need the talents of all people, who bring with them different experiences, different understandings of the universe, and different ways of engaging in the democratic process and in the community in which we all live.

This is the thing that's of concern here in Bill 20, that we are moving away from these fundamentally important democratic processes that we have literally spent thousands of years creating and that have helped the greatest number of people to rise up from the hard-toil work of having labour that only is directed at feeding themselves for a day in hopes that the next day they can also do the same thing to being able to actually contribute in a grander, more celebratory way in the benefits of all society, some of them by being excellent doctors, some of them by being excellent lawyers, but some of them by being the sort of people who help us to think better and to make better decisions by bringing incredible artistic talent to the visual arts, to the dramatic arts, to sculpture, and to dance and all those other kinds of areas. That's what enriches society, and you don't get that by saying that we need more people to perform a particular governmentally decided function.

We need people to be able to move into those kinds of professions because they are personally engaged and have within them talents and abilities that other people don't have. I would love to be able to say that I can sing, but I simply cannot. I could certainly clear out this House if I were to start singing now, but I certainly admire the people who can do that. I can tell you that they truly enrich my life and enrich the life of the society in which I live. I have friends who have moved to Edmonton simply because we have such a wide range of possibilities here in Edmonton. They came here. One friend, who I had an amusing conversation with, said that he came to Edmonton because they have things like the Folk Festival and the Fringe Festival and the jazz festival and the Heritage Festival, and I said to him: "Oh. Which one of those do you like the most?" He said: "Oh, I don't go to any of them. I just love to live in a city that has all of those things."

9:40

I thought that was amusing but I also understood what he was saying. It wasn't about his own personal needs that were being satisfied and fulfilled by any of those particular things. It was about creating the opportunity for society to thrive, not simply to survive by completing the functions that are necessary for a society to get along day to day to pay their bills but to actually create an opportunity for people to enjoy their lives and to enjoy their relationships with other people and to create the society in which the outlook of your day is about being in relationship with others and not just simply providing the function as a cog in the machine to some other system merely so that you can put food on the table. I think that that's the concern that we have here in this amendment, and that is that we need the government not to be overly controlling in terms of making decisions about the enrolment targets.

Now, we know that universities for a long time have been engaged in processes where they try to encourage enrolment and try to ensure that students are successful. It's generally referred to in academic settings as strategic enrolment management, or SEM. I just want to read you a quote by Michael Dolence, who said that SEM is "a comprehensive process designed to help institutions . . .

achieve and maintain the optimum [enrolment],” where “optimum” is “defined within the academic context of the . . . institution.”

It’s very important that we trust our institutions, that when we create universities, we trust them to have an understanding of their own function and their part in the larger society. We encourage them in their strategic enrolment management, but we do not control it. We do not move that kind of decision-making away from the universities and the colleges into the role of the minister because I think there’s danger when we do that.

Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other hon. members looking to speak to amendment A3? I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-South.

Mr. Dang: Thank you, Mr. Chair. It’s always a pleasure to rise and speak to an amendment in this place, particularly when it’s an amendment from my hon. colleague for Edmonton-North West.

I think that it’s a very reasonable amendment, because when we look at amendment A3 and we look at Bill 20, Bill 20 basically does every single thing it can to attack postsecondary students, right? It makes life harder in almost every single way for postsecondary students. So why don’t we try to do something about actually getting people into postsecondary? If we’re going to make their lives hard and we’re going to make their lives expensive and we’re going to make their loans cost more and their tuition cost more and all the things that they do cost more, Mr. Chair, then perhaps we can at least make sure that they get into school first. I think that’s something that’s very important.

I think it’s very important. When we look at the way Bill 20 is worded before the amendment, it basically gives carte blanche to the minister – right? – to do whatever he wants, to have no guidelines on how to set out these targets without doing any consultation. I think that’s something that’s very shocking. I think that governments shouldn’t move in that way. Governments shouldn’t do things without consultation. They shouldn’t do things without understanding the effects it will have on communities, without understanding the effects that things will have on completion rates of high school students, FNMI students, and so much more, and without understanding what it will do to affect things like competitive admission requirements.

When we talk about these types of issues, Mr. Chair, we have to understand, in a wholistic picture, that postsecondary education is not in a bubble, right? Everything we do at one end affects the other end. When we do things like increase tuition by 23 per cent as a means to pay off the \$4.7 billion no-jobs corporate giveaway, when we do things like try to increase student loan rates by 1 per cent, on the other end you’re going to be affecting enrolment. You’re going to be affecting the ability of people to enter the schools. So when the minister makes these carte blanche changes to entrance requirements and enrolment caps and enrolment targets – this amendment allows us to ensure that we’re not prohibiting, in a negative way, students from entering postsecondary education, because we know that postsecondary education is so essential to having a strong workforce. It doesn’t matter whether you go to a trade school or a college or a university. Going to postsecondary education improves your life outcomes in so many different ways. That’s something that I think that members on both sides of this House will understand and support.

When we talk about these programs, we have to understand that we should be trying to have a measured or reasoned approach, right? The minister got up earlier and spoke a little bit about how he thought it was too prescriptive and how he didn’t like how prescriptive it was and how it kind of told him what to do. I think

that’s something that’s a little bit disappointing, Mr. Chair, because when we look at the amendment, it says: well, the minister must consult. That’s basically the crux of the amendment here, that the minister should actually talk to people about what he’s doing. If the minister doesn’t think that’s an important aspect of his job, then I think that perhaps the minister has a lot of things about his job he needs to reconsider.

I think it’s very important that when we look at amendments, we actually understand what they’re proposing, understand what the core values of the amendment will be, and understand how the core amendment will change what we’re trying to move forward with. When we talk about having a proposed consultation period and enrolment target period and all these sorts of things and when we talk about the different types of professions that are being governed and having these types of significant changes, that the minister in the original bill, without the amendment, is being given carte blanche to change, when we see these significant powers being given to the minister without any consultation, it really begs the question: why should we trust the minister? It’s not that I say that I don’t trust this minister, but legislation has to work for years – right? – and potentially decades, Mr. Chair. It’s important that when we pass legislation, we understand what the long-term impacts are going to be.

Without doing adequate consultation and without requiring the minister to do adequate consultation, I think it’s doing a disservice to all of our constituents. It does a disservice to all Albertans, really, because having the ability to actually understand the impact by talking to administrators, by talking to students, by talking to high schools, by talking to school counsellors, by talking to teachers – doing consultation is not a bad thing. This government seems to think that doing consultation is a dirty word. Consultation, for them, is a dirty word, Mr. Chair. The Premier himself said that they wouldn’t stop for consultation, that they must move forward quickly. I think that that’s something that doesn’t speak to why we are here as legislators. It doesn’t speak to: what is the best type of change we want to make for our province? It doesn’t speak to the type of bill that we want to be passing. I think that’s something that’s a little bit disappointing. I think it’s something that I’m hoping the minister will reconsider, that I’m hoping all members of this House will reconsider as well.

When we talk about planning to increase participation, when we talk about trying to kind of improve the livelihoods and abilities of students across this province, it’s important that we actually understand what we’re doing. Right here, in section (a), sub (b) of the amendment, we want to make sure, for example, that we don’t do things to increase the competitive admission requirement significantly. These competitive admission requirements, Mr. Chair, are something that many institutions use in many different fields. I know that the field that I went into, computing science, had competitive admission requirements. I know that the fields a number of my friends went into, such as engineering, had competitive admission requirements, and many, many other faculties had them as well. But when we talk about competitive admission requirements, basically by the stroke of a pen, by a very, very minor change, this minister could suddenly have somebody who would have gotten in one year, and the next year they could be 10, 20 per cent out of the admission requirement range, right?

That is something that students should have. Students should have a stability of knowing that they need to aim to have certain targets. Students should understand that if they want to get into certain fields, they sort of have a ballpark at least of where they want to perform. I think that’s something that’s very important, that we can give students this stability. We’re already taking away the stability of students in terms of tuition, for example, knowing that

tuition is going up potentially 23 per cent to pay for the \$4.7 billion no-jobs corporate handout. We know that student loans are going up a percentage point as well, working out to thousands of dollars. I think it's over \$7,000, if someone will correct me, per student over the life of their loans. When we're talking about large numbers like that that are already affecting students' ability to plan effectively, students' ability to have that effective long-term planning, and affecting their ability to enter school – that's on the back end, Mr. Chair. Things like student loans are on the back end. Things like how much tuition cumulatively adds up over four, five years is on the back end.

9:50

But the front end, getting students into school and into postsecondary, should be this minister's primary goal, to actually help more and more students get into postsecondary. Instead, it seems that this minister doesn't actually care about that because he thinks, in this case, Mr. Chair, that a clause making sure that we don't adversely affect competitive admission requirements would be negative. That's, of course, very concerning, especially when he's also rebuking a clause that says that we want to make sure that completion rates of Alberta high school students, including FNMI, First Nations, Métis, and Inuit high school students, are maintained without adversely damaging the ability of students to complete their secondary and then enter postsecondary education.

When we're looking at these types of changes and the minister not actually reading and understanding that the consultation with these groups is important and not understanding that the consultation would allow us to have better policy and better targets, I think that's something that's very concerning. I think it's very concerning that the minister just doesn't think it's valuable, doesn't think it's valuable to consult and doesn't think it's valuable to talk to the actual people who are being most affected by this. We understand in this House that we want people to complete postsecondary education, we want people to attend postsecondary education, and we want people to have the best experience possible in postsecondary education, but we know that this bill, Bill 20, is making many, many if not all of those things harder. We're trying to make this bad bill better by making it on the front end for students to enter university, NAIT, whatever it is, whether it's a trade school or a college or a university, whatever they need to enter, Mr. Chair.

What the minister doesn't understand is that bringing in adverse requirements like this and bringing in adverse outcomes like this can actually harm those entry rates, right? So why don't we step back? Why don't we consult on that? Why don't we actually talk to the people that need to get into these schools and people that are running these schools and all of these things, Mr. Chair? I know my hon. colleague from Edmonton-Gold Bar has spoken about how perhaps not only listening to administrators is good, but it seems that the minister doesn't even want to listen to administrators. I mean, administrators don't always have the best interests of students in their role, and I understand that, but at least they have some interest. Without accepting this amendment, the minister doesn't want to listen to even the administrators, doesn't want to listen to anybody. The minister thinks he knows best, and I think that that's something that's a little bit disappointing.

I think it's disappointing because we know that in some cases we do need to collect information – right? – that we do need to collect a better picture of what's going on and how the things and policy that we set in this place and in Executive Council will affect thousands of people if not tens of thousands of people, Mr. Chair. That's why we look at this amendment. That's why we look at saying: "Let's just slow down. Let's consult. Let's talk to people. Let's understand the impacts." I think it's very reasonable. I think

that members of the now government caucus, when they were in opposition, brought amendments forward like this many times and spoke at length about how consultation, slowing down the process would benefit Albertans and would benefit the ability of the government of the time. I'm sure that they would agree that the government now could make better decisions as well if they simply actually talked to Albertans and actually talked to the people they were affecting and talked to the families that they were affecting.

It's disappointing that this minister doesn't think that's something that's important to him. It's disappointing that this minister doesn't think it's something that's important, to have those types of conversations and to understand the types of impacts we'll have. When we look at Bill 20, we can see, again, that 23 per cent increase to tuition. We see a 1 per cent increase to student loan rates. We see in all of these attacks again and again, for example dissolving the access to the future fund and all of these types of attacks on postsecondary, that this minister doesn't seem to actually have the best interests of the students at heart, doesn't seem to want to be encouraging more students to enter.

When we look at this and say that, well, the minister doesn't even want to consult on the enrolment targets that he's giving himself the power to set and doesn't even want to talk to people about the enrolment targets that they want to set, Mr. Chair, I think that's something that's very concerning, because we can see throughout this bill, time and time again, that it's an attack on students, that it's an attack on the ability of students to enter and maintain and sustain and stay in postsecondary education. It seems the minister doesn't really have the answers to why that's an adequate thing.

I think the minister got up early and said that this amendment was too prescriptive. Well, Mr. Chair, it says that the minister should consult. If that's too prescriptive, then I don't know what the minister thinks his job is. I think it is the duty of the minister to make sure that he has the best information for the bill moving forward, and I think that many members here would agree with me. I think it's disappointing that the minister doesn't understand that.

I think it's a very reasonable amendment. I think it addresses a lot of the clauses that are concerning in terms of not recognizing that you could have spikes in competitive admission requirements, not recognizing that those fluctuations in competitive admission requirements can adversely affect things like school completion rates, can adversely affect secondary completion rates, not postsecondary but secondary school completion rates, can adversely affect things like, obviously, postsecondary admission rates.

It's this whole idea, Mr. Chair, that students don't deserve stability, right? The Conservative government here is bringing forward a bill that overwhelmingly says: "Students don't deserve stability. They don't deserve stability in their tuition fees. They don't deserve stability in their student loan rates. They don't deserve stability in their admission requirements." Again and again and again we see that this government doesn't seem to understand why somebody might want to be able to plan, why they might want to be able to plan the next four or five years of their lives. Especially as a young person, especially as a student, when we look at students – and let's say that you're 17 or 18 years old and planning to enter a postsecondary institution, whether that's a two-year trade program or a four-year degree or whatever it is – when students are looking to enter postsecondary, they want to be able to have a plan.

I know that when I entered postsecondary, I thought I had a trajectory. I said, "In four or four and a half years I'll be able to complete these programs and enter into additional streams," whatever it was. I know a lot of my friends had the same thoughts. I know that even, like, many years ago – I won't say how many,

Mr. Chair – when my father entered and he went to NAIT and got a computer programming certificate, he knew that he wanted to complete it over two years, and then after that, he'd try and find a job. But this type of stability, that students want to plan for, wanting to understand what their life will look like: especially when you're a younger person, 17 or 18 years old, you're looking at spending upwards of a quarter of your life in postsecondary, basically – right? – because you're going to spend four or five years in it. You're looking to spend a quarter of your life, and you want to plan that next quarter of your life. Instead, this minister thinks it's not important that that stability exist, that it's not important that these students be able to plan, that it's not important they know what their tuition is going to be, that it's not important that they know what their student loans are going to be, that it's not important that they even know what the admission requirements are going to be, so they don't even know if they're going to be able to get into the thing they've planned for.

I think that's something that's pretty shocking. I think it's something that I hope we can do better. I hope we can do better because students deserve to have that knowledge, right? If you're entering school, in many cases, Mr. Chair, for example, you're in an advanced program at your school, so you're in an advanced placement program, AP, which is commonly seen here in Alberta, or you're in an international baccalaureate program, IB, as well. If they're in either of these programs, in many cases, when they're in grade 11, so when students are 16-ish years old, they're already planning their entry into postsecondary. They're already planning their entry into degree programs, and they're taking requirements to get into degree programs. They're doing things like arranging their courses for their grade 12 year to make sure they get into degree programs and not understanding the stability of those admission requirements, let's say, if they want into a science or an art, if they want to get into chemistry or biology or computer science or whatever it is. Not having that stability and not having the understanding of what the admission requirements are can really adversely affect the ability of these students to plan.

It speaks again and again to how this government doesn't seem to understand the needs of students. When we talk about the needs of students and that stability and how they need to be able to plan their lives, Mr. Chair, and plan the next, probably, most formative years of any of their lives, that's where consultation comes in, right? That's where the minister needs to go and actually talk to people and understand how these are going to impact their lives, but the minister doesn't think that's important. Being forced to actually go talk to the people about the changes his bill is bringing forward in Bill 20 here: the minister thinks that those types of things are too prescriptive. Perhaps telling the minister to do his job is too prescriptive, and that's a little bit disappointing.

It's a little bit unfortunate, I think. It's unfortunate for students and unfortunate for people planning to enter the postsecondary system. It's unfortunate for people that want to get into a trade school or another postsecondary institution, Mr. Chair. That's something that's unfortunate, because this minister, I think, needs to do better, right? We need to understand how you're going to be affecting the largest stakeholder, the most important stakeholder when you're the Minister of Advanced Education, the students. If you don't understand how this is going to be affecting the students, if you don't care how this is going to be affecting students, I think we have to have a really solid conversation about: what are you doing as the Advanced Education minister? If the enrolment caps without this amendment suddenly spike 10, 15, 20 per cent, then some of these students aren't able to get into postsecondary, and that begs the question: what is the Advanced Education minister even doing in their portfolio? What is that minister even doing, and

why does that minister think it's okay to try and restrict the students from entering the fields and entering the postsecondary? I think that's something that's very concerning.

10:00

I think it's something that needs to be answered here today because when we look at the minister's authority, when we look at what we're giving the minister authority to do today, we need to understand that students deserve better, right? Students deserve a government that is listening to them. Students deserve a government that is trying to fight for them, is trying to make their life more affordable, and this bill does none of those things, Mr. Chair. It does none of those things. This amendment doesn't fix many of those things, actually. I'll admit to you that it fixes one of those things. It fixes admission a little bit. It kind of fixes admission, and it fixes some enrolment targets, but this government doesn't even want to go that far. They don't even want to make one change that would benefit the students.

I think that when the minister refuses to want to listen to students and listen to consultations and actually understand the impact they'd be having on high school students looking to enter postsecondary – it's not only high school students, Mr. Chair. I know that many people go back to postsecondary some way through their career as well. That allows them to do things like upgrading. It allows them to do things like mid-career changes. But if they don't understand and they don't really have the ability to predict what the competitive admission requirements are going to be for their re-entry into postsecondary either, that actually limits the ability for people who are looking to find different types of work and new work as well. It speaks again and again to how this minister and this government don't seem to care, don't seem to understand that adversely impacting people's entry into postsecondary is a negative thing. Adversely impacting people's ability to understand and have stability around postsecondary is a negative thing.

I don't know why we need to explain this to the government. It's something that should be self-evident, Mr. Chair, but perhaps it speaks to their values and how they don't really believe that we should be supporting these people. I think that the people who are looking for new jobs, the people who are looking to enter the workforce and get this type of education, would disagree. I hope that every single member of the House will think very solidly about that and understand how this is going to affect their constituents and their families and their neighbours and their communities.

I encourage every single member of this House to vote for this amendment, and I look forward to hearing from the rest. Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other hon. members looking to speak to amendment A3?

[Motion on amendment A3 lost]

The Deputy Chair: Moving back to Bill 20 proper, are there any members looking to speak? I see the hon. Member for St. Albert has risen to speak.

Ms Renaud: Thank you, Mr. Chair. It's my pleasure to rise and speak to Bill 20, Fiscal Measures and Taxation Act, 2019. This is yet another huge piece of legislation. You know, it's sort of interesting. I can remember not that long ago, when some of the government members were on opposition benches, that regularly they would quote the number of pages in pieces of legislation that were in front of them and would proceed to go on and on about the time that was required to read it or how perhaps pieces didn't fit

together. Suddenly that just seems to be gone, so we're just inundated with these massive pieces of legislation that do a really good job at camouflaging quite a number of things. Let's just start. Where to start? Let's start at the beginning, I suppose. Just for the record, for clarity, this bill has 102 pages, repeals five different acts, creates two new ones, and amends a dozen other ones. It's a little bit disturbing.

Let's focus first on tax credits that are in this piece of legislation. Although there are a number of things that are changed in this legislation, what is disturbing is the theme, and the theme seems to be: investment in other sectors or unique sectors or sectors that would lead to true diversification just doesn't seem to be very important. We've seen just systematic cutting, reducing, or completely eliminating the work that's been done, the path that's been laid towards diversification.

I really question why that is. Of course, the answer has got to be that if you're going to create a \$4.7 billion giveaway for already profitable corporations – and let's be clear that these are corporations that, I believe, are earning a net profit of about \$500,000 a year. These are fairly profitable corporations – and, you know, great for them for doing so well – but it's unfortunate that we are directing these kinds of resources to these companies. These fledgling start-ups or these companies in really unique sectors that have the ability to take us in new directions and truly are job creators in and of themselves: these are the folks that are really suffering. Again, I don't know why. I guess this government really does want to take us backwards in all kinds of ways, some of them in terms of our human rights and social justice and, it looks like, in terms of our economy as well.

Let's call this \$4.7 billion giveaway what it is, and it is – you know, we've called it before trickle-down economics, which really is kind of a joke. It started as a joke, but that's what this is. So I just want to talk a little bit about – there's a business columnist out of the United States that had quite a bit to say about this sort of thinking. Some of the things he had to say were quite interesting and, I think, add to the discussion here. He says:

One of the biggest lies foisted on the American people . . .

Again, he's from the United States

. . . is that rich people getting richer – when rich people get richer, we all benefit, that being the basic premise of so-called trickle-down theory. For decades working families have been told not to worry about the growing wealth gap between the nation's haves and have-nots. A rising tide lifts all boats: we've been told that with encouraging smiles and pats on the back.

You can see sort of where he's going with this.

Here's another contributor. I'd like to quote William Darity, who's a professor of public policy at Duke University. He says:

It's nonsensical to think that greater wealth for the rich translates to improved fortunes for everybody else. Otherwise, we would not have observed such an obscene increase in the degree of income equality that has restored the magnitude of levels that existed on the eve of the Great Depression. I've not seen anyone make a serious claim for a trickle-down effect with respect to wealth. Put simply, there is no empirical evidence, none whatsoever, that trickle-down economics deliver as promised, bringing more jobs, higher pay, and better conditions to millions of people. The reality is that the rich get richer – the rich get richer – full stop. They buy more houses, cars, boats, and stuff.

That's how he ended his quote. I mean, it's a little bit flippant towards the end, but I think you get the message.

I think that when we look to the south, we see an entire country really engaged in this – I don't even want to call it "trickle-down" – move towards creating more tax breaks and tax incentives and wealth for a very, very small portion of the people that live there. We know that the gap between the very, very wealthy and then the

rest of the people continues to grow. I'm sad that this government has chosen to emulate those choices. You know what? I must add that in the United States currently, their President – we'll see how long that lasts – a Republican, has done what Republicans have always wanted, to give great big tax breaks to wealthy people and to wealthy corporations and then tell the rest of the American people: yeah, this will trickle down; you'll be great. In fact, it hasn't. These fiscal hawks, these fiscal Republicans have now created the largest debt they've ever seen. How does that work?

I think that in such a short time – and I also find it quite interesting that before we even began to see what was in the government's budget, before we had a chance to debate anything, this government jammed through a corporate tax break of such magnitude that it would jar everything else after it. That's very telling, that they wouldn't wait to put it into the budget to discuss, to debate, to allow questions on. They just did it at the very beginning, knowing that Albertans would see what they're doing.

10:10

We are seeing this almost on a weekly basis, that very large profitable corporations, having already received the benefit of this tax break, are actually taking their money and going elsewhere when really this was supposed to be about job creation. It turns out that it's more about wealth creation, which is unfortunate.

Again, let's go back to some of the other things that have been jammed into this huge piece of legislation, which is really unfortunate because when we have such a small amount of time to go through this and to talk about what this means for the future of Alberta, for the future of Albertans, we don't actually have time to go through and to really examine all of these pieces.

As I was flipping through it, I noticed that one of the tax credits cancelled – and I have to admit that I'm not totally surprised by this – is the scientific research and experimental development tax credit. This particular tax credit provides support in the form of tax credits and/or refunds to corporations, partnerships, or individuals who conduct scientific research and experimental development in Canada. Now, of course, thankfully, there is still a federal program in place. This particular tax credit is 35 per cent of the first \$3 million in qualified expenditures and then 15 per cent on any excess amount. Alberta now will join Prince Edward Island as the only provinces that don't offer a provincial top-up to this federal program. Once again, it's just another step backwards. It's almost like a systematic changing of where we were, a very progressive province that was sort of leading the way in Canada, to: now we just are joining the back of the pack. We are losing really important tax credits, and people will go elsewhere. We are losing important tax credits, important programs. Why? I don't really know.

One of the things that will impact thousands of Albertans is the education and tuition tax credits. It's hard to believe that this government is so arrogant and entitled that they would believe that Albertans can manage the kind of cuts that they're just throwing at them by saying: "Trust us. Trust us. By investing in this large corporate tax giveaway, everybody will benefit." Well, let's look at an average family with a postsecondary student. You've now cut the education and tuition tax credits. Students will pay more for their tuition. If they're required to take out a loan, they're going to pay more for that loan. If they tried saving for tuition for postsecondary, they would have likely earned less than minimum wage because this government saw fit to reduce that as well. It's like this full-frontal attack on postsecondary education and Alberta families. Once again, it's just another example of the very wealthy doing quite well, and the rest of us just need to suck it up.

One of the other things that I was really disturbed about was the child and family benefit tax credit. What really bothered me is that on the day that this budget was dropped, actually, as we were feverishly going through it trying to figure it out, we calculated very quickly that by changing the income thresholds, what this government had essentially done was cut. Of course, they like to spin it. In their minds, the way they spin it is: "Nothing is cut. Nothing is changed. Everything is great. Nothing to see here. Move along." But really there has been a lot of damage done here. The child and family benefit tax credit: we'll reduce the benefit – here's a big number. Listen to it: 165,000 Albertans will be impacted by these new income thresholds. Now, I know it doesn't bother you because this doesn't impact you, but I can tell you that there are thousands and thousands and thousands of Alberta families that barely get by. This particular tax credit: if they are just on the cusp of that income cut-off, when you change this benefit, you are going to cause damage. But you don't seem to care. You don't seem to listen. All we get back is: "Nothing has changed. Nothing to see here. Everything is fine. It'll all trickle down. We'll be rosy. Everything will be good." It's not good.

The Alberta child benefit: let me give you an example. When I talk about . . .

The Deputy Chair: I hesitate to interrupt the hon. Member for St. Albert, but in accordance with Standing Order 64(5) the chair is required to put the question to the Assembly on the appropriation bill standing on the Order Paper for third reading. The committee must first rise and report without question put.

[Mr. Milliken in the chair]

Mr. Orr: Mr. Speaker, the Committee of the Whole has had under consideration a certain bill. The committee reports progress on the following bill: Bill 20. I wish to table copies of all amendments considered by the Committee of the Whole on this date for the official records of the Assembly.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Does the Assembly concur in the report? All those in favour, please say aye.

Hon. Members: Aye.

The Acting Speaker: Any opposed, please say no. That is so ordered.

Prior to moving to the question on the appropriation bill, I believe the hon. Government House Leader has caught my eye.

Mr. Jason Nixon: It's like you're a mind reader, Mr. Speaker. I'm just so blown away by that.

I'd like to move that we move to one-minute bells for the remainder of the evening.

[Unanimous consent granted]

Government Bills and Orders Third Reading

Bill 24 Appropriation Act, 2019 (continued)

The Acting Speaker: The chair is required to put the question to the Assembly on the appropriation bill standing on the Order Paper for third reading.

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

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 10:18 p.m.]

[One minute having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

[Mr. Milliken in the chair]

For the motion:

Aheer	Loewen	Rowswell
Allard	Long	Schweitzer
Copping	McIver	Toews
Ellis	Nicolaides	Toor
Getson	Nixon, Jason	Turton
Glasgo	Nixon, Jeremy	van Dijken
Glubish	Orr	Williams
Goodridge	Panda	Wilson
Gotfried	Pitt	Yao
Guthrie	Pon	Yaseen
Jones	Reid	

Against the motion:

Carson	Feehan	Schmidt
Dang	Goehring	Sigurdson, L.
Eggen	Renaud	Sweet

Totals: For – 32 Against – 9

[Motion carried; Bill 24 read a third time]

Government Bills and Orders

Second Reading

(continued)

Bill 27

Trespass Statutes (Protecting Law-abiding Property Owners) Amendment Act, 2019

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Minister of Justice.

Mr. Schweitzer: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to move second reading of Bill 27, the Trespass Statutes (Protecting Law-abiding Property Owners) Amendment Act, 2019.

Mr. Speaker, over the last few months as I've travelled across Alberta, I particularly focused on rural communities and mid-sized centres across Alberta, talking about rural crime, talking about the challenges that we have in our communities: too many people that are living in fear, too many people that are too brazen in their criminal activities targeting rural communities, targeting Albertans. The feedback that we received from Albertans was crystal clear. We need to make sure that we have the strongest property rights possible in the province of Alberta, and that's what this bill here works towards, Mr. Speaker, to make sure that Albertans know that their property rights will be respected.

We heard on a couple different areas, Mr. Speaker. One is on trespassing. People just have been too brazen in their trespassing, so the purpose of this bill helps tighten that to send the clearest signal that that can't be done in the province of Alberta without facing a stiff penalty. In addition to that, we also saw the fact that criminals, people committing a criminal act on property, then have the brazen determination to sue a law-abiding property owner. Mr. Speaker, that is unacceptable in the province of Alberta. This bill seeks to make the proper amendments to address those issues, and I'll get into the details here.

Today I'm seeking support for Bill 27, the Trespass Statutes (Protecting Law-abiding Property Owners) Amendment Act. If

passed, it will help halt the erosion of property rights in Alberta and deter those seeking to trespass on private property. The proposed amendments will add an explicit reference within the Petty Trespass Act to land use for the production of crops, the raising and maintenance of animals, and the keeping of bees.

It will also increase the maximum fine for trespass without notice from \$2,000 and \$5,000 for first and subsequent offences to \$10,000 and \$25,000 respectively. It will increase the maximum penalty for trespass with notice to fines of \$10,000 and \$25,000 for first and subsequent offences respectively, a term of imprisonment of up to six months, or both; create an offence for a corporation to direct counsel or aid a trespass; create a maximum fine of up to \$200,000 for corporations; create provisions in the Petty Trespass Act and the Trespass to Premises Act to address entry under false pretenses; increase the maximum compensation that can be ordered for loss of or damage to property under the Provincial Offences Procedure Act from \$25,000 to \$100,000; reduce property owners' civil liability for injuries or death to criminal trespassers and make this retroactive to January 1, 2018; and amend the Limitations Act to suspend the limitation period for a civil action pending the determination of possible criminal conduct on the part of the property owner.

Mr. Speaker, these are measures that Albertans have long been calling for. They're asking to be protected. They want to make sure that their property rights are respected. I hope the members, on both sides of this House, will support this legislation and for the rights of property owners across Alberta to be respected in the province of Alberta.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

Are there any members wishing to speak to this bill? I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning has risen.

Ms Sweet: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's an honour to rise and to speak to Bill 27, the Trespass Statutes (Protecting Law-abiding Property Owners) Amendment Act, 2019. That's a long title. First off, I want to recognize and acknowledge that, of course, trespassing on anybody's property is obviously a very scary thing, even scarier in rural Alberta when you're isolated and you're not as close to your neighbours and it feels like the police are too far away. This bill, obviously, addresses a real concern, but there are some questions and some clarity that we're asking for at this time as we move forward into Committee of the Whole.

Part of the question and concern that we have is that most Albertans are good neighbours, and we all look out for each other. We understand, you know, that making sure that our neighbours are protected and safe is important. But what we see with this bill is that there's a potential to be going down a dangerous path, and that's the path around stand your ground legislation. What we're looking for and what we need clarity on is what this will look like. Obviously, there is a way that this legislation can start creating changes that could potentially start looking at stand your ground.

We have some questions for the minister. If a trespasser is shot on someone's property, will there continue to be a criminal investigation? This seems to make the law more complicated in many ways. How will people be educated about the profound changes in this bill, particularly in regard to the duty of care?

There's also a provision in the bill that speaks to the government's plan to train wildlife officers and others to respond to 911 calls. Again, we just have some questions about: how will they be trained to deal with the particular situations that they may be

responding to? Will they be given the same authorities as police officers, and what will those look like?

The other piece that I am curious about as well is why the bill is retroactive to January 2018, why it's not coming into force at proclamation, and why it's backdated to January 2018, a full year, well, two years prior by the time this bill may potentially be proclaimed.

There are questions around the exemption from civil liability for injuries to trespassers when the owner has reasonable grounds to believe the trespasser is committing or about to commit a criminal offence, also around landowners not being liable for injuries or death unless it was clearly caused by the landowner. Trespassers that get injured have no civil claim unless it's proven that the landowner or occupier committed a criminal act. The landlord does not owe a duty of care to the trespasser.

There are lots of questions just around the retroactiveness of this and then why it's so explicit around some of these questions. Again, I'm not saying that they aren't justified. They're just for clarity and just pieces that we're asking for.

Then, of course, why have the references for the penalties increased to the point that they've increased to? Where was the decision and what was the rationale around the dollar amounts that were chosen? Again, I'm not saying that there shouldn't be penalties but am just wondering why they were increased to the levels that they were increased to and then, of course, substantially for first and subsequent offenders.

Those are just some of the questions that we have. Obviously, as we move into Committee of the Whole and the minister is able to maybe respond to some of my questions, that would be beneficial.

10:30

I do want to highlight, though, that there is definitely some real value in some of the concerns that are being addressed around the trespassing component. I know that we've heard from experts about the risk to biosecurity around some of these farms. Obviously, hog producers have some real concerns around the swine flu and the fact that it's easily transferable to people if they enter the barn without going through the appropriate steps to make sure that they're not transferring it. When the issues around the Hutterite farm for the turkeys became an issue, again, there's a real concern and real risk around the biohazards around turkey farms and making sure that we aren't transferring diseases between animals and humans and then taking them off the property.

I think that those concerns are definitely valid and definitely things that we need to discuss. It's just clarifying some of the other questions around where and why we're doing that. To be honest, my biggest concern is why it's retroactive. Like, what's the rationale to 2018 and not coming into force when it is proclaimed? There has got to be some rationale there that I'd be really interested in and curious to hear about.

Obviously, as we continue forward, there may be some more questions that come up from my hon. colleagues, but for now I'll just leave it at that and look forward to hearing from the minister in response to some of my questions.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other members wishing to speak at this time?

Hon. Members: Question.

[Motion carried; Bill 27 read a second time]

The Acting Speaker: I see the hon. Government House Leader has risen.

Mr. Jason Nixon: Well, thank you. Man, things are just moving through here so fast. I love progress. I know you like progress, too,

Mr. Speaker. I want to thank the opposition for being so co-operative this evening. As such, I'll move that we adjourn until tomorrow, Tuesday, November 26, at 10 o'clock a.m.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 10:33 p.m.]

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