



Province of Alberta

The 30th Legislature
First Session

Alberta Hansard

Monday evening, December 2, 2019

Day 50

The Honourable Nathan M. Cooper, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta
The 30th Legislature

First Session

Cooper, Hon. Nathan M., Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills (UCP), Speaker
Pitt, Angela D., Airdrie-East (UCP), Deputy Speaker and Chair of Committees
Milliken, Nicholas, Calgary-Currie (UCP), Deputy Chair of Committees

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Dreeshen, Hon. Devin, Innisfail-Sylvan Lake (UCP)	Rehn, Pat, Lesser Slave Lake (UCP)
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Party standings:

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New Democrat: 24

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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

7:30 p.m.

Monday, December 2, 2019

[Mr. Milliken in the chair]

The Acting Speaker: Hon. members, please be seated.

Government Bills and Orders Committee of the Whole

[Mr. Milliken in the chair]

The Deputy Chair: I would like to call the committee to order.

Bill 20 Fiscal Measures and Taxation Act, 2019

The Deputy Chair: Are there any comments, questions, or amendments to be offered at this time? I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora has risen.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. I want to begin by acknowledging the trauma that happened here today and recognizing all the people who've been impacted by it, including people in this building, the staff who responded, and the people at home. I know many are feeling triggered today by such a public and tragic loss of life. People who die of suicide don't chose to die; it's something that happens. I grieve for the person who died today.

Tonight we're considering the Fiscal Measures and Taxation Act, 2019, a bill brought forward by the Finance minister, a bill that is one of two significant omnibus bills that have sweeping changes that I think have, I would say, the vast majority of them, detrimental impacts on the people of this province.

I'm going to start by talking about the child and family tax benefit credit, something that I know made a significant difference in the lives of so many in the four years prior to this most recent election. There are many things that folks on the other side criticize that we did, but I haven't heard anyone criticize lifting half of the children who were living in poverty out of poverty by supporting those families through the child and family tax credit as one of those initiatives. Of course, there were many others, including initiatives to support women entering the workforce through things like piloting the \$25-a-day child care plan, increasing opportunities for people fleeing domestic violence. The number of people that have talked about not being able to afford to leave a very unsafe situation is something that no one should ever have to feel, that they can't afford to leave an unsafe situation, that they can't afford to break a lease.

One of the things that I know made a significant impact, whether people knew it personally themselves or not – you don't always notice a tax credit, but you do notice if there's a little bit of extra money in the bottom of the bank account once you finish doing your taxes – is that new child and family benefit that was brought in, that benefited 165,000 Albertans for the better. Now we're seeing that 55,000 Albertans will lose the benefit entirely, and many will lose it partially.

The maximum benefit was \$4,998 per family for both credits, and it's \$5,120 per family under the new credit. But the income thresholds have been changed significantly. Under the old system it was paid to families with an annual net income below \$43,295, a very precise number, I know. The reason why it's precise is because things like this need to be indexed and adjusted every year, with income being indexed, but of course we know that indexing isn't something that this government is choosing to continue with. So instead of \$43,295, it's being changed to \$41,000. It used to be

\$1,155, or \$96.25 per month, for the first child; \$577, or \$48.08 per month, for the second; and the same numbers for the third and the fourth. Families with a net income between \$26,769 and \$43,295 could receive a partial benefit.

That's being changed significantly. As a result, many families will drop off the list completely: as we said, 55,000 completely removed from the list and about half removed partially. There are no details about the breakdown except that families with two children may receive \$593 and up to four children may receive \$889 per year. Families with a net income of between \$24,467 and \$41,000 may receive a partial benefit. These are things where I emphasize the word "may" because I think leaving these types of things up to consideration of "may" rather than "shall" certainly creates greater uncertainty for many families.

In terms of the Alberta family and employment tax credit, under the old system families were entitled to receive the following amounts: \$801 per year, or \$66.75 per month, for one child; \$1,530, or \$127.50 per month, for two children. There were further breakdowns for three and four, and they did escalate for those numbers of children. Instead, that's being changed to a net income of \$27,060 to \$41,000. The maximum working component will range from \$681 per month – again, that's a decrease from the \$801 – to a maximum of \$1,795, and again that's a decrease from the \$2,113 that it was previously. The credit starts to reduce at \$41,000, and it's phased out completely at \$61,000.

Again, not things that were campaigned for less than a year ago during what has been referred to as, you know, a massive mandate. There certainly were a number of things that a mandate was given on, but cutting income for low- and, I would say, below average income families certainly wasn't front and centre in the platform. I don't remember any campaign stops that emphasized that.

I'll touch base on the access to the future fund, too. It's pretty clear that the government has chosen not to prioritize postsecondary students or their families. The government went after the financial support for students by, of course, increasing tuition and increasing the student loan interest rate payments. That's another one. I talked to some recent graduates who said: "I was relieved when I graduated and tuition was frozen. Having those final years with a frozen tuition rate – not that tuition was particularly affordable, but at least it was frozen and predictable. But now having the interest rates upon graduation increase by a whole percentage: that's a significant adjustment."

Imagine, anyone in this House who has a mortgage, if your mortgage payments went up by 1 per cent with next to no notice and without the ability to shop around and get a better rate, because of course you don't have that when it's a student loan. It's a provincial loan in a province that's supposed to be investing in you and your future and instead unilaterally chooses to increase those payments by a per cent. That is a significant increase for many folks who are still transitioning to the world of work and are in beginning positions, and often the compensation isn't significant.

The purpose of the fund, the access to the future fund, was to support innovation and excellence and enhance and expand opportunities for Albertans to participate in accessible, affordable, and high-quality advanced education without restrictions. This is something that I think most of us would probably say. When people raise postsecondary with you when you're door-knocking, I doubt that they said: "You know, there are too many choices. It's too affordable. We need to reduce choice, and we need to make this more expensive." I imagine that you probably heard things to the contrary.

I know that when I grew up, in northern Alberta, there was AVC when I was a child, Alberta Vocational College, and then Northern Lakes later on. That was the only option, really, locally, and it was still a good drive, about half an hour either way, to either campus.

The opportunity of having to go away when I wanted to pursue an undergraduate degree: at least tuition wasn't as expensive as it is today, and it certainly wasn't as expensive as it will be tomorrow.

I worry when I look at the statistics. When I was studying education, I looked at the statistics about who is most likely to be able to participate in postsecondary, and who is most likely to become teachers was specifically the area that I was looking at because I was doing my education degree at the time, after my math degree and my religion degree. When I was doing education, it was very clear that it was middle- and upper middle-income families, that it was men more often than women at that time, that it was urban more likely than rural, and that it was people who had European ancestry more likely than people who were newcomers or who were indigenous to this land.

7:40

I remember thinking, "Well, at least I only had two of those sort of working against me, and at least my parents were in a position to be able to help me come to Edmonton and set up home here and make that transition." But many families aren't. For many students, particularly those who are from lower income families, the idea of taking on debt is already terrifying. The idea of taking on debt, not getting a tax credit for the tuition, and having your interest rates hiked up unilaterally is very scary.

When we're talking to students – and I imagine that probably all members of this House or at least the vast majority do spend time in schools and that students probably ask them about their career path, ask them about what it's like to be an MLA, ask them if they went to postsecondary – I would like to be able to say that we're working to make life better for Albertans. I've seen that on podiums in the past and seen it on podiums recent as well. I know that government likes to have those statements, and it's true. That should be our mandate. It should be our goal in life when we come to this place, to bring forward bills that will indeed make life better.

But what we are doing just in one small part of this bill, because this bill is so sweeping, just in this piece around access to the future, is that we are making decisions tonight that will make life more difficult, that will make life harder, and that is certainly not why I get up in the morning, and it's not why I door-knocked. I don't think it's why anybody in this place decided to run for office in the first place. I could be wrong. Certainly, they're welcome to tell me that they decided that they wanted to take away postsecondary funding and increase the rate of tuition and get rid of the tuition tax credit, that that was one of the big motivators for running for office. Feel free to tell me that. I would certainly be shocked, but, you know, if that's why you're in this place, then own it, I would say. The fund currently has \$58 million in net assets, as we understand, but that will of course be depleted significantly.

I'm going to touch on the cancer prevention legacy fund because this is something I did mention in second reading of this bill, I believe. Here we are again today, and I still think that there are so many questions left unanswered about why it is that the government feels so focused on reducing something or eliminating something, rather, that is focused explicitly, that had a sole mandate, and that had a purpose of preventing cancer, I think, something that should be a focus of this Assembly. I think it should be a focus of all societies that have the ability to do research. I think research into something like preventing cancer and, of course, curing cancer as well should be a top focus.

This fund supports teams that do work around prevention. About 45 per cent of cancers in Alberta, we know, are caused by factors that can be changed, and about 6,700 cancer cases could be prevented every year. I know that this is something, I imagine – not unlike suicide, cancer impacts virtually every family in our

province. Cancer is something that about half of us, at some point in our lives, will personally experience, and of course anything that could be done to prevent that, to prevent that hardship on the individual as well as on families, I think, should be a focus of government.

That's making the ethical argument. There's, of course, the fiscal argument, too, with regard to how much we spend on cancer treatments every year, and rightfully so. We need to do everything that I think is within the proven evidence of being effective in treating cancer. I think that that should be afforded to all Albertans. I don't think that I want to be in a place where some could get treatment and others could not. But, again, if we can prevent nearly 7,000 cases of cancer in our province every single year, that is something I think we should all strive for and work to make a priority.

And that's the thing. When you have these dedicated funds that are separate from general revenue, they have a dedicated mission. They have a dedicated focus, and their focus really has been very significant. I'd say that their legacy is one that I think deserved an opportunity to continue rather than be absorbed into general revenue and be at the whim of the government of the day, whether or not they would have that dedicated focus. I would certainly hope that this government would have that dedicated focus.

I also hoped that this government wouldn't be laying off nurses and teachers, just as was foreshadowed in the prior election. We were told that no such thing was going to happen, and then here we have it. In Calgary alone, 300 Calgary public teachers have received layoff notices. On the weekend, Friday, we learned that 5,100 – and counting – health care workers will receive layoff notices in the near future. It certainly isn't something that was campaigned on. In fact, when we asked about it during the election, we were told that we were fearing and smearing and that, of course, no such thing would happen.

Here I am, saying, "I have deep concerns about the cancer prevention legacy fund being disbanded and moved into general revenue," and I am told: "Oh, don't worry. We'll still fund that work. We're just not going to do it from a dedicated body." I find that really hard to swallow. You know, fool me once, shame on you; fool me twice, shame on me. I'd say: fool me over and over and over again, and no wonder I have no faith when I'm told that something is being taken away but don't worry; it'll just be absorbed and will be handled somewhere else. I sincerely wish I could believe that. I really do, because it's not my desire to see us live in a place where things like cancer prevention have to be considered budget cycle by budget cycle. I think that cancer prevention is something that we should all agree we are committed to, and as a government and an opposition, as an Assembly, we shouldn't be eliminating cancer prevention from an area of focus for this government.

I think it's something that every Albertan would expect their government to care about, preventing cancer and doing what they can in what are arguably the world's best research institutes. Here in the province we have two fantastic research institutes, between Calgary and Edmonton, doing cutting-edge work in this area, and that work needs to continue. We worked hard to attract these researchers who are here as well and the folks who do the work through Alberta Innovates in terms of the health side and, prior to that, the Alberta health futures initiative, I think it was called. I'm sorry; my brain is a little full today. This is something that has been happening for years. We've been attracting and properly funding research in these areas because we believe that Alberta should be a leader and that Alberta should be driving for positive change and the elimination and prevention of cancer. The fact that that is being dissolved, this cancer prevention legacy fund, through this bill, I think, is something that is deeply troubling to myself and, I imagine,

to many Albertans, who expect their government will do more to support cancer prevention and research, not less.

Then, of course, there's the lottery fund. Something that I've had raised with me a number of times is around the community facility enhancement program, CFEP. These are grants that are being cut this year by 35 per cent, and that's approximately 100 projects that won't be funded this year. There are also cuts to the community initiatives program of at least 8 per cent, but we don't know exactly how much is going to be cut because when we've asked those questions, we haven't gotten clear answers. The minister wouldn't say how much that funding is now for grants that used to be offered for initiatives around antiracism and status of women initiatives.

These are all areas that concern me that relate directly to this bill. I understand that the minister has given verbal assurances that the funding from the lottery fund will continue to support community programs, but the numbers certainly are telling a different story when we go through those budget line items. So there is concern that this move in this bill will further the lack of transparency and the separation of talking points from reality.

7:50

Cutting the STEP grant. Many of us, I imagine, in this place – I worked as a STEP student. I worked for the Alberta Community Crime Prevention Association. It was probably one of the many pieces that set me on the path to where I am today, working with law enforcement, many city police as well as RCMP, working with community agencies, working with social justice organizations to make sure that we were focused on a crime prevention through social development model, one that was proven to be the most cost-effective as well as the least damaging to individuals or to communities. Something that I think relied heavily – that STEP grant not only turned into a job for that summer, but it turned into part-time employment for at least, I think, another two years while I was in university. It's hard to remember. The months kind of blend together sometimes. I'm proud of the work that we did in that organization and some of the legacy that continues today.

It also helped me learn more about the John Howard Society and the work that they did, particularly at that time, around the Youth Criminal Justice Act and the work... [Ms Hoffman's speaking time expired]

Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other hon. members wishing to speak at this time? I see the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo has risen.

Member Ceci: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. I, too, want to carry on where my colleague for Edmonton-Glenora left off. I think the first thing that I want to say is that this bill is regrettably taking many wrong turns in terms of what's necessary in our province. I know that there are many proposed cuts buried within the bill, and I think all Albertans as a result will feel the effect of this austerity over time.

I think the first thing that I want to talk about is the ripping up of the city charters fiscal framework. Of course, that was a great deal of effort and work that was put in place by the previous government, and as you know, Mr. Chair, it was signed on to by the two large cities. When the new government came in, it was summarily ripped up in terms of the presentation of this budget before us. I think the two large cities, rightly so, and probably other municipalities around the province are wondering what the sense is in signing contracts or signing agreements with this new provincial government as they don't keep to other contracts that are before them.

The city charters fiscal framework allowed the understanding that when the economy was doing well in Alberta, cities, those two cities in particular, would do better, and when the economy wasn't doing very well, as is the place now, where we're about half a per cent of GDP growth or less when we get to the end of the year under this new UCP government – they understood that they would go up with better years and down with not-so-good years. With the framework that is being worked on, the local governance fiscal framework, they will do worse with good years and even less well in bad years, Mr. Chair, as a result of not seeing \$1 per \$1 increase with regard to increases in the economy and increases in provincial revenues and seeing only 50 per cent of that come through.

Now, I know the explanation has been, "Well, you know, these are tough times, and everybody has to tighten their belt," but that doesn't really make sense in terms of where municipalities are at. They provide, I think they say, somewhere around 80 or 90 per cent of services within their municipality to citizens, and they receive about 10 cents on the tax dollar. The agreement we had in place with those two large cities was a fair one. They agreed to it, and they understood it, and it was a model that we were looking at for other municipalities around the province. But, as I say, it was summarily ripped up by this UCP government.

The next thing I want to focus on, Mr. Chair, as my colleague did, is around the lottery fund. Where we worked with a commission to oversee the investment of those funds, that is being changed now. The lottery fund is disestablished, and the money from the fund shall be paid into general revenue. Many people come up to me and say, you know: "What is happening? Will we see the same amount of funds? Will we see the same sort of process put in place?" They really don't know, and they're, like me, suspicious that the general revenue fund will see the monies and that there won't be the commitment that was there with the previous government, that had been there for a long time, in terms of how the lottery fund worked. I was on one of the first lottery fund boards, back in the year 2000 or so, for the city of Calgary, and we worked very hard to disburse those funds to all of the appropriate nonprofits that were eligible for those funds. That was how it operated many, many years ago, and I think that that was a better system than the current one that is being put in place by the UCP.

I want to go on to the Municipal Government Act, Mr. Chair. I want to talk about the changes that are proposed there. Of course, the changes, for the most part, are around funding. That will be a significant change for municipalities. They won't be able to anticipate, on a very big basis, the money coming from the local government fiscal framework, as I mentioned.

I do want to say that there are many other aspects of this bill that don't seem to be in the best interests of public transit, green infrastructure, municipalities around the province. One I want to focus on – and I'll shortly provide an amendment to it – is with regard to the green line in Calgary and the valley line in Edmonton. Mr. Chair, that's found from page 97 to page 102. We know that when this bill came out, there was a great deal of consternation and, frankly, surprise by the two cities, where they again felt they had an agreement in place. They did have an agreement in place with regard to funding, and that funding was summarily, again, ripped up. The agreements were changed, and they cannot count on the monies coming from the provincial government.

Frankly, they're scrambling to ensure that their projects can go forward in the future and doing all sorts of things at their own city councils to talk about: you know, if we can't anticipate when the monies are coming from the provincial government and they are far less than we anticipated, can we go back? In Calgary's case there was a motion brought forward to look at perhaps ripping up the

contract with the Calgary Flames that was put before their council for discussion at their budget deliberations last week. Mr. Chair, that's the extent that councils not only in Calgary but around the province are subjected to as a result of the changes that this government has undertaken with regard to signed agreements that were put in place.

I'd like to put before this House an amendment with regard to the green line in particular, and I'd like to essentially go back to an agreement that was signed with the city of Calgary in particular.

You know, I've seen and heard different ministers talk about: we're not really doing anything that's untoward; we're providing clauses in the contract there that make sense or are buried in other contracts around the province with regard to large projects. Just before I read this out – I'll give it to the Clerk for her to read – I can tell you, Mr. Chair, that I am not aware of the clauses that are talked about by the Minister of Transportation and others as being normal clauses for projects of this size.

I'll give you a minute to read it, and then I'll read it into the record.

8:00

The Deputy Chair: If the member could just read it into the record now for everybody's benefit, and then please feel free to continue with your comments.

Member Ceci: Thank you. I will continue with my comments. The amendment is to Bill 20, and as I said, this starts on page 97, Mr. Chair. I move that Bill 20, Fiscal Measures and Taxation Act, 2019, be amended in schedule 3 as follows: part A, section 7 is struck out; part B, section 9 is amended by striking out subsections (3) and (4); and part C, section 16(1) is amended by striking out clause (c) and substituting the following so that it would read:

- (c) for the purpose of section 5(2), prescribing the funding that will be provided and disbursed to the City of Calgary;
- (d) for the purpose of section 5(3) and (4), respecting amendments to the grant agreement;
- (e) for the purpose of section 6, prescribing the funding that will be provided and disbursed to the City of Edmonton.

Thank you, Mr. Chair. I'll continue.

As I said, it's very disturbing, and I'm speaking from kind of channelling the people at the councils in Edmonton and in Calgary, where they had agreements in place with regard to major infrastructure, the likes of which neither city has undertaken in the past and which they both called their biggest infrastructure throw of their history. In Calgary's case – and Edmonton might be somewhat similar – it was about 4 and a half billion dollars, with a "b," Mr. Chair.

As we know, what's before us here is essentially changing all aspects of that agreement, and it changes it by putting everything at the discretion of the minister and also with regard to the Lieutenant Governor in Council. Mr. Chair, we know that the Lieutenant Governor in Council is bound to work with orders in council from cabinet, so really what this is doing is putting the minister in a position to hold funding, change funding, and get out of funding entirely. That person would take recommendations to cabinet, and cabinet would deal with those recommendations and pass them on to the Lieutenant Governor in Council. I don't know how you can, as a major city in this province undertaking the biggest civic infrastructure construction work they have ever taken on, deal with a situation where really they can be subjected to 90-day clauses, where they can be given notice to terminate the grant agreement without cause. It's onerous, it's draconian, and it shouldn't be in this section 3. It should be struck from section 3, and that's what my amendment gets at.

If we want to see our cities develop, if we want to move people on a mass transit basis, if we want to construct these projects that will take, you know, five to 10 years to complete – no one would undertake this work with a 90-day clause built into it. They would be risking quite a bit and not being good fiduciary partners for their citizens, and they would be taking on the risk themselves. That's not how these agreements have been happening in the past. That's not how these major infrastructure projects take place. We don't put all the risk on one party and say: all the benefits go to the citizens in that community if you take on the risk. We want the city of Calgary, the city of Edmonton to undertake this work, to put people back to work. It would be 20,000 people, Mr. Chair, in Calgary's case, that would have the benefit of long-term employment if this were to go forward in the way that the agreement was proposed. As this agreement is proposed now, those jobs will not happen as a result of the tenuous agreement the province has made with the city of Calgary.

Really, Mr. Chair, the whole bill has some problematic pieces to it. Section 3, schedule 3 at the end is, in my estimation as a Calgarian, the most problematic and should be amended so that we can ensure the benefits of the jobs, the employment, the emissions reduction. I've heard estimates of a quarter of a million people per day being transported by a future green line when it is built. It starts out much lower because of the shorter amount of green line constructed in phase 1, and phase 2 they're looking at currently in terms of how it gets constructed. But those jobs, the emissions reduction: none of that happens if the city of Calgary does not feel confident with the money coming from the province of Alberta. That's why I'm recommending that these pieces be put in and the offending pieces be taken out.

Mr. Chair, Edmonton is a different matter. It's also mentioned in my amendment: "(e) for the purpose of section 6, prescribing the funding that will be provided and disbursed to the City of Edmonton." I know many people want to see the valley line built as well, with almost an equal number of employees being taken on from the private sector, the public sector. That, of course, is at great risk if we don't see changes to this as well.

Mr. Chair, there are a number of tax credits – I want to move on to those for just a second – that will be lost with this bill. As we know, ending those tax credits, seven of them, will have a great impact across this province. Just last week the Calgary Economic Development corporation mentioned that one of those tax credits being lost – I believe it was in the interactive digital media area – means that a thousand more jobs won't be coming to Calgary. Really, we're going backwards in terms of business attraction as a result of the provisions in this Bill 20.

I would just hope that members of this House see the reasons for addressing these changes that I've put forward in the amendment and know that by striking out the clauses that are offending, Calgary and Edmonton will both have greater certainty on when monies are coming, and they won't feel at risk on their own with regard to the province pulling out of this funding agreement in schedule 3 within 90 days. It's totally inadequate for a project of this size. It leaves them scrambling, and that would be far too onerous on a city that is trying to do the right thing by investing in public transit for their citizens and the province of Alberta.

Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Just for the benefit of the House, this amendment will be referred to as amendment A4.

Are there any hon. members wishing to speak? I see the hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs.

Mr. Madu: Thank you so much, Mr. Chair, for the opportunity to speak to Bill 20, the Fiscal Measures and Taxation Act, specifically with regard to the amendment that has been proposed by the Member for Calgary-Buffalo. Again, I am going to limit my contribution tonight to those amendments, the first of which is to strike section 7 from this act. The second is to amend section 9 by striking out subsections (3) and (4) of the act. The Member for Calgary-Buffalo has also proposed a substitution, as identified in part C of the notice of amendment that we all have, requiring that section 16(1) be amended by striking out clause (c) and substituting the following: (c), (d), and (e), that deal with section 5(2), sections 5(3) and 5(4), and section 6.

8:10

Let me say this, Mr. Chair. You know, part of the reason why we brought in the local government fiscal framework act is in order to make sure that we are funding our municipalities at a level comparable to the rest of the country.

The Member for Calgary-Buffalo was the previous Finance minister that oversaw record debt and deficit like we have never seen before. If you will recall, Mr. Chair, in all of the four years that he put forward a budget, we ran billions and billions of dollars in deficit. The former government inherited about \$1.3 billion in surplus and turned that into a minimum of \$6.9 billion in deficit for each of the four years that they were in office, and they racked up debt like we have never seen before, a provincial government-wide debt in 2015 that was \$12 billion, and they took it by March 31, 2019, to nearly \$64 billion and, by all estimates, on a path to a hundred billion dollars.

That was the fiscal environment that this government inherited from the previous government. They embarked on reckless spending as if there was a pot somewhere or a tree from where we pluck money. That was the record of this member that has now put forward an amendment, you know, that would essentially make it impossible for us to fund our municipalities, to allow us to live within our means and fund them in a way that is comparable to the national average.

By the way, Mr. Chair, you know, there is no question, as the MacKinnon report concluded, that we spend 20 per cent more than the rest of the country, so it's irresponsible, I would submit, for the former Finance minister to be putting forward this type of amendment, that only goes to return us to the era that the people of this province rejected in record numbers on April 16.

As Minister of Municipal Affairs I am proud of the fact that we replaced the city charters fiscal framework with a local government fiscal framework act that works for each and every single municipality in this province. Mr. Chair, when I was travelling around this province this past summer, what I heard from those municipalities loud and clear was that they do not want us to pick winners and losers. They want us to be fair across the board. They expected, contrary to what the members opposite would like us to believe, that there was going to be a period of fiscal restraint in order to bring us back to balance and make sure that never again would we face the circumstances that we face now as a consequence of the members opposite's fiscal and financial recklessness. So on that basis alone, it's obvious that I will be opposing very strongly the recommendations contained in section 7 in the proposed amendment.

Now, he also proposed striking a clause that we had inserted, Mr. Chair, with respect to the funding for the various LRT projects, in schedule 3 of Bill 20, the public transit and green infrastructure project act, a clause that essentially, you know, puts on notice both cities to make sure that when you are embarking on that level of unprecedented investment, in the billions of dollars, in physical

infrastructure that we have seen in this province, that we are prudent and diligent in making sure that the project timelines, the costing, and all of those things are on schedule.

We have been clear. We have committed \$1.5 billion, you know, to these projects in Edmonton and in Calgary, and we have made it clear to our municipal partners that we are prepared to follow through with them, but at the same time we also expect them, our partners, to make sure that these projects proceed in a fiscally responsible manner. What the member opposite would like us to do is what they have done in the past four years, which is that wherever they can find money, just throw it without any strings attached. No wonder then, Mr. Chair, that we find ourselves in this awkward position, having to make sure that we live within our means, you know, something that previous Conservative leaders worked so hard for. There was a time in this province when we were debt free, and, you know, in just four years they ballooned that debt.

Mr. Chair, this amendment that the member has put forward, including, you know, a provision to allow the Lieutenant Governor in Council to be able to make bylaws, I mean, rules and regulations to make sure that the intent behind both the local government fiscal framework act and the public transit and green infrastructure project act remains. This is something that you would see in virtually every piece of legislation that grants the Lieutenant Governor in Council the power to make regulations, or in some instances a minister to provide a ministerial order. So for all of those reasons it's obvious that none of this amendment would work for me, and for that I will be opposing it.

But, Mr. Chair, I think it's very important, again, as I have said, to reflect on how we got here. At a time when we should be focused on rebuilding our economy, making sure that our focus is on jobs, the economy, and the pipeline, which has been what we campaigned on, the business for which we obtained a record mandate from the people of Alberta, that ought to be the focus of this Chamber. And I will implore all the members opposite to join us in that particular effort because when we succeed as a province economically, when we clean up our house, the two biggest cities of Edmonton and Calgary are going to be the biggest beneficiaries because those are the two places where we spend the bulk of our provincial resources. They are our two biggest cities, and they are important. Edmonton, after all, is our capital city. They are an important partner.

8:20

I have said privately and publicly that even in these difficult economic circumstances that we face because of the disastrous policies of the members opposite, we must continue to build. Bill 20, the Fiscal Measures and Taxation Act, 2019, with respect to those two items, specifically speaks to that. You know, in Budget 2019 we maintained MSI funding for 2019-2020 a hundred per cent, even given the current climate that we face. All we are asking for is a modest 9 per cent reduction by the time the local government fiscal framework act kicks in, two years from now. Two years from now, Mr. Chair, so that we can bring balance to our finances and begin to grow our economy and finally begin to pay down the record amount of debt that members opposite have bequeathed to this province.

Mr. Chair, once again, I think that it is irresponsible for the members opposite to be putting forward an amendment that seeks to undermine the hard work that we have put in on this side of the aisle to rein in the financial recklessness that we saw in the last four years. One of those is that the previous NDP government overprojected their revenue by \$6 billion, and then you wonder why we had to make the tough decision to cancel the city charters fiscal framework, that was negotiated on the basis that we were going to have an additional \$6 billion in revenue. That did not happen. That

wasn't the case. So the question I have for the members opposite is: where do they expect us to get that extra \$6 billion from?

Obviously, what they would prefer us to do is to continue to borrow and saddle the next generation with multibillion dollars in debt, a debt they did not ask for. You know, we are spending \$2 billion in debt-servicing costs, \$2 billion that I would prefer to spend in this city, in Calgary, but, Mr. Chair, it's something that we sent overseas to bond masters, who are not living in this country, because, again, of the policies pursued by the previous government.

So it is disappointing, Mr. Chair, to see this type of amendment. This is not the type of amendment I would expect from a former Finance minister who ought to be aware of the dire economic and financial circumstances that we face as a province. On that particular business I will implore all members of this particular House to vote against this amendment.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other members wishing to speak to amendment A4? I see the hon. Member for Calgary-McCall has risen.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I rise to speak to the amendment. While I was listening to the remarks from the Minister of Municipal Affairs, it sounded like he completely missed what this amendment is doing. Anything and everything the minister said has nothing to do with the amendment at hand. I will read section 7, for instance. The amendment suggests that section 7 be struck out. Section 7 reads, "the Minister may amend any term, condition or provision of the grant agreement or a funding agreement by regulation." What this provision is doing is concentrating power in the hands of cabinet, in the hands of the minister. What we have seen from this government: when they got the power, they abused the power; they even fired the Election Commissioner who was investigating them. So they can't be trusted with these kinds of powers on an important project that is vital to the city of Calgary.

I will read a little bit about the project that's at hand. It's not just merely a transportation project. It's about the future of Calgary, it's about the future development of Calgary, and it affects thousands and thousands of people in Calgary. Stage 1, for instance, will have 20 kilometres of LRT track. It will have 14 stations, 18 bridges, one kilometre of elevated track between Inglewood/Ramsay and 26 Avenue stations, three park-and-ride facilities with a total of 1,800 to 1,900 stalls, three tunnels, four kilometres of city tunnel from 20 Avenue N. to Macleod Trail, one light rail vehicle maintenance and storage facility, approximately 40 to 45 low-floor vehicles, each 40 metres long. The worth of the total project: \$4.6 billion. On the opening day the benefit listed for this project: it will carry 60,000 to 65,000 Calgarians – that's a huge number – serve all Calgarians by connecting to major activity, employment, and industrial centres outside the downtown core of Calgary; connect over 2,300 existing affordable housing units; support businesses, employees' travel choices for 191,000 existing jobs. So it's a vital project for the city of Calgary.

What I heard from the minister has nothing to do with what we asked to be amended. He said that the former Finance minister had a deficit. What the former Finance minister projected was \$6 billion. What your minister is projecting is \$8 billion, \$2 billion more than what we projected.

An Hon. Member: UCP math.

Mr. Sabir: That's your math.

Otherwise, everybody else will agree that your deficit is higher in this budget than what we had projected. You have completely

failed to understand why this project is vital to the city of Calgary, and I would suggest that instead of hurling insults at the city council, calling them spending freaks, go sit down with them, talk to them, understand why it's important and why this . . .

The Deputy Chair: Hon. member, I hesitate to interrupt, but I'm sensing that this has turned from a third-party conversation through the chair to a direct conversation across the aisle, so I would ask the hon. member to just speak through the chair. Thank you.

Mr. Sabir: Through you, Chair, I want to say that it's an important project for Calgary. It's an important project for the city's future development. As an MLA for Calgary I think it's my responsibility to speak about the importance of this project.

What I was saying, through you, Chair: the reason that I heard for rejection of this amendment has nothing to do with the amendment itself. What the amendment was trying to do was take, I think, these kinds of arbitrary powers away from the minister and leave it where it was before.

I think the right way to do it, Chair, will be that the city of Calgary, the city of Edmonton have some certainty. If they have planned for this project for years, it shouldn't be the case that this government can take everything away just on a 90-day notice. That's way too arbitrary. That puts the future of this \$4.65 billion project at risk. That puts the future of this important project at risk which will help carry over 60,000 to 65,000 Calgarians every day. It's creating jobs, and once it's complete, it will help us connect those who are working in the downtown core with a job. It will help people who are living in affordable housing units. It will provide them with an affordable form of transportation. Also, it will help us reduce greenhouse gases by 30,000 tonnes, and that's equal to 6,000 vehicles being taken off the road on the opening day of this project. So it is clearly an important project.

Through this piece of legislation, where they have done many other things, the things they are doing with this project are that they are concentrating arbitrary powers in their hands, that will put the future of this project in jeopardy. That creates uncertainty for the city of Calgary. That creates uncertainty for Calgarians. That's why this amendment, brought forward by my colleague the MLA for Calgary-*Buffalo*, is an important one. It seeks to amend and make changes that are needed to create that certainty, to assure the city of Calgary that they will get the funds needed to complete this project. That's why I'm speaking in favour of this amendment.

8:30

Through you, Chair, the minister also mentioned that when they campaigned, they campaigned on jobs, the economy, and pipelines. I don't think that anywhere in their big, huge platform it was mentioned that they will put this kind of project at risk by cancelling the charter framework, city charters, by putting in arbitrary powers like that, that they can cancel this project on a 90-day notice, whether it's in Calgary or Edmonton. They didn't campaign on it. That was not the promise that they made. That's not what Calgarians expect from them.

Calgary is already hurting. We are seeing each and every day that we are losing jobs in Calgary. Even today we learned that 370 people were laid off at Husky last week or so, in a couple of weeks. These are the projects – not only are they creating jobs during the construction phase; many future jobs depend on these projects. So far what we have seen from this government is that they brought forward a \$4.7 billion corporate handout, and what are we getting in return? Energy companies like Husky are getting \$233 million from their handout, and they are laying off Albertans here in Calgary. They are investing in Wisconsin, they are investing in

Saskatchewan, and they are investing in the U.S. We are already losing jobs, and putting that kind of uncertainty in the legislation respecting this project will not send a good signal for the job market in Calgary, for future jobs in Calgary.

What we are seeing here because of their policies: companies like EnCana, who benefited from their handout, from their policy, are moving their investment down south. So far whatever policies they have brought forward have not created any jobs. They have not attracted any investment. What we have going in Calgary through these kinds of measures, through this kind of concentration of power in the hands of cabinet and ministers: they're putting the future of this province at risk as well. It's creating huge uncertainty. Ask Calgary city council; ask Calgary's mayor. They are also elected representatives of the people of Calgary. They won't agree with this government's policy to do so. What so far we have seen from this government, from this minister, through you, Chair, is that they have been hurling insults at them that they're spending freaks – they're this; they're that – but this is not something that anybody in Calgary would want to see.

They're talking about modest reductions of 9 per cent. Sometimes 9 per cent reductions are huge. Ask somebody who is living on AISH. I am just, I guess, digressing a little bit. We added an increase equivalent to CPI. That's less than even a 2 per cent increase sometimes, but it's \$30 a month and almost \$370 a year. Sometimes these increases are huge, and cutting, like, 9 per cent: we are already seeing the impact in Calgary. It's already projected that property taxes are going high. It's already projected that services will be impacted.

That's why I will be supporting this amendment. It's an important amendment. It restores certainty for this project. The government, if someday they don't like what's going on in Calgary, won't be able to cancel it on a 90-day notice. It's an important project for Calgarians: many jobs depend on it right now and, in the future, how the city shapes, how jobs will be created, how people will be able to connect jobs with recreation, with their loved ones, with each other. Having these kinds of amendments – the minister will be able to amend the funding formula; the minister will be able to cancel it on 90 days' notice – is absolutely not acceptable. It creates uncertainty.

I will urge that all members of this House, especially those who are from Calgary, should stand for this amendment. It will bring certainty, and that's exactly what the city wants. The city wants this project to go forward. It's an important project for, I think, many different reasons, that I talked about as well: the creation of jobs, future job creation; how our city shapes; reducing congestion in our downtown core; reducing greenhouse gases, taking 6,000 vehicles, on opening day and per day, kind of from the streets. It's an important project. The government should take this amendment seriously, and the government should take Calgary seriously, which is already hurting, and should not put the future of this project in jeopardy.

That's why I'm speaking in favour of this amendment, and I urge all members of this House to vote in favour of this amendment. Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

I see the hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs has risen to speak.

Mr. Madu: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I mean, let's be clear. What the hon. member opposite just said, in summary, is, you know, again, for us to be able to provide funding without any oversight whatsoever as to how that money is spent. Section 7, that the member referred to, that the Member for Calgary-Buffalo asked us to strike, is an amendment to a grant agreement or funding agreement. "The

Minister may amend any term, condition or provision of the grant agreement or a funding agreement by regulation." This is something that the members opposite used all the time in the various legislation that they passed. [interjections] It is a standard practice to grant the Lieutenant Governor in Council . . .

The Deputy Chair: Hon. members, there will be ample opportunity, given how debate follows in Committee of the Whole, for any member to speak on this amendment, so I would just ask that the hon. minister continue and that the House afford him that opportunity.

Mr. Madu: Thank you, Mr. Chair. You know, we are making an investment of a record \$1.5 billion, and the members opposite would not want us to make sure that that money is used prudently. That in itself is the rationale behind their request to strike section 7 from Bill 20.

Mr. Chair, you know, they also ask us to strike sections 9(3) and (4). Section 9(3) reads:

Any proposed changes and related information submitted to the Minister under subsection (2) must be approved by the Minister prior to the City proceeding with the changes to the project.

This is particularly important given the fact that in recent months we've heard that the proposed costs for that particular project were growing by the billions. We are in this province struggling with . . .

Member Ceci: The money is only one part of it.

Mr. Madu: One point five. The money is just 1.5: that's what I heard. The Member for Calgary-Buffalo just said – \$1.5 billion is nothing to the Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

Member Ceci: I didn't say that.

Chair's Ruling Decorum

The Deputy Chair: Hon. members, please. There is one hon. member currently with the floor, and that's the Minister of Municipal Affairs. I invite an exceptional debate between both sides of this House, and in order to do that and in order to do that effectively, then I would say that other members will of course have the opportunity to stand when that opportunity arises at the appropriate time, my guess is possibly once this member is done. Then we will move on to the next member. That would probably be the best way to carry forward.

If the hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs could please continue.

Mr. Madu: Thank you, Mr. Chair. You can tell that this has been my experience in this House, where there is heckling after heckling. Members on this particular side will always give them the deference to allow them to speak and debate issues on the floor of the House. Then it is always difficult for us to be able to hear the responses to their questions.

8:40

Debate Continued

Mr. Madu: Mr. Chair, back to section 9(3), that the Member for Calgary-Buffalo is, again, asking us to strike. These are large-scale projects, and what section 9(3) is seeking to do is to give the minister that oversight responsibility to review changes, if any, to the proposed project. Again, that is what they are asking us to strike. No oversight whatsoever: no wonder we found ourselves on this fiscal cliff, because they have no idea what oversight means.

Mr. Chair, they are also asking us to strike subsection (4) from section 9. I read subsection (4):

The Minister may modify or impose additional terms and conditions prior to approving the proposed changes to the project.

This is in relation to subsection (3). If the minister looks at the particular project, he may then make a recommendation to the city to require them to make changes so that the project can proceed in an orderly fashion and in accordance with the intent behind the project. Again, it speaks to oversight and making sure that issues of costing, timelines, and relevance are maintained in a large-scale project of this nature.

The member also proposed changes to section 16(1) with respect to striking clause (c) and substituting the following. Again, if you go back to section 5(2), that the member is urging us to amend, section 5(2) says:

Notwithstanding Schedule E of the grant agreement, the Lieutenant Governor in Council may by regulation prescribe the funding that will be provided and disbursed to the City of Calgary.

You know what the member is urging us to do, Mr. Chair? "Prescribing the funding that will be provided and disbursed to the City of Calgary." So if there is reason, you know, for the minister, by regulation, in accordance with subsection (2), to prescribe the particular funding, he is seeking to remove completely that responsibility. That is not how a responsible government functions.

Mr. Chair, the member is proposing changes to section 5(3) and section 5(4). Subsection (3) reads:

Notwithstanding Schedules D and F of the grant agreement, the Minister may by regulation amend the auditing and financial reporting requirements that must be met by the City of Calgary.

Again, it speaks to sound financial and auditing principles. Again the Member for Calgary-*Buffalo* is asking us, you know, not to have anything to do with whether or not this, arguably one of the biggest investments that we will make in this particular sector, is carried out in a way that protects hard-earned tax dollars. A requirement to amend the audit and financial reporting: got it; it is not required. Again, no wonder we found ourselves \$64 billion in debt, a record deficit.

Second to last, Mr. Chair, subsection (4) says:

Notwithstanding Schedule A of the grant agreement, the Minister may by regulation amend the eligible and ineligible expenditures.

Again, sound business practice when it comes to large-scale projects, to make sure that the confines of this particular project remain as tabled.

Finally, Mr. Chair, the Member for Calgary-*Buffalo*'s last amendment has to do with section 6 of the public transit and green infrastructure project. Section 6 reads:

Notwithstanding any term or condition in a funding agreement that sets out how funding will be provided and disbursed to the City of Edmonton, the Lieutenant Governor in Council may by regulation prescribe the funding that will be provided and disbursed to the City of Edmonton.

Again, seeking to gut any oversight over this large-scale project. That, I will submit, Mr. Chair, would be irresponsible in a time that we are seeking to rein in the recklessness of the previous government and show that we are providing value for hard-earned tax dollars and making sure that we do not saddle ourselves with multibillion dollars in debt, that we are not trying to dig ourselves out.

For the members opposite, you know, to provide this type of amendment is disappointing. On that basis, Mr. Chair, this amendment has no business making it to this Bill 20. I will urge all of my colleagues to vote against the amendment.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. minister.

I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-*West Henday* has risen to speak.

Mr. Carson: Thank you, Mr. Chair. It's an honour to rise to speak to this amendment to Bill 20. I'm sure I'll have the opportunity to speak to my concerns around Bill 20 as a whole, but of course we have this amendment before us. I appreciate the Member for Calgary-*Buffalo* bringing it forward.

I also just want to point out the fact that the minister just spoke twice to this amendment, and I always appreciate it when ministers are willing to speak, but the fact is that the second time the minister rose, he didn't say anything different than he did the first time. He didn't answer any of the questions that were brought forward when the amendment was brought forward. If the government is going to take part in this debate with us, which I do appreciate, I would appreciate it more if they actually brought something new to the table when we bring up our concerns.

Just a few things that I want to point out as this debate continues. December 15, as my city councillor pointed out, will be the 10-year reunion, I suppose, since the valley line LRT route was approved. Here we are 10 years later, much too late, I would argue, for this to be moving forward. But, thankfully, under our government I had the opportunity to stand with an NDP government, with the Minister of Transportation, and the federal Minister of Transport as well and commit the funding for this very important piece of infrastructure in our city, in regard to the valley line LRT, which is affected by this amendment as well.

When I see this government bringing forward clauses within their legislation saying that they are able to cancel – and my biggest concern here is not necessarily the 90 days. As the Minister of Transportation continues to say, that is a normal thing, yet he has not been willing to bring any examples of that forward. But my bigger concern is the without-cause clause in there. Now, I have repeatedly questioned the Minister of Transportation in this House, and unfortunately that minister has continued, from what I can tell, to bring forward facts that do not align with reality. The minister said that in the federal legislation – now, I would appreciate it if the minister wants to correct me if I'm wrong here, but from what I could tell, there is no without-cause cancellation clause in that legislation. The 90 days is in there. The without-cause piece is not. That becomes a concern when we look at the ability of this government to create relationships.

8:50

I mean, when this government ripped up the city charter fiscal framework, their first attack on our municipalities, and then, further to that, when the city mayors were concerned that this government was not going to hold up their end of the bargain, that first of all they supported when we were in government, when we brought forward the legislation to commit this funding to the municipalities – then, again, during the election they said that they were going to still keep that campaign commitment and keep that funding commitment – well, you can only imagine that the big-city mayors were very concerned. The mayor of Calgary ripped that piece of paper up and threw it in the garbage because that agreement, that this government committed to, was not worth the paper that it was written on.

Once again, how are these municipalities and these big-city mayors supposed to support this idea when, first of all, they bring their concerns forward and what happens? The Minister of Justice attacks the mayor of Calgary, calling him a liberal mayor, calling them, you know, fiscally irresponsible and whatever else they decided to call them that day, and then they came back to this House and said: "The municipalities should trust us. You know, we have their best interests at heart." Well, unfortunately, I don't see how the municipalities and the mayors specifically could trust anything this government has to say, especially when the conversation has

not even been had in the first place. This was thrown at the mayors and thrown at city councils.

Another concern I have is that, once again, the Minister of Transportation in question period in response to my questions answered, saying that he has not heard from any city councillors that they are concerned about the without-cause clause in Bill 20. I find that very hard to believe, Mr. Chair. It makes me question whether this minister has even had a conversation with any of these councillors, because the people that I've talked to have been very concerned about that 90 days but more specifically about that "without cause." Once again, the minister continues to say things that I don't necessarily believe, and I'm not sure that the city councillors do either, yet this government wants to consolidate power within their ministry.

Once again, they say that they should be in charge of the fiscal accountability of the cities in this instance, that they should have the final say on whether they get the funding from the province or not. It is absurd, Mr. Chair, because on one hand we have a government that's saying, "You should trust us with your money, and we should tell you if you're allowed to spend it on this," but on the other hand you see mounting levels of debt. The Minister of Municipal Affairs just stood up talking at length about the amount of debt that we took on, not recognizing the amazing movement that we saw in infrastructure debt reduction. But this government is now moving forward with a \$4.7 billion handout to the largest corporations. Just yesterday we saw that Husky is pulling \$500 million out of their capital spending, but we're supposed to and the city is supposed to believe that this government is going to make the right decision for them. Well, I don't think that's the case at all.

Now, once again, it's been 10 years since the valley line west LRT route was first approved. It is time – and I have heard from my constituents that it is time – to move forward on this. Unfortunately, what this government is doing is downloading their debt onto municipalities. The government is saying that they are not going to commit to the first couple of years of funding, as was promised, which only means that the city, the municipality, is going to have to pick up that debt-servicing cost, which is actually going to cost them even more to pay for because cities cannot get that money at the same rate as the provincial government.

Once again, I fully support this Bill 20 amendment. I think that the 90 days without-cause cancellation clause is absolutely ridiculous. Maybe the Minister of Transportation wants to clarify that, the without-cause pieces, in the federal legislation, and then I would apologize for my mistake, but I would be interested to hear from him. Thank you to the member for bringing this forward.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung has risen to speak on this amendment.

Mr. Dach: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I'm pleased to rise in this House most evenings, not so much this evening. But I will speak to the amendment to Bill 20 because, of course, this LRT project also runs through my riding of Edmonton-McClung, and it means a great deal to my constituents as well. It's passing strange, perhaps not so much, but I'm very curious about the government members' positions with respect to how things must be with a long-term project, one which is supported by government, perhaps government money, whether that be in the public sector versus the private sector. If it's a long-term project such as maybe an oil sands project, which is, of course, over the course of many years, from initial investment to oil being produced and then shipped and exported or produced and refined, if it's a long-term project like that, then the government members are all for stability and

guarantees and making sure that the security is there for these large-industry members and investors to proceed with the project without delay, without uncertainty, knowing for sure that from point A to point B that project is going to be supported and that they have the backing of the government's support without question.

That goes as well for other infrastructure projects, Mr. Chair; for example, pipeline projects. We've heard often from members opposite, on the government side, about how important it is to provide security, certainty, long-term stability for major infrastructure projects like pipeline projects, for example, yet those pipeline projects are something that usually will enjoy the government's support. Knowing that, of course, for commitments of many years and major, major infrastructure dollars and government guarantees, it is very important for the security and completion of those projects that the security be there.

The same thing goes, Mr. Chair, for other private infrastructure projects like refineries, for example. They're usually a significant number of years from initial planning to financing to engineering to design and eventual construction and the bringing into commission of refineries. That type of project is something that government members also suggest requires stability, long-term support, unwavering commitment. Uncertainty is not something that can prevail during these types of long-term commitments according to government members when they are in support or speaking in support of major private-sector infrastructure projects.

However, Mr. Chair, I find it more than contradictory when government members, on that side, in speaking to this amendment, will talk about their 90-day clause without cause, the escape clause which they are now trying to implement, which this amendment hopes to reverse, as something that is somehow necessary for the stability of the government's position and their budget. Well, it certainly creates a whole lot of uncertainty, a whole lot of damage to the long-term projects that are the green line in Calgary and the LRT expansions in Edmonton.

These projects are no more dispensable than some of the major infrastructure projects that have been undertaken privately, Mr. Chair, yet the distinction that we see between them, even though they may be comparable – and sometimes the public infrastructure projects have more impact in terms of creating jobs and employment and investment and public good and social good over a long period of time. Even with those projects where we now will see the government hoping to maintain a 90-day clause without cause to retract those projects, we find that the certainty and security for those projects is something that the government values less because they're public infrastructure. Somehow they seem to be dispensable projects.

It's in opposition to what they consider essential for private-sector projects, whether they be oil sands, whether they be pipelines, whether they be refineries or other major infrastructure projects that quite often get put on hold or delayed for years until they end up being way more expensive than they otherwise would have been had they been implemented, put in place, constructed on time, rather than being put on hold.

9:00

This amendment, by which we seek to reverse the 90-day clause-without-cause proposal in the government's bill, is something that would go a long way to maintaining the sanctity of the need for long-term certainty in major infrastructure projects, whether they be public or private. It's not something that is totally switchable when you're building a public versus a private infrastructure project. There is a question of public dollars in play quite often with the private infrastructure projects: the major infrastructure projects are reliant upon government support, subsidy, long-term financing, financial backing, yet those private-sector projects rarely get

interfered with or stopped in the middle of a major project, because for some reason they seem to be sacrosanct and untouchable, and the government is very much the first one to come to the defence of maintaining certainty of investment in infrastructure projects that are private sector based.

However, in this instance, Mr. Chair, we see public infrastructure at risk, projects that are being put on hold, where the government has adopted the word "pause" to make it more palatable to the public. But pausing or putting them on hold or invoking a 90-day clause is something that the public is painfully, increasingly aware of in this province. There's a long, long, and growing list of infrastructure projects that this government has put on hold, indefinitely paused, put into the black hole of never-never land and probably never going to happen land. What's happening in this province is that people are asking: "What's next? Who's next? Who's the next target?" People see their neighbours being targeted. They see their neighbouring cities being targeted, where infrastructure projects are being put on hold, delayed, are probably never going to see the light of day, are possibly up for targeting in the next budget cycle.

In this particular budget cycle, Mr. Chair, we see the Premier indicating: oh, it's not so bad; it's just a certain percentage level. Well, multiply that percentage level by four, and you've got a pretty significant amount of infrastructure being delayed, obstructed, or taken, perhaps, right off the table.

It's not something that this government, I think, really has felt the wrath of Albertans about, but I'm sure they are prepared for an earful because indeed that is something that they're going to get. When an infrastructure project so important to the public as the green line in Calgary is as well as the LRT is in Edmonton – the LRT goes through my constituency of Edmonton-McClung as well as that of my colleague from Edmonton-West Henday and that of the Member for Edmonton-Glenora as well and has been waited for for 10 years. It affects the Member for Edmonton-Rutherford, pretty much everybody from Edmonton centre to the west end, following the line. And then the valley line as well.

All those major infrastructure projects having to do with the LRT are now put under question because the government wishes to maintain their 90-day clause without cause, creating uncertainty and also creating an environment where future investors, future bidders on projects like these may very well have second thoughts about going ahead and bidding on large public infrastructure projects in this province because of the uncertainty the government has created in their strategy of maintaining for themselves a 90-day clause without cause. If indeed a project may end up getting put on the back burner or halted after so much has been invested already, after 10 years of painstaking public consultation, after deciding upon the routes, if that project is then potentially going to be, at the stroke of a pen, put on hold or potentially never ever going to get built, investors and even engineering companies, contractors are going to be wanting perhaps not even to bid. If they do bid, they're going to be wanting to build in an insurance clause to protect themselves in the event that the project gets put on hold.

So this government, which prides itself on being so much the proud builder of infrastructure and the entrepreneurial wizards of the long term and the only ones in the province that are capable of governing with a mind to the bottom line, is in fact creating a situation where long-term infrastructure projects of a public infrastructure nature in particular are being put at risk of escalating costs because of their practice now of retaining unto the cabinet a 90-day clause without cause, a kill-the-project clause.

I wish the government would be consistent in its application of their ideology towards their supports for long-term infrastructure projects in terms of how much they see the need to be giving certainty and security for these projects over the long term. What

this amendment to the bill proposes to do is to return us to a situation of that security, where this 90-day clause without cause is rescinded, where the government accepts that public infrastructure is as indispensable as private infrastructure and that it requires and deserves the protection of that long-term certainty that governments should be giving to public infrastructure projects in a similar way as to private infrastructure projects by not giving themselves the right to yank the carpet out from underneath those who would be investing in these public infrastructure projects as well as the taxpayer, whose public money is at risk and whose wait for the social good and public benefit of these projects has been, in this case, over 10 years.

It is very insensitive, in fact, uneconomic, and poor governance on the part of the current government of Alberta to put in such a clause, to create such uncertainty, add a high level of cost, and damage the long-term viability of many future public infrastructure projects by creating a climate in the province of uncertainty and lack of trust of the government's willingness to proceed from point A to point B to get a project actually built. It's not a situation that one would have expected from a so-called free-enterprise government but perhaps one that's not too surprising to see from a government that does seem to have public infrastructure and public servants in their sights as a target for their cutting of budgets. It's a system of imbalanced priorities.

It begs the question, as I asked before: what's next, and who's next? In my particular riding of Edmonton-McClung there is the Misericordia hospital, and there's an emergency ward that this government has said that they would build. They would complete the project that we announced when we were in government, a \$65 million addition, a new emergency department at the Misericordia hospital. I'll tell you what, Mr. Chair, I've got a sneaking suspicion that that's the next one on the chopping block. We'll be seeing what happens in the next budget cycle.

Be warned, Albertans. There are projects that you have planned for, that you have spent numbers of years hoping for and campaigning for. They've been approved, they've been announced, yet they might be yanked. The Misericordia hospital emergency ward is one that I fear this government has targeted next for chopping. Be warned that this might be happening. I for one as well as other members of my caucus will be certainly ready to mobilize those individuals who want to support the continuation of this important infrastructure project to make sure that the government follows through on the commitments that we made and that they said they would honour.

Mr. Chair, with that, I conclude my remarks with fair warning to the government that public infrastructure projects deserve to be treated with the same respect and capacity to reach their fruition as private infrastructure projects. This requires the certainty of a long-term commitment and certainly is threatened by the inclusion of a 90-day clause-without-cause part of a piece of legislation, that threatens to crater these projects in midstream and threatens the long-term viability of public infrastructure projects, that deserve the certainty of those that are found in the private sector.

I'll conclude my remarks and invite all members to support this important amendment to revert to a situation where 90-day, pull-the-rug-out clauses without cause are not part of the legislation.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

On amendment A4 I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-North West has risen to speak.

9:10

Mr. Eggen: Well, thank you, Mr. Chair. I appreciate the opportunity to say a few words in regard to this amendment to Bill

20, and I appreciate the Member for Calgary-Buffalo bringing it forward. You know, it's interesting. I've spoken a number of times on Bill 20. I guess there's sort of a common theme that runs through it, although I struggled for weeks to try to figure out what it was, because you have your film and tax credits, you have the tax credits for the high-tech industries, you have these changes to the municipal governance and so forth, advanced education and so forth. It seemed quite disparate, but when you start to put it together, the common theme I'm starting to see is that this current UCP government is bent on consolidating authority and power over so many areas in our economy.

You know, Mr. Chair, this could be quite a dangerous exercise, especially, let's say, with the green line or the valley line in Calgary and Edmonton, respectively. These are very significant projects that are key to the economic development in each city moving forward for the next 20 years or more. We know that there is for both an appetite for building each of these projects, and you have, very carefully and over a long period of time, a joining together of three levels of government to fund them. So for this UCP government now to come forward and to put any question as to their sincerity around moving forward on these lines undermines the whole thing. When you have three levels of government putting forward such a significant amount of money, it's not easy to do. If one-third of the partnership is suddenly demonstrating less than a rock-solid commitment to building these lines, then it calls into question the viability of being able to do that in the future, moving forwards.

You know, I found it interesting that the Minister of Municipal Affairs – and he did it twice, because he did the same speech twice, so I got the message, for sure – seems to say: well, since there's such a great fiscal instability, we're not sure what to do. The message that I get pretty loud and clear from this minister is that he's not committed to these projects and that he says: well, we have to balance the budget. Well, you have to build the things that you're responsible to build as well, right?

We know that the green line in Calgary, say, for example, is a major investment in how the future of the city is going to look like economically – right? – transportationwise, housingwise, for development. I mean, there are literally things being built, all planned along the line. I know that in the Ministry of Education we had met together with the city to try to align new schools along the green line so that, you know, kids could use the green line to go to school. Just building infrastructure around nodes: this is how big cities grow and develop over time. You see successful 30-year plans or more. I think this is part of a 30-year transportation and development plan that integrates housing, retail, schools, hospitals – you name it – with the LRT line as sort of the trunk of the whole thing.

Don't play with these sorts of things when they're already in motion, right? Don't just say for the sake of consolidation of power that, you know, without any particular reason you would somehow have a 90-day withdrawal on these important projects. I mean, that is irresponsible governance, Mr. Chair, quite frankly. I'm really proud of the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo bringing forward this sensible amendment, that I encourage everyone to support.

We know that here in Edmonton, for example, any degree of interference that we saw with the current leg of the valley line really slowed things down, right? If you haven't driven along the length of the valley line, it goes from downtown Edmonton, across the river and then up Connors Hill to the Bonnie Doon area, down Argyll Road and so forth down south. I haven't gone very much further south than that. I'm a north-side guy. It has been delayed significantly, and some of those delays were to do with interference by levels of government in the project. The federal government stuck their nose in and, you know, demanded that it be a P3 project.

That slowed the thing down by a long shot, right? The fallacy of either saving money or efficiency or anything by building it as a P3 – we learned very well from the P3 disaster of building schools here in the province of Alberta that it's a dead-end road.

Again, by making sure that projects are organic and that they are being managed by the experts on the ground to ensure the efficiency and what's needed in a city, that's the way to be a responsible manager at a provincial level, not sticking your fingers in, changing the rules in the middle of the game – right? – and expecting anything but uncertainty and consternation as to whether, you know, the project is a go. Is it a go in a timely manner? Are we going to have delays that will just end up costing the project an awful lot more money over time?

I think that the Member for Calgary-Buffalo has got a good amendment here. I'm certainly behind it, and I hope that others in the House will follow as well.

Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

I see the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo has risen to speak on amendment A4.

Member Ceci: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. I just want to address a few things I heard coming from the Minister of Municipal Affairs a little while ago, particularly the city councils in both Edmonton and Calgary: I get the impression that he believes that they're junior legislators in this province and that they don't have the skills and abilities that he does with his seven months of sitting in this Legislature. You know, I just need to remind him that there are people on Calgary city council that have been there for 26 years. The mayor has been there for nine years, since 2010. That city is the largest urban centre in this province and the source, along with the area around it, the census metropolitan district, driving the major part of economic leadership in this province. They know what they're doing. They have built over time the west line LRT, the northeast line LRT, the south line LRT, and of course they want to add to it with regard to the green line. The other significant projects that I can think of that they've built and delivered on time, on budget are things, like the downtown convention centre, major interchanges throughout the city, costing hundreds of millions of dollars.

Mr. Chair, you know, this amendment is not one that's saying that more money needs to be given to the city of Calgary or the city of Edmonton for their major LRT projects. It's not saying that any less money needs to be given to them, the province's money which we committed to both Edmonton and Calgary. In Calgary's case it was \$1.5 billion. I'm not recommending that more needs to be given. I'm recommending that what needs to be given needs to be assured to them that it's coming. We know that with this budget it's been pushed off four years. A dribble of money is going to be happening in the next four years, and then after four years the balance, leading out for several years, will be delivered. That, of course, puts significant challenges in front of the city of Calgary. This amendment seeks to correct the onerous parts of Bill 20 that no one counted on in the city of Calgary. They were surprised when this bill came out and objected to it, of course.

9:20

You know, I think what I object most to is the Minister of Municipal Affairs – and I'm taking from what he's saying, but it's like he treats them like a junior order of government, that they're less legitimate than this order of government, the provincial government, or indeed the federal government. Well, that party doesn't think the federal order of government really knows what they're doing. That's unfortunate as well, that they believe that.

I just want to correct some other things. When we were in government, Mr. Chair, we targeted operational spending, operational investments at population growth plus inflation growth. We tried and stuck to that effort to bring that spending down to that level, that combined level of population growth plus inflation. Those were tough years, 2015 and '16. As you know, they were recessionary years in this province.

But '17 and '18 were growth years, and they were growth years to our GDP as a result of our work to make sure that people kept working as well as the fact that David Dodge, the former Bank of Canada governor – you know, you have your expert who guided you on the blue-ribbon panel; we had our expert, David Dodge, former Bank of Canada governor – said very early on that the recession will be tough on this province and billions will be leaving because private investment won't be coming to spend that money here because of the recessionary years. He said: because those private investment dollars are not going to be here, use your public dollars to keep this province going. As a result of our investment of those monies, which this minister says was irresponsible because it racked up debt, Mr. Chair, I can tell you that in 2017 the GDP in this province grew 4.6 per cent.

Where did it go in 2019 after the policies of the UCP have come in? It's .5 per cent. It's flat or it's going to be in recession as a result of these policies brought forward by Janice MacKinnon and others in the blue-ribbon panel. In 2018 the GDP grew just around 3 per cent. Again, that's a number that won't be seen by the UCP in their management of the budgets and the GDP in this province in 2019. It won't happen.

Lastly, Mr. Chair, I note that the Minister of Municipal Affairs has been speaking to Calgary media and talking about how the Calgary council, you know, is spending way too much money and being critical of Calgary council. I just saw a newspaper report, and the mayor is firing back on all of that stuff. He is saying that maybe this government is trying to distract from their destructive budget, that's having an impact on the city of Calgary right now with a 33 per cent cut on police funding, with a reduction in MSI that's going to be a problem for the city of Calgary going forward, with changes that they're bringing forward that weren't discussed, weren't talked about, weren't negotiated, were just as a matter of course brought forward and that said to the city of Calgary: "Here. Now deal with this." Deal with it they will, but it's not because they have a good partner on the other side. It's because they have a draconian UCP government who, out of all costs, is saying: you're going to have to tighten your belt, and we don't care if it results in higher taxes. It's going to result in higher taxes. That's clear.

I just wanted to correct the record on all those things, that we're not talking about more money going to the LRT green line. We're talking about treating the city of Calgary and the city of Edmonton as legitimate partners in the development of infrastructure in those cities, something they have been doing for decades, Mr. Chair, and they'll do for decades after this one-term government is gone.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

I see the hon. Minister of Transportation has risen.

Mr. McIver: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I'll just make a couple of brief comments here. The hon. members across seem to be wilfully short of memory, and that's okay. Sometimes I'm short of memory, too. I just hope it's not quite so wilful as what I think I detect here. We've had some of these discussions in question period and made it clear that the members opposite are complaining about a cancellation clause in the provincial side of the funding, but on the federal funding for the very same LRT line there's a cancellation clause, and somehow the members opposite don't seem at all

troubled by that, nor do they seem to understand the inconsistency in being troubled by one and not at all by the other. In fact, they seem to think that one doesn't exist and the other one does, but in fact both of them exist.

The funding was promised in our campaign. The hon. members are fond of referring to the section of the legislation that talks about the cancellation clause – and I'll remind them again that there's a section for cancellation in the federal funding – but they're ignoring the section that I think the city would be interested in, and it says that the full \$1.53 billion for Calgary and \$1.47 billion for Edmonton is payable, which means promise made, promise kept where I come from.

I know that they have to say these things because they're trying to distract from the disastrous record that they had when they were in government and the fact that they didn't get these things completed. I guess you could hardly blame them because after being the only one-term government fired in the history of Alberta and having racked up debt at a record rate, which was the accumulation of deficits at a record rate, and having created unemployment in Alberta at a record rate, they've got a lot of records.

Actually, you know what? They've got gold medals in all the wrong sports. They have left 170,000-odd Albertans out of work. They have taxed Albertans with their carbon tax in the most destructive way, which made everything more expensive for the least vulnerable Albertans, including municipalities, by the way, who also complain constantly about the NDP's carbon tax, and which also made it more expensive for seniors, people on low income, charities, nongovernment organizations, churches, community associations. The folks across the aisle were severely . . . [interjections] You know, Mr. Chair, I can hardly hear myself talk.

Chair's Ruling Interrupting a Member

The Deputy Chair: Hon. members, I feel compelled to still hesitate to interrupt. However, I would say that the crosstalk in the House isn't helpful for me to be able to hear the individual with the call at the current time. As I've stated a few times in today's evening session, there will be ample opportunity for members to speak after the individual with the call. I think that there have been some repeated comments from the other side of the House which I would welcome in the course of debate. However, at this time it is the Minister of Transportation who has the floor.

Please continue.

Debate Continued

Mr. McIver: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I'm happy to do this, and I'll note that while the Member for Calgary-McCall was speaking, we sat quietly and listened regardless of how little sense his comments made. When the Member for Calgary-*Buffalo* spoke, we sat and listened regardless of how little sense that made. I'm just here correcting some of the nonsense that we heard earlier. [interjections] See? They still can't be quiet.

You know what? The fact is that the city of Calgary was not well served by the member opposite. The fact is that I don't think I voted ever for a budget there because the tax increases were always too high, and I'm not sure whether the member opposite ever voted against one of those. But you see, Mr. Chair, therein lies the problem. At some point somebody has to think about what things cost, they have to think about the value of things that they're buying, and they actually have to think about the poor people that have to pay the bill. See, there's a place where there's a big difference across the aisle

from where we are, because we actually do think about the value of things, we think about the cost of things, and we actually think about the poor people that have to pay the bill.

Ms Hoffman: Then why is your deficit bigger?

Chair's Ruling Interrupting a Member

The Deputy Chair: Hon. member, I have to call order at this point. I have, in the last 40 minutes, probably made the same interruption four or five times, so I would just ask that – at the present time the individual with the call is the Minister of Transportation. Do not worry, for if there is a member from your caucus speaking, then I will afford the same opportunity for that member to speak on this amendment. So if the hon. member could please continue, then after he is done, there will be, like I said, ample opportunity for debate on this amendment.

Please continue.

9:30 Debate Continued

Mr. McIver: Thank you, Mr. Chair, and I'll try to hear my own thoughts, if I can, over the din.

Mr. Speaker, as I was saying before the folks on the other side were heckling as they could, the big difference between our side of the aisle and the other one is that we actually have to take the time to consider who has to pay the bill, because there is no such thing as government money. Whether it's a city government or a provincial government or a federal government, it's only people's money. It's the taxpayers' money. None of it's our money. We just are hired through the election process to be stewards of that money, and we all have – I try to remind myself of this every day, so I'll say it out loud for everybody's benefit – temp jobs here. We only temporarily steward the money that belongs to the citizens, but while we're doing that, on this side of the aisle we actually think about those poor citizens when they have to pay back the debt that's accumulated by their government, where the folks on the other side seem to think that it comes from a money tree or some other place, and they never consider that the money has to be paid back.

Therein lies a great deal of the difference, Mr. Chair, and therein lies the fact that while the other side wants to spend \$3 billion without any control over how the money is spent, we actually think it's . . . [interjection] Again, I can hardly hear myself for the former Minister of Finance that got fired after one term, Mr. Chair. It's unbelievable that, although I listened quietly the whole time he was talking and never said a word, the hon member just can't seem to stop yapping during the time when someone else is speaking.

However, Mr. Chair, I will say that the other side seems to not actually concern themselves with who has to pay the bills for their bad habits, which is why the other side was fired after one term, which is why the worst Finance minister in the history of Alberta was fired after one term along with all of his teammates, which is an indication that he never learned anything during the time on city council, during the time as Finance minister and in the last few months in opposition hasn't really put that together. That's why I'm saying these things, to help the hon. member so that he might be more successful in the future.

Mr. Chair, this is important. It's important because the cities want their LRT. It's important because our government wants to help them pay for the LRT. It's important because in the legislation there's a section where we've said that we have set aside \$3 billion so they can build their LRT. But then we go to the difference between our side of the aisle and the other side of the aisle. Our side

of the aisle simply wants to make sure that the money is spent on what the city said it was, which I think is a reasonable way to steward the money that is not ours. The folks on the other side want to hand over \$3 billion with no strings: no checks, no balances, no belts, no braces, no way to control and make sure the money is spent on what it is intended for.

Now, Mr. Chair, we trust the cities, but to quote Ronald Reagan, the phrase "Trust, but verify" is a good one. All we're saying is that we do want to give them this money, we do want them to build their LRTs, we do want them to be a success, and we want those LRTs to serve the good people of Edmonton and Calgary. We just think it's our duty as stewards of the taxpayers' dollars to have some mechanism to make sure the money is spent on what we said it was going to be spent on, which again takes me back to the difference between this side of the aisle and the other side. We care very much about accountability with how the money gets spent. The other side seems not to care a whit.

Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview has risen to speak and has the call now, please. [interjections]
Order.

Ms Sigurdson: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Chair. It's my pleasure to rise and talk about the amendment from my hon. colleague from Calgary-Buffalo. It's an amendment to this omnibus bill, Bill 20, and we certainly need to reflect on what actually is in this bill. You know, on a day like today, when we've had a significant tragedy on the steps of this Legislature, I am pleased to stand up and speak about how important it is to support Albertans. Unfortunately, there are some changes that are happening here in our province that are hurting Albertans. Certainly, if we can improve this bill, which I believe this amendment does, then we can absolutely improve the conditions for Albertans.

First of all, on section 7, it says at the beginning of this amendment to strike out section 7. I just want to refer to that. "The Minister may amend any term, condition or provision of the grant agreement or a funding agreement by regulation": that's pretty *carte blanche*, Mr. Chair. It is, like: pretty much do whatever the heck you want to. Is that good legislation? And it's by regulation, so it doesn't have to be an order in council. I mean, for sure this bill would be much more fair – we know that in a good government there are checks and balances. This sort of removes them. It is quite audacious that the government would put this kind of clause in here.

Also, other aspects of this bill talk about specifically Calgary, and many of my colleagues have talked about Calgary. In section 5(2) it says: "Notwithstanding Schedule E of the grant agreement, the Lieutenant Governor in Council may by regulation prescribe the funding that will be provided and disbursed to the City of Calgary." Of course, that's about the green line. That also is a significant heavy hand. It's taking away the authority of Calgary, which did have a plan, and saying that they can delay it, which seems to be what this budget indicates. What havoc that creates for our largest municipality. Is the government realizing what they're saying? You know, in a very heavy-handed way they're taking away the authority of our major municipality to make some choices and decisions.

I am just going to refer to a CBC article about this. This is what Mayor Nenshi said. Regional infrastructure has taken a hit of \$50 million, and the green line is now a big problem, Nenshi says. The city was supposed to receive \$555 million for the planned LRT over the next four years, but it's now down to \$75 million. According to the mayor it's 20,000 construction jobs that are now in the balance. He says, and I'm quoting: I don't know how you complete the green

line on time, and we certainly don't have the debt capacity; I don't think it's too much to say that the project itself is in jeopardy. So by this legislation they are creating a lot of, tremendous difficulty for the city of Calgary. This amendment would improve that and make it not just sort of a unilateral decision by this government, that actually would be respecting the city of Calgary, not what this government is doing.

Secondly, in another clause we're referring to the city of Edmonton. They are delaying, actually, the funding for that. You know, these are millions of dollars in delay, which causes, of course, some more jeopardy for a project. As with many of my colleagues on this side of the House, that expansion does go through my riding, sort of Stony Plain Road over to Meadowlark mall. It goes through my riding. I'm concerned about that because that does give people in Edmonton-Riverview much better access to the downtown core, to the west. It is a very important investment by this government. Really, the government broke an agreement with those large cities about that. This amendment, brought forward by my hon. colleague, certainly would go a long way to support that project to go ahead.

You know, all of us come to this work with different backgrounds, and I come to it from social work. One of the things we always ask about any kind of policy is: "Who benefits? Who doesn't?" So who's benefiting from this? I'm very concerned that the cities are really hurting by this and also regular Albertans who need access to transit. We know how fundamental and important transit is. We also know that seniors often don't want to drive when they're older, so having access to efficient, affordable transit is so key. This is who the government is hurting. They're not supporting them. This project was committed to, well on its way, and it's just very tragic that by this omnibus bill they're rolling back supports for many people who would be taking advantage of that transit system, for sure.

9:40

If we ask ourselves more about who benefits from what's in this bill, I just want to say another aspect. You know, the hon. member who was speaking just previous to me seemed to tell us what we thought. I don't know, but it kind of irritates me when people tell me what I think or why I'm doing something. I think it's disrespectful. It's actually very important that we care enough to let other people express themselves, but all sorts of ideas about why we did what we did: I just really take a lot of exception to that because one of the things we did was we really committed to making sure that average Albertans were supported. This bill is rolling that back.

One of the things they're doing is that the Alberta child benefit and the Alberta family employment tax credit are being rolled into one in this bill. In so doing, that's changing the threshold, so fewer families actually are eligible for that; 165,000 families will receive less, and 55,000 families will no longer be eligible. I'm concerned about that. Those are average Albertans that aren't going to have those supports. That's what I care about. I care about people being supported. You know what else that the Alberta tax child benefit did? It reduced child poverty by 50 per cent in this province. That is something I stand here so proud of, and I would do it again.

I would not give a \$4.7 billion corporate giveaway. I would give money to people who are on a low income, for children living in poverty, and I would increase the minimum wage. I would do the things our government did, and you know what? It wasn't crazy spending. It was actually redistributing the wealth because we know that in Alberta we have the highest inequality of any province in Canada, and that's nothing that I'm proud of. I'm distressed by that. The top 1 per cent – I have the stats here – earned 46 times that of

the poorest 10 per cent, the largest gap of all the provinces in Canada. So what the heck are we doing? Continuing to give all sorts of money to the elite, \$4.7 billion to corporations: why are we doing that? Why are we deindexing AISH and the Alberta seniors' benefit? We're pushing people down. We're just supporting another elite group. That's not responsible government. Actually, that's the role of government, to develop a more robust middle class, so we as a government lifted the floor by increasing minimum wage, supporting all sorts of programs for people. What this government is doing is the complete opposite, and we have increased inequality.

We know that income inequality is particularly striking in urban areas, with the major Alberta cities, Edmonton and Calgary, coming in second and third place after Toronto for the largest income gaps between the top 1 per cent and the bottom 10 per cent. That's really nothing that I'm proud of, and that's actually one of the things that motivated me to get into politics. It's because I wanted to create more equality in this province, and that means supporting people with important programs. But of course this bill isn't doing that. This bill is continuing to erode programs for Albertans. Certainly that's not a good move, and we know that by this amendment that actually helps it. It takes away so much power in the hands of the minister, which seems outrageous to me. We really have checks and balances in politics, and the minister shouldn't be able to just by regulation decide what contract is signed, what clause goes in. You know, these are multimillion dollar projects, sometimes billion dollar, so it just seems ridiculous that this would be going on. I just want to speak very clearly that I am in support of this amendment.

I also just want to talk again about who benefits and who doesn't. This omnibus bill also talks about, you know, many tax credits. They're taking away some tax credits. In my riding there's the film and video association. It's called FAVA. FAVA is, of course, an umbrella organization advocating for film and video. I met with a young woman. Her name is Katrina Beatty, and she's a film producer. Because of the delay, of not continuing to accept applications for the screen-based production grant – this year I know that the minister did make some amendments, and now apparently it's . . .

The Deputy Chair: Hon. member, I hesitate to interrupt you. However, I think that at the present time we're dealing with amendment A4, and I would say that we should make efforts to be relevant to that. The only reason I've chosen to do this at this time is because the premise of your statement, after you stated that you were done talking on amendment A4, was to then say that you were going to start discussing the bill proper. I would say that there will be ample time for you to do that. I'm not trying to stifle your debate on the bill. All I'm saying is that at this present time I think that it would be a more effective use of discussion in the House on this amendment to stick to the amendment. When this amendment does end up being accepted or defeated, then we will move to the bill proper. If you could please continue with that in mind.

Ms Sigurdson: Well, I just want to refer again to the amendment, then, put forward by Calgary-Buffalo. Again, I just think it's, you know, extraordinary to think that a minister has this omnipotent power. Striking out section 7 would be very important. You know what I think? It's a bad habit that this government has. It thinks that it can do things sort of unilaterally, without involving the big cities.

The hon. member who spoke before me talked about the bad habits of our government. Well, I just want to talk about their bad habits. One of the things that they're doing is firing teachers and nurses. They seem to care more about – and he was part of this government – sky palaces and private planes and going to London and five-star hotels. This government has some bad habits, very

unlike our government, which did not have any of those scandals because – you know what we did? – we invested very much in supporting people and caring about people, regular Albertans, not elite people.

I absolutely want to support this amendment. I know that for the cities, both of them, it would improve their contract. I think that they've broken good faith with the large cities. Both mayors, you know, were shocked that these huge changes were made. These amendments would talk specifically about how to make it better and not delay funding, not reduce funding.

This is all very important to fairness and justice, which I really encourage the government to understand, the people on the other side. You know, caring about all Albertans is their job. It's not just about the elite. It's not just about corporations. It's also about regular people who need to take transit. It's also about regular people who are involved and need some help with public programs, kids in schools, all of those people. It's not just about that top 1 per cent, which this government seems to think are the most important. They're busy creating more inequality, which is not what is fair or just.

I think that I've made myself clear on this point. With that, I'll sit down.

9:50

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member. I would just ask the hon. member to table the CBC article at the appropriate time.

Are there any other hon. members looking to speak to amendment A4?

[Motion on amendment A4 lost]

The Deputy Chair: Moving to the bill proper, Bill 20, I see the hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Jason Nixon: Well, thank you, Mr. Chair. I move that we adjourn debate on Bill 20.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Bill 29

Municipal Government (Machinery and Equipment Tax Incentives) Amendment Act, 2019

The Deputy Chair: Are there any comments, questions, or amendments to be offered at this time? I see the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo has risen to speak.

Member Ceci: Thanks, Mr. Chair. I'll start with comments first and later put forward an amendment. The things I want to say with regard to Bill 29 – of course, it builds on the bad Bill 7, which we dealt with in the spring. That bill I think you could probably call picking the pockets of municipalities around the province. It certainly doesn't do a whole lot for municipalities, who want stable and predictable funding from their local tax base, from the province in this case, maybe even from the federal government. They want stable and predictable funds. Bill 29 does none of that. As we heard with Bill 7, the concern of many municipalities was that it puts them in a race to the bottom with other municipalities around the province trying to attract businesses, that then would be, you know, tax exempt or tax deferred for a period of up to 15 years. That is not stable. That's not predictable in terms of those tenants, which they believe are really important for them to address their needs going forward as municipalities.

The only – only – good thing about both bills 7 and 29 that I can envision is that they are enabling legislation, which means that municipalities have the ability to use them or not. Mr. Chair, I think

we're finding out every day that municipalities are not using this enabling legislation, bills 7 and 29, when it gets royal assent. You know, partially or fully exempting taxes for nonresidential properties as in Bill 7 and now for machinery and equipment, which can be in place for up to 15 years, is not something that grows a municipality. In fact, it's something that puts it at risk of being not sustainable in the future.

The other thing I wanted to remind members of this Legislature about is that it doesn't really give new authority to municipalities. They can already do things like cancel, reduce, refund, or defer taxes under section 347 of the MGA. We know that that has been used by the city of Calgary. It has been used by Chestermere. It has been used by Lethbridge. That enabling legislation is already in place. Just as the previous reaction to Bill 7 from various mayors around the province, including notably Iveson and Nenshi – they were worried that it would create a race to the bottom, and it doesn't address the property tax problems that those cities, particularly in Calgary's case, are trying to address.

Mr. Chair, there's another thing that Bill 29 won't do. The machinery and equipment already is in place in many municipalities, not all. You know, will it attract new business to this province? That's suspect. It may attract a feeding frenzy amongst municipalities who try and eat each other's lunch with regard to new businesses by offering them up to 15 years of tax referral or exemptions.

Mr. Chair, the other thing that I wanted to bring out, of course, is that this bill distracts from what municipalities really need, which is a solid framework that will replace MSI. What we know with regard to the local government fiscal framework is that it will not replace MSI in the same way as the MSI agreement or the city charters agreement that we had put in place had addressed, that if revenues grow at the provincial level, they would grow at the same rate at the municipal level. That's not happening, so stable and predictable funds aren't guaranteed as we had put in place. This bill does nothing that municipalities can't already do for themselves if they chose to. They have that power under section 347. What we see with this is nothing that gives them anything more than they already have.

I'm going to put forward an amendment soon, Mr. Chair, but I just wanted to say that, you know, I don't believe this is what municipalities were asking for. I think it's a missed opportunity. This bill and the previous Bill 7 are not something that municipalities, as I understand, as I can remember, were clamoring for. They weren't asking to be given an opportunity to give up 15 years of taxes for businesses in their area. In fact, with M and E that's not something that the city of Calgary and the city of Edmonton can use. I don't think they have the infrastructure in place, that asset class in place in their municipalities to take advantage, if they chose to, under this enabling legislation. It really treats municipalities differently in that regard.

The numerous cuts to municipalities on top of this potential cut, if they use this, I just want to remind members of the Legislature, include things like cuts to the Alberta community transit fund, cuts to police officer funding throughout the province, infrastructure funding cuts, MSI cuts. There's a clawback of the fine revenues, we know, to municipalities in this province that the province is undertaking. As I talked about with the local government fiscal framework, we know that the revenue will grow slower in both of those areas as a result of the changes.

It seems like, you know, a better approach would have been to stay with what our previous government put in place, and that's tax credits that were being utilized across this province. But the giving up of funds in this Bill 29 and Bill 7 are very much like the failed policies that were put in place by the UCP government in terms of

the \$4.5 billion they're giving away to wealthy corporations as a result of giving taxes away in terms of the handout to those corporations. This is more of that, Mr. Chair, more of that in Bill 29, which is the same as Bill 7. I think that we're seeing that approach as not being successful because we're not seeing the reinvestment of monies in the province from those corporations that received those monies, \$4.7 billion. We're not seeing jobs return as was promised by this UCP government in their platform promises of pipelines, jobs, and the economy.

10:00

What we are seeing, Mr. Chair, is concern and worry from municipalities, who believe that, you know, their stable, predictable funds are getting more unstable and less predictable as a result of this enabling legislation, which they probably won't use. Why would you when you can't count on the province following through with its promises? Why would you work to give up money at the local level that you are counting on to invest in your community?

With that said, Mr. Chair, I want to bring forward an amendment, and I'll wait till it gets handed over to you with regard to speaking to it. The original is on the top.

The Deputy Chair: Hon. member, if you could please read this amendment, which we'll be referring to as amendment A1 for debate. If you could read it into the record and then, just in the interests of time, continue with your remarks.

Member Ceci: Thank you. I will. I move that Bill 29, Municipal Government (Machinery and Equipment Tax Incentives) Amendment Act, 2019, be amended in section 2 by adding the following after clause (d):

- (e) by adding the following after subsection (9):
 - (10) Within 6 months of the coming into force of the Municipal Government (Machinery and Equipment Tax Incentives) Amendment Act, 2019, and every 4 years after that, a committee of the Legislative Assembly must commence a review of the amendments made by that Act and submit to the Assembly, within 6 months after beginning the review, a report that includes any amendments recommended by the committee.

That, Mr. Chair, is endeavouring to address the fact that I believe – and I haven't heard anything to the contrary – that municipalities may not be utilizing this act, just as they're not utilizing Bill 7. I've not heard any anecdotal information. I've heard the minister stand up and say, you know, that this county or this MD is using Bill 7. I think what we need to do is get some actual evidence that the bills brought forward are having a positive impact on the communities that the minister wants to see use them.

Without any evidence, Mr. Chair, what we really are getting is, like, trophy legislation to match or mirror the kinds of things that the UCP government has done with regard to their taxation policies for corporations, which, unless somebody can point to where it's had a positive effect, haven't had an effect of growing jobs or increasing investment in this province.

What this amendment really does is provide an opportunity for a committee of the Legislature to hear information and evidence. Perhaps they want to talk to municipalities who have tried to use this or will use this or did use this about what impact it's had in their municipal districts around the kinds of goals or aspirations the minister talked about with regard to Bill 7 or with regard to Bill 29, which is fixing Bill 7, which doesn't really do anything at all either, in my view.

Mr. Chair, what we hear from municipalities, you know, is that they'll look at it, that they'll try and figure out if there's some positive impact it has. But multiple-year tax exemptions, both full

or partial, and deferrals of taxes to attract investments very much seems to them like putting them in a less stable, more unpredictable place for collecting taxes from businesses that enjoy everything going on in municipalities.

Mr. Chair, the previous item that the Minister of Transportation talked about, how I was on councils and that he was voting against tax increases and that I was supporting reasonable tax increases: I just want to remind that member that Calgary has been judged – and you don't get this way by racing to the bottom in taxes and taking away the ability of your councils to invest in public infrastructure, a public realm, that makes a difference in people's lives – even as recently as this year as the fifth-best place to live in the world. In Canada it's usually up there in terms of the third- or the second-best place in Canada to live.

You don't get that way by racing to the bottom in taxes, as I was saying. You do that both by investing in and addressing the public realm, the services people rely on, and keeping that within a reasonable level for the people who are your citizens. We did that in Calgary, and I'm proud to be a member of council that stood up to make that happen. While some people voted against every expenditure of dollars in our city, I believe it's the right thing to do, and it's been evident to others looking at Calgary and saying: that's a pretty great place to live. I'm proud of that. I'm not so proud of Bill 29 and Bill 7 because, as I said, they create a situation that will result in less predictability and stability for municipalities, MDs, and counties around the province with regard to their collection of taxes.

Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

I see the hon. Premier has risen to speak on this amendment.

Mr. Kenney: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'm pleased to be able to rise in debate, just having arrived back from Toronto and the Council of the Federation. I'd like to thank the Member for Calgary-Buffalo for his participation in this debate, his amendments, and his constructive engagement in an important part of our strategy to get Alberta back to work by restoring investor confidence. Given the questions and skepticism raised by the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo, I thought that I would offer some context for the bill before the House and indeed Bill 7, which preceded it in the spring session, both introduced by the hon. the Minister of Municipal Affairs.

In I believe October of last year, I was on a visit to India renewing acquaintances and friendships that I have amongst the senior political and business leadership of the world's largest democracy. During our meetings, both in New Delhi and Mumbai, I encountered at least two major global energy companies with large future investment budgets for petrochemical projects around the world. Both of them expressed an interest to me directly in prospectively investing billions of dollars in new capital spending here in Alberta, projects that would create potentially thousands of jobs and also provide a local market for our stranded Alberta natural gas to help that industry. However, they both raised with me very bluntly the competitive disadvantage that we were at in some respects, and one of those was property taxation. They raised with me the fact that they were looking at prospective petrochem investments on the U.S. Gulf coast, in Texas and Louisiana, and in other jurisdictions, all of which were offering lower property taxes, all of which offer very strong incentives to attract major job-creating capital investment of that scale and nature.

10:10

These CEOs of major global companies were very blunt with me in India last year, saying that if Alberta really wanted to be

competitive in attracting these kinds of investments, we had to show – I remember one CEO saying it – quote, at least as much flexibility on issues like property taxes as the U.S. Gulf states do, unquote.

Now, the U.S. Gulf states, by the way, Mr. Chair, have benefited from approximately \$200 billion in new capital investment in petrochemical projects in the past five years alone. Two hundred billion dollars. That has created tens and tens of thousands of good, high-paying jobs, very often in blue-collar trades and operating jobs for good union workers down in the U.S. Those jobs should have been created here. Our share of the global petrochemical industry has been shrinking. I understand – I'd have to verify the exact, precise numbers – that we've gone from about 3 per cent to about 1.5 per cent of the global petrochemical market over the past decade or so because of all of that new investment elsewhere.

I got a very clear message in India that we needed to get in the game, partly through greater flexibility in local property taxes. I came back here, and then a few weeks later I visited the Industrial Heartland and was greeted by Her Worship the mayor of Fort Saskatchewan and the mayor of Strathcona county and other local officials. They were very clear with me that one of their top policy proposals, Mr. Chairman, was to give municipalities greater statutory flexibility under the Municipal Government Act to offer property tax incentives to attract major new capital investment like petrochemical plants. There I had the demand being expressed by prospective investors, the request being expressed by municipal governments here.

I consulted informally with other municipal governments that are keen on attracting new capital investment, and the ones I consulted thought this was a good idea. Now, I know that that is not a unanimous view amongst our municipalities; I grant that. Some have told us that they don't want to have to compete. Well, I say to them – and I've said this to the Alberta Urban Municipalities Association – with respect, that the whole economic ethos of Alberta is one of competition, and that principle of competition should not be limited to the private sector. In fact, the whole idea of our federation is partly the idea of having a competitive environment, and we have created that. That's the Alberta advantage. Municipalities that want to create their own municipal advantage I don't think should be restricted from doing so.

Really, the NDP's position on this, Mr. Chairman, is that the government of Alberta, through this Legislature, should dictate to them what their local property tax regime is. All we're doing is giving them the option to act freely to incentivize job-creating investment. If there are some municipalities where, instead, their local voters choose to elect councillors who are focused on higher taxes rather than more jobs, bully for them. That's the democratic choice they can make now and, under this legislation, in the future.

Let me also point out, Mr. Chair, that since this government came to office in the spring, we have been involved in a number of intensive conversations with major prospective investors, including in the petrochemical industry. In fact, as you may know, I was in Texas for three days on an investment promotion trip two weeks ago, and almost half of my time in Texas was spent with major global petrochemical companies, getting into really serious conversations about investing prospectively, in each instance, more than \$10 billion in petrochem projects in the Edmonton region. We are entertaining expressions of interest from at least four companies in that industry. If they all went ahead with positive final investment decisions, those decisions would represent cumulatively over \$30 billion of incremental capital expenditure, primarily in the Edmonton region.

I can tell you that, to be illustrative, just one of those, a prospective \$10 billion capital expenditure on a petrochemical

project, would be projected to at its peak employ 10,000 workers. That's in the construction phase. Then in the operating phase I believe it would be closer to 1,500. In both instances, whether in the construction trades or the professional services, architectural and engineering, or the great blue-collar jobs to follow in the operational jobs, you're talking about really good-paying jobs here. A lot of those, I would remind the NDP, would likely be unionized private-sector jobs as well.

This is a good news story, but I've got to tell you, Mr. Chairman, these petrochem companies were very clear with me that they're looking at other jurisdictions. They're looking at the U.S. Gulf coast. Some of them are looking at the Middle East. Some of them are looking at Argentina. Who knew? Argentina has a huge emerging oil and gas sector. There's cheap natural gas feedstock like we've got, lower labour costs, and lower property taxes. What happened was that after we passed Bill 7, we heard from more of these companies saying: look; we appreciate your gesture there, which opened up some flexibility for nonresidential property tax incentives for up to 15 years in Bill 7, but the real value for us and in terms of the competitive decision we have to make with the U.S. Gulf coast and other jurisdictions, the real difference would be if this applied to machinery and equipment. That is why we've come forward with Bill 29.

I can understand that the opposition may be skeptical about this, but I just do want to convey to the members of the opposition and to our partners in municipal government that what's motivating this, Mr. Chairman, is actual, real-live input from these prospective major investors that could create tens of thousands of jobs in Alberta. One of the reasons we brought this forward – I will admit this one was not mentioned in our throne speech. Frankly, when we started the fall session, we did not expect to bring forward this bill. This bill was a result of the input I received in Texas from these companies. We wanted to send a very clear message that we are hungry for that investment and those jobs, that we will move quickly. We wanted with this bill to demonstrate just how quickly Alberta is prepared to move not just to meet but to beat our competitors for thousands and thousands of good blue-collar, high-paying jobs. That's the point of this bill.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. Premier.

Are there any other hon. members looking to speak to Bill 29?

Seeing none, I am prepared and ready for the question on amendment A1.

[Motion on amendment A1 lost]

The Deputy Chair: Moving back now to Bill 29 proper, are there any hon. members wishing to speak on this?

Seeing none, I am prepared for the question. Are you ready for the question?

Hon. Members: Question.

[The remaining clauses of Bill 29 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

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

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Deputy Chair: Any opposed? That is also carried.

The hon. Government House Leader.

10:20

Mr. Jason Nixon: Well, thank you, Mr. Chair. I move that we rise and report progress on Bill 20 and rise and report Bill 29.

[Motion carried]

[The Speaker in the chair]

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

Mr. Hanson: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The Committee of the Whole has had under consideration certain bills. The committee reports the following bill: Bill 29. 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.

The Speaker: All those in favour of the report, please say aye.

Hon. Members: Aye.

The Speaker: Any opposed, please say no. The motion is carried and so ordered.

The hon. the Government House Leader.

Mr. Jason Nixon: Good evening, Mr. Speaker. I ask for unanimous consent to waive Standing Order 39 in order to proceed to Government Motion 43.

[Unanimous consent granted]

Government Motions

The Speaker: The hon. the Government House Leader has the call.

Amendments to Standing Orders

43. Mr. Jason Nixon moved:

A. Be it resolved that the standing orders of the Legislative Assembly of Alberta, effective October 8, 2019, be amended as follows:

1. Standing Order 7 is amended
 - (a) in suborder (1) by adding “Deferred Divisions (Thursdays)” after “Tablings to the Clerk”;
 - (b) by adding the following after suborder (3):
 - (3.1) Each of the following Members may, immediately after a Ministerial Statement is made, make a statement in response to it:
 - (a) a member of the Official Opposition for a period of no longer than 3 minutes;
 - (b) if requested by a Member other than the Member referred to in clause (a), and on the Assembly’s granting of the request by unanimous consent, that Member for a period of no longer than 2 minutes.
 - (c) in suborder (7) by adding “except in respect of Deferred Divisions” after “items in the ordinary daily routine”.
2. Standing Order 8(1.1) is struck out and the following is substituted:
 - (1.1) Notwithstanding suborder (1), on a Monday afternoon
 - (a) if no items of business under suborder (1) other than Motions other than Government Motions remain on the Order Paper for consideration prior to 5:00 p.m., the Assembly shall proceed to Motions other than Government Motions, and
 - (b) if no items of business under suborder (1) stand on the Order Paper for

consideration, the Assembly shall proceed to consideration of any items of Government business under suborder (2).

- (1.2) Notwithstanding suborder (1.1) and (5), on a Monday afternoon following the conclusion of business for consideration of the Assembly under suborder (1), the Assembly may grant unanimous consent to proceed to an additional Motion other than a Government Motion or to any other item of business that is not yet due for consideration by the Assembly.
3. Standing Order 13 is amended by adding the following after suborder (6):
 - (7) Subject to Standing Order 16 and 32(4)(b), after the Speaker’s calling of Orders of the Day a Member may occupy another Member’s unoccupied seat during the proceedings but must immediately relinquish the seat on the request of
 - (a) the other Member, or
 - (b) the Speaker.
4. Standing Order 32 is amended by striking out suborder (4) and substituting the following:
 - (4) When Members have been called in for a division
 - (a) there shall be no further debate, and
 - (b) despite Standing Order 13(7), a Member must remain at the Member’s seat during the division.
5. The following is added after Standing Order 32:

Divisions at third reading may be deferred

32.1(1) A division on the vote on a motion for third reading of a Bill shall be deferred upon either of the following Members providing notice to the Assembly:

 - (a) in the case of a Government Bill, the Government House Leader or a member of the Executive Council acting on the Government House Leader’s behalf;
 - (b) in the case of a public Bill other than a Government Bill, the sponsor of the Bill.
 - (2) A notice that a division shall be deferred under suborder (1) must be provided prior to the sounding of the division bells for the division.
 - (3) If a division has been deferred, the Clerk shall conduct the division
 - (a) on the Thursday immediately following the day on which notice was provided under suborder (1), and
 - (b) during the daily routine under “Deferred Divisions”.
 - (4) Despite Standing Order 32, if more than one division is to be conducted during the daily routine under “Deferred Divisions”, the Clerk shall
 - (a) sound the division bells only before the first deferred division, and
 - (b) limit the interval between the sounding of the division bells to one minute.
6. Standing Order 41 is amended
 - (a) in suborder (4) by striking out “amend the motion” and substituting “amend the motion or replace it in its entirety”;
 - (b) in suborder (5) by striking out “amended motion” and substituting “amended or replaced motion”;
 - (c) by adding the following after suborder (5):

(5.1) A Member may not make a request to the Speaker under suborder (4) with respect to a motion other than a Government motion that has previously been amended or replaced on the Order Paper.

7. The following is added after Standing Order 52.04:

Motions in committees

52.041(1) The Chair of a standing or special committee may establish deadlines by which a Member who wishes for the committee to consider a proposed substantive motion or proposed amendment to a substantive motion is required to file the proposed substantive motion or proposed amendment with the Committee Clerk.

(2) On receiving a proposed motion or amendment in accordance with suborder (1), the Committee Clerk shall distribute a copy to each Member of the committee.

(3) A Member may not, without the approval of the committee, move a substantive motion or an amendment that was not filed in accordance with suborder (1).

(4) The Chair of a standing or special committee may take all reasonable steps as the Chair considers necessary to facilitate the committee's consideration and disposition of multiple proposed substantive motions or proposed amendments that are before the committee for its consideration.

B. And be it further resolved that the amendments in this motion shall come into force on passage.

Mr. Jason Nixon: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I do have the copy of Government Motion 43. Of course, it's on the Order Paper. It's quite lengthy. I seek your instructions if you need me to read it into the record or if it's satisfactory moving it in the context of it being on the Order Paper. I will summarize what is in it either way, but I await your instructions.

The Speaker: I appreciate that, hon. Government House Leader. I just seek the guidance of the House to ensure that everyone has a copy of the Order Paper as well as the motion. That being the case, you can proceed with your summary.

Mr. Jason Nixon: Well, thank you for that, Mr. Speaker. I do appreciate that. This is a fairly lengthy but simple amendment to the standing orders. First off, it will codify practices for ministerial statements. As you do know, we operate under several Speaker's rulings in regard to ministerial statements. This will now put those Speaker's rulings into the standing orders the same way that they've been called in this Chamber for a long time and codify that practice within our standing orders.

The second thing it will do is clarify that government business can be done on Monday afternoons when there is no available private members' business. If there is available private members' business, that will take precedence. Certainly, we have found a few times in the 30th Legislature already, particularly at the beginning of a sitting, that there was no private members' business available yet, and it makes sense to be able to then use the time in the Legislature to our full capacity. Mr. Speaker, I know that you know that time in the Legislature is valuable, and that allows this to happen.

The third thing it does is allow MLAs to sit in other members' seats after Orders of the Day have been called. Members will still have to be in their own seat to speak. They'll have to be in their own seats during the daily Routine, question period, and to vote, Mr.

Speaker. This basically means now that during second reading and third reading it will be the same as it is in Committee of the Whole; members will be able to freely move around the Chamber and interact and do other work with their colleagues.

It will also now allow for divisions at third reading to be deferred to Thursday afternoons, Mr. Speaker, by the government. I should note that there's an error in the version that members are looking at as we speak, a minor clerical error, that adds a second 15-minute bell to the same process. I'm sure everybody agrees that we don't want two 15-minute bells during that process. I do anticipate that one of my colleagues will rise shortly to move an amendment to change that error.

The other thing it does is that it makes changes to Motions Other than Government Motions to allow private members to replace entirely the wording of their motion. This would allow them to make one change per motion for private members' motions. We've seen situations where private members of both parties have sought to make changes to their private members' motions, and we want to be able to provide them an opportunity to do that. We think that by doing it once, that allows for any mistakes to be fixed but does not allow for it to be abused.

Lastly, it amends the Standing Orders to empower committee chairs to set deadlines on motions or amendments to those motions, and this should lead to less drafting of motions on the fly in committee meetings.

Those are the changes to the standing orders that we are proposing. I do hope that it enjoys the support of the majority of members in the Chamber, Mr. Speaker, and I look forward to hearing the debate.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-North West.

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the opportunity to speak to this Government Motion 43, which is changes to the standing orders. I mean, it's sort of a mixed bag, quite frankly. I appreciate the intention of many of these changes. Some of them, I think, our side here as the Official Opposition have a problem with.

Just to go very briefly through each of the seven sections that are described here, as the Government House Leader just did, number 1, which is the codification of the ministerial statements, I think that that's fine. I mean, you know, it's sort of a long-standing practice that we've done and it kind of just puts that to paper, and I think that we don't have a problem with that.

The second one around Monday afternoon, you know, this idea of moving to government business if there's no private members' business available, in itself, I mean, that is practical, but it speaks to a larger problem that we're starting to see emerge here in the Legislature, which is that sending private member's bills to that committee first is turning into quite a logjam. I think that the government side and opposition side both have experienced problems with this, so I would respectfully suggest that we take a look at that over time – right? – because what we've seen now with a number of bills going to committee straightaway is that somehow they get lost. I think that we've experienced frustration around that, and so have private members on your side, too. Maybe if we can try to fix that – this standing order I think is a symptom, perhaps, of a larger problem that exists in regard to the changes to private members' business.

The seating thing, well, you know, I think it's okay – right? – being able to move around a bit. I think that people have started to realize, the new members, that you can do that during committee, and it's kind of refreshing to move into different places. I'd ask hon. members, if they're sitting in my chair, to not touch my stuff, but I

think otherwise we don't have a big problem with that. I was joking, of course. You can touch my stuff as much as you like. It's okay.

In regard to the bell thing, I think the government members spotted the same problem that I saw, right? We're going to fix that, I believe, Mr. Speaker, with an amendment so that you don't have two bells going on there. I think that that is reasonable.

Being able to amend the motion by the person who's brought it forward: I've seen that a couple of times in the years that I've been here, so I guess that's a small thing that could be used. I mean, if you want to do that on the fly during the course of debate, I think that might add some liveliness to the dynamic interaction around when we're debating motions and so forth.

The last one, motions in committees: I have a problem with this, right? You know, again, the flow of committee and making motions from the floor, I think I've seen that over the years to be a really productive way by which you can move committee business to a more productive end. Having to submit motions ahead of time to committee I think is getting in the way of both the traditions and the function of parliamentary democracy and how committees function, and I don't think that is really the best thing moving forward.

Yeah, it's kind of a mixed bag. I mean, I would suggest that, you know, based on number 7 and perhaps number 2 and so forth, it makes it a problem for us to be able to vote for this motion in its entirety. Thank you.

10:30

The Speaker: Are there others wishing to join in the debate? The hon. Member for Central Peace-Notley.

Mr. Loewen: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Yes, I'd like to just take a few moments with Motion 43. Obviously, this is a motion that will help kind of streamline things with the business that happens in this House, make things just a little easier and a little more friendly to get things done in an orderly fashion.

Saying that, I would like to move an amendment at this time. Would you like me to read it out now or wait for it to be distributed?

The Speaker: Hon. member, if you could just wait until the table has a copy of the amendment, and then I will allow you to proceed as they're distributed. We'll just wait for the table.

Mr. Loewen: Okay.

The Speaker: Hon. members, we will refer to the amendment as amendment A1.

Please proceed.

Mr. Loewen: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I move that Government Motion 43 be amended in part A in section 5 in the proposed Standing Order 32.1(4) by striking out "if more than one division is to be conducted" and substituting "if one or more divisions are to be conducted."

Mr. Speaker, it's a small adjustment in words, of course, but we all know in this House how words matter and how small changes in words can make a big difference. Obviously, the intent is to include all divisions that would happen, so the terminology "one or more" versus the previous wording, which was "if more than one," which would mean that the first one wouldn't be subject to this amendment. I hope that's fairly clear as far as what we're looking for here, which is that "if one or more divisions are to be conducted" is the main phrase that we would like to substitute in.

I'll leave that with this House right now. I'm free to hear any other discussion on this matter. Thank you.

The Speaker: Hon. members, is there anyone else wishing to provide questions or comments with respect to amendment A1 under Standing Order 29(2)(a)?

Seeing none, is there anyone else wishing to comment?

Seeing none, I'm prepared to call the question on amendment A1.

[Motion on amendment A1 carried]

The Speaker: We are back on Government Motion 43. I see the hon. Government House Leader is rising again. I would assume that it's not to speak to the government motion given that he's already done so.

Is there anyone else wishing to speak?

Seeing none, I'm prepared to call the question on Government Motion 43.

[Government Motion 43 carried]

The Speaker: The hon. the Government House Leader.

Mr. Jason Nixon: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and through you to all members of the House I thank them for all their hard work this evening, lots of progress. I'm trying to find the date tomorrow; I believe tomorrow is December 3. As such, I would move to adjourn the House to December 3 at 10 a.m.

Statement by the Speaker

Death on Legislature Steps

The Speaker: Hon. members, prior to adjourning this evening, I would like to just make a very brief comment about this afternoon. We do not know what the circumstances of this person's situation was, and I don't think that it's for us to speculate about. I do know that we've all been affected by this afternoon's incident. I personally have been affected by suicide before today, and today's tragedy has also affected me. It has also affected our first responders, whom we thank for their service and efforts today, as it has affected others in the building.

What we do know tonight is that every life lost is a gutting, heartbreaking tragedy. On behalf of all members of the Assembly I wish to offer my sincerest condolences to the family and loved ones who are feeling the pain this evening of this terrible loss.

I also know that we all can and should do better as we continue to try to support one another, that we can reach out to someone struggling, that we can be more compassionate and more patient and more empathetic towards our families, our friends, our neighbours, our co-workers, and indeed to our fellow Albertans. A moment like this demands not only our reflection but also our commitment not only to do good but to be good to one another.

For any members or staff who are needing additional supports I encourage you to reach out to the 24-hour employee assistance line. That number can be found in the earlier e-mail correspondence from today. As well, there will be counsellors on-site tomorrow here in the Legislature Building as well as in the Federal Building for any staff or members who so require.

Having said that, I hope that you all have a restful and safe evening.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 10:37 p.m.]

Table of Contents

Government Bills and Orders	
Committee of the Whole	
Bill 20 Fiscal Measures and Taxation Act, 2019.....	2679
Bill 29 Municipal Government (Machinery and Equipment Tax Incentives) Amendment Act, 2019.....	2693
Government Motions	
Amendments to Standing Orders.....	2696
Statement by the Speaker	
Death on Legislature Steps.....	2698

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