



Province of Alberta

The 30th Legislature
First Session

Alberta Hansard

Tuesday morning, November 26, 2019

Day 47

The Honourable Nathan M. Cooper, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta
The 30th Legislature

First Session

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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

10 a.m.

Tuesday, November 26, 2019

[Mr. Milliken in the chair]

Prayers

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

We are at Ordres du jour.

Orders of the Day

Government Bills and Orders

Second Reading

Bill 25

Red Tape Reduction Implementation Act, 2019

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Associate Minister of Red Tape Reduction.

Mr. Hunter: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to be able to rise today for the second reading of Bill 25, the Red Tape Reduction Implementation Act, 2019. The proposed legislation reflects our government's commitment to cut red tape and to make Alberta one of the freest and fastest moving economies in the world. It also reflects our commitment to reduce red tape in order to make life better for everyday Albertans. The Red Tape Reduction Implementation Act, 2019, builds on the momentum established by actions already taken by our government to reduce red tape.

It makes changes to several pieces of legislation. Generally speaking, the changes proposed by Bill 25 can fit into three themes: to encourage investment by speeding up regulatory approvals, to reduce regulatory burden for municipalities and other government partners, and to eliminate or modernize outdated and redundant rules.

Under the first theme we have three amendments designed to encourage investment by speeding up regulatory approvals. Bill 25 will amend the Forests Act and give the Minister of Agriculture and Forestry the authority to approve forest management agreements. Currently these agreements are subject to approval by cabinet. Allowing the minister to approve forest management agreements will make the approval process less burdensome while continuing to allow proper oversight by government. Of the 17 submissions submitted by the Alberta Forestry Association, this was number one on their list because it allows them to get wood to the mills faster and allows them to be able to get their people back to work. The proposed change aligns with other land-use dispositions such as those for oil sands or gravel operations.

Bill 25 proposes an amendment to the Hydro and Electric Energy Act as well. Currently stand-alone legislation is required for every hydroelectric development in Alberta once the normal regulatory process is complete. Bill 25 proposes to repeal this unnecessary requirement in order to encourage the development of small-scale hydroelectric projects. All projects must still undergo public

hearings and environmental impact assessments, but cumbersome legislation isn't required to get these projects under way anymore.

This bill proposes to repeal also the Small Power Research and Development Act as it is no longer required. The act was created to support renewable small-power generation development in the mid-1980s to early 1990s in Alberta. The program expired in 1994, and the last contract ended earlier this year. Alberta has a thriving renewable energy sector, and the small-scale generation regulation already supports market-based electricity generation for renewable and alternative energy sources.

Moving on to our next theme, to reduce regulatory burden for municipalities and other government partners, Bill 25 proposes an amendment to the Municipal Government Act to streamline provisions that hamper administrative efficiencies for municipalities. This bill proposes the repeal of a provision in the Safety Codes Act to better align with national building and fire codes. Government will follow future editions of national building and fire codes, ensuring we meet strict standards while still promoting safety for workers and for the structure.

Moving on to our final theme, to streamline, eliminate, or modernize outdated or redundant rules, Bill 25 proposes to amend or repeal six different pieces of legislation. First, the bill proposes to repeal the Persons with Developmental Disabilities Foundation Act. The foundation has not existed since 2002, and its functions are no longer a part of the persons with developmental disabilities program. Repealing the act will dissolve this inactive foundation and would have no impact on delivery of PDD services.

Second, Bill 25 proposes to remove a provision in the Glenbow-Alberta Institute Act that prescribes that management, in displays of items in the Glenbow Museum collection – actually, it describes prescriptively those collections. This amendment removes red tape and encourages an innovative collaboration by allowing the Glenbow to loan out parts of its collection. Because the amendment requires an agreement with the Minister of Culture, Multiculturalism and Status of Women, the government of Alberta will continue to have a say in the ongoing protection of Alberta's cultural assets.

Third, the bill proposes an amendment to the Health Professions Act to dissolve the Health Professions Advisory Board. The board's advice has not been requested since 2012. The board's dissolution was recommended by the Public Agency Secretariat as part of a review of agencies, boards, and commissions, and we're acting upon that review.

Fourth, Bill 25 proposes to repeal an outdated reference to chiropractic services under the definition of basic health services in the Alberta Health Care Insurance Act as chiropractic services have not been covered since 2009.

Fifth, Bill 25 amends the Human Tissue and Organ Donation Act to make it easier for Albertans to become organ donors. Albertans will now be able to register online in one easy step to indicate they want to donate their organs and tissues after their death. This will save Albertans, and it will reduce time and confusion regarding their wish to donate their organs and tissues.

Mr. Speaker, at this point I want to be able to remind the Member for Edmonton-Decore, when he continues to say that this ministry is doing no good for Albertans, that when B.C. did this, they actually increased organ and tissue donations by fourfold. B.C.'s residents were richly blessed because of this kind of a legislative change and because of the red tape reduction efforts there. We're going to do the same thing here, so I hope that the member is seeing this as a very positive effect and the reason why we should be actually effecting red tape reduction here.

This also clarifies how Albertans can donate their bodies to educational research. To be clear, this amendment is separate and apart from the private member's bill currently before the House. However, this bill allows those who do not want to opt in to organ donation because of religious or cultural reasons to also opt out online.

Sixth, this bill will amend the medical services incorporation foundation act. The M.S.I. Foundation's board appointment process hasn't changed since 1970. It is outdated and causes unnecessary delays in appointments. Currently three public board appointees must be made by the Lieutenant Governor in Council. Additionally, the MSI board's chair is to be appointed by the Lieutenant Governor in Council as well. This amendment would change this to allow the Minister of Health to appoint the three public board members and for the MSI board of trustees to select the chair from among their membership, giving them more control over what happens in that board. The proposed changes will improve efficiencies of the foundation's operations and will streamline its appointment process.

Now, this concludes my overview of Bill 25, Mr. Speaker, the Red Tape Reduction Implementation Act, 2019. These changes are designed to encourage investment, reduce regulatory burdens, and streamline, eliminate, or modernize outdated or redundant rules, allowing government to move quicker. Together the changes proposed in Bill 25 represent a conscious and co-ordinated effort to reduce red tape across government, to free up the creativity of our partners in businesses and government, our job creators and innovators, and to make life better for all Albertans.

I'd like to thank the members for their time, Mr. Speaker, and I look forward to a healthy debate on this bill.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member. Just for the purposes of clarity of *Hansard*, I would like it if you would just please state that you are moving second reading of Bill 25.

Mr. Hunter: With that, Mr. Speaker, I move second reading of Bill 25.

10:10

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore has risen to speak.

Mr. Nielsen: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker, and good morning to you on this rather wintry day as we were coming in here. We now have before us, finally, in second reading, Bill 25, the Red Tape Reduction Implementation Act, 2019. Seeing as how we brought it up right out of the gates, I will of course mention around the organ donation that I am part of the private members' committee that was reviewing the private member's bill that came forward. On the theme of organ donation we're certainly very excited about what that could be, and hopefully the minister will be quick to amend his rules should that private member's bill pass because the two would kind of conflict a little bit. But, you know, that's really just a little bit of housekeeping there.

On the whole, Mr. Speaker, when we are talking about Bill 25, an omnibus piece of legislation, the fourth such piece of legislation that we've seen before this House, I have to admit that seeing this type of bill being presented in the House here today is kind of contradictory to some of the members that served in the 29th Legislature, particularly their displeasure around omnibus legislation or what they felt was omnibus legislation. As you know, Bill 25 proposes approximately 13 different changes across six different ministries. I do remember a certain discussion around some labour legislation that was changed back in the 29th

Legislature that absolutely dealt with several different changes within that bill but within one ministry.

You know, the associate minister, of course, back then had said something, I believe, on May 30, 2017:

This legislation from the NDP government is omnibus in nature and would be best served if split into two distinct components to allow for faster passage of compassionate care leaves. This government is being disingenuous by lumping together changes to both the Labour Relations Code and the Employment Standards Code into one big omnibus bill.

Yet here we are looking at 13 different changes across six different ministries. I think I've said it before on other pieces of legislation that are like Bill 25, Mr. Speaker, that to come across with those types of comments and then, when you have the opportunity to do it different and apparently do it right, you actually just seem to repeat the cycle, which we've seen four times now, including Bill 25 – so is this a disingenuous attempt at lumping a whole bunch of legislation into one bill and, you know, justified in that?

Whatever the case is there, Mr. Speaker, we do have this here before us, and we need to look at its components, some of which, again, I don't have any potential concerns with, including things like the organ donation. But I do have some concerns around some of the other pieces that are being proposed in this.

You know, I think the one thing that we have to remember is what this ministry was mandated to do. It was supposed to be able to help to create an atmosphere that creates jobs and helps to grow the economy. So when I see such things like "How do we store some of Alberta's museum treasures?," I'm wondering: how is that creating jobs? How is that growing the economy? It seems more like a statute change than red tape reduction.

I mean, we've seen in other legislation where the government has been very, very proud that they are, for instance, merging different departments, all under the umbrella of red tape, being more efficient, and saving Albertans money. When we get excited about a million dollars – say, for instance, we roll the Election Commissioner into the elections office – and then we look at this ministry in itself dealing with red tape, very clearly we saw during estimates that ministries were able to deal with red tape on their own, making their own decisions. I mean, the labour ministry, right out of the gate, actually created a bunch of red tape, you know, but that's beside the point here at the moment. But they were very clearly making decisions around red tape. The Ministry of Municipal Affairs was very clearly making red tape decisions to try to help municipalities do their jobs a lot easier. The Ministry of Treasury Board and Finance very clearly was making decisions around red tape.

Funny, of course, that the red tape ministry, which Bill 25 came out of here, is very clearly making red tape decisions without the ministry. Maybe I might want to suggest to the government that with this \$10 million ministry we have here, that seems to have only created one job so far, they maybe might want to look at just rolling it all into Treasury Board, letting everybody else do their red tape decisions. Then maybe we can take that \$10 million and put it into something effective, maybe like not rolling back AISH recipients' incomes.

We're starting to see a pattern, Mr. Speaker, around how legislation like Bill 25 is coming forward. Of course, there's a great, big emphasis on giving, for instance, \$4.7 billion in tax breaks to great, big, wealthy corporations like Walmart, but we're focused on legislation that, quite honestly, I think could be simply dealt with through statute changes. But we're trying to claim red tape reduction here and claim a ministry, so I guess if I was in that

position and I had to justify \$10 million, I'd probably be looking for any kinds of little things that I could find as well.

Some of the things that this thing is looking for include changes within the forestry act. It proposes to transfer things from orders in council to a ministerial order. I certainly remember members opposite in the 29th Legislature getting rather excited about more powers being given to the minister to make decisions. Here again we're in that situation where we're saying one thing, yet actions that we're doing say something completely different, and they're contradictory, Mr. Speaker. I'm not necessarily possibly concerned around this, but I do have to point out that, you know, this was something that was a problem for some of the members opposite, including the associate minister of red tape, when it came to giving more ability for the minister to get business done.

We have things around the Persons with Developmental Disabilities Foundation Act. I was able to do a little bit of checking. This is a bit of a housekeeping item, Mr. Speaker. It hasn't existed since 2002, so it's probably pretty safe to say that we won't be using that going forward at this point. But, again, is this creating jobs? Is this growing the economy? I would argue that that's not the case. We're not creating jobs. We've created one job, but we're not growing the economy with changes like that. I think it's a little bit, I guess, short when it comes to being able to say that, you know, we're making substantial changes that will – I think the words were: supercharge our economy.

10:20

Again, I'd mentioned a little bit earlier around the Glenbow-Alberta Institute Act. You know, I guess again I'm questioning: is this really red tape reduction? Is this creating jobs? Is this growing the economy? That was the number one thing that the UCP ran on during the election, Mr. Speaker, and this is our A game coming out of the gate. I know the first bill was to help to create the ministry and sort of some of the framework for how it was going to operate. It sure would have really been nice to have seen a definition around red tape. Maybe then we wouldn't be potentially considering some of these things as red tape reduction. Maybe they would have been more considered like statute changes and things like that. But I just struggle to see how this creates jobs and how this grows the economy.

We also see some changes in the Small Power Research and Development Act. Of course, this is a repeal. The government says, of course, that contracts have been concluded and that the small-scale generation regulation already supports market-based electricity generation from renewable and alternate energy sources. While I think this is probably a good idea, I guess I question that because I haven't seen a lot of interest in this government, Mr. Speaker, around renewable and alternative energy.

Again, you know, we have a potential piece of legislation here that we're changing. We're saying one thing, but things that we've done before, things that we've said before are a little bit counterproductive towards that. I don't think it necessarily sends a signal to investors to be able to help grow an economy when we're not really supporting the industry but we say that we're going to help make things more streamlined. I'm really not too sure whether this will be a benefit or not, but time will tell with regard to that.

We've also seen some changes around the Hydro and Electric Energy Act. I think this could be a positive change for approval, that it's not going through legislation. Certainly, you know, we've seen in the past – and, I think, the easiest example, Mr. Speaker, around changes, and I'm surprised this one's not in this bill because this would have been a really simple one, Minister – where schools can't change their name without coming to the Legislature for approval and having an MLA sponsor that, I mean, really, just to

change the title at the top of the paper or on the envelope or something like that. I'm surprised that that one wasn't in here because that actually would have been red tape reduction, helping those not come through the Legislature. I think given some of the cuts that we've seen, though, with regard to the budget, we might have some worries around that change here for the Hydro and Electric Energy Act.

We're also seeing some changes within the Health Professions Act. Now, that's the one thing about omnibus legislation, Mr. Speaker: it can be difficult sometimes to reach out to stakeholders to be able to get their input. Again, we're looking at 13 different changes across six different ministries, and it's been difficult to try to get some feedback. I am concerned that, you know, some of the changes – and I'll get to those shortly here, Mr. Speaker – maybe haven't necessarily been thoroughly consulted on, again, another point that members who were part of the 29th Legislature and are serving within the government and the government caucus very regularly accused the previous NDP government of not doing around consultations. Again, we have the chance to show how to do it better, how to do it right, yet we're not seeing those types of things.

It's reviewing a number of agencies, boards, and commissions. That work, you know, rightfully is being continued, so I will give kudos in that sort of department there. That was work that was started by us to try to make things move a lot more efficiently. I'm always willing to listen to those types of things. I know that for the former Finance minister that was something he wanted to make sure was done. He didn't quite get a chance to finish that work, but at least this government is continuing on that fine work that he started.

I'd already mentioned around the tissue, organ. I don't think I need to continue around this one.

I would like to spend some time, though, Mr. Speaker, on one part, and that's the Safety Codes Act changes. One of the things that we've seen change over the years is around the height that wood structures can go to. We're always, you know, mindful of checking with people, checking with builders around how we can do those structures, but one voice that has always been absent from the table has been fire. When we're talking about a structure that potentially could be going over six storeys now, I think it's very, very important that we have those voices at the table.

You know, when we look at house construction, for instance, Mr. Speaker, they used to have the really big, thick beams through the house to help support the house, and from what I understand, those were designed at the time to be able to survive in a fire, giving as much as an hour or even maybe a little bit more. Certainly, people would be able to egress from the building, but then fire coming into the building would be safe enough to try to get that fire put out. What we've seen in some of the changes now is a lot thinner beams around that. It's my understanding, speaking with folks from fire, that on average those things may only last somewhere between eight to 15 minutes, and a lot of times we see fire showing up on location, ready to go to deal with the fire at the eight-minute mark, which means that there are about four minutes left for them to try to get that fire out.

When we translate that now to a building that's potentially going over six storeys, we need to make sure that we have fire at the table in order to look at how that structure is built so that not only does it give people time to get out of the building safely but that fire has time to get into the building and actually put the fire out. That is something that has been very much lacking not only on the provincial scale but also on the national scale. I think we have an opportunity here to bring that voice to the table to make sure that as we're moving forward, changing these safety codes and the regulations, the building codes and such, those are expressed within

that to make sure that our first responders, our firefighters are able to go safely – well, relatively safely – into a structure and come out again when it's done.

Of course, when you have these structures, the most critical part is during construction, Mr. Speaker. Those things can sometimes go up like a Roman candle. I lived in the west end of Edmonton here, and there was a large structure – I believe it was four storeys – that was being built at the time. Unfortunately, it caught fire, and all of the structures that were nearby in terms of, you know, lower buildings and whatnot – it completely melted all of the siding off these buildings, generating an incredible, incredible amount of heat.

Again, I think that as we move forward, when we're looking at these safety codes within Bill 25 and some of the changes that we might be proposing, we need to have those voices at the table in order to make sure that we are building these structures in the safest way possible not only for people to be able to get out but for firefighters to be able to get in and put that fire out. Hopefully, we might be able to have a larger conversation in Committee of the Whole around that, and maybe we can look at some ways that we might be able to deal with that in terms of getting fire at the table during that part.

10:30

We've also heard of some of the changes for municipalities. I know there's a bit of a concern from the RMA around some of the changes that are being proposed in Bill 25. Perhaps it was just simply an oversight at the time, but the deadline for completing ICFs, the deadline here . . .

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other members wishing to speak? I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-Whitemud has risen.

Ms Pancholi: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I'm pleased to rise today to speak to Bill 25, the so-called Red Tape Reduction Implementation Act. You know, I reviewed this act, and while I'm new to the Legislature, I have had experience in the past working within government and seeing things called miscellaneous statutes amendments acts. Some of you members, especially those who had been part of the previous Assembly, would be familiar with that. When I actually reviewed Bill 25, I was surprised or maybe I will even say amused to see how a lot of what is actually proposed as significant red tape reduction would be changes that would actually be part of a miscellaneous statutes amendment act, something that, of course, I hear and understand from my colleagues that the previous members complained about.

Let me just say that calling it something else, calling it a Red Tape Reduction Implementation Act, doesn't actually make it anything different than, really, a miscellaneous statutes amendment act although I will note that there are a couple of other pieces in there that don't actually fall within that but are actually either policy changes or increase red tape. This is actually a great exercise in irony, I have to say, to call something red tape reduction when what we've really seen is that this government has increased red tape by creating – well, they have created one very significant public-sector job, which is the Associate Minister of Red Tape Reduction.

Again, I mentioned that I worked in government for some time before. I know that the Associate Minister of Red Tape Reduction has stood up in this House and has questioned a number of times the credentials of members of the opposition as Albertans because of, apparently, where we lived before we moved to Alberta or how many of us were actually born in Alberta. Apparently, that's significant to the associate minister since he continues to bring it up over and over again. I have actually spent most of my life here in

Alberta, and I can say that I actually have a little bit of Alberta history, a little bit of Alberta government history that I recall.

I think it would have been in 2006 that the Alberta government, under the former Progressive Conservative governments, the previous ones, had a ministry called RAGE, which was the restructuring and government efficiency ministry. A very apt acronym was RAGE because it really caused nothing but rage for most of the bureaucrats and, probably, Albertans because it was a giant waste of money and time. In fact, that seems to be what this government is repeating here. Let's create a body; let's fund it with \$10 million I believe it is. I'm looking at the Member for Edmonton-Decore. Yeah. Head nodding. Yeah, \$10 million given to create an Associate Ministry of Red Tape Reduction. Well, we've been through this pattern before.

Now, I appreciate that this government seems to like to repeat some of the worst parts of previous Conservative governments. They seem to be very quickly falling into some old habits: you know, entitlement and cronyism and these patronage appointments that they love to do and creating panels and talking about fiscal responsibility when really they're throwing away money on pancake parties and planes and, you know, very, very five-star hotels. I mean, like, obviously, the lessons are hard to unlearn, apparently, for Conservatives. They haven't learned the lesson about the waste of time that was the restructuring and government efficiency ministry back in the previous Conservative government, so they're repeating that mistake, which is the Red Tape Reduction Act.

You know, I think I'm allowed to speak about my own absence and presence in the House, so I will say that I wasn't present in the House when late last week the Associate Minister of Red Tape Reduction stood up and introduced this bill. I believe – I saw it on social media – that he made a very bold and very classy statement. I know sarcasm sometimes doesn't come across in *Hansard*, so let me just state that I am being sarcastic when I say that it was classy when he referred to the fact that he was going to be giving an enema to government about red tape reduction. Very classy for an associate minister. Then I thought: well, interesting. Then I read Bill 25, and I thought: "Wow. Is this the bold statement that he's going to make? Is this the quote, unquote, enema that he's giving to government?" He has a pretty different understanding of what an enema is than I do, I guess. I mean, I've never had one, but clearly he thinks it's a pretty mild procedure, considering this bill and the contents of it. Let's be honest. There's very little in here that does anything to substantively reduce red tape, and it does nothing that could not have been achieved by simply doing a miscellaneous statutes amendment act.

I note as I'm going through it: okay; so they're repealing some acts that apparently have been spent in terms that the contents and the objectives of the bills have been achieved or completed, such as the Small Power Research and Development Act. The government claims: okay; that's no longer necessary, so it's repealed. Great. That's fine. It could have been done by a miscellaneous statutes amendment act.

I note that they have made changes to the Persons with Developmental Disabilities Foundation Act because they're saying that the foundation has not existed since 2002, so there's no need for the foundation. That's fine. I can't see a real concern with that. Again, that could have been done by a miscellaneous statutes amendment act.

I believe that the same applies to a number of other bodies or advisory committees, and I do note that the former government actually had done a complete review and was doing these reviews of these agencies and boards, so certainly this was probably inevitably going to be happening anyway.

They dissolved the Health Professions Advisory Board under the Health Professions Act. It hasn't been in place and used since 2012. Yeah. No problem. Go ahead and do that. Again, it could have been done by a miscellaneous statutes amendment act.

Really, if this is the bulk of the associate minister's work, he must be quite disappointed. I wonder: what is he going to do once this bill is passed? Of course, I'm not naive. We know that this bill will likely be passed. Despite whatever we say on this side of this House, the government will vote in favour of passing it. I just think that then his work is done, right? And this cost Albertans \$10 million? This is what we established one new position within the public sector for? This is what we've done? Well, he must be very proud of himself to complete his entire mandate with this bill.

The other thing that's important to note, apart from the quite minor amendments that this bill makes that could have been achieved without the establishment of a \$10 million position and department staff and everything to review that, is that there are some pieces in here that I'm not even sure are red tape reduction. I'll go back to one piece in particular that I have a little bit of familiarity with given my past work. I note, for example, that Bill 25 amends the Education Act to require school boards to enter into joint-use agreements with municipalities when school boards provide services in one or more municipalities. Well, of course, all school boards provide services in one or more municipalities, so essentially this is mandating all school boards to enter into joint-use agreements with municipalities.

Now, my background is that I've worked with Alberta Education, but I also worked directly with school boards for many years, and I'll say that this already takes place. This is already happening. Almost every school board that I've worked with has joint-use agreements with their municipalities. But further to the point, for a government that stands up and says that they believe in government efficiency and in lowering red tape to actually mandate locally elected bodies, which are both school boards and municipalities, force them to enter into agreements and then create a system within this act with the amendments to the Education Act where they actually monitor those agreements and make sure that they're in place – they actually mandate how those agreements can be amended, which is quite intrusive, actually, for a government.

It's actually getting quite into the weeds with other locally elected bodies who are entering into agreements about what those agreements must say. Not only is that contrary to, I think, the position that this government has repeatedly stated, which is that government should be hands-off and entities should be able to do whatever they want, but apart from that, it actually goes contrary to the principles behind the Education Act. Now, we stood up on this side of the House when this current Education Act was being debated again in the summer session, right after the election. I actually have a very detailed understanding of the Education Act given my past work, and I've stood up in this House and said many times to the members opposite, particularly the Minister of Education, that I wasn't confident that the members were actually familiar with the contents of the Education Act.

It seemed to me – and it's plainly obvious to most Albertans as well – that they were only fixated on one piece of the Education Act, and that was the piece that rolled back protection for LGBTQ2S students, which they achieved because that was the only purpose behind why they brought in that Education Act. That's why they sought to bring it forward. Promise made, promise kept. They rolled back protections for LGBTQ2S students, so good for them. The problem, as I pointed out a number of times in the Legislature, is that the Education Act has a whole bunch of other pieces involved in it, and one of the core fundamental pieces is that it grants natural person powers to school boards.

10:40

That was as a result of school boards, again locally elected bodies – and I have to emphasize that given the statements by the Minister of Education last week where she's threatening a locally elected school board, the largest in the province, because she's so shocked that cutting education funding means laying off staff. She's now threatening a locally elected school board with disbandment. I appreciate that she might not be very familiar with the powers and responsibilities of a locally elected body like a school board, but those natural person powers were critical to what school boards wanted in the Education Act.

They wanted to be able to make decisions about when they enter into agreements. They wanted to be able to have the authority, as they are locally elected, to manage their budgets to some extent but also to make those decisions of when and if to enter into joint-use agreements – that's just one example – to enter into any agreement, really. That was a core part and a core principle behind the Education Act.

But here we see, by virtue of what I will say is essentially a miscellaneous statutes amendment act or a red tape creation act, that this government is now meddling with that, which speaks to me again about the fact that this government is not familiar with what was in the Education Act, is not familiar with what were the core principles and objectives behind that act, which was to grant greater authority. Now they're going in and mandating that school boards enter into those agreements.

Look, I'll say this again. Most school boards already enter into these joint-use agreements because they're critical. To actually treat school boards as if they don't know already the value of joint-use agreements, the value of working with our municipalities to talk about how community spaces, things like – we see now, you know, the development of schools that are connected to community rec centres and spaces that are really designed to work with the community, not just serve either schools or municipalities but actually to serve the community. School boards and municipalities have been doing this for ages. They think it's really great. The ones I've reviewed have always been very great and very co-operative.

I just find it very ironic that it would be included in this act as if it's some kind of red tape reduction because actually it's about now government overseeing. I imagine they'll have to mandate or somehow require a review of these agreements to make sure that they're actually in place and have the provisions in place. So they're actually creating red tape, which is completely unnecessary, for the most part. To include it as part of red tape reduction says to me that this associate minister really has very little to do.

In fact, where we heard this government stand up and beat the drum about red tape reduction is about approving projects, approving energy projects and all that. I see none of that in this act. Of course, I think it's going to be diffused, as it always has been, into the work of each individual ministry and their responsibilities within their ministry to create efficiencies, to make sure things are working properly, to make sure the objectives of the ministries are met. That's always been the responsibility of individual ministries, and I imagine that's still happening right now. I imagine we're going to see that review as it constantly was happening through all government, making sure that things were happening the way they should.

But it only speaks to, again, the fact that the creation of a separate, stand-alone, red tape reduction associate minister and ministry is actually a facade because red tape reduction is about making sure that all the government ministries are operating efficiently. No further evidence is required than this, frankly, anemic bill that we are seeing right here. Really, what this is, again, is to show that red

tape reduction and creating an associate minister and all of that responsible for that was just some sort of symbolic measure to show to their base that they're taking red tape seriously. Well, if this is their evidence of taking red tape seriously, if I was – and I'm not – a UCP supporter, I would say: "Wow. That's pretty sad. This is not very effective. This isn't going to do much." I'm also wondering what the associate minister is going to do next because, really, this seems to be all that they have coming forward.

You know, again, I was not part of the previous Assembly, the previous Legislature, but I understand and I'm not surprised it's been a constant criticism whenever big omnibus bills are brought through. We've seen at least four of them this session alone, and it's a make-work project for a government who has demonstrated in the last few weeks that they actually do not have efficiency at the heart of what they're doing. I think this is a very good piece of evidence to support that; \$10 million thrown away on a bill that, frankly, could be achieved with a miscellaneous statutes amendment act and actually does not eliminate red tape.

I think that once again we're seeing more proof that this government really is not about fiscal responsibility or fiscal efficiency. They're throwing away money on pet projects. I, for one – I'm sure many of my constituents feel the same way – am starting to get a little bit fed up with that.

Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to rise to speak and to voice my objection to the contents of this bill, mostly because it's a waste of time. Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available for questions and comments.

Seeing none, are there any members wishing to speak to the bill? I see the hon. Member for Calgary-*Buffalo*.

Member Ceci: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. My pleasure to speak to Bill 25, Red Tape Reduction Implementation Act, 2019, specifically focusing on the issues with regard to the MGA and the changes proposed in this act that reflect on the MGA or amend the MGA.

You know, as I was going through it, there were a number of things, of course, that I want to focus on. I want to pick up first where my colleague left off with regard to the ICF process, the intermunicipal collaboration framework process. I note that on the website for the RMA they do go into this a great deal because there are a number of proposed changes that would impact the ICF process. Perhaps the Minister of Municipal Affairs or the Associate Minister of Red Tape Reduction can provide some clarification at some point. I did listen to the associate minister talk about how the proposed changes to the ICF and the Municipal Government Act would improve things for municipalities, but I'm not sure of all of the changes that he's talking about and how it's actually red tape reduction and how it would improve life for municipalities throughout the province.

For one, the deadline for rural-to-rural ICFs remains at April 1, 2021, and as I understand it, some of the rural municipalities can have a dozen or more other municipalities on their boundaries. That remains quite challenging in terms of a timeline for them, April 1, 2021.

I do note that many of the things in this bill soften or make it easier for municipalities to focus on the issues that are important between them and not on all of the long laundry list of services that they potentially had to go through. This bill kind of says, "Where there's disagreement, that's where we want you to focus" or "Where there's a benefit, we want you to focus on that area and not other things that you won't be working together around." You know, on the surface that makes sense. I do wonder about the

comprehensiveness of future intermunicipal collaborative frameworks and intermunicipal development frameworks with that kind of understanding. The concern that was brought forward was: is the deadline for rural-to-rural ICFs remaining at April 1, 2021, when there are such a significant number of counties and MDs on the boundaries of some? Do they need more time? I think this is suggesting they need more time to do that.

I just want to also say that there are some things in this around the arbitration process, that is a significant portion of this bill. Arbitration between municipalities is an important aspect of sorting things out. The question that I have, though, is: do any of these changes in the bill deal with who actually pays for the arbitration or the experts that are brought in? If this is making it more challenging for municipalities to resolve disputes between them, perhaps the province should be putting some money on the table to incent or to help municipalities work together so that they can get to the end process, which is, you know, the sharing of resources, the sharing of services, so that we're not making things redundant at the municipal level that they could very well share like waste-water and water services.

10:50

Speaking of waste-water and water services, I know that the AUMA received over 140 responses when they asked their members and surveyed their members about: what would be important in a red tape reduction bill? Many of those responses, 60 per cent of the responses, identified that they encountered regulatory barriers when dealing with drinking water, stormwater, and waste water, and I fail to see in any of this bill where that is being addressed. It strikes me that the AUMA membership went to the extent of talking to their members and getting some feedback, and I fail to see where that feedback is incorporated into this bill. You know, you don't get many chances to bring forward bills, probably, if you're an associate minister, so I would think that you would want to make sure you're addressing the needs of those AUMA members that are out there.

Also, just looking at what was important for those members of the AUMA, it says that over 50 per cent of the respondents highlighted that they experienced red tape in grant applications and reporting. Now, I have looked throughout this bill, and I fail to see where, under the various ministries that are impacted by changes here, grant applications and streamlining of regulations are identified. I could be wrong, and that's where the associate minister or the Minister of Municipal Affairs or any other minister dealing with grants may have the opportunity to clarify for me when they get the opportunity.

I'd just go back to additional changes that are proposed in the bill, that come forward from the RMA in this instance. You know, I just look at joint-use and planning agreements that are between municipalities and school boards. Certainly, I know there are challenges in that regard, and I just don't know if all of the proposed changes here will benefit municipalities and school boards. I think they're intended to. But I can tell you that forever in Calgary we've been working very closely with the two, now four, school boards in that municipality for the benefit of both the taxpayers – children, parents – and good planning. I'm not sure where the problems are that are seen as being fixed by what's before us today.

The review of ABCs was talked about by my colleague previously. I can tell you that we did a significant review of agencies, boards, and commissions. I'm not sure that I'd see it as red tape reduction to say that one is being killed that hasn't been in service since 2004, whatever it was. That doesn't really kind of address the definition of red tape reduction. When we did the review of agencies, boards, and commissions, there were over 200 and

some – I can't remember the exact number – and it was reduced to under 170. I think that would qualify as red tape reduction. But that's already been done, as I said.

The other aspects of changes that I'd like to focus on that I read in this bill have to do with making life simpler, I guess, and easier for municipalities. You know, it's eliminating the requirement – I just don't see it as red tape – for names of people who are attending in camera sessions of a council to not be put forward or to not be documented. I'm not really sure what that's about. I wonder if there's a concern about in camera sessions of councils generally and that this is an attempt to take that opportunity away from councils. You know, it's certainly something they do when there are issues that can't be relayed to the public immediately. They go in camera to essentially get their act together and find out more about a particular issue before it's reported on. But you do have to report on what the issue was when you come out of in camera. So I'm not sure what changes in here would be red tape reduction. I'm certainly looking forward to the associate minister telling us.

There is a change from 90 days to 120 days for by-elections. I'm not sure how that's red tape reduction, but, you know, perhaps you can clarify. There is a need, of course, when there is a vacancy on council and there's a significant amount of time before the next election, that that seat get filled, and there's a process that has seemed to work forever. Now there's a change to 30 more days to allow councils to fill that position. If anything, it would seem to delay it up to 120 days. Perhaps the associate minister can tell us if that came out of any of the discussions that he had with the RMA or the AUMA or who brought it forward and if it's a long-standing, niggling thing that municipalities have worried about and wanted changed. Certainly, I don't know what the problem is.

I think those are some of the concerns I have. Obviously, the RMA has given a significant amount of feedback. From reading their website, I can see that the concern is around arbitration cost and that the concern is around the number of changes to the IDP process, the arbitration process, and several other things that are other proposed changes that are in here.

I will sit down now, Mr. Speaker, and hopefully the associate minister and others can provide some clarification to me. Thanks.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available for questions and comments.

Seeing none, are there any other members wishing to speak to the bill? I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my privilege to rise and speak to Bill 25. For anyone who has taken the time to read through it, it's misnamed, quite frankly. It's not red tape reduction at all. I mean, I think there are actually two pieces that may reduce cabinet approval time, again not necessarily having the effect that the minister will tout or that this government claims about how it's making it easier to do business in the province. I don't know of a regulation change, other than one in here, that actually does that.

You know, I want to start off, first of all, reading into *Hansard* the dictionary definition of red tape, which is important because many of my comments to follow are about the fact that I'm going to give examples of how it's not actually red tape reduction. Red tape, as defined by the *Oxford* dictionary, is "excessive bureaucracy or adherence to rules, especially in public business." I don't know if you know this, Mr. Speaker, but the origin is from Bill C-18 federally, so named because of the red or pink tape used to bind official documents. That is actually the history of red tape.

Now, a number of changes that this bill makes, as my colleague had mentioned, don't actually require legislation. They can be done

through miscellaneous statutes. There are some that could be done through OIC changes, including the dissolution of some boards. In fact, by bringing forward a piece of legislation, it's actually added levels of bureaucracy, the fact that we are taking time, all of us, to be here to debate a bill where many of the functions of this bill aren't necessary in its own stand-alone provision. This government is gung-ho to put forward omnibus legislation that has sweeping changes to dozens of acts affecting every single Albertan. That can be done in omnibus legislation like raising the personal income taxes of every single Albertan. Yet making a few statutory changes needs its own piece of legislation?

I think what we're seeing here, Mr. Speaker, is a trend, that this government is trying to create the illusion of doing things but isn't in fact moving them forward, not much. Again, I will come to a couple of examples here, and one of them I do agree with, so I will give credit where credit is due.

11:00

I can tell you, Mr. Speaker, first of all, that the dissolution of some of the boards in this that have not been functional: that's not red tape. The board is not even meeting. There is no red tape. That's not preventing anyone from doing anything, including the minister or any government. That's a dissolution of a board. That could be done in a statutes act. It doesn't need to be put in its own stand-alone bill.

Now, Mr. Speaker, as well, the appointment – I think it's the health board the minister spoke of. Appointing board members now can be done by the minister. Now, is that going to save time on taking it to cabinet and going through the cabinet debate process? Yes. Does it make it more expedient? Yes, it does. Now, I can tell you that there is a reason and a long-standing history for why appointments go to cabinet and aren't done by individual ministers. Part of that is to ensure that there is oversight, that it isn't a minister appointing friends or buddies or others who maybe aren't qualified. But they could do that if they had the sole discretion and the sole authority.

The other thing is that, again, part of that process is so that cabinet members can deliberate. I'll give you a great example of something that I find concerning. The change to the Forests Act: now the minister has the exclusive authority to enter forest management agreements. Now, the challenge that I have with this – I mean, first, my question is: how many forestry companies did the minister speak to, and how many of them are asking for this? This is news to me. I have a pretty good relationship with the forestry sector, but maybe they came and spoke to the minister about this change.

The challenge with this is that the forest management agreements, including dealing with the amount of harvestable timber, impact more than just this single minister. This has incredible impacts on the surrounding municipalities around the Crown land. It has impacts on the Minister of Energy's portfolio because these forest management agreements impact the oil and gas sector. They have significant impacts on the Minister of Municipal Affairs' portfolio. They have impacts on Environment and Parks. The challenge with giving the minister exclusive authority to enter into forest management contracts or agreements is that you've now siloed this one responsibility that the minister has, so now the Minister of Agriculture and Forestry doesn't need to talk to the other ministers. They don't need to be looped in to talk about: what are the other points of view or perspectives on approving a certain section of land for use in the forestry sector?

The other thing that's interesting is that I don't know if all of the forestry companies are going to be in favour of this, where it may give certain benefits to individual companies and not to others. I hope that when we get to Committee of the Whole, the Minister of

Agriculture and Forestry can talk about the number of companies that he's consulted with and how taking this to cabinet was so onerous. I can tell you that I've been part of cabinet deliberations on forestry management agreements and felt that I appreciated having the different perspectives of the different cabinet ministers, each of them coming, obviously, with their own individual lens and with the lens through which they see different issues through their portfolios. I found it very, very beneficial to have those conversations. So that's one that – I guess, you know, we could consider that eliminating red tape, not having to go through cabinet. The challenge is that there's a reason behind it and, I think, quite a legitimate reason.

The other one that's interesting in this bill, Mr. Speaker, if I can find it here, relates to the AUC approving hydroelectric dams. I'm curious to know: who was consulted on this? Again, what is the new process for the AUC to ensure that they are adequately consulting with indigenous groups, consulting on the environment, consulting with municipalities who are going to be impacted by this, by the creation of dams? This is going to have significant impact on wildlife habitats.

I can tell you that under the PC government, between 2012 and 2015, I sat on the Resource Stewardship Committee, where we took a significant amount of time to travel the province and study the issue of hydroelectricity in northern Alberta and the impacts that a new facility would have, whether that's run-of-the-river or an actual dam. You know, I'm interested to know the impacts that this will have for the electricity companies – on their transmission, on supply, on their costs – which also would go through the AUC.

The other thing that's fascinating is that I've recently learned that the controversy around the Oldman dam – this is why we actually have the existing legislation, because it was so controversial. There was a Supreme Court decision on that project. Anyone who lives in that area, I think, will recall that part of the reason there are these processes in place is to prevent another situation like that from happening.

Yes, I guess you could make an argument that that's red tape, but it's red tape that's there to ensure projects get approvals. I mean, what's interesting is that, again, the government talks about the disappointment with the Northern Gateway being torpedoed – fair enough – and feeling disappointed that it did, but let's look at: why was it torpedoed? It goes back to failure to adequately consult before that project was given the green light. In order to ensure that we get projects moving forward, whether it's pipelines or hydro dams, you know, having these pieces in place – they serve a purpose. They may be a little time consuming, and they may be onerous, but if it means that the project will go forward, then I think it's worth it, rather than being embroiled in courts and injunctions, tying up dollars. Again, I mean, you want to talk about eliminating uncertainty. Well, that creates uncertainty for investors. Having a very clear process mapped out, I think, is your better approach.

The other thing that's interesting is that in estimates with the Energy minister we talked about ways to improve the AER, how they can expedite their approval processes, because we know that that's an issue, especially for energy companies. There are examples of projects that have been tied up for years. You know, I appreciate the Minister of Energy responding or answering this question, saying: "Well, we are working on that. We are working with the AER to identify ways that they can expedite their approvals." Okay. Well, it sounds like the Minister of Energy sure doesn't need the minister of red tape to get involved. If anything, he's probably going to slow it down.

I don't see the value-add of that ministry. I agree with what she's saying, that there are a number of things that we did, whether it's regulations that came through cabinet, et cetera, and

to look at them with a lens of: what service are they providing? What purpose do they provide? Is it still necessary, and if not, do they need to be amended, or can it be eliminated? But we don't need a whole new ministry to add a new layer of bureaucracy looking at bills and regulations when, quite frankly, as the Member for Edmonton-Decore said, we can use that \$10 million elsewhere. You basically mandate to every ministry that they look at every single regulation and piece of legislation through the lens of: what new regs would this create, and would that be a burden for either businesses or others? I don't see the clear value of that ministry, quite frankly.

Now, having said that – and I don't think it was necessary to come through a whole ministry – where I will give credit, whether this is for the minister of red tape or the minister of ag and forestry: allowing buildings to be higher than six storeys, I know, is a huge boon for our forestry sector. I'm quite confident that they were quite happy about this. They were asking at least our government to consider this. I know that there's an example; I believe it's in British Columbia. It's the tallest wood-structure building, that is really a showpiece. It's, like, 20-some storeys high, Mr. Speaker, built of wood, standing today, with absolutely no problems. We'll knock on wood. Really, it points to how the forestry sector, through innovation and their technologies, can build structures that are as fire resistant as those made of other materials.

Now, I appreciate the Member for Edmonton-Decore talking about: I hope that our firefighters have been consulted on this and discussed and weighed in on the impact. But I know that, from a forestry point of view, aligning Alberta's regulations with federal to 12 storeys is a good thing. The one piece in this bill that I do agree with and appreciate is that section. I will say "Good job" to the government and, quite frankly, "Good job" to the forestry sector because I know that they've been very vocal in asking for this. But, again, this one piece: does it need to be in this bill when you have three other omnibus pieces of legislation that are making amendments to a number of different statutes?

11:10

Really, it begs the question: is this creation more of a talking point? It was part of the election platform. You know, I guess, to put it one way: where's the beef? We're talking about all this red tape elimination. I don't see it, quite frankly. This bill, unless I overlooked it – I encourage the minister, when we get into committee, to talk about which of these changes will expedite or help businesses, because so far I haven't come across examples where this actually helps resolve the issue of red tape. To go back to where I started, Mr. Speaker, with the definition of red tape, many of these changes are not actually red tape reduction. It's a great talking point. It's flashy. The government can go to Albertans and say, "Look at what we're doing" although anybody who dives into this says, "Where's the red tape reduction?" Again, is it necessary to create a ministry and to have a bill which does this?

With that, Mr. Speaker, I mean, those are really the issues that I have with this unnecessary – there are three massive omnibus bills before this House right now, maybe two, that it could be a part of. I'm curious to have the debate continue in Committee of the Whole, and I will leave my comments there.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available should anybody wish to make quick questions or comments.

Seeing none, are there any other members looking to speak to the bill? I see the hon. Member for Calgary-McCall has risen.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to speak to Bill 25. As my colleague was finishing up his remarks, he was asking, “Where is the red tape reduction in this bill?” and he was looking around. I think I would agree with him. I didn’t see any red tape reduction in this piece of legislation. Rather, it’s more like an omnibus bill, which makes amendments that deal with 13 pieces of legislation.

Some of the members on the other side will remember that when they were in opposition, we were bringing forward changes to workers’ compensation and the Labour Relations Code, fairly connected pieces of legislation. They were doing everything, essentially, to split that because that was an omnibus bill, that was too much for them to deal with, that was curtailing debate on these bills. Now here we are. That’s the third or fourth piece of legislation in this sitting where they’re dealing with as many statutes as they want and want us to debate all of these changes.

I think, as was mentioned before, that some of these changes have nothing to do with red tape reduction. If you’re getting rid of some body, some foundation that was never consulted, that was never in the way of making decisions, that was of no use, I think those are the kinds of things, cleanups, that are for a miscellaneous statutes act. In every session, every sitting there used to be one, at least, that dealt with those kinds of changes.

Then there are things that are more like policy changes. As was mentioned about the wood structures, changing the wood structures, allowing wood structures more than six storeys or changes to the Safety Codes Act: these are substantive changes, policy changes. I think that the ministries that deal with these pieces of legislation, I would argue, are better positioned to make those changes. If those ministers need another minister to look into their ministry and tell them what process is not good, I think that’s a bigger concern.

When I was in Community and Social Services, we looked at AISH application procedures, and we were able to reduce the information that we were getting from individuals that was not needed. Their applications were 22 or 23 pages, and we were able to bring it down to 16 pages. Then the application was in two or three parts. We were getting one section filled, and then we were giving the medical form for clients to take to their doctor and get that filled, so we combined that application as well. That was somewhat of a reduction in the red tape. Today, when I looked at this legislation and went through the pieces of legislation it deals with, I quite frankly had to look up, really, what red tape reduction means. As my colleague from Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview quoted from the dictionary, I also googled it to just, I guess, clarify for myself that whatever I’m thinking red tape reduction is, that’s exactly what it is. That is, I guess, cleaning procedures. How it’s defined in Google is that you are reducing the bureaucratic obstacles. I think that here we don’t see any kind of reduction on those lines at all. It’s either a cleanup that was done previously in a miscellaneous statutes act, or it’s some kind of policy changes that are better suited for the ministers who are in charge of those ministries to deal with.

I don’t see a huge red tape reduction if I talk on a couple of statutes, a couple of changes that relate to the Energy ministry. One was the Small Power Research and Development Act. The government says that all contracts have been concluded, so repealing this may be a good idea, but as such it’s not reducing any kind of bureaucratic obstacles that were in the way of these projects or that will change the way we do things. Rather, I would say that it only gives another indication on the part of this government that renewables, as we have seen before, are not a priority for this government. I’m not sure if the programs that were previously under Energy Efficiency Alberta will continue with the target of over 30 per cent; in Energy estimates we were told that they are not.

I don’t think it’s in any way, shape, or manner red tape reduction as I understand it.

The second thing is the Hydro and Electric Energy Act. I think that’s the most important change contained in this piece of legislation, how we will deal with hydroelectric projects. These are oftentimes projects of huge magnitude and importance, and meanwhile many other considerations and just leaving it to one minister may remove some unnecessary requirements. Considering what we have seen from this government and different ministers, I think it’s concerning that they are just consolidating powers in their hands. What we have seen in this Energy ministry so far is that there will be some war room, the Canadian Energy Centre, where they appointed a failed UCP candidate to look after our oil and gas resources’ reputation. The same thing happened with the inquiry when that kind of power was exercised. They appointed a commissioner who awarded another \$900,000 contract to a firm where his son is a partner. That kind of consolidation of power under this government’s minister is also a concern, and again I don’t see how this is reducing any kind of bureaucratic obstacles from any of the process.

11:20

When the UCP was campaigning, they were using this red tape reduction, essentially, to make Albertans believe that somehow there is a huge bureaucracy, that somehow the size of the public service is huge, that there are managers managing the managers, that kind of rhetoric. They promised Albertans that they would clean up those things and make processes easier. This bill doesn’t do anything along those lines. It’s just another miscellaneous statutes act, or the changes contained in it should have been properly consulted on and dealt with by the minister responsible for these statutes.

Based on these, I will not be supporting this piece of legislation because it does nothing to reduce red tape at all.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available.

Seeing none, are there any other hon. members wishing to speak to the bill? I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung.

Mr. Dach: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I’m pleased to rise to speak to Bill 25, Red Tape Reduction Implementation Act, 2019, briefly and focus on some elements of the proposed legislation. Although it changes or repeals up to 13 acts, the same thing could have been accomplished, as other speakers have talked about, by using a miscellaneous statutes amendment act, not a red tape reduction act in and of itself. It’s trying, actually, to give purpose to the Associate Minister of Red Tape Reduction. It’s an attempt to give him something to do and speaks to how unnecessary the whole bill is and the whole ministry is.

Reducing regulation and updating existing regulations and statutes is an ongoing process, Mr. Speaker, that has historically taken place throughout governments. It can be dealt with by cabinet decree or a Premier’s mandate letter to the ministers without creating an entire ministry to be the red tape minder overlooking all ministries. All of this, as other speakers have mentioned – and I certainly concur with them – could have been accomplished through miscellaneous statutes amendment acts, which is a rather normal process of updating existing legislation and statutes.

The government uses the language of red tape to justify eliminating key services to pay for their \$4.7 billion corporate handout, and it does nothing to create jobs. This bill is simply a collection of housekeeping items that can be done, as I mentioned,

in the statutes amending act or done by the ministers responsible for their own acts.

As critic for Ag and Forestry I wanted to touch briefly upon a couple of things that this act does to touch that ministry. For example, the entry into forest management agreements can now be done through a ministerial order instead of an order in council. While I agree that this is a reasonable change, it could have been done in a statutes amendment act or by the Minister of Agriculture and Forestry. It does not justify the associate minister's job.

Secondly, with respect to the forestry end of the ministry that I'm the critic for, of course, the measures would be better placed in a miscellaneous statutes amendment act, as I mentioned. The parts of the Safety Codes Act which would be changed allowing wood buildings to be higher than six storeys is something that I applaud along with our Opposition House Leader, and it is bringing it in line with federal regulations. It is something that will allow larger, higher buildings to be built out of wood.

I note that in the Alberta Forest Products Association election platform, that they released last March, they were hoping, as a key recommendation, to seize "future opportunities including building public projects with wood, investing in research to develop new products, and helping to open new markets." All of these hopeful recommendations from the Alberta Forest Products Association are things that are reflected in the desire to amend the regulations allowing higher buildings, taller buildings, to be built with wood. We certainly applaud that. However, expressing this desire to have more public projects built out of wood is something that the Alberta Forest Products Association envelopes in a goal of having regulations that allow the development of new products here in Alberta and, of course, is always involved in making sure that any proposals they make to change safety codes do in fact reflect their desire to maintain safety of buildings.

Much, much work has been done by the Alberta Forest Products Association in concert with their scientific wing, and nothing in their recommendations would be something that could be described as an unsafe or unexamined factor when they talk about increasing the number of storeys that they're allowed to build with wood. I certainly support that, but the Safety Codes Act changes, once again, did not have to be implemented through a mechanism such as a red tape reduction act and would more properly have been found in a piece of legislation under a miscellaneous statutes amendment act.

I certainly applaud the Alberta Forest Products Association for its desire to promote the building of higher structures with wood and also certainly hope the government would concur that we should be seeking every opportunity to make sure that the construction of public buildings with wood to a higher height is something that is actually discussed seriously and, hopefully, promoted within government circles so that we can see more structures using Alberta's technology to create taller structures with wood implemented in the very near future. But, once again, it didn't have to be implemented by way of a bill called the red tape reduction act, something that's simply here to justify the minister's existence. It is a ministry which really is looking for a role to play when, in fact, the role was already being played by ministries themselves, as historically has taken place throughout time.

I wanted to touch upon one more of the elements of this act. I could reiterate a few other things, but I think I will probably just stick within my critic role as it relates to Agriculture and Forestry and suggest that the ongoing recommendations of any minister to his deputies are always to make sure that redundancies and unnecessary legislation and regulation are brought to his or her attention. The whole concept of a red tape reduction act is really an effort to try to create an impression in the public that governments

don't have this as an ongoing measure when, in fact, it can be pointed out that in our past government's history this was an ongoing process – we had made great strides in reducing inefficiencies and reducing the number of agencies, boards, and commissions that were not operating or operating efficiently – and that the whole creation of the red tape reduction ministry is a rather ironic creation of more red tape in and of itself.

Once again, a miscellaneous statutes amendment act has historically been used for this type of legislation. We didn't need an omnibus bill that kind of showboated what governments normally do as a matter of process. I would hope that this is the last time that we see the creation of a ministry designed to do something which, in fact, accomplishes the opposite.

For those reasons, Mr. Speaker, I won't be supporting the legislation. I do look forward, however, to seeing the pieces of it that are touching on particularly our forest industry and developing technologies and implementing regulations to allow the creation of public buildings in particular to a higher storey made out of wood, particularly wood that is designed and engineered in this province for export globally. That's something that I hope to see. But, once again, it wasn't necessary to do it through this piece of legislation. A miscellaneous statutes amendment act would have been the better mechanism to have used.

Thank you.

11:30

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available.

Seeing none, are there any other members wishing to speak on this matter?

Seeing none, the hon. Associate Minister of Red Tape Reduction to close debate.

Mr. Hunter: Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the robust debate and the presentation by the members opposite of their concerns. I will let them know that we have made copious notes and are looking forward to being able to discuss them in Committee of the Whole.

I would like to just really quickly confirm to the members that – I want to remind them that we are not creating a new budget item, that this is actually an associate ministry under Treasury Board and Finance. So we are reallocating some of the funds that that ministry has in order to be able to focus on and address the issue of red tape reduction, which the hon. members had the opportunity in the last four years to do but failed to do. Albertans have said that this is important to them.

One of the other concerns that I've heard is that this is not a red tape reduction initiative. Now, I would obviously disagree with them on that, and I would state to them that this actually does matter. I stated at the beginning, when I talked in my introduction of this Bill 25 in second reading, that when B.C. did this organ and tissue initiative, they actually saw a fourfold increase. That actually had a material effect on individuals' lives, a fourfold increase in organ and tissue donors. So, Mr. Speaker, this actually does matter. It doesn't just matter to businesses; it matters to individuals. This was a red tape reduction initiative which took place in B.C., and this is a best practice that we've decided to put into effect as well here. It is actually something that I very much enjoy doing, to be able to work on these red tape reduction initiatives.

I would like to speak also to another point that they made, that it could have been done in other ministries. Well, Mr. Speaker, this is a government-wide initiative. It's just focused under the red tape reduction ministry's responsibility and mandate. Each of the ministries that have brought forward these submissions has been well vetted. I have the greatest confidence in these ministers and

their ability to be able to look for those redundancies, which is what we've seen today with this bill.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I conclude my remarks and thank the members and move to close debate.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

[Motion carried; Bill 25 read a second time]

The Acting Speaker: Just prior to moving to Committee of the Whole, the hon. Deputy Government House Leader did catch my eye. If she could please continue with some remarks.

Mrs. Savage: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I move to adjourn the Assembly until this afternoon at 1:30.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 11:34 a.m.]

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