



Province of Alberta

The 30th Legislature
Second Session

Alberta Hansard

Tuesday morning, April 7, 2020

Day 15

The Honourable Nathan M. Cooper, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta
The 30th Legislature
Second Session

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New Democrat: 24

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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

10 a.m.

Tuesday, April 7, 2020

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

The Deputy Speaker: Good morning, everyone.

Prayers

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

Please be seated.

The hon. Minister of Justice.

Mr. Schweitzer: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I rise to request unanimous consent of the Assembly that members be able to sit, speak, and vote from any chair within the Assembly for today's sitting.

[Unanimous consent granted]

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Minister of Justice.

Mr. Schweitzer: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I would also like to request unanimous consent to revert to Introduction of Bills.

[Unanimous consent granted]

Introduction of Bills

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Minister of Justice.

Bill 8

Protecting Survivors of Human Trafficking Act

Mr. Schweitzer: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It is a privilege for me today to rise to introduce the first reading of Bill 8, the Protecting Survivors of Human Trafficking Act.

Madam Speaker, currently Alberta fails to have targeted legislation that helps to protect survivors of human trafficking. This legislation will empower survivors to get protection orders, enable police to take quicker action to rescue survivors, allow survivors to sue traffickers, and create an awareness day to make Albertans more aware of this important issue. I hope members of both sides of this House will support this legislation.

I ask that we move first reading of Bill 8. Thank you.

[Motion carried; Bill 8 read a first time]

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs.

Bill 13

Emergency Management Amendment Act, 2020 (No. 2)

Mr. Madu: Thank you so much, Madam Speaker. I rise this morning to request leave to introduce Bill 13, which provides additional amendments to the Emergency Management Act.

As you know, Madam Speaker, on March 20 we introduced Bill 9 to amend the Emergency Management Act in response to the

COVID-19 pandemic. In response to Bill 9 the cities of Edmonton and Calgary have helped us determine some further changes that would enhance our pandemic response. These proposed additional changes to the Emergency Management Act include providing a longer duration for local states of emergency during a pandemic and clarifying that it is an offence to not comply with orders made under states of local emergency or a provincial state of emergency.

This bill, Madam Speaker, will also make additional changes to clarify the powers of a minister with respect to local states of emergency, including aligning states of local emergency in a pandemic with provincial states of emergency from a duration of seven days to 90 days, clarifying that electronic council meetings can be used to pass resolutions for a local state of emergency, providing the Minister of Municipal Affairs with the authority to modify a local state of emergency without terminating it, and clarifying that it is an offence to defy an order during a state of emergency. If passed, this bill will provide greater clarity and improve co-ordination between local and provincial responses to the COVID-19 pandemic and future province-wide emergencies.

With that, Madam Speaker, I move first reading of Bill 13.

[Motion carried; Bill 13 read a first time]

Orders of the Day

Government Bills and Orders Second Reading

Bill 3

Mobile Home Sites Tenancies Amendment Act, 2020

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Minister of Service Alberta.

Mr. Glubish: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I am pleased to rise and move second reading of Bill 3, the Mobile Home Sites Tenancies Amendment Act, 2020.

This is a bill that I am very excited to be talking about because I know that residents of mobile-home communities have been asking for changes for many years, and for too long their requests have gone unanswered. This legislation is not only a big step forward for residents in mobile-home communities, but it is also a sign of hope. As we begin debate on this legislation, it is important that all members of the Assembly understand what has brought us to this point.

Madam Speaker, the Mobile Home Sites Tenancies Act, or the MHSTA, establishes minimum standards of conduct for both landlords and tenants or residents of mobile-home sites in Alberta. In Alberta there are about 50,000 mobile homes, which represents somewhere around 3 per cent of all dwellings in the province. Many Albertans choose mobile-home communities as a low-cost alternative to apartments, condos, or traditional houses.

Early on, after being named minister, I started hearing a number of concerns around the MHSTA. That is why this past summer I toured across the whole province to meet with mobile-home community residents and landlords. I wanted to hear directly from Albertans about these issues. Madam Speaker, I heard a lot from these residents. One thing that surprised me was that no minister had ever sat down to talk face to face with them about their frustrations and concerns with the MHSTA.

Madam Speaker, I'd like to tell you about what one of those residents, Brenda Neville, a resident from Parkland Village, said to the media when we first announced this bill, and I quote: "I was thrilled when the minister and our MLA came to our community to speak to me and other residents about life in the mobile-home community and how the government might be able to help make

life just a little bit better for us. This was, honestly, the first time anyone in government had ever taken the time to sit down to hear our concerns. I've tried many times before, and nobody else has ever cared." End quote.

Madam Speaker, I'm extremely proud to be the first minister to take the time to travel and sit down with Albertans across this province to discuss this very important issue. I'm very pleased to lead our government's efforts to make life better for residents of mobile-home communities, and I'm especially pleased to be doing this only 11 months after having been elected. We listened, we heard, and we are taking action.

When I met with these Albertans, one thing that came up a great deal was the lack of options to resolve disputes between a landlord and a tenant. Currently if a tenant and a landlord of a mobile-home community have a dispute over their contract, their only option is to try to resolve this dispute in the courts. This is not ideal and is a sharp contrast to what all other Albertans have access to under the Residential Tenancies Act. Tenants and landlords of apartments, condos, and traditional houses can access the residential tenancy dispute resolution service, more commonly known as the RTDRS, as an alternative to the courts. This legislation that we're talking about today would extend the RTDRS to residents and landlords of mobile-home communities.

So why does this matter? Well, Madam Speaker, it might be helpful for me to take some time to talk a little bit about the RTDRS. The RTDRS is a quasi-judicial tribunal that specializes in resolving disputes between landlords and tenants that would otherwise need to go to Provincial Court. My department estimates that since 2006, the RTDRS has diverted more than 80,000 cases from the provincial court system. It's no secret that our court system is overburdened, so it is easy to see how valuable the RTDRS can be as it helps to divert thousands of cases from the Provincial Court every year.

This legislation will not only save mobile-home residents and landlords time and money, but it will also reduce the burden on our court system from mobile-home disputes as these cases would be better served under the RTDRS. This will ensure that Albertans who need to access our court system for other reasons will not face unnecessary delays. It is worth noting that the courts will continue to be an option if needed or preferred or appropriate. We are not taking away that choice from Albertans. But I am confident that the majority of cases will be best handled through the RTDRS instead of the courts.

10:10

Madam Speaker, another interesting fact about the RTDRS is that by the end of 2019 we had received more than 10,000 applications for dispute resolution. Residents and landlords in mobile-home communities know that the RTDRS is more accessible, has faster turnaround times, and is more cost-effective, and that's why they've been requesting access to this for so long. It is exciting to be able to deliver a solution for them on what they've clearly told me is a priority and to do so this early on in our mandate.

Madam Speaker, I've mentioned that there are some significant advantages that the RTDRS can offer Albertans dealing with tenancy disputes. Let's talk about a few examples. Going to court is costly and time consuming. It's not a viable option for many people. By comparison the RTDRS saves both residents and landlords money because it costs significantly less to file a dispute than to start a court action, in most cases by more than half. Additionally, the RTDRS takes a less formal approach to hearings, and parties can more confidently represent themselves without the requirement of having a lawyer. Further, the RTDRS can typically hear and decide tenancy disputes more quickly than the courts,

which are responsible for adjudicating a vast range of legal issues. When going through the court system, it can take months just to have your case heard, and then it takes additional time to receive a ruling. In contrast, filing a dispute through the RTDRS means reaching an enforceable resolution much more quickly.

Having said that, I think it's important to identify some of the disputes that can be addressed through the RTDRS from both the resident and landlord sides. These include the return of a security deposit to a tenant, the recovery of unpaid rent by a landlord, the abatement of rent where a landlord has reached an obligation in termination of a tenancy. Let me be clear. The types of disputes that the RTDRS can hear are not changing as a result of this bill. We are simply extending the same service offered under the RTA, or the Residential Tenancies Act, for residents and landlords of apartments, condos, and traditional houses to the residents and landlords of mobile-home communities.

Now that we have covered at a high level what service the RTDRS provides to tenants and landlords, I think we can all agree that it makes sense for mobile-home residents and landlords to have access to the same service as all other tenants and landlords in Alberta.

Madam Speaker, as I was working on this file, I asked my officials what other provinces across the country were doing, and I was surprised to learn that Alberta was the only province in the country that didn't provide a dispute resolution service to mobile-home communities. I find that so surprising because as I toured across the province and talked with residents from mobile-home communities all across Alberta, the message I heard was the same: we have been asking for this for years, and nobody in government has ever listened to us. It's shameful that we have been lagging so far behind the rest of the country on this for so long, and it is unfortunate that members opposite took no action on this during their four years in government. But with this legislation we will close that gap, making life better for Albertans who live in mobile-home communities.

I know that I have already quoted her, but Ms Neville can speak to the importance of this bill far better than I ever could because she is a resident of a mobile-home community and is one of the people who have been advocating for this for a long time. During our announcement she told us why this bill is so important, and again I quote: "This bill means that residents like me can finally be heard. It means that we will be treated the same as other residents, with dignity and respect. It means that finally the government is listening." End quote.

If I were to sum up the feelings of the many people I have met with on this topic of the MHSTA, it would be just that. They did not feel that they were being treated with either dignity or respect. Residents in mobile-home communities knew what they wanted: access to the same dispute resolution services offered to the rest of Albertans. They wanted their government to acknowledge this and to take action to help them. I am proud to be serving with my colleagues in this government, who have worked so hard to bring this legislation forward to demonstrate that we have listened, we have heard those concerns, and we are taking action by bringing this bill forward.

I think it's also important, Madam Speaker, to note that this change is being welcomed wholeheartedly not only by residents but by the management companies as well. In fact, Lachlan MacLean, the vice-president of Parkbridge Communities, said that they, and I quote, support this move to enable access to dispute resolution services as a way to help all parties clarify and resolve issues of responsibility. End quote.

For your reference, Madam Speaker, Parkbridge is one of the largest mobile-home community landlords in the country, with

significant operations here in Alberta. Again, Ms Neville said, and I quote: “I think it’ll be tremendous for both sides. I do believe in the future it’ll allow us to even maybe get to a point where we can communicate better without even having to go to a dispute resolution.” End quote.

Madam Speaker, as you can imagine, I have spoken to members of the media about this bill. I will never forget the day of our press conference when we first announced this bill. After I had made my announcement and after Ms Neville had shared her story, a very personal story, one member of the media mentioned something to the effect of: this seems like a no-brainer. Then they asked the questions: “Why hasn’t this been done before? Why weren’t mobile homes included in this before?” All I could say to her was: that’s a really great question. The fact is that I don’t know why the previous government didn’t take action on this file. It certainly wasn’t because mobile-home community residents were silent, but for some reason their concerns fell on deaf ears. Our government recognizes that this is a priority, and that’s why we’re moving on it so quickly. This is a big and important step forward, and I’m very proud of our work so far.

In closing, Madam Speaker, this bill does more than just provide access to the RTDRS. This bill lets Albertans in mobile-home communities know that our government has heard them, is taking action to address their concerns and their priorities.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Are there any other speakers wishing to speak on Bill 3? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker, and thank you to the members for the increased efforts around creating some physical space between all of us. Just for your own interest, we measured the desks, and they’re about a metre, so if you want to follow the law, it’s your best idea to have two desks between each speaker, obviously, if possible.

I want to acknowledge that this is a piece of legislation that aligns with what was in our campaign platform in 2019, so I’m excited that this has been something that has been taken up by the government. I think it’s an example that when there are good ideas, certainly we welcome any party bringing those forward and using them to make sure that they better the province for all of its residents.

I also want to say that while I think this is a useful piece of legislation, I find the timing of its consideration concerning. I think that when I look around – I’d be happy to be corrected if I’m wrong. I think we’re the only Legislature that’s sitting right now in the Commonwealth, not just in Canada but in the Commonwealth, because we are in a state in our world where there is a grave pandemic and where we continue to see numbers rise of illness as well as fatalities.

To continue to convene the Legislature to discuss business as usual, because this is certainly important business, but it is business as usual – and I would assert that given the legislation, that we agreed to pass quite expeditiously last week, that enhanced powers of members of cabinet to act on things like this through MO in times of a public health emergency, which we certainly are in, I find it troubling that we’re standing here pretending that this is three months ago. If this was three months ago, I would probably very enthusiastically say: “Yes, full speed ahead. This was in our platform. I think we should be moving on it. I think we should be enacting it.”

The fact that we reconvened the House and pulled all members from the province away from their families, most to drive hundreds of kilometres to be here today, to go into grocery stores away from

their home, to find ways to be here to exercise their democratic responsibility around a representative democracy, to discuss a bill that doesn’t relate directly to the pandemic, I think, is not great use of this Assembly’s precious time, time that we were told just a few short weeks ago we couldn’t take to properly debate the . . .

Mr. Schow: Point of order, Madam Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Cardston-Siksika. Point of order.

Point of Order Relevance

Mr. Schow: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I do greatly appreciate the Member for Edmonton-Glenora’s remarks regarding her concerns. I don’t – I rise on a point of order: 23(b)(i), which speaks to a matter other than the question or the discussion. We are discussing the Minister of Service Alberta’s bill. We’re not discussing being in the Chamber. I would ask that the member go back to the discussion at hand.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker, and thank you to the government for raising this. I think it’s incredibly important that we be aware and respectful to the circumstances under which this Legislature has convened because, specifically to Bill 3, we are in a situation where not every constituent in Alberta, not every resident can have their MLA in the Chamber at one time to discuss, due to social distancing, due to the circumstances. We are not in a bubble although we often refer to dome disease. We are in the context of what is happening in our province, and I think it’s entirely reasonable to bring that through the comments as we talk about these pieces of legislation. I know from all of my interactions with constituents that people are thinking about and worried about the state of our economy, the state of their health, the state of our health care system, and how business will continue to be done in this province.

10:20

In the past the Speakers have offered a great deal of latitude when it comes to bill debate in the spirit of keeping things moving along productively, which I think has been appreciated in the past. In this case members are dealing with a global pandemic and also Bill 3. I think it’s appropriate to be able to talk about the impact of this bill as well as what is going on in our province at the moment, and I think Albertans tuning in would be surprised to see a debate that does not actually refer to what is happening in the world today at the same time as what’s happening in this individual piece of legislation.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. members, given the situation which we find ourselves in world-wide – I have a certain amount of understanding in this Chamber when it comes to debate around these issues. However, we do still follow a certain set of rules, that has been put in place by this Chamber. While only about two minutes or so have actually been debated thus far, I think this is a great reminder for all members to try and focus on the point at hand, but there will be some latitude given to the situation which the entire world finds itself in right now.

Hon. member, given that, I will ask that you proceed with your debate.

Debate Continued

Ms Hoffman: Thank you. Reflecting on what I've been saying, I think that if we are going to be the only sitting Legislature to still have in-person sittings, likely in the Commonwealth – again, happy to be directed otherwise – we should be acknowledging the realities of what is happening with regard to COVID-19 and the state of our world. I think that this is something that we should all be reflecting on as we are in this place, as we continue to post on social media encouraging our constituents to stay at home, as we encourage them to find ways to abide by the new law. I know that on the weekend there were two tickets issued, perhaps in your riding, Madam Speaker, for I think it was two young people going to the grocery store who were in the same car. Eventually those tickets were thrown out. But they are actually in breach of the law, and I think that's something that we all should be considering.

To continue on with Bill 3, Mobile Home Sites Tenancies Amendment Act, 2020, you heard me say, in an exciting moment of debate a few nights ago, that I grew up in Kinuso. That is where I spent most of my childhood. We also lived in Altario and in Castor, but the bulk of my childhood was in Kinuso. For about half of that time we lived in a mobile home, a mobile home in town on a lot that we bought, so of course it wouldn't meet the mobile-home sites portion of this. I loved growing up in that home. We had a great experience. It was the first home that my parents were able to buy outright and not have a mortgage. That's why we made the decision to buy a lot and buy that mobile home, because it was important for us that they as teachers be able to save for their future, save to send me to university. At that time tuition was far less than it is now but was still a big stretch for two teaching Albertans.

I have spent a considerable amount of time visiting mobile-home communities in our province, some while door-knocking in Parkland county, of course. That, I think, is actually the largest community in the riding, the mobile-home community. That was a great opportunity to get to know some folks. Then, of course, when I was on the school board, I overlapped with the area represented by the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar, and there was a mobile-home community there as well. Some of the things that I would hear about, questions or concerns that related to the part – oh, Sherwood Park as well. I knocked a number of times in that area. Yeah.

We have a number of mobile-home communities in our province, and I think that it would behoove our Assembly to ensure that all members had an opportunity to engage on this topic at a time when we aren't being overlooked by other pressing matters, as our House leader has most recently referred to. Most Albertans aren't even aware that we're sitting right now. Most Albertans assume that we're doing the things that we're encouraging all of them to be doing. Most are worried about whether or not we have enough respirators. Most are worried about how they're going to pay their next cheque. Most are refreshing that website trying to get the provincial supports, right? There are a number of issues at mind. That doesn't mean that the issues around mobile-home communities aren't a priority – they absolutely are – but I think that they deserve the focus of all MLAs, who are elected to represent Albertans, because certainly there are a number of Albertans who will be impacted by this legislation.

I have a few questions that I'm hoping, perhaps in closing of second or in Committee of the Whole, the minister responsible can perhaps respond to or other members of cabinet, hoping that they've discussed in preparation of the bill and bringing it to this Assembly for consideration. The first one, I would have to say, is around RTDRS. What will be the involvement regarding issues of submetering and utility use? I think that's something that we don't

always consider when we think about residential tenancy dispute issues, but certainly that's something that I heard raised when door-knocking in the mobile-home communities.

Then another one, of course, is with regard to the \$50,000 limit on remedies that can be claimed. What key issues in mobile-home communities are being missed by putting in that cap, or how was that reached?

Another one, that depends on what season you're there and you're talking to folks around whether it's snow removal or whether it's maintaining public spaces – I know that most communities have some kind of recreation area and a playground, and I heard a lot of questions raised around: what abilities do tenants have to ensure that their common areas are being well maintained? Of course, if you're in a condominium or joint-ownership venture, you have some ownership stake. While you own your home in a mobile-home community, you don't actually own the shared assets. That's something that you pay a lease rate for, and it's something that a lot of folks depend on, those shared assets.

This is often a reason why somebody would choose to buy a mobile home in a specific community, because they like the amenities that are there. They like the fact that there's a local corner store. They like the fact that there are social activities on the weekends. They like the fact that there is a playground, all things that, of course, we're limiting or eliminating our use of today, but this bill will be in place in perpetuity, presuming the government uses this opportunity to continue with pushing it forward.

So we want to make sure that there is a mechanism for folks to be able to raise their concerns and have them addressed because while you do own your home and you have the right to move it – many mobile-home community owners will tell their tenants that: "You know, if you don't love it here, you can move your home" – that is a huge expense. It's a huge undertaking. To move at any time is difficult for families, and to move your entire home is even more challenging, especially when many will have structures that are also built on the lot that serve them and their family, sometimes will have full additions on the side or other structures to support them, just like any house would have. Of course, the fact that this is not owned land makes it more complicated, Madam Speaker.

Also, does the government have a plan to deal with the issues of those roads and snow removal? Road issues: because it was about this time last year that many of us were in the midst of very long days of door-knocking, I remember that the drainage in Parkland Village wasn't great. There were some really sippy areas. I'm not saying that that was because the owner did that intentionally. It's just that folks said: "Do you want to make my life better? Find a way to clear out this culvert and get the water moving." Those were some of the points that were raised with me about this time last year. It was a little bit warmer, so it was a little bit soppier.

Will there be additional staff within Service Alberta to handle these changes? I do believe that there will be increased demand. I think that mobile-home owners have said that this is something that they want; therefore, I assume it's something that they'll plan on using. Of course, given the budget that was rushed through so eagerly just a few weeks ago because we were told, "You know, we don't know how many more days we'll be here" – well, it seems like a lot more days. We had to just absolutely rush that budget through in all sorts of undemocratic ways, moving debate from about 30 hours to three, moving it from committees, where we would have had the appropriate number of support staff and all the members able to participate in debate, to this Chamber, with certainly a very different set of circumstances. The budget rushed through, and that budget saw a number of reductions in a number of key areas.

10:30

One that we heard about often was that there was going to be, you know, belt-tightening in the public service, and I believe that Service Alberta was no exception to that. There were certainly reductions that I recall, and again if I'm wrong, I'd be happy to be corrected. With the reductions in the public service and increased demand through new legislation, how are we going to ensure that the legislation actually has teeth and the capacity to be able to fulfill its mandate that we are giving it in this Assembly? Does the minister anticipate that he will have the capacity to actually address this new demand given that there were many positions cut from Service Alberta itself in the most recent budget?

I want to highlight something that I think was good, and that is that I expect that the coming-into-force date is going to be moved up since we're here debating this right now. It says that it will come into force, of course, after royal assent. The minister previously announced that it would be ready by the fall, but again I hope that since we're being called back to deal with this, quote, urgent business, end quote, it is something that's actually going to be put in place far more quickly than in the fall.

Again, this is something that we campaigned on. It was in our platform. We believe that this is, in general, a move in the right direction. But is this the right way, and will we have the right resources in place to ensure that it meets its intended mandate?

We've heard the member say that this is something that should have been done years ago. It probably should have been done many, many years ago, perhaps 44 or 20 or something like that. I remember an elder telling me that the best day to plant a tree was 20 years ago; the second best day is today. So I guess we're here planting the tree today. Let's make sure that we actually are doing it and that we move forward, if this is so pressing, in a much more timely fashion than the fall. Again, if it is not planning on coming into effect until the fall, then I expect that we could have waited until we were on the other end of the pandemic, not on the growing side of the curve but on the downside, before we work so quickly to reconvene the Assembly to discuss typical business of the Assembly.

I also think that there should be some provisions to help tenants with being able to afford rent in the midst of this pandemic. I'm not sure. I think there are some provisions in this bill, but I'd love to have clarity from the minister about if that is indeed part of this new legislation or not. Just like folks who are paying rent in buildings that they own, when you own the building but you don't own the lot, that rent can still be very significant and a significant pressure on families who need to have a little bit more flexibility and fewer bills right now, not stressing about the current bills that they do have, which, of course, everyone is. Everyone is nervous. Even if they currently have job stability, that might not be the point into the future and what that will mean for them and for their family and for their ability to cover their expenses. I hope that that is a high area of focus for this minister when it comes to folks who are living in mobile-home communities.

We can only waive fees for mobile-home owners in this piece of legislation or through a ministerial order, I assume, because we are in a public health emergency. That was one of the pieces that was argued, that there would be the ability to have ministers, if they believe that it's an emergency, take additional steps to be able to enact additional laws through MO. If that isn't something that's in this legislation, I would like it to be, first of all, so I imagine that we might consider amendments with that regard. Yeah. I think it's something that we should probably consider, putting an amendment into this legislation, since we did do it for other rental facilities not

that long ago. That is something that I would like us to consider as we move to further stages in consideration of this bill.

Of course, allowing applications to move from courts to RTDRS I think is a good move. I think it can be more expedient, and I think that we should be ensuring that is something that is happening, especially while the courts aren't sitting. Of course, I think that it's probably easier to have provisions around physical distancing in RTDRS. I certainly hope it is, and it certainly would seem to be a more appropriate venue for that probably at all times but especially during a time of public health crisis.

I think that those are some of the main points I wanted to raise. I wanted to add that I have tremendous respect for all folks who live in all sorts of different housing situations, and I think that mobile-home communities is one area that the law was silent on for quite some time. I think that this certainly has the ability to create a new opportunity for folks to be able to exercise new rights around their home living situation, and being able to access a cleaner, more streamlined, less expensive process I think is certainly a good move.

Again, is this the most pressing matter for you and your constituents today? Not sure. I expect probably not. I think it's an important matter. I think that all members of the Assembly should be here to consider this, to debate or at least hear the debate on this matter, and to make decisions that will have a lasting impact as it is not every day that pieces of law get opened up for amendment, and certainly the Mobile Home Sites Tenancies Amendment Act, 2020, is a special occasion, so I think we should make sure that we get it right. I hope that we've covered all of the key areas that require amendment in that act through this amendment act. I'm not sure, and I'm not sure that we'll hear all of the voices that have opinions on that either, Madam Speaker.

I think that this is a time when a lot of folks are taking stock of what matters to them and their families. I think it's important that we consider that when we are, you know, butting right up against the direction from the chief medical officer of health around group assemblies and around physical distancing and all those things – I know we're taking a number of precautions to try to protect one another and, in turn, our families and our communities because all of us will, of course, go home at some point. And when we do, I hope that we can go home saying that we took those considerations of increased risk for ourselves, for all the folks who work in this building and all the folks we require to have the Assembly continue to sit, for our individual families and for our home communities, and that we can say that we did it because we thought it was the absolute most important thing to be doing at that time, and that this was something that was in the public interest, even though we were butting right up against the advice of the chief medical officer of health.

I know that we like to think that we are immune in this building to many things, and we are to lawsuits. We can say all sorts of things in this place without being sued. That is one thing we are immune to, but we certainly aren't immune to other increased risks that this place might hold for us and for all of those that we come into contact with.

That being said, I again want to reinforce that generally I'm supportive of the legislation. I think that this is something that we put in our platform, that I'm glad to see that the government has picked up and is moving forward with, Madam Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Are there any speakers wishing to speak? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. Schmidt: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I'm pleased to rise to speak to Bill 3, the Mobile Home Sites Tenancies Amendment Act,

2020. I and all of my NDP colleagues believe that everyone in Alberta has the right to a home. If the COVID pandemic has shown us anything, it has shown us how important it is to have a safe house to live in. If we are to make any serious progress in slowing the spread of the virus to keep our health care system from being overwhelmed with patients in need of acute care, we need every Albertan to be able to have a safe place to be able to shelter themselves for the duration of the pandemic.

10:40

The pandemic is not only a public health crisis; it's also an economic crisis, and there's no question that the province of Alberta will have to do a lot of heavy lifting to rebuild our province once the pandemic has passed. One of the key measures of success in that effort, in my view, is if we've made sure that every Albertan has a safe and secure roof over their head. There is much work to be done to achieve that measure.

Too many Albertans right now have no place to call home. As we speak, in Edmonton and Calgary thousands of homeless Albertans are being cruelly warehoused like livestock in the Edmonton Expo Centre and the Telus Convention Centre in Calgary, where physical distancing recommendations can't be adhered to, people have no places to shower and only limited options to maintain basic personal hygiene to prevent the spread of disease.

Other places like Toronto and Vancouver have used hotel and motel spaces to provide temporary shelter for homeless people. The approach that this government takes denies homeless Albertans even the tiniest shred of human dignity and instead treats the homeless as vectors that the rest of Albertans need to be protected from.

In addition to the thousands of Albertans who have no home, there are hundreds of thousands more whose housing is extremely precarious. In 2019 Statistics Canada found that almost 200,000 households in Alberta are in poor housing need, which is a bureaucratic way of saying that 200,000 Alberta households either can't afford the house that they're living in or the house that they live in is too small or unsafe. So we started out before this pandemic with 200,000 households who are already on the edge of homelessness and then the bottom fell out of the economy when the pandemic hit Alberta. How many hundreds of thousands more are now trying to keep a roof over their head with no income and with no certainty that there'll be a job that they can go back to once the pandemic is over? We don't yet know that number, but we should suppose that it's significant.

When we were elected government, in 2015, we asked why we were in this situation to begin with, where hundreds of thousands of Albertans are either homeless or one missed paycheque away from becoming homeless. First among the reasons why was that Alberta had for many decades invested far less per capita in affordable housing than every other province in the country. We tried to reverse that. We announced in 2016 a billion dollar investment in affordable housing, which was double what the previous government had invested, but before we could make serious headway on addressing the housing need in Alberta, this UCP regime was elected.

The first thing they did was to cut a \$4.7 billion cheque to Alberta's wealthiest corporations. Then they cried poor and took a wrecking ball to affordable housing, slashing grants to housing management bodies, reducing rental supports by a quarter, and, most shockingly, reducing the capital investment in the Alberta Social Housing Corporation to zero dollars. As a result, Alberta still stands last in the country when considering the number of subsidized houses as a percentage of the total housing stock.

Waiting lists for affordable housing are extremely long and will grow ever longer as more Albertans lose their jobs.

With hundreds of thousands of Albertans in need of affordable housing and with no prospect that this regime is going to make any serious attempts to address that need, Albertans turn to whatever private-market solutions exist for affordable housing. For many, this means purchasing a mobile home and renting a lot from a landlord who operates a mobile-home site in what lawyers call a land lease arrangement. Housing affordability is one of the main selling points that these landlords use to promote their offerings. If you look on the website of Parkbridge, one of the largest mobile-home site companies in Canada, they tout the affordability of their sites compared to freehold home ownership. Tens of thousands of Albertans own mobile homes on these types of sites because it's the affordable option that makes the most sense to them.

But these land lease arrangements are fraught with problems. When people own the home but not the land that it sits on, they're at the mercy of the landlord to maintain the property to ensure that the value of their home is preserved. Now, I've seen with my own eyes the damage that's done when simple things like proper drainage aren't maintained. Lots flood in the springtime, causing homes to rot and become infested with mould. Roads become traversable only by boat because the water has nowhere else to go. If the rent's going up, you'd better hope that you can come up with that extra money or find the thousands of dollars that it takes to move your home to another site where the lot fees are affordable, otherwise you have to walk away from your home that you've already invested thousands of dollars in. A problem with the utilities? You have to deal with the landlord and not the utility companies because that's just the way it works.

These problems are only the tip of the iceberg. In the short time that I've had the privilege of representing the residents of Maple Oak Ridge, the mobile-home site in my constituency, I've been overwhelmed with stories from constituents who have lost or are at risk of losing their homes, that they own, because of problems with their landlord. I just want to take a moment to thank the residents of Maple Oak Ridge for educating me so extensively on the issues surrounding mobile-home sites, and I want to thank them for their powerful advocacy. It's largely because of their work that we're here today.

What makes this situation even more problematic is that these disputes between tenants and landlords can only be resolved by taking a case to court, which is an extremely time-consuming and costly measure. The time and money involved in these disputes puts tenants in an extremely powerless position. Residents very rarely have the time or money to challenge their landlords while landlords have nothing but time and money to challenge their tenants. This severe power imbalance in favour of the landlord means that mobile-home site tenants must depend on the mercy of their landlord if they don't want to be living out on the street, and that's simply wrong.

For a long time tenants in any other kind of rental relationship have had access to the residential tenancy dispute resolution service, a fast and affordable alternative dispute resolution service that eliminates the need to go to court. Access to this kind of dispute resolution service is fundamental to restoring some semblance of balance in power between landlords and tenants, but mobile-home site tenants have not had access to this dispute resolution mechanism, and I know that I'm speaking for thousands of mobile-home site tenants when I say that this legislation is welcome and long overdue. For that reason, I will be supporting this legislation, and I urge everyone in this Assembly to do so as well.

I also want to address some of the comments made by my colleague from Edmonton-Glenora. You know, she's wondering

why we're here debating this legislation. I have to stress that I've heard clearly from my mobile-home site tenants that this is a matter of urgent importance. During the course of the pandemic there are still going to be mobile-home site tenants who are facing eviction with no other way to battle their landlords except being able to take them to court, and it's critical that these tenants be given access to the dispute resolution service to make sure that they can adequately defend themselves and their homes to keep themselves and their communities safe during this pandemic.

That's not to say that this legislation is perfect, though. While I believe that access to the DRS is a good first step to balancing the power between landlords and tenants, there are things that can be done to make this legislation better. Firstly, tenants want to know when they'll have access to it. Delaying access to justice is denying access to justice, and residents in mobile-home sites cannot wait a minute longer to get access to the DRS. That's why my colleagues and I will be bringing forward an amendment to ensure that the DRS is up and running as soon as possible.

Secondly, right now the DRS is set up to handle only those disputes that involve issues valued at \$50,000 or less. This arbitrary value limit will significantly reduce the number of cases from mobile-home site tenants that could be heard since the issues that tenants deal with often far exceed this value. The issues in mobile-home sites are expensive, and this cap must be lifted so that tenants have an easily affordable means of having these issues heard as well.

With respect to affordability, we also have concerns around the fees that tenants are charged to apply to the DRS. The economic fallout of COVID will be drastic and long lasting, and we anticipate that there will be many more disputes between tenants and landlords in the coming months, at a time when many tenants have lost their income and will not be able to afford the fees to even apply to have their cases heard at the DRS. That's why we'll be proposing an amendment to eliminate fees to bring cases forward to be heard.

We strongly believe that access to the DRS should be available immediately, and we also believe that any cases currently before the courts should also be able to be moved to the DRS. This is only fair since we believe that everyone should have access to the DRS regardless of when their disputes with their landlords began. In addition, it will unblock the courts, allowing them to more effectively use their resources. To achieve this fairness and to relieve the courts of a great deal of workload, we'll be proposing amendments to allow cases currently before the courts to be referred to the DRS.

The tactic of economic eviction is rampant in the mobile-home site world. This is a tactic that's used by landlords to evict tenants by raising the rent so high that the tenant can no longer afford to live there. This is wrong. Tenants have the right to defend themselves and the homes that they own, so we'll be bringing forward an amendment to eliminate this practice of economic eviction.

10:50

Finally, we have a number of questions about whether or not many of the issues that my constituents have raised as concerns such as mobile-home site fees and charges related to utilities submetering will be eligible to be heard by the DRS. To deal with these questions, we'll be proposing an amendment to clarify that these issues can be heard by the DRS.

Let me conclude my remarks today with this thought. As public servants in this very uncertain time we are called upon to protect Albertans from a pandemic that knows no boundaries or borders. Housing is not only a human right; it's a public health issue. It always has been, but the COVID-19 pandemic has put this into stark

relief. By giving tenants more power to hold landlords accountable, this bill is a step in the right direction towards building an Alberta where everyone has a secure home, and we will support it. But let me be plain: it is but one step on a path that Alberta must take to build safer, more resilient communities for all of our fellow citizens.

Since coming to power a year ago, the UCP has governed for the few, without regard for and often at the expense of the many. In doing so, they've held true to a harsh and outdated ideology that leaves people to fend for themselves. This crisis we now face points to the folly and short-sightedness of that approach. Madam Speaker, we can do better. We have to do better, because at the end of the day, we're all in this together, one Alberta with one shared future.

In giving tenants additional tools, I'm pleased that this bill points to that truth. But until it's fully realized, I can assure this Chamber that we on this side of the House won't stop fighting for people, for a better, fair, and more prosperous Alberta for all Albertans.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

Member Loyola: Yes. Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I was very intrigued by the comments by the member, and I was wondering if he could add anything else regarding, specifically, constituents of his and how important this issue is for them.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. Schmidt: Well, thank you, Madam Speaker, and I want to thank my hon. colleague from Edmonton-Ellerslie for that question. Certainly, I began hearing from residents in the Maple Oak Ridge community even before the election. As soon as everyone knew what the boundaries for the new constituency of Edmonton-Gold Bar were going to look like, members from the Maple Oak Ridge community began talking to me about the issues that they had in their mobile-home community.

And I have to tell you, Madam Speaker, that it's overwhelming, the kinds of problems that they have to deal with. Like I said, lot drainage is a huge issue. Uncertainty around who's responsible for what is a huge issue, and a lot of the mobile-home site tenants are caught in a frustrating game of pass the buck. When they have issues that they are faced with, they try to go to the municipality. The municipality tells them that it's the province's responsibility, the province tells them that it's the municipality's responsibility, and in the end nobody takes responsibility for these issues, and tenants are stuck in the middle.

I was very pleased to be able to hold a town hall in the Maple Oak Ridge community, once this bill was introduced, to discuss the impact of the legislation and to discuss with them the ways that we could make this better. It was frustrating. It was disappointing, really, Madam Speaker, because there are so many concerns that mobile-home site tenants have to deal with that aren't addressed by this legislation.

Of course, as opposition we only have limited power to bring forward amendments, and we just cannot under the rules of this Legislature deal with all of the issues that exist in the Mobile Home Sites Tenancies Act that mobile-home site tenants are faced with. But we were pleased to be able to come up with a number of amendments related to how the DRS operates that will make the system much more accessible and much more fair for tenants. I'm really grateful for the level of engagement, the level of willingness in the community to be able to work with me as their representative

to make sure that their voices are heard, because they've felt voiceless and powerless for too long.

You know, it's interesting that the minister congratulates himself for only taking 11 months to introduce this legislation. Well, the bill was written well before that. In fact, he could have taken it off the shelf the first day after the election and brought it forward, but of course that's not their true priority, Madam Speaker. Their true priorities are the wealthy corporate elites of this province, and that's why we saw them cut a \$4.7 billion cheque as their third act in this Legislature and why here we are, a year later, finally getting around to mobile-home sites.

So I don't think the members of the UCP regime should be taking too many victory laps because, you know, Parkbridge is one of the companies that benefits from their \$4.7 billion handout, and the tenants have gotten nothing, Madam Speaker. In fact, in this time of economic collapse the tenants of my mobile-home community are still struggling to get the financial support that they need to make sure that they can even pay the rent this month. And from what we've seen from this government, there is no help coming.

Again they're caught in the middle of this game of pass the buck because the chairman of the UCP seems to think that it's not his responsibility to look after the financial interests of the people of Alberta, that it's actually the federal government's responsibility. He's foisted all of that responsibility onto the federal government. And we know that there are a whole host of issues with those programs as well. So why is it that my tenants have to wait for months and months and jump through many hoops to get a bare minimum of financial support when their landlord got a huge tax break the first day after this government was elected? That's not fair, Madam Speaker. At least, this legislation gives them some power back to be able to hold a powerful entity like Parkbridge accountable and at least gives them some hope of defending their interests and saving their homes. That's an important step forward, and I'm glad that we're doing it.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Lac Ste. Anne-Parkland.

Mr. Getson: Well, thank you, Madam Speaker. It's good to be back. As we're talking about the current state of affairs, I was one of those individuals who had to self-isolate. It wasn't COVID – thank goodness – but obviously leading by example and doing those things is something that we as MLAs and public servants do. That's something that we strongly believe in our caucus as well. It was only little, mild cold-like symptoms. A couple of days, and I was back at it. But what I did get to do was work a lot from home, obviously. I got used to that. I'm very empathetic towards what other folks are going through in that regard. The other thing, too, that was very interesting was that I had a chance, actually, to watch what was taking place here. So I really want to appreciate all the colleagues, from both sides of the aisle, that stepped forward and are doing their service for the public for what we are here to do. Again, within that vein, regardless of what's taking place outside, there is legislation that still needs to move forward, because as of day one, when we first started these jobs, we were hearing things about the mobile-home communities.

In fact, Madam Speaker, as some may recall, in my very first speech, my maiden speech, I talked about the constituents in my area, in Parkland Village, and what they were experiencing with some of the rent increases, the issues with dealing with the landlords that they were dealing with. One of the largest things that I heard at the door – even though the Member for Edmonton-Glenora was out door-knocking in my area, she may have heard some things; I heard quite a bit more. Not only was it site drainage, but it was actually

the economy. At that time folks were really stressed, to start out, with four years – and we've heard our party referred to as a regime. I would hate to repeat what some of the folks referred to the prior government as and their methodology and style, but I don't want to digress too far on that because we'll be going down the leads and following suit in the vein of the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar, which is always interesting. It's like watching *Alice in Wonderland* go on some alternate tour ride and seeing a different, altered state of reality.

Mr. Schmidt: Point of order.

Point of Order Insulting Language

The Deputy Speaker: A point of order has been called. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. Schmidt: Yeah. Well, Madam Speaker, I'm not as excited to see the Member for Lac Ste. Anne-Parkland back in the Legislature as he is to be here, primarily because of the behaviour that he's already exhibited, one and a half minutes into his speech, under 23(h), (i), and (j): using insulting and abusive language. I demand that he retract his statement and apologize.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Cardston-Siksika.

Mr. Schow: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I do not believe that this is a point of order. This is simply a matter of debate. On a number of occasions during that member's speech he referred to members of this side in a disrespectful manner, including calling the Premier the chairman of the UCP. This is not a point of order. I believe that this is a matter of debate, and I think it's absurd that that member even rose on this. I ask you to decline this point of order.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. members, I struggle to find the difference in speech style between each of the members in question around this. However, I would caution all members to stick to the matter of debate which is in front of us. This is a caution for all members in this Assembly as we move forward in the times that we are facing right now. I do not find a point of order. I do express some caution, and I will ask the hon. member to proceed with debate.

11:00

Debate Continued

Mr. Getson: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I apologize, honestly, for getting a little heated on that and causing some of that colour and bringing that request for a point of order there.

With that, again, the folks in my community of Parkland Village had a lot of concerns, and it was primarily around the economy. Moreover, it was the first time they had seen actual representation in that area. Brenda Neville was the lady that the minister referred to. Now, for the folks at home, what takes place in here is rather interesting, at least on our side, from me being brand new to this. What we do is that we interface and we have feedback with our constituents. We then take and compile that information, and then we take it to the ministers at the time. A lot of times when we're in lengthy debates, like we were during the filibuster period when we first started, there was ample opportunity for us to have lots of dialogue.

Now, the interesting thing was that the Member for West Yellowhead had a lot of mobile-home areas and the members for Strathcona-Sherwood Park and Spruce Grove-Stony Plain did as well. We had the same things. Even the MLA for Edmonton-West

Henday formerly was known as the advocate for these types of issues. So a lot of us, with the exclusion of the Member for Edmonton-West Henday, that sat around at night talked about some of the challenges and issues that we had.

Now, the interesting thing was that the brand new Minister of Service Alberta was all over this like a dog on a pork chop. He had asked us to go back to our constituents and make sure to run this through. So even though some of the other members opposite may not realize all the work that goes into this, there was tons of work for the last bill. It's not just introducing a bill, thinking it's really great, bouncing it off the shelf, and then see if it passes in this House. Proper due diligence, consultation took place all the way through this process and included a lot of us MLAs.

So with that, we went back to our constituents. We had them put together their issues and challenges. Now, Brenda Neville comes to the forefront because she was fantastic. She had a spreadsheet on this. She had all the information from her constituents. They posed a bunch of questions, compiled that in place. The minister was on a tour, so last summer he literally was hitting all the hot spots in the province and sat there. We already heard that she had mentioned that he was the first one to do that.

I have an actual note in my office, that I'd like to share. It was to my constituency manager. It was after the press release, after we had done all this work to get it to this point. It said:

Esther

Can you please pass along my humbled thanks to MLA [for Lac Ste. Anne-Parkland] for allowing me to be a part of this today.

That was with the press release and bringing it to that point.

I know that when they changed the boundaries on whom we got to vote for I was hesitant. There has never been anyone else within our riding that has ever taken the time like he has.

I sincerely appreciate his time and support. It was very humbling for me . . . to be a part of [this. Thank you so much.]

She goes on further to thank my constituency manager for all the feedback and interface and everything else we were doing, not just on this one single item but the whole gamut.

Back to Bill 3, again, we can't boil the ocean. We can't do everything all at once, but I am so proud to see that this is a progressive measure, that we're starting to hit the high points that our constituents brought to us. We're actually having meaningful conversations with them. And it's supported by the members opposite, dropping the partisanship for a bit here. "Obviously, some of us are more spirited than others in that vein. But dropping that for a bit, yeah, we agree in context. Everything is good." This is what I'm paraphrasing from their side. So let's move on with this.

Minister, thank you so much for doing what you can in those areas. There's lots more work to do. Once we get through this pandemic, obviously, there are going to be some issues, and the biggest challenges are going to come back again to the economy. We did manage to get rid of the carbon tax. That was a big stress at the time. There's still the federal carbon tax that we're trying to deal with. To my constituents: we're working on that as well; we know that you are in challenged circumstances. A lot of these folks stepped forward and did the right thing to help us. And if we're looking at the amount of support that we have in that area, I think the polls spoke to it very well, and the engagement and the feedback that we're having speak to that as well.

So I'm not going to chew up tons of the shop clock anymore, Madam Speaker. I'm very happy to be here, very supportive of this. I strongly encourage everyone else to vote in favour of it. And to the folks back home and to the folks specifically that engaged with us on these items: we're working on it, and as you can see, we consider this a high priority insomuch as we're here today taking

care of business and still making sure that things go forward and that this doesn't fall through the cracks.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available.

Seeing none, the hon. Member for Edmonton-City Centre.

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I appreciate the opportunity to rise and speak to Bill 3, amendments to the Mobile Home Sites Tenancies Act. Now, as has been mentioned, this is an item that's seen a good deal of discussion, I think, since back when we were government. Indeed, I remember having the opportunity to go with my then colleague Robyn Luff, who was then the MLA for Calgary-East, and having the opportunity to go and meet with some residents and some advocates at a mobile-home park just over on the east side of Edmonton and having the opportunity to sit down with them, the group of mobile-home tenants, and talk with them about a bill. At that time Ms Luff had in front of the Legislature a private member's bill that was looking to establish a committee to look into issues around affordable housing and looking to ensure that all Albertans were able to access an affordable place to live, to have that roof over their head.

That was the first opportunity that I had to begin to learn about and understand what the challenges were in the unique situation in which people find themselves when indeed they have a mobile home, that being that you own your home, but you do not own the land you're on. You do not own the utilities that are hooked up to your home. You don't own the road that leads up to it. Individuals who live in a mobile-home park find themselves in a very unique situation in which they are incredibly dependent on the individuals which own that park and indeed own the land beneath them and control the utilities, the quality of the roads, and many, many things which impact the lives of these individuals.

Indeed, we recognize the unique challenge that's existed in that. You know, if I am renting an apartment, if I am renting a home, I can merely be evicted. Okay. Certainly that is a significant inconvenience. For some, that may be a danger to health or other things, particularly in the midst of something like this, a COVID pandemic. But I can still leave, take all of my belongings, and I still have everything. I have lost, perhaps, my damage deposit, perhaps investment in a month or two of rent, but that is my loss. But for somebody who has a mobile home, it is not nearly as easy for them to pack up their entire home and move it. If I'm renting an apartment or home, I can move to a different apartment or different home. It is a far, far more difficult prospect to have to move your entire mobile home to another piece of land.

It's certainly been true for some time in Alberta that there has been this gap in what has been available to protect those who find themselves in that particular situation, and we've heard of situations where that has been abused or where people have been put in very difficult situations, where the very land on which they have been keeping their home was being sold out from under them and they were being left with very little recourse or little ability to afford to move to another place. As I think my colleagues have indicated, we are in support of these amendments to the act.

Now, I recognize, of course, that we are here under extraordinary circumstances, under rules that were put in place by the current government to allow us to address emergent and urgent issues to do with the COVID-19 pandemic. I imagine we will continue to have some discussion around that on a variety of bills, and we have on some previous bills. On this particular bill I would say that, yes, this does meet that standard which the government had set in place and had agreed would be the standard for when we would choose to breach the recommendations that have been put forward by the

chief medical officer of health and indeed put ourselves in this exceptional circumstance where we are travelling from across the province and heightening our risk to ourselves and our families and our communities back home. But that is an exceptional circumstance. This bill could arguably meet that standard, so we are here to debate it.

Now, the bill amends the Mobile Home Sites Tenancies Act to allow disputes to be handled by the residential tenancy dispute resolution service. That is a good move, Madam Speaker. Indeed, I've had the need and the opportunity to make use of those services myself. For a brief period I served as a landlord, and certainly I appreciate the challenges that landlords can face. That's why I do appreciate the steps that this government took to address the questions of evictions and rent, that they did consider the position that landlords can find themselves in. I think that's important to recognize. Certainly, I had my own situation where I had a problem tenant who was not paying rent, so the folks that were acting on my behalf did make use of those services to address the situation.

I can appreciate that we need to empower that, so I think that bringing in the RTDRS in this situation to help mitigate these disputes and indeed not have to force people to go to court to do so is an important step. I think that it's valuable for both the tenants and the landowners to be able to forgo that expense and be able to have a fair hearing in an environment with a much lower barrier to entry. Of course, what is being proposed here is for a fee of about \$75 to apply. I guess a court application would be \$100 to \$200, so that is a relative saving for individuals. It allows them to be able to go to the RTDRS and have their discussion there, whether that's about security deposits, rent reductions. Whatever the issue may be, they're able to go forward and deal with that.

11:10

Now, there are questions, I guess, around how the RTDRS will deal with what are unique circumstances for things that it would not have had to deal with previously. Recognizing that it has largely had to arbitrate in situations, like I said, where an individual is renting the entire property – the home, the land, everything – as opposed to simply renting land on which to place their home, this introduces some unique situations that the RTDRS would have to consider: the sale or disposal of an abandoned mobile home, a mobile-home site occupied by the surviving spouse of a partner, issues that may be around seeking specific performances.

Then again, we also have the situation where the government is proposing a limit of about \$50,000. So what's going to happen then, in those circumstances where it involves a remedy over \$50,000? Those issues then may have to go to the courts.

I would like to recognize the government for bringing this forward. I realize this was not something that they brought forward in their election platform. We had included it in ours as it was something that we had been considering and looking at as a government. Indeed, it's one of my regrets that we did not have the opportunity, while we were in government, to move that final step and address this through legislation. I do appreciate that the new government, the minister, on coming in, did pick that up. As we heard from some of the members, they did go out and consult with their constituents on this issue as well, and from what I heard, they heard about that on the campaign trail. I appreciate that after those discussions we indeed have this legislation coming forward today in the House and that we have the opportunity to make this change.

Recognizing, of course, that during this COVID-19 pandemic there indeed will likely be some owners of mobile homes who may be unable to pay their rent, they're going to face unique challenges, then, in terms of – again, they own their home, the property they are on, and perhaps they even have payments on that mobile home.

That's entirely possible. Many of these people may have mortgages that they are struggling with, and then on top of that, they would have to make payments for the land which they are occupying, which they are renting from the landowner, and of course, then, the question of the utilities that are hooked up and other facility fees which may be involved. I appreciate that we are going to be providing them with the same opportunities for resolution and to potentially address those situations.

Of course, Madam Speaker, what we're hoping is that landowners, just as landlords across the province, as the Premier has expressed on many occasions, will do the right thing and indeed work with the tenants of these mobile-home parks, who have their homes on these pieces of land, to provide them with support, to provide them, perhaps, with an opportunity to renegotiate payments, to be able to find ways to work around this. Indeed, many of these individuals may find themselves in the position of being unable to work. They may be working in an occupation where their business has been shut down, and they're unemployed. They may themselves be self-employed and be facing a significant loss of income due to a loss of contracts and interest in their particular work at this time.

As I recall, some of the individuals that I visited with Ms Luff a few years back were, in fact, on AISH or on other disability payments. They'd had family or others who had supported them in being able to secure their own home. Indeed, one of the folks we visited with was a woman who does modifications. Specifically, she retrofits mobile homes for individuals living with a disability. That was the case with the woman whose home we visited and indeed with some others in that situation. Again, they are uniquely vulnerable, and we recognize that they may be facing increased costs because they have difficulties accessing groceries or other supports, and those supports may not be there for them now.

Of course, with them being on a fixed income and not being eligible currently for other government supports – although we've seen that other provinces, like the province of B.C., have brought in a top-up for individuals living on government support or disability supports or other things or rules around not doing government clawbacks on any additional income they're able to bring in from the federal government support, we have not done that in Alberta. So an individual in that situation who owns a mobile home, again, can find themselves in a situation where they are unable to cover those costs. We're providing that additional protection for them through this bill.

This also reminds me of one other thing, Madam Speaker. I recognize that we are here and discussing this today as part of that emergent legislation in that the government has deemed this is important in order to protect those who are facing the COVID-19 pandemic. That's the reason we are debating this legislation here and now. But one of the other pieces that did come up in these discussions was the question of life leases. I know that I have a life-lease facility in my constituency, and I know that there are a number in other constituencies around Edmonton and, indeed, across the province. Perhaps members of government have heard about this as they've been out and having their discussions about mobile homes and talking with others in their communities, that folks who are in a life-lease situation also lack some protections or the standard rights that would exist in a standard landlord-tenant relationship.

Now, to be clear, a life lease is a unique situation in that individuals basically have signed over, I think, a certain amount of a mortgage or insurance or other things, which then gives them the place where they can live. They don't actually own the place where they live. They are leasing it under an agreement with the owner of the building. They have certain rights and certain protections, but at the same time they're not quite considered a tenant and they're not

quite considered an owner, so they find themselves sort of falling in between. If there are concerns about maintenance of the facility, if there are concerns about other issues which may arise around the property, it's very difficult. They don't have any prescribed legal process to address that problem.

This is a gap that was existing and that I know I brought forward to our Minister of Service Alberta, Mr. Malkinson, as did several of my colleagues. The MLA for Edmonton-Whitemud, Dr. Bob Turner, and some others had been discussing it. That was an item under consideration. So far I have not heard from the government whether this is something they have come across. Admittedly, this is not something that I've had the opportunity to raise with the Minister of Service Alberta myself so far, but it is something I wanted to note as we are having this discussion and making these amendments, that it is perhaps another piece that we would wish to consider and that might be relevant to the question.

Now, at one point we had noted that we had written a letter to the Minister of Service Alberta, I believe, from our caucus outlining a few things that we may be considering to bring forward as amendments, and I certainly look forward to that opportunity because, again, while we absolutely support this bill and we support these changes and we support this moving forward now to provide this protection for individuals during a time of global pandemic, we do feel that there may be some steps we can take to perhaps make this bill better.

As I noted, currently there is a limit of about \$50,000 that's in place, a cap. Often we hear from mobile-home tenants and owners that there are issues of infrastructure deficiencies. When we get into questions of infrastructure, that could certainly quickly, I think, exceed a cap of \$50,000. If there are issues with the road system or the utility system or perhaps the plumbing and sewer system of a mobile-home park, it's unfortunate if that then is something that immediately has to go to the courts, that there is no opportunity for tenants to perhaps try to resolve this at a lower level, at a lower cost to all individuals involved, that instead they are forced to have to go directly to the courts. We'll have an opportunity to perhaps bring forward an amendment to discuss that.

Just recognizing that currently my understanding is that in previous discussions this was a process that was going to be enacted and then in place for the fall of 2020. Now, of course, again, we are here today discussing this as emergent legislation that we recognize needs to be in place immediately in order to address people who may be caught in a bad situation due to the COVID-19 pandemic. That being the case, it seems appropriate that we would have an activation date for this legislation much sooner. Indeed, if we feel this is taking all the appropriate steps, if we feel that this has been well discussed with the community – and certainly from what we're hearing from government members that seems to be the case, that they've given this very careful thought and discussion over the last 11 months – my hope would be, then, that we would consider this bill to be ready to go.

Now, certainly I appreciate the additional pressures that this could create for the RTDRS at a time when it is likely also seeing an increase in cases simply due to the number of situations that we may have currently with individuals unable to pay rent or landlords that are seeking rent and trying to resolve how we're going to deal with those situations in the year of COVID-19. That said, I think that certainly there should be room for the government to provide some additional surge funding to help deal with this because I don't think that a shortage of capacity . . . [Mr. Shepherd's speaking time expired]

Thank you.

11:20

The Deputy Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available. The hon. Member for St. Albert.

Ms Renaud: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I was enjoying the comments, so I would like to encourage my colleague to take a little bit of extra time to finish his thoughts and comments. Thanks.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-City Centre.

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you, Madam Speaker. As I was saying, yeah, I think it would be unfortunate to let a question of capacity leave any Albertan in the lurch, to be caught in the gap, to fall through the cracks at what is a time, I think, of enormous economic stress and indeed just personal anxiety for many Albertans. I think that having the opportunity to have this act in place as soon as possible and providing whatever funding is needed for the RTDRS to be able to increase their capacity, to be able to work, of course, now through virtual means, most likely, for most of these cases and take the opportunity to work through this at a time when I think many Albertans are going to need that support and are going to need that help, that would be a reasonable investment.

The changes that have been made to rent and evictions for tenants has made the financial situation that Albertans are in a little bit better. One thing I might suggest, and we may be looking to make an amendment along these lines, is that perhaps we make it free for folks to access the RTDRS. Again, the reason for that, as I just said, is that at a time when many Albertans are going to find themselves in a difficult position, where they're having to resolve these situations while potentially not having work, while having their children at home because their schools are closed, while facing perhaps significant financial impact from the loss of work or an inability to operate a business, even a burden of an additional \$75 to \$100 could be a considerable burden for individuals in that situation.

I think there are many, many Albertans right now for whom every dollar counts. So even if it was for a brief period while we are still finding our way through this pandemic, you know, as is the case as we are implementing now, certainly that's perhaps something that can be done by a ministerial order, recognizing that indeed through Bill 10 last week the government has afforded itself significant power, not only to adjust or modify any existing legislation but to introduce entirely new laws simply by the stroke of a minister's pen, because they believe it's in Albertans' best interests.

I spoke at length about that last week, and indeed I've seen a good deal of comments about that coming out even from some allies of the Premier like Mr. John Carpay, who have expressed concerns with that. Certainly, if there's any place where such a significant – significant – taking of power for the government during the course of a pandemic or a public emergency, if there was any place for that to be applied, this might be such a place here. That would provide the opportunity, then, for us to ensure that all Albertans are able to afford the support that they may desperately need to keep a roof over their head during a difficult period.

Now, there is also a potential amendment to come forward around the question of cases being able to be moved from the courts to the RTDRS. Indeed, as I understand it, a common tactic in residential disputes may be for a party to bring a case immediately to the courts as a tactic to intimidate another party who may not have the same resources or financial ability to contest a case in the courts. So it would be, I think, appropriate perhaps to consider providing a means by which there could be a quick ruling in which something is brought forward to the courts in which their judgment

could be made to say: “You know what? This is not significant enough that it requires a court’s jurisdiction. This is something that indeed could be considered by the RTDRS and, therefore, allow for a much simpler hearing to occur at a much lower cost to all parties involved and indeed a much lower cost for the province as a whole.” Indeed, when we operate a courtroom, we have the judge and we have the space and all the individuals attending. That is a significant cost to the Alberta taxpayer. If there are ways we can lower that cost through a more reasonable resolution, we should.

I look forward to further debate on this bill, and indeed I thank the government again for bringing this forward. I look forward to having some further discussion, perhaps seeing some of these amendments come forward during Committee of the Whole.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Are there any other members wishing to speak to the bill? The hon. Member for St. Albert.

Ms Renaud: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It’s my pleasure to stand and speak to Bill 3, Mobile Home Sites Tenancies Amendment Act, 2020. I would just like to build on some of the comments made by my colleagues earlier and just add my thoughts. I think one of the things that we’ve come to realize, although I think most of us always instinctively knew this, is that affordable and safe housing is not only a human right but is probably the one singular thing that keeps us safe. I think, particularly, we’re demonstrating right now that having access to a safe home is literally going to save lives.

I think this is an important piece of legislation. Again, I’m not going to get into the timing of this. I think that my colleagues have explored that, but I do think it is absolutely vital that we take every step and every measure to prevent any further evictions and, if at all possible, find the easiest way to direct people to dispute resolution, keeping in mind, as my colleague from Edmonton-City Centre said, that especially now more than ever every single dollar is important to Albertans who have lost work, who are forced to stay home because of school closures, child care closures, people taking care of loved ones or family members who are sick or are sick themselves.

I think this is an important piece of legislation. I’m happy to support it. I will be far happier to support it with a number of amendments, as have been outlined by my colleagues, and I will focus on a couple. As we know, mobile homes are an important option for affordable living for Albertans, and Albertans in mobile homes deserve an accessible way to deal with issues and disputes. I think we’ve touched on, you know, why this wasn’t done previously. That’s sort of irrelevant at this point. I think what’s important is that we get it done as quickly as possible to avoid any further problems. I don’t believe the government is going far enough in terms of some of the costs, some of the processes, but we can get into that as we start to propose amendments to make this emergent legislation better. That is our job, to be here and to debate and to propose changes or amendments that make things better.

I just want to go back a little bit and talk about why I believe this piece of legislation is so incredibly important. Affordable housing or the prevention of future eviction, especially now but all the time, is very important. My colleague from Edmonton-Gold Bar talked a little bit about the number of Albertans who are precariously housed, who are at risk of eviction, and many who just don’t have access to safe, affordable, and accessible housing. And that is the reality. We will see the consequences of that now during a public health emergency. When people don’t have access to affordable, safe housing and they are evicted, they are put at more risk, and there is more strain on the front-line services that are dealing with managing an emergency right now. These things are many times

preventable. Stable housing in good times – they’re less good for some people – and in normal times, when we don’t have a public emergency, is still a problem.

I was quite thankful for my colleague from Edmonton-Gold Bar for talking about and reminding Albertans that when the UCP government was elected, their agenda was very clear, Madam Speaker. One of the first things that this government did was introduce massive corporate welfare in the form of a tax break for very wealthy corporations while at the same time cutting services and cutting investment into affordable, accessible housing. When you bring those two things together, I think it’s very clear where the priorities are. I’m happy that there has been a shift right now to understand how vitally important it is now – and I would argue that it has always been important – to do every single thing that we can to ensure people have access to a safe home and that we prevent eviction every time that we can.

We know that eviction negatively impacts families in so many ways. It impacts their ability to stay together many times. It sometimes creates environments that are more conducive to abuse, whether it’s gender-based violence, domestic violence, whether it’s neglect. We know that that’s a reality. We know that lack of accessible, affordable housing takes a toll on the mental health of Albertans. We know that lack of secure, affordable, accessible housing, where you’re not constantly under the threat of eviction – you know that you have things that you can do should you arrive at that place, but failure to do that results in all kinds of family problems. In normal times, when we’re not stuck at home, what it does is create unnecessary stress on families, be that the need to pack up and leave and all of the financial consequences of that, whether it requires children to consistently be pulled out of school, put in another school, causing all kinds of stress.

11:30

Again, I want to underline that the risk we introduce when we fail to invest in appropriate dispute resolution, the prevention of eviction, and affordable, accessible housing is that we are laying a foundation for the increased risk for the potential of domestic violence, gender-based violence, and neglect. I would say that any kind of investment in the prevention of eviction, the promotion and the investment in affordable, accessible housing is a good thing to do in normal times, all the time, and particularly now.

It will be my pleasure to support this piece of legislation. It is my sincere hope that the government will go further and understand that, you know, you don’t always get it right the first time, and there are some necessary amendments, I believe, to expand the protections for Albertans who choose to live on mobile-home sites.

You know, on a little personal note, when I was growing up – I think I was about 12 or something. I grew up in sort of a big city. I grew up in and around Montreal. At that time my parents – I’m not from a wealthy family – had always rented. For whatever reason – I don’t know how we got there – they were able to purchase a mobile home, so we moved from the city centre to a more rural community in Quebec called Saint-Jérôme, and for the first time it was incredible. We had our own house, albeit longer than I was used to. We had our own place. We had land where we actually had a garden. We had access to some of the things that the Member for Edmonton-Glenora talked about. For the first time we had access to a park right there. We had access to a little swimming pool. We had neighbours, so there was this sense of community that I had not experienced before because we’d not experienced home ownership in a place like that.

So I just want to say that I think that in order to have enough housing inventory for all Albertans, that are at every economic stage of their lives or need to have access to safe, affordable,

accessible housing, choosing this kind of home needs to be protected, as protected as single-family home ownership, whether it's a duplex, as well as protection for other renters.

I do applaud the government for listening to the suggestions of the Official Opposition a while ago when we encouraged them to really look at protecting renters from eviction, although I have some concerns about the process because it's not very clear. You know, there are always things that we can make better. I'm hoping that those processes are starting to become more clear for both parties, hopefully learning from that process that was launched. Once we pass this legislation, if indeed we do, with the recommended amendments, we will be able to also make the process very clear.

A couple of things. I wanted to talk about also some of the amendments, as I mentioned, that I do believe will make this legislation stronger. I'm going to join my colleagues in calling for removing the cap on cases to be heard in the dispute resolution services. I think I'm going to focus on waiving the fees for people to use the dispute resolution services.

I think, again, that during normal times far too many Albertans are truly one paycheque away from losing all kinds of things: losing their homes, losing all kinds of security. I think that especially now, when we know tens of thousands of Albertans have lost their jobs, when we know that tens of thousands of Albertans have no choice but to stay home and care for their children – the schools are closed; child care centres are closed – like all of the other measures that we've taken or tried to take, it's really important that we support tenants at this phase, in the midst of the pandemic, that they be able to deal with disputes in a very quick and very affordable manner. I will look forward to speaking on those amendments when they come up.

Also, allowing applications to move cases from the courts to the dispute resolution process is very important. I think we can all agree that there are a number of systems within government and within the public service that are operating right now because they have to. We can argue about some of the work at another time, but I think it's important that we do everything possible to look at: are there other ways that we can deal with these issues without bringing in more public servants, more people into places where it is difficult to follow the recommendations of the chief medical officer? I would suggest that that is just another way to support the need for moving cases from the court to the dispute resolution process.

Again, the technological wizards that are part of the public service: I sincerely hope that they will be able to find ways that some of these things can be done remotely to prevent any possibility of transmission of infection and to follow the recommendations to keep people home as much as humanly possible and to keep them safe so that we can get through this as quickly as possible and start to resume some of the other important work that we need to do around our economy.

I really appreciate, actually, the comments made by the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar. It's clear that he has certainly taken the time to reach out to his constituents to hear specifically what their concerns are. If I understand it, a lot of those concerns will drive the amendments that we will start to propose in this place. One of the most important things that I heard was that people are saying that, you know, homelessness is always a danger, and I think that when you have people that are struggling paycheque to paycheque or job to job or struggling to meet the needs of their family, we must do everything in our capacity to ensure that processes are simple, that they're clean, that they're representative, and that they're affordable. If that means waiving fees right now, I say: let's do it. People are struggling. The difference between \$50 – let's say that that was the fee to go through a dispute resolution. Fifty dollars, when you stretch it, can feed a family for a week.

I think this is the new criteria that I believe we need to use as we start to evaluate the emergent need of the actions that we take to protect Albertans, not just to protect them in their homes but to protect them, give them the tools that they need, anything at all that we can do to give them the tools that they need, so that they can stay home, feed their families, and get through this incredibly difficult, stressful time, not only because it's a public health emergency but because of the subsequent economic free fall and hardship that tens of thousands of Albertans are squarely facing every single day. We are fortunate in this place that we are not in that group because we are for whatever reason – you know, we're essential workers. We're here to do the work of government, to try to guide Albertans through this. We have not lost wages – we are not in that position – but I think it's incumbent on each of us . . .

The Deputy Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available. I see the Minister of Service Alberta is standing.

Mr. Glubish: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I was listening intently to all of the members opposite as they spoke to this important bill, and I thank them for their feedback. I thought, you know, especially with what the Member for St. Albert was raising about the whole idea of waiving fees, that I just wanted to talk about that briefly to maybe provide a little bit of insight to all of the members in this Assembly. I know that not everybody lives this every day, that not everybody is using the RTDRS every day, so maybe there would be some clarification I can provide to raise some awareness in this House.

11:40

The RTDRS already has a provision that allows the administrator to waive the fees when there is financial hardship demonstrated by the applicant. I'm pleased to say that this already exists, that this protection is already there. We know that in light of this pandemic, the COVID-19 crisis, and the related economic fallout that Alberta is suffering and all the world is wrestling with, there will be a number of folks who are going to be under financial hardship. You know, I'm pleased to be able to report to those in this House that when folks are applying to the RTDRS in these trying times and they can demonstrate that they are going through financial hardship, there is already a mechanism in the RTDRS, under the Residential Tenancies Act, that allows for those fees to be waived, providing that relief so that nobody has to worry about being unable to access this support simply because they can't pay a \$75 fee to file their application. I think that's important to note.

You know, I agree that we want to make sure that the folks who need this service the most can access it at a time when they need it the most, which is at a time of financial hardship. That's, I think, an important thing for all of us to note and keep in mind as we work through the ongoing debate on this bill, as we discuss its merits, as we consider some of the amendments that the opposition is planning to bring forward at later stages of this process. I think that on this one it's just worth noting that what has been asked for already exists in the existing system, which I think is good news for all of us and certainly good news for the folks who may need to avail themselves of the RTDRS in the months to come.

You know, just on that topic of urgency and financial difficulty, I think it's important also to recognize that, again, this is why this is so urgent. This is why we're still discussing this bill at a time of emergency, and I thank a number of the members opposite for validating the importance of that debate. I know the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar mentioned that this is important, that he's heard from his constituents that this is important. I know that the Member for Edmonton-City Centre said the same, that this is a

matter that meets the standard of urgency, and I know that a number of other folks from the other side of this House also chimed in to say that this is important. It is important, and I appreciate the willingness to work through this and, hopefully, end up in a place where we are giving mobile-home community residents access to a tool they don't have today to be able to deal with disputes.

As we can all imagine – I know it was just a week and a half ago that I announced the measures we've brought forward to protect renters in this crisis, and then we had some debate about Bill 11, which we all passed with support from all sides of this House. At that time, you know, there were some questions in that debate about: well, what about Bill 3, and how does that relate to this? It does relate to this because ultimately those protections against eviction for renters all tie in to the RTDRS being a tool through which disputes about nonpayment of rent would be heard and a decision about whether an eviction can be enforced or not would be made. So by getting Bill 3 across the finish line, it will allow us to ensure that mobile-home residents can access the RTDRS at a time when there may be a significant uptake in cases that need to be heard and adjudications made.

Again, that is why this is so important for us all to be discussing at this time. I appreciate everyone's participation in this discussion, and I look forward to the ongoing debate in the future stages of the democratic process here.

In terms of, you know, making this available as soon as possible, I can also confirm – and I'm sure we'll have more time to talk about this later, too . . . [Mr. Glubish's speaking time expired] I guess we'll have more time to talk about it later.

The Deputy Speaker: We'll have to talk about it later.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-South.

Mr. Dang: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It's always a pleasure to rise, especially when we're talking about an issue like this, which I think can help a lot of people here right now across this province, and especially since it's something that we've been hearing for quite a bit of time now and that we think is important that we can move forward with so that people who are in mobile homes have a way to deal with their issues and disputes.

I want to thank the minister for providing some additional comments there regarding this. I think that while we, our caucus and myself, generally support this bill, of course, as you've heard already, Minister, through you, Madam Speaker, there are a number of amendments we'd like to propose. I know the minister had spoken at some length today about the waiving of fees, and I know the members of our caucus have spoken at some length to the waiving of fees as well.

I think one of my personal concerns, Madam Speaker, is that in particular the process of waiving fees actually requires applying to a clerk, typically at a courthouse or at the RTDRS office. Right? As we know, the RTDRS office and the courts are both closed at this time, so it actually could be very onerous or in some cases it's unclear if it's actually possible to apply for a waiver at this time. I mean, certainly, I hope that the minister will look at either accepting an amendment that would waive those fees throughout the pandemic, just as a blanket, or perhaps some sort of administrative change so that the applications can be done online or over the phone or something of that sort. I think that would certainly benefit many Albertans, because it is a situation where we're looking at a unique scenario, where the typical structures just aren't available to the public. You can't go into the office and do the things that you would normally do. Perhaps the Minister of Justice and yourself could work together on making that sort of system available.

People will still have to be required to show things like proof of income, show things like past pay slips or past statements from the CRA, Madam Speaker. All of those documents, particularly in a precarious situation: maybe somebody has less access to something like the Internet at home or whatever it is. They're going to have difficulty going to their bank to get those statements. They're going to have difficulty going to the courts to apply for the waivers. I think that with all of those things, while I understand that the minister is well intentioned in terms of saying, "This fee waiver structure already exists," that structure for many people could basically be unusable at this time. That's why I think it's so important that we actually look at these things and that we actually try and make practical changes.

Of course, if it's not in an amendment and if the minister thinks there's a better way to do it than an amendment, then we can certainly look at perhaps supporting it through some sort of administrative change through his ministry or through Justice as well. I think that's something that we would happily support. I think it's something that is important, and I think the minister recognizes the necessity of the fee waivers, as he has spoken to already.

I think we are going to be proposing some additional amendments. My colleagues have already spoken to how we want to remove the \$50,000 cap for cases to be heard, and that's because, especially right now, if there are issues of infrastructure in a mobile-home park and we look at how the issues of infrastructure can continue and compound over time, very quickly we can see that those issues will exceed \$50,000. Indeed, right now, when perhaps some people aren't willing to – "willing" is the wrong word. For safety reasons people aren't able to go to work and perhaps do some of those renovations or whatever and follow the advice of the CMOH. We can see those types of issues compound over and over and over again, right? Madam Speaker, I think that's something where we want to make sure that there is a system in place to address those types of concerns and that the RTDRS is able to actually speak to those types of concerns and make decisions on those types of concerns.

I think it's been spoken of at length that this bill needs to come into force fairly quickly because these types of actions do need to be available for everybody. It does need to be something that we can protect every single Albertan from, right? We assisted in moving Bill 3 through the House very quickly, and I think that certainly people that are in mobile homes deserve those same protections. They deserve those same protections. They deserve the right to have a dispute resolution service. They deserve the right to be able to go and actually feel safe in their homes and that there is a fair arbitration system in case of a dispute with their landlord. I think those are all some really important things that I wanted to bring forward.

Obviously, for cases that are currently in the courts, I think that we would like to see an amendment that would move those into the RTDRS. As I've said already, Madam Speaker, courts are currently closed, and the offices of the RTDRS are actually closed, right? So the RTDRS has now moved to a phone arbitration system. People that are applying for it can either proactively provide their phone number, or they'll be contacted by the RTDRS through their phone. I don't know if the minister was administratively involved in that directly at all, but I think that's actually a good thing. I think it's actually a good thing, so I congratulate the minister on that, that the RTDRS is already currently able to do things via phone. That means that people that have no recourse through the courts, whether that's a landlord or a tenant, or have no recourse through the traditional systems right now are able to access some sort of arbitration service.

11:50

The amendment we would like to propose is to then bring the people who are basically stuck – if they've already put forward or applied for a court case and it qualifies under the RTDRS but they had chosen to go to the courts for one reason or another, they would have the option to come to the RTDRS now, right? The RTDRS continues to operate, and it's doing good work via phones so that people don't have to violate the rules of the CMOH. Indeed, since the courts are closed, they actually can't move forward, right? It's simply a practical issue.

If the RTDRS is able to hear those applications – I hope the minister would support that we give these Albertans the certainty that they can start moving their process forward again – that would allow us to keep justice moving, to keep the process moving, and to protect both landlords and tenants, right? It would give proper arbitration, and it would protect landlords and tenants because you wouldn't be sort of just waiting. People wouldn't be in their homes waiting to see what happens. As the minister and the Premier have spoken to, many times with problem tenants, as it were, who are engaging in activities where they must remove them, it would allow the RTDRS to make that decision. In the case of tenants who are having significant disputes with their landlords, where their landlords are perhaps not providing the services or facilities required and the type of maintenance required, particularly during a global pandemic, it would allow those tenants to have a resolution through the RTDRS as well.

Certainly, we think it's very important that the system keeps moving throughout this pandemic and that we try to make life as normal as we can for these Albertans. In this act we think that people who live in mobile homes deserve the right to have their process move forward, just the same as any other Albertan, and that they deserve that security, just the same as every Albertan. Right? I think that's something that's really important.

I think that some of my colleagues have already, again, spoken to how rent should not be increased when cases are being heard by the RTDRS because that's obviously an intimidation tactic, right? That's obviously a way to try and force an applicant to withdraw, particularly if a tenant is applying. I mean, obviously, there is a power imbalance when you have a landlord and a tenant – that is inherent in the system – but what we would like to have is some way to control that so that when a case is being heard, you can't arbitrarily raise those rents. So we would like to introduce an amendment to that.

I think the minister, through some of the legislation that was passed last week, has the opportunity to perhaps do that administratively. I think the minister could sign a paper and do that today through an order in council if he so liked. I would hope that the minister would look at protecting every single Albertan equally and making sure they're not being unfairly intimidated when they try to move forward with these sorts of matters.

The minister, I think, is trying to do the right thing here. I think the minister said earlier, in his opening remarks, something along the lines of: I was asked why this hadn't been done sooner, and I couldn't tell them. Well, I'd encourage the minister perhaps to look to some of his colleagues who were in government for 44 years. But, certainly, I think it is a bill that we should be moving forward with, right? I think that certainly it's a bill that we had tried to move forward and that, as some of our former ministers in our caucus here had mentioned, had already been worked on at quite a bit of length. I think it's something that we genuinely support, that we think is a good bill, and we think that it is well intentioned. We think it just has some areas that could use some assistance – right? – that could

be improved quite a bit, that could close some holes and allow this process to continue to move forward for more people.

The fact of the matter is that this bill as is, this amendment to the Mobile Home Sites Tenancies Act, will help people. That's the reality. But we could help more people by making some very simple amendments. I think every single member of this House is here trying to make sure we can help as many people as possible during this pandemic. We're trying to make sure the system continues to move as efficiently as possible during this pandemic, and there are some simple things like moving some court cases down to the RTDRS.

The RTDRS, of course, is able to provide binding arbitration, and that's inherent to how the dispute resolution service works. That type of arbitration for many people, who perhaps have been waiting for quite some time for their court cases – as many people here know, Madam Speaker, when you apply to the courts for resolution, for trial, it can take many, many months to get a court date. Instead, for people who have been waiting and are expecting to receive a judgment or at least go to court to try and argue their points, it would be nice if we could offer these people a different option – right? – if we could offer them the opportunity now to come back to the RTDRS as the courts are not going to be hearing for what will likely be months to come. We will likely be in this global pandemic for many months, and it means that many, many court cases will likely be stalled for many, many months.

The Minister of Justice knows very well, Madam Speaker, that the courts in many cases have a very high burden, right? They have a very high caseload, they have a very high workload for people on both sides of the courts, and we know that there are opportunities to relieve some of that load as well. I mean, the minister speaks to how he needs to invest more and more in courts, and we see the Minister of Infrastructure – I know I've spoken to him about how the infrastructure in courts has been degrading over the years as well. Perhaps we can relieve some of that burden by moving it into the RTDRS, and we would be able to do that relatively simply by moving a number of cases through amendments here.

I'm hoping that the minister will consider that moving forward. I'm hoping the minister will consider the importance of that and how it can relieve multiple facets and help people in many different ways, because it's not just about this one type of case. It's about making sure the entire system continues to work as efficiently as possible to make sure that Albertans are able to have as normal a situation as possible as they are staying in their homes and as they are trying to stay safe and as they are trying to live their lives as best they can. I would hope that the minister would consider that this is something where we want to make sure, with an amendment, that the system would work – right? – that the system continues to provide that stability, that support. If the system continues to provide a parachute, as it were, for people in Alberta, that would be something that we would be very happy to support.

I mean, it's something that I think we want to make sure is going to help as many people as possible. We know that many, many Albertans who live in mobile homes do it because it's an important, affordable option for families, right? It's something that, when we were in our platform and we looked at it when we were in government, we knew was something that had to move forward. We knew it was something that we needed to support. We knew it was something that we needed to actually engage with Albertans on and have a proper plan for it. I think this is a very well-intentioned piece of legislation. I think it's something that, in large part, does do many of the things the minister intends to do. I just think that there is an opportunity for us to make it better.

I believe that all the amendments that I've spoken about and that my colleagues have spoken about this morning have already been

given to the minister in advance so that the minister can review them and perhaps, if the minister feels it's necessary, either give some rebuttal on why it could be done administratively or perhaps could subamend them to sort of make them fit what the department requires. But I hope that we can have some agreement that these types of amendments, that are just trying to make the system more fair, make sure that we have an immediate process that works for everybody, are a supplement to the last bill, that we had just passed last week. I want to make sure that we just have all those supports in place.

I want to make sure that if the minister hasn't received those, he certainly lets us know. It's my understanding that our staff has reached out and provided the minister with all of that information. He's nodding there, so that's good to hear. It's always good to hear when the staff have done what they said they did. Apologies to the staff watching.

But it's certainly a good thing to know that that process is now moving forward – right? – that we now have the opportunity. I know we're in second reading here. I look forward to committee because in committee we'll have the opportunity, perhaps, to debate more thoroughly point by point and back and forth, of course, some of those individual issues, some of those in the amendment. We'll be able to see the language as well. I'm looking forward to that because I think it will allow us to engage with the minister on the practical aspects and perhaps the nitty-gritty, as it were, and for the parliamentary nerds here, we'll have a lot of fun with that, I think.

But, Madam Speaker, I think that certainly I myself . . .

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. member, I hesitate to interrupt, but the clock now says noon. This House will stand adjourned until 1:30 this afternoon.

[The Assembly adjourned at 11:59 a.m.]

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