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The 30th Legislature
Second Session

Alberta Hansard

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Day 47

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

7:30 p.m.

Monday, July 20, 2020

[Mr. Milliken in the chair]

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

Government Bills and Orders Committee of the Whole

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

Bill 29 Local Authorities Election Amendment Act, 2020

The Deputy Chair: Are there any comments, questions, or amendments to be offered with respect to this bill at this time?

Mr. Jason Nixon: Question.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood has the call.

Member Irwin: Yeah. I hope the House leader will join debate on Bill 29.

It is an honour to rise and speak to this bill. I've not had a chance to speak to it in committee. Without, you know, giving too many spoiler alerts, I do think we'll have a couple of amendments coming. I'm not going to speak at a great amount of length because I do want to speak to some of the amendments we have forthcoming. I guess that's not a spoiler alert because, in fact, I believe I heard previous comments from our critic for Municipal Affairs, who spoke to the need for changes to this bill. In fact, it's not just us who are calling for suggested changes to Bill 29; it's a whole number of folks. So what I'd like to do is talk about some of the people that have chimed in to say: "You know what? In its current form Bill 29 will not do what it intends. In fact, in a few cases it will actually add barriers." In particular, what I would like to focus on is how, as it's currently written, Bill 29 will in fact, arguably, add a lot of barriers for women and for underrepresented populations in politics. So that's what I would like to focus on.

I also want to mention a little bit, you know, some of the concerns just generally around sort of a common approach that we're seeing in a number of the UCP's bills this session. We get criticized for talking about the UCP's sort of American-style approach, yet I think our criticism is quite well founded, because not only do we see that with our concerns around Bill 30 – and, yes, I will make a connection to Bill 29 here shortly – but we see it with some of the attacks on unions. But with Bill 29 we see it in the sense of big-money politics, the American-style, PAC sort of politics that will be brought into our electoral system.

You know, I've spent a lot of time – I know that my esteemed colleague from Edmonton-Whitemud spoke about this in the House the one day. I remember hearing her comments as well. Both she and I have spent a lot of time encouraging other folks to get involved in politics, primarily women and gender-diverse folks, in particular. That's been something that I've been quite passionate about. Even before I ran for office, I was guilty of encouraging – I don't know if "guilty" is the right word, but I was certainly somebody who was always encouraging others to run for office, particularly folks who didn't necessarily see themselves in politics, who didn't see a place for themselves in politics. That's something that I've continued to do over the years.

You know, many folks in this House know that prior to running for a provincial office, I ran federally back in 2015. I was unsuccessful, but in the lead-up to that, I met a lot of really excellent candidates, particularly women. I met folks from diverse backgrounds who ran for office despite the fact that they knew it was going to be an uphill battle. In that case, I met a lot of candidates who knew that they might not necessarily be successful, but they wanted to run the strongest campaign that they could. So many of those folks that I've met over the years are going into politics for the right reasons, and they're going into politics without having a whole lot of money behind them.

In fact, I was just involved in a sort of campaign prep webinar with some folks that are part of Ask Her YYC's campaign readiness program. I know, again, the Member for Edmonton-Whitemud has been involved in that a little bit. I know the Minister of Culture, Multiculturalism and Status of Women has been involved in that as well.

One of the things that I shared with that group is that, you know, there was a question – I won't get the words correct, because it seems like months ago although it was only a few nights ago – something along the lines of: do you need to have a large support network in place before you run for politics? Honestly, it sounds cheesy or it sounds cliché perhaps, but I said that you need to have a dream and a good friend. I know I'm just one example, but when I started my career in politics – I started running really early, in 2013, in advance of the 2015 federal election – truly I didn't have a bunch of donors lined up. I didn't have a lot of contacts when I started. I started by doing all that hard work, by meeting people, by talking to people, by knowing that even if I didn't have a lot of money, I knew that I would have people who would support me, and, sure enough, that started to grow.

I tell you all of this because a lot of folks get discouraged as they enter politics because they worry about the fact that they don't have a whole lot of money behind them, right? That's just one. We know that research shows, especially research that focuses on women and gender-diverse folks in politics, that one of the reasons why women hesitate to enter politics is because they feel like they don't have the financial backing, that they won't have the financial supports in place that perhaps a male competitor might.

You know, this is a time – and I raised this in the House the other day; I posed this question to the Minister of Municipal Affairs – when the context around us really should be compelling us to look at the representation in this House and to look at how we can increase diversity so that we can get more women in politics, so we can get more nonbinary, gender-diverse folks in politics, so we can get more racialized folks in politics, so we can get more indigenous folks in politics. I know that's a goal of everybody in this House – I hope it's a goal of everybody in this House – but to do that, we need to lessen the barriers that these populations face when entering politics.

The challenge is that this bill as written adds additional barriers, makes it more challenging for those populations to enter politics. It means that, you know, the wealthiest folks will have a head start. It means that folks who perhaps already have influence over politics will have even more influence. Again, that's not the political system I want to see. I want to see a political system where anybody, whether they've just arrived in Canada and received their citizenship or whether they're, like I said, an indigenous person entering politics for the first time, whether they're a young woman who's been told that they don't have a place in politics – no, absolutely not. I want all those folks to know that they have every right to be in this House.

7:40

As I said, I know we're going to be introducing some amendments where we hope to address some of the key challenges, but what I would like to do is that I'd like to quote this. As I said, I talked about this a little bit in the House the other day, but I want to just get it on the record. I want to share a little bit more about two organizations who support increasing the representation of women and nonbinary folks in politics, sort of what they've come together on and the statement that they've shared with this government and, specifically, with this minister. I'm going to quote a little bit from their release, and I can certainly table that for *Hansard*.

Parity YEG and Ask Her YYC are concerned that amendments proposed in Bill 29 fail to level the playing field for half of Alberta's population. Bill 29 introduces significant changes to the Local Authorities Election Act that affect key stakeholders, including candidates and third-party advertisers. Fundraising – a key concern for prospective candidates – will see new rules that may deter women from mounting effective political campaigns.

Like I said, there's clear evidence to show that fundraising is a barrier that a lot of women identify when considering entering politics. Again, it's been clear. There have been a number of academics who've written scholarship on some of these barriers that hold back women. So that's clear.

For the benefit of folks in this House who don't know the work of Parity YEG and Ask Her YYC, these are two, you know, fairly new organizations. They both kind of came out of prior organizations, Equal Voice and some of the others that have focused on supporting women in politics. Both of these organizations have come together, and – I'm looking to the Member for Edmonton-Whitemud – I think this might be the first time that they've collaborated on a press release. So it's kind of nice to see the Calgary-Edmonton collaboration happening. The folks that make up those organizations are primarily women who have a lot of experience. There are some young women who might not have political experience, but they've studied these issues a lot, and they've spoken to a lot of folks who've navigated the political system, so I take their recommendations quite seriously.

As I noted in the House the other day, they took an intersectional lens. They applied sort of a gendered lens to the bill, which, I was assured by the minister, all the bills are receiving, and they recommended the following:

defer the implementation of Bill 29 until after the 2021 election to allow future candidates, third party advertisers, community service organizations, and other affected stakeholders a period of transition to properly adjust their operations and align with the forthcoming changes to legislation.

I think that's a really fair ask, because although 2021 might seem like a long ways away, it's really not. We know a lot of folks – candidates for school boards, for councils across this province – are starting to prepare, and they should be. I mean, I've always been an advocate of folks starting as early as they can, right? It might not be actually fundraising, but it's having those conversations, and it's having those coffee shop meetings, all those things, at a nice physical distance, of course. That's a fair suggestion, for sure.

The second one, that

the Government of Alberta engage in further consultation regarding the changes proposed in Bill 29 to ensure [that] equity-seeking groups do not face additional obstacles to running for office.

Ask Her YYC and Parity YEG have offered their services in participating in further consultation. I would suggest that, absolutely, consultation is needed and that, absolutely, this government should be consulting with those equity-seeking groups that are affected, right? Have a round-table with racialized folks,

with members of the LGBTQ2S-plus community, with women of all different backgrounds. I think that's really, really critical, because I would gather – I mean, I shouldn't assume, but I would hope that the government certainly wouldn't have intended to add additional barriers for those folks seeking to run for office.

Finally, they say that

the Minister consider further amendments to restrict campaign contributions between election cycles, including personal contributions, reduce the amount individuals can donate to campaigns, and require candidates to file their financial disclosures during the campaign period.

Again, we don't want a political system that just privileges the rich and the wealthy, right? We want to be able to tell that prospective candidate who might not have a lot of money, like I said, that they're just as valued and they have just as much of a right to have an equal playing field entering politics.

Ask Her YYC and Parity YEG make a really good point just noting that, you know, this is an opportunity we've got. I started my comments by saying: we've got calls happening all around us for racial and social and economic justice. We've got the Black Lives Matter movement really capturing a lot of attention. Here's a time when we can truly prioritize diversity and pluralism in politics. We only need to look as far as – I can pick on Edmonton here because I'm a proud Edmontonian – Edmonton city council. Only 15 per cent of councillors here in Edmonton are women.

I didn't hear the comment from Calgary-Glenmore, but hopefully she will stand up and share that because I'm sure it's valuable. In addition to the fact that there are, you know, 15 . . . [interjection] I meant that in all sincerity. I honestly didn't hear you.

Fifteen per cent of city council is female. There's also a significant dearth when it comes to racial diversity on Edmonton city council as well. Again, you know, all of us want young people to sit in the gallery or to sit in city council chambers and see themselves in the politicians, right? Again, this is why I thought it was really important that we share Ask Her YYC's and Parity YEG's comments, because I fear that the unintended consequences of this bill will be quite serious. Again, at a time when we could be making so many strides and really adding diverse voices to our political system, we could in fact be taking a step back. We could in fact be doing that.

Like I said, I've got a few more things that I want to say, but they'll be more in relation to some of the amendments that are forthcoming. Again, you know, I know that there are folks on the government side of this House who are advocates for women and for diversity in politics, so I really want them, as we move forward with some amendments, to consider those amendments. We have a pretty, pretty sad track record when it comes to this government accepting our amendments, but, always the optimist, I'm hopeful that this government will consider those.

With that, Mr. Chair, I will conclude. Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you.

I see the hon. Minister of Culture, Multiculturalism and Status of Women has risen to debate.

Mrs. Aheer: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. Thank you for the opportunity to have this discussion, and thank you to the previous MLA who just spoke very eloquently about this. I think I can speak for everyone on this side. We're all massive advocates for women on this side, especially during the last elections; 44 per cent of our nominations were women. Now, of course, they don't always win. You never know what's going to happen in a nomination, let alone in an election. We had a lot of really, really incredible candidates running. I'm very proud. Actually, on all sides there were some

really, really incredible women right across Alberta running for many different parties. It's wonderful to see.

What I'd like to be clear about, though, is that this is a collaboration amongst all people about making sure that – you know, the member was talking about levelling the playing field. If we're talking about that and we're talking about dollars and about the importance of that for any particular candidate, some of the things that we're actually advocating for were in consultation with a lot of the municipalities that told us about a few things that are very important.

For those of us who have run in multiple elections, we know how difficult it is to be an incumbent. When I ran for my first election, the gentleman that I ran against was a person I supported in the previous election, and I worked really, really, really hard to get him elected.

Mr. Jason Nixon: Bruce McAllister.

Mrs. Aheer: Yes, Mr. McAllister. That's correct.

Mr. Jason Nixon: Good old Bruce.

Mrs. Aheer: Yeah. Actually, he was a very good friend of mine. I taught his daughters. I'm very good friends with him, so running against him, a very, very important person in our community, and against a family that I loved immensely – in fact, his daughters lived in my house doing musical theatre pretty much every day – was probably one of the most difficult choices I made at the time. What I have to say, though, is that the gentlemen that came to my house that night to ask me to run – people always say: how did you get involved in politics? I always say: well, actually, politics picked me.

7:50

I've always been in the background. I've always worked in that space, and I've always been involved in politics, but there were seven gentlemen sitting in my kitchen one night when I came down from teaching choir, and I asked all of them, "Well, who's running?" because at that time we'd had the floor crossings, and we were looking at somebody from Wildrose to replace running in that riding. I asked them, "Who's running, and when are we getting ready to do this campaign?" and they said, "You are." I remember thinking – it's probably one of the very first times I've ever almost fainted, having these seven lovely gentlemen sitting in my kitchen saying that I was going to run to be the next elected representative of the riding. I actually didn't know what to say.

To this day I still bug them all, going, "I cannot believe what you got me into." I'm just kidding, but the truth is that at that moment – it took them a month, actually, to track me down. I have and had a very successful music studio in my riding, and it was a beautiful, beautiful way to make a living and to spend time with the members of my community. As a result, you know, I got to volunteer a lot in my community and participate. I'd been teaching in that community for over 25 years, so it was really difficult for me to even imagine moving on to a different section of my life when I had this very beautiful, very successful business. One of my friends, Patrick, who was the head of the constituency association at that time, day after day after day would call me and then he would ask to meet me for coffee and then he would sit me down and tell me why I had to run and why it was important. It was so much to absorb, and I couldn't even believe it.

After a month of constant pestering, I finally said, "Okay. Let's figure out how to do this." Then, you know, to get your nomination in and then to get the people to sign off on your nomination – I was going house to house, to all of these people I'd been working with for 25 years going, "What do you think?" and they're, like, "Are

you not going to teach anymore?" I'm, like: "Well, I don't know. Will you sign my nomination paper?" I got all of these signatures on my nomination paper. I made up my own little flyers on my little photocopier with this distorted picture of myself, that I cut by hand myself, to start putting out at the doors, myself and my at that time 16-year-old son, who sat with me at the kitchen table and cut these little individual pieces of paper that we handed out at the doors. I think I handed out about – I don't know – 400 in the first few days. I was really motivated.

You know what was interesting about that is that I ran against somebody who I considered to be one of my closest friends. I ran because at that moment these lovely gentlemen that had sat in my kitchen believed more in me than I believed in myself, and they gave me a reason and a purpose to believe that I had something to add to this discussion, something that I hadn't actually seen in myself. To talk about what Ask Her YYC and Parity YEG talk about, a lot of the discussions that we have around this table – the MLA previous to me that was talking about this was saying about having massive supports around you. It's actually not about that, but it is about having faith in who you are and your ability to run. I agree with her. [interjections] You have one friend, right? So I'm agreeing with you.

Member Irwin: Oh.

Mrs. Aheer: Yeah. It's not actually about having humongous amounts of support, although that is helpful, and there are people who have had that. But if you're talking about levelling the playing field, let's just talk about money for a second and municipal elections. Did you know that at municipal elections money can be held and then those war chests can be built up? The whole reason I told this last little bit of the story is about talking about how difficult it was to beat an incumbent. I only won by 260 votes in my first election, and I door-knocked at 6,400 doors. It was the last couple of days, I swear, and the advanced polls that got me across the finish line. But it was beating an incumbent that was well liked – I helped with that, I might add – and was obviously a choice for folks. It wasn't about not being able to beat, but the incumbency of that is such an unbelievably intimidating thing to go up against.

It actually had nothing to do with my gender. Let me be clear about that. Nothing to do with that. I'm a hard worker, so I just outworked Bruce McAllister in that particular election. But what it did tell me is that what was different about me than perhaps somebody else is that I needed to be asked so many times. I really, really needed those folks to have faith in me, especially the incredible gentlemen I had working around me, one of them being my husband, and my sons, actually.

If you think about how we focus our campaigns on meaningful efforts, meaningful campaigns, being able to do small things like making sure that incumbents are not able to have those war chests really, really levels the playing field. It's one of the most important things. Actually, in consultations and in discussions with municipalities and others, it was one of the things that came up over and over again. I believe it was Mayor Naheed Nenshi, actually, that brought it up, although I think there have been some discussions around the amount in particular, but he actually brought it up. He had mentioned on quite a few occasions that it was really important that there was a change to the donor rule per donor so that it was from a per-donor rule to a per-donor per-candidate, and that's just so that those dollars can't be held over in that war chest, so that a new person, especially if it's a woman, has an opportunity to run.

The member was mentioning earlier about Edmonton. The last few elections where new people have won have actually been men in those particular elections, not women. It's not because women

don't run; it's just that the playing field is really tricky. If you're talking about barriers to anybody running, that's a huge barrier. It's not the money; it's the access to dollars that an incumbent might have that you might not have.

For example, Chestermere is actually a really, really good sort of description about all this because probably for at least the last 10 years, we've had more than 50 per cent of our council being women. One of my very dear friends was the former mayor of Chestermere, Patricia Matthews, one of the strongest women I've ever met and really, really brought to light and met up with a lot of female councillors. Now I have the reeve of Wheatland county, Amber Link, another very, very strong female representative, again, really, really building these councils with everybody involved.

It's not a matter of whether or not we have women running. We do. But if you think about, too, that, for example, in a municipal election the incumbents are bound to win because of dollars and war chests, what do you think happens with voter turnout? Really, really, really poor voter turnout. What do you think that means for new women running? That's absolutely a zero playing field. We want voter turnout. We want people to feel empowered to come out and vote, but if they feel like their vote doesn't mean anything because of the incumbency and the way that incumbency works in municipal politics, it's really, really difficult to inspire somebody to take away time from their family and their businesses.

I mean, in Alberta we have more women entrepreneurs per capita than anywhere else in the country. These are women who run their own businesses, okay? They're not going to just leave their business to run for an election without a really good reason to do so, and if there's an incumbent that's going to win because he's got a war chest of \$50,000, chances are that common sense will tell you: meh, I'll think about it. It has nothing to do with the barrier of being a female, let me tell you. Talk to any of the women on this side; being a woman is not a barrier. However, having the ability to run against an incumbent that has those dollars is. It doesn't matter what their gender is at that point in time.

If we're looking at how it is and the kind of people that really want to do this job – I don't know about on this side, but I question my sanity quite often, my choices, not because I don't love being here with all of you, because I do, but there is so much sacrifice from your family and the time that you have at home with your kids. For the MLAs that have the privilege of living here in Edmonton, you get to go home to your families. For many of us our families are, you know, a minimum of three hours away. Those are precious few hours that we have on the weekend to spend with them, try to make up for lost time. There are many in here who have young children, who are away from their babes. That's really, really hard. Those young women and men, actually, who are running and who have those children, you guys are, to me, one of the most important groups that we have here because you have a vested interest in the future of this province and how things are going to be for your children.

Some of the most important discussions that I've had around any of the tables that I've been privileged to be part of is with young parents because these people have an incredibly vested interest in how this province is going to play out for their kids, what kind of debt we're going to leave for them, what kind of mess is possible, or how do we clean it up and make it better. Those are the kinds of things that have to motivate any of us that move forward, regardless of your gender, but if you're talking about barriers, we're actually making changes to this legislation. The NDP actually started on this legislation and started some good things. We're just taking it to that next level to make sure that that playing field is level.

8:00

If you think about it, you know, there are 19 municipalities in Alberta that are classified as cities, and only two cities currently have women mayors. Many cities have fewer than 50 per cent women as councillors. The fundamental question of why actually doesn't just come to the barrier of being women, but it actually talks about the incumbency of the people that are there already.

The other statistic that we don't look at is how long the same person has run over and over again and how many times they've gotten voted back in again because nobody shows up to vote. What is our percentage in municipal? Like, 35 per cent, I think, max, right? In the last provincial election we had almost 70 per cent. Why is that? Well, because of the motivation and the desire to get out and door-knock and the reason to be able to fight an incumbent, right? But there's a much more level playing field there.

The previous speaker had spoken about: only rich people can buy into this. This actually changes that. A person can actually support themselves in an election, in this municipal election, to be able to go forward because they're not fighting against an incumbent with a war chest of \$50,000. Everybody can spend the same. I actually think that if there's a lack of ethnic diversity and gender diversity in councils, how do we end up leveling that playing field? Well, that's exactly what we're doing, and I really don't understand how this can be interpreted as anything more than that.

For the good people, regardless of gender, who are running, who care deeply about this province: we all think about those important things, about how it is that we reflect people. We have an incredibly gender-diverse and ethnically diverse caucus on this side. It's a beautiful tapestry, very, very reflective, I think, of what our province looks like. One of the things I'm so proud of is this little family that we have here of all these different backgrounds and faiths and ethnic backgrounds. I learn so much from people in this House. It's a truly humble, humble position for me, and I would never take that for granted. I think that if you look at elections with that level of humility, through that lens, you can see that this is actually what this legislation is doing. It's actually bringing it back to the people.

If we're looking at barriers to entry and what the member was mentioning about what Ask Her YYC and Parity YEG were talking about, I would think that those organizations would see this as a wonderful opportunity to have more women run, and these are really great organizations. I believe, actually, the Minister of Children's Services is also a mentor along with others. That is amazing, and, you know, it's wonderful to actually speak with her and also the members, various people from all different ideologies, in this House that speak to women about running. What a magnificent thing.

One of the things that we always talk about, too, is making sure that we have people that will go out and monetarily support folks of diverse gender backgrounds, of diverse ethnicity who are running. Really, really wonderful things. You can see that the world is going in this direction, that there is this desire to – on this side of the House there was so much opportunity. I think we had – what? – 300 candidates running, I believe, for the nominations, something along that line, with every background possible.

I kept meeting all of these. Actually, I remember that the Premier, the leader at that time, came up to me and said, "Your job is to get more women to run." That's what he told me. I said to him, "Well, how would you like to do that?" He goes, "I'm going to help you. We're going to do this together," and then we ended up with all these incredible women running. In fact, some of them ran such rock-star campaigns. Like, I've never seen anything like it. This is

my second time going into an election. I can point out several campaigns in here.

Actually, the Member for Banff-Kananaskis came over to my house one day. I used to call her fierce. She had actually worn a hole in her running shoes from her campaign because she has one of the biggest ridings in the province, mountains end to end in the riding. Fierce is what I would call her, absolutely amazing and fierce, and she was really, really committed to making sure that every single person's house was knocked at.

I think that the member went at least twice to certain... [interjection] Three times, yeah. I remember seeing her running shoes. She came out to my house. I thought I door-knocked a lot; nothing compares to the MLA for Banff-Kananaskis. She earned that seat. She earned that election. It was such a privilege to be with her during the nomination as well, too, when she won that thing. It was wonderful. I was just so proud. It's one of those moments when you feel very lucky to be at the beginning of a person's career and see how far they've come.

She did that because of the leader's faith in her, because of all of the officials that you see here now that ran equally strong campaigns, the men and women that gathered around her to make sure that her campaign was successful not just in money but in support and energy and faith in her ability to do her job.

I think that when we're talking about the financial footing, I would suggest that Ask Her YYC and Parity YEG would see this as a humongous opportunity to make sure that whatever barriers we see, perceived or otherwise, they become a thing of the past, that competency, strength of character, desire to work hard, all of these other things that we see in so many members of this House regardless of what side we sit on, they really define the reasons that we're here.

Again, I say this with extreme humility because any of us – any of us – at any time could see that this could be the last time that we're here. None of us has a guaranteed job here. It's one of the most wonderful things about this job. You are held accountable, and at any time and even within your own party, depending on what party, you could be kicked out by another member from your own party who wants to come in and take your... [interjection] Yeah. If you have nominations, that is.

We had very, very competitive nominations. I think that probably – and I'll just speak to the ladies on this side. I think every one of you ladies can probably stand up and talk about the competition during your nominations, right? It was something else. Something else. But once that happened and that nomination was done, we all rallied behind each other, and it was this amazing family that came together, even before the election, when we were just campaigning, regardless of how you got to your nomination. They are some of my most favourite stories, and I hold them very dear. It's one of those things that inspires me every day to continue on what I would consider sometimes the insanity of my being here in the first place.

The truth is that you have to want it so badly. So how do we inspire that? That's the question, I think, fundamentally. How do you inspire that desire that goes beyond fear and concern or the idea of intimidation or all these other things? Those are the questions that we need to ask.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. minister.

Are there any hon. members looking to join debate? I see the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo has risen.

Member Ceci: Yes. Not with regard to 29(2)(a), but I have an amendment I'd like to put.

The Deputy Chair: Sorry?

Member Ceci: I have an amendment that I'd like to put at this time.

The Deputy Chair: Sure. So you're speaking to Bill 29 right now?

Member Ceci: That's right.

The Deputy Chair: And it sounds like you want to put together an amendment. Absolutely.

Member Ceci: Okay. I'll hand this over.

The Deputy Chair: Just give me one second.

If the hon. member could please read it in for the benefit of *Hansard* and then continue with his comments. You have 19 minutes still.

Member Ceci: Okay. Thank you very much. I'm submitting an amendment. Member Ceci to move that Bill 29, Local Authorities Election Amendment Act, 2020...

The Deputy Chair: The Member for Calgary-Buffalo is moving this amendment.

Member Ceci: Oh. I apologize. Yeah. The Member for Calgary Buffalo moves that Bill 29, Local Authorities Election Amendment Act, 2020, be amended in section 15(a)(ii). That's on page 6, colleagues. It reads (a) in the proposed section 147.2(3)(a) by striking out "to any candidate for election as a councillor" and substituting "in the aggregate to candidates for election as councillors." The subsequent part of that amendment reads: (b) in the proposed section 147.2(3)(b) by striking out "to any candidate for election as a school board trustee" and substituting "in the aggregate to candidates for election as school board trustees."

8:10

The explanatory notes are on page 6 with regard to how this amendment has changed the current Local Authorities Election Act. Colleagues, if it's not clear, I'll just state that I would put this amendment because this would allow individuals in Alberta to contribute up to \$5,000 total, or in aggregate, to candidates for school board and candidates for local elections. As it reads now, the proposal in Bill 29 would allow individuals to contribute up to \$5,000 to as many candidates as they want in the province. I'll just underline that again: to as many candidates as they want to contribute \$5,000 to. That's what they can do with regard to the current proposal before us in Bill 29, not only for local council positions throughout the province but for school board positions as well.

I know that it's a hypothetical, but I'll pose it anyway because it could happen. I imagine it could happen. An individual could provide an unlimited amount to as many unlimited candidates in unlimited jurisdictions. Just to be clear, I think there are somewhere over 342 local councils in this province. There are far fewer, of course, school boards. An individual with deep pockets could support, hypothetically, 200 candidates at the local elections throughout the province at the councils and as many at the local school boards if they wished. They could infuse local elections with a million dollars of their own money, and it would be totally legal in this province. That will obviously have real consequences in smaller jurisdictions throughout this province because the amounts that council members in some places run on could be several hundred dollars or a couple of thousand dollars, but obviously a person who is interested in influencing an election could put \$5,000 behind a candidate and blow all the other candidates away.

The amendment I'm putting forward is to see \$5,000 in aggregate to candidates for election as councillors and school board trustees. I just want to remind people in the Chamber tonight that both the AUMA and the RMA have principles identified on their websites with regard to how they want to see the Local Authorities Election Amendment Act addressing their local elections. They both – at least the AUMA, for sure, and, I think, the RMA, too; I remember reading it a couple of weeks ago – have said that they're interested in amendments coming forward to deal with the principles so that the act lines up with the principles that they've identified.

I'd submit that the \$5,000 per candidate for as many candidates as you wish to donate to, either at the local elections or the school board levels, does not – does not – meet the principles that the AUMA and the RMA have identified. I'd be really interested afterwards if the minister could rise and speak to amendments that would line up Bill 29 with the hopes and wishes of the RMA and the AUMA, as they've identified.

The other thing that I wanted to say is that one of the principles there is that local elections should focus on local issues and not be about power in our province. Clearly, significant contributions across this province from a source or several sources working together is about power and takes away from the local issues that councillors run on, councillors speak to and know best at their local level.

We've heard from stakeholders. I've heard from stakeholders – many are rural – that see the proposed changes to the donation limits as a challenge – and I mentioned that – to their local elections. They aren't speaking because they're incumbents; they're speaking because they're concerned with the changes to the rules. Fundraising has always been, at the local level, about creating and maintaining relationships in our communities.

I heard the previous speaker from Chestermere-Strathmore talk about relationship building and how important that is. I can speak from experience that donors who came onboard with my first election, in '95, for city council stuck with me over the years, and I obviously benefited from their trust and their placing support in me, but I think they benefited by my hard work as a councillor and my efforts to represent people in my riding and do the best job possible. That's reflected in the fact that Calgary – and I mentioned this in the chambers before – was voted the best city in Canada for many years running during the time that I was sitting on council.

I can remember the Member for Calgary-Montrose's father saying at many celebrations or ribbon cuttings we were at together that Canada was the best country in the world and Alberta was the best province in the country, and he would proudly say that Calgary was the best city in the province. He said that over and over and over again during his – I'm sure it was – 20-some years of representing the people of the riding that he represented, which was in east Calgary.

Anyway, the focus has always been on local issues at the local level, and I believe that changing it with regard to the proposal in Bill 29 will defocus it from the local issues and make it about more systemic issues in this province, which I don't think will necessarily benefit the province. The changes aren't adopted in terms of a \$5,000 aggregate limit. For instance, 10 people with \$25,000 can pool their money, support candidates perhaps for mayors in Red Deer, in Medicine Hat, in Lac La Biche, in Grande Prairie, and they can give them all \$25,000. It's absolutely going to change the way elections take place at the mayoralty level as well as on council.

The proposed legislation will drastically change things in this province. In B.C. they have local contribution limits of \$1,200 per donor, and that's an aggregate amount. In Ontario the individual limit is \$1,200 to any one candidate, but there is an aggregate of \$5,000 from any donor in that election. Raising the limit and

allowing for unlimited contributions, like I've suggested, absolutely will, as I say, put a change in this province's local, municipal, and school board elections which won't be for the better. I don't think they benefit Albertans; as I'm trying to suggest, I think they benefit people who would try and move some sort of agenda. For instance, you know, with \$5,000 a person can get into a campaign for the sole purpose of working against perhaps the incumbent or perhaps a front-runner in the race. We've seen that before in this province at the provincial level, and it's not something we want to see recreated at the local level. Kamikaze campaigns have no place in this province.

8:20

I've kept the \$5,000 aggregate contribution because I don't see that as horribly different than the \$4,000 that was there before, but it does limit the number of candidates one person can support because if they want some meaningful support to go behind candidates, the aggregate of \$5,000 has to be split up. I do believe that this does level the playing field, particularly in rural Alberta, to ensure that those elections are won on values and not access, as I said, to – for instance, in Grande Prairie, a municipal election there typically is in the couple of thousand dollars range. A \$5,000 amount of money to as many candidates in Grande Prairie as you want to support will absolutely alter elections in that community so that they won't be the same ever again.

I do want to touch on consultations with municipalities – that was mentioned by the previous speaker – and say that in my consultations with municipalities, they're not thrilled with this "as many people as you want to support, you can support up to \$5,000," so I sincerely hope there'll be amendments coming forward in that regard.

There are things in this bill, of course, that are worth supporting, and the inability to accumulate monies, donations and build those up over time is a good thing. I think that that alone will assist in levelling the playing field between newcomers and people who are running for the second or third or fourth time who are in the position.

I just want to say around incumbency that my experience has been that there have been challenges in Calgary, in particular, and I heard the minister talk about: I think it was three in the last 10 years. But if you go back further than that, there are many sitting aldermen who have lost their seats over particular issues in those ridings or those wards. In the first election I was in, I was in an open ward, but there were two incumbents who lost out to challengers who weren't known to any great degree. People judged those aldermen, they were called at the time, on their merits, and they lost their elections. You know, it's not something that – and it happened repeated times over the course of my tenure there. I do want to say that that goes on. I believe that incumbents who address the needs of their ward are good in that regard, do get reelected, or they do get re-elected.

The other thing I wanted to say about incumbency is that the thing that really increased the number of, percentage of people coming to the polls in municipal elections was, in my experience, the openness of a mayoralty race. If there was an open race for mayor, you saw the percentage of voter turnout kick up 10 or 15 per cent from where it was previously running. Sometimes it was around 30 per cent for municipal elections, but when it was a mayor's election, it really ignited the interest of people in the community and got them out to the polls to vote for who they wanted to see as mayor. That's a really big thing in getting people to polls, open races for the mayor and, obviously, open races for wards, too, but not as much as the mayor.

I'm not of the view that we can see \$5,000 contributions – and it shouldn't say "any candidate." It should say "as many candidates

as you can afford,” but it does say “any candidate for election as a councillor” and city trustee. Like, I’m almost flabbergasted that we would be going in that direction because I think it lends itself to difficulty, and the difficulty is that you’ll get people working to put together slates or put together issues across the province that really have nothing to do with local elections. The local councillors focusing on local elections will then have to deal with – and I’m not even sure what those issues might be. They might be something that takes councils in a totally different direction than they’ve usually been in with regard to addressing the needs of their local citizenry.

I think there’s good sense in this amendment, and I certainly hope all of you look at it with the view that we want to keep local elections just that way and have people in local towns, cities, counties, and summer villages focus on the candidate and the issues they’re bringing to address the concerns of their local communities. I’m not saying that a \$5,000 contribution to a candidate in Grande Prairie will suddenly turn the scales, but I’m saying that it’s something that puts a totally different look and questions why those candidates are dealing with somebody in Calgary who wants to give them a contribution in Grande Prairie. Like, what business is it of the person in Calgary around a Grande Prairie local election? Perhaps people have views about that, and they think that it is their business in Calgary to be influencing Lac La Biche’s election, but I certainly don’t understand the reason you would get involved with a location election aside from some of the earlier comments I made.

Mr. Chair, those are my concerns and my amendment, that’s before you, and I certainly hope to hear more debate about this well-reasoned amendment. Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

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

Mr. Madu: Thank you, Mr. Chair. It is an honour for me to be able to speak to the amendment put forward by the Member for Calgary-Buffalo but also to speak broadly about Bill 29, the Local Authorities Election Amendment Act, 2020. You know, I fully support the changes that Bill 29 makes, and many other Albertans do as well. All Albertans understand the need for fair and democratic elections in our province. Unfortunately, we have seen levels of voter participation erode in our local elections, suggesting that voters have lost confidence in the democratic process at the local level, something that should concern all of us. What should be the closest level of politics to our citizens has become something that they have somehow given up on.

There are many reasons for this, though, not the least of which is the enormous advantage that incumbents have over political newcomers. Mr. Chair, I think this is an issue that I can fairly speak on. As many of you in this House know, up until 2019 I wasn’t a known household name in the political environment. But, you know, Bill 29’s main goal is actually to make sure that those folks who have been disadvantaged from being able to participate in elections have the ground levelled for them so that our local elections can be fair, democratic, meaningful, and competitive.

8:30

Mr. Chair, I have been paying attention, obviously, to some of the debate in this House since the introduction of Bill 29. The members opposite have raised many concerns about Bill 29, one of them being the amendment in Bill 29 that will allow donors to contribute \$5,000 per candidate across our province.

You know, Mr. Chair, on June 24 I believe it was the Member for Calgary-Buffalo who wrote a tweet about Bill 29 and said, “Big money, dark money, American style super PACs, less transparency, did I mention big, dark money?” That was a tweet by the Member

for Calgary-Buffalo. We can agree that this wasn’t an eloquent critique, but it was a critique nonetheless.

A lot of concern has been raised about how this legislation would introduce money into our local elections, which is at the heart of the amendment that the Member for Calgary-Buffalo has put forward. But the fact remains, Mr. Chair, that elections cost money unless, of course, you believe they should be publicly financed, which some have suggested. But this bill isn’t anything close to the allegations that have been made by the members opposite and certainly by the Member for Calgary-Buffalo, that this opens the floodgate to big money. Nothing can be further from the truth.

Under the current system, to be clear, donors can give up to a maximum of \$4,000 to a candidate of their choice. Under our proposed changes they can give up to a maximum of \$5,000 to a candidate of their choice, but they can also give up to a maximum of \$5,000 to other candidates if they so choose. You know, Mr. Chair, as someone who is new to politics, who ran in Edmonton-South West, who took on the NDP established candidate, took on former members of the Legislature in nomination, as I was saying before, my interest is to make sure that folks like myself – newcomers, women, folks from various diverse groups – have the chance to take on the established candidates, the unions.

You know, Mr. Chair, just to be clear, in the southwest, in the northern part of the southwest, I encountered big money in my own constituency. There were certain neighbourhoods where you go to, and on the street you have the union members open up their homes. The Member for Edmonton-Glenora: I encountered her several times in the north part of my constituency, the Hamptons, with their union members. They open up their homes to campaign.

This bill, Mr. Chair: in fact, its intent is to provide fundraising flexibility because in the end we legislate for the people. We do not legislate for the big unions. We legislate to make sure that the ordinary people have the ability to participate in our democratic process. You know, in Calgary Mayor Nenshi’s 2017 campaign period the revenue was almost \$650,000, and Edmonton Mayor Don Iveson’s campaign in 2017 had a budget of just under \$400,000, but we never hear the NDP talk about any of these things. They talk about big money, but I challenge them to show me where any of them took to Twitter or the media to complain about these hundreds of thousands of dollars by some of our municipal leaders in the previous elections.

Mr. Chair, having a system of fundraising that only benefits established, well-connected candidates or incumbents does a great deal of disservice to political newcomers. If that is the goal of the members opposite, that we can agree with. The question is: how do we achieve that goal? How do we accomplish that purpose, to ensure that newcomers are not wiped out by a well-oiled, established candidate with a war chest, household names who can fund raise as easy as possible?

Mr. Chair, we have also had concerns about moving the disclosure due date until after elections are over. I want to be clear that there is no other jurisdiction in Canada that mandates early disclosure for local elections, and neither was it the case before 2018. This was a change made by the NDP in 2018. Up until then, again, I have gone through the records of most of the critics of this particular bill to see whether or not prior to 2018 they were on record, and I couldn’t find anything. But what is important is that there is no municipal jurisdiction in this country with that requirement, and the question there for the members opposite is: why all of a sudden in 2018 did it become a problem?

You know, as far as I know, Mr. Chair, this change remains consistent with the members opposite, what they are already doing. Each and every one of us here in the provincial election gets the opportunity to make our financial disclosures post the election. That

is consistent with, you know, virtually every other jurisdiction in this country.

We have also heard from the members opposite about concerns with respect to increasing diversity on councils, something that I share with the members opposite, and how these proposed changes in Bill 29 would make that impossible. Again, I want to be clear. I fully support taking steps to increase the representation of people of colour and women on councils across our province, and that's why we are talking about this legislation today, legislation that would make it easier for political newcomers to raise money and run their campaigns with less red tape and to challenge a seasoned incumbent for office.

As I said, you know, Mr. Chair, we must remember that in this province we have to do everything we can to encourage diversity in our councils, in this Legislature, and that's why I am proud of my colleagues. You know, when we ran in 2019, we had a lot of women, as my colleague the Minister of Culture, Multiculturalism and Status of Women earlier alluded to. We had strong, principled women seek out nomination in 2019. We had in Edmonton-Glenora Marjorie Newman. We had in Edmonton-Rutherford Hannah Presakarchuk. We had in Edmonton-McClung Laurie Mozeson. We had in Edmonton-West Henday Nicole Williams. We had in Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood Leila Houle. We also had in Edmonton-South another friend of mine, Tunde Obasan. On this side of the House we have a culture of encouraging women and folks like myself to participate in the democratic process, and that is something that I want to deepen. That's something I want to encourage.

8:40

This bill is something I have reflected a lot upon, and I've asked myself: what were some of the things that allowed me in Edmonton-South West to compete in a nomination against folks who were well known in the political side? For those who don't know, my opponent from the NDP spent 22 years with the CBC and was a senior adviser to the then Premier and the former Minister of Transportation, Brian Mason. So the members opposite poured all of their resources in Edmonton-South West, and I reflected and asked myself: what was it that I did that was helpful? I've tried to ensure that those things are reflected in this bill, you know, so that when the unions out there pour out their dark money, as the Member for Calgary-Buffalo would like to say, that particular candidate that doesn't have the support of that dark money is able to solicit \$5 here and there across our province. It doesn't have to be \$5,000. It doesn't have to be \$2,000.

But that flexibility – you know, I had friends from Grande Prairie, from Westlock, from Wood Buffalo, from Calgary, from Edmonton, from rural Alberta send in 5 bucks, \$10, 20 bucks. Take a look. Go to Elections Alberta. Take a look at my disclosure. Take a look at where the money comes from across our province. It made a lot of difference. It made a lot of difference across our province. So if the goal is for diversity, we must provide the flexibility for folks like myself to go after the big money that the Member for Calgary-Buffalo is talking about.

Mr. Chair, while I hope to see more women represented on council, many women who possess strong free-market values and ideals have been successful, and I'm thinking about the mayor of Red Deer, Tara Veer; the mayor of Whitecourt, Maryann Chichak; Edmonton city councillor Bev Esslinger; and Wheatland county reeve Amber Link. Some good women candidates have been successful. These changes will make it easier for even more to have a good chance of becoming successful, and I don't want us to ever lose sight of that.

Another change that I think will be very helpful to folks like myself and for diversity in our municipal elections is what I have proposed, which is to eliminate the ability of incumbents to carry large war chests over from election to election. This is something that the members opposite, while they were in office, had the opportunity to have done, but they did not do that. They made a change in 2018. Now, if their concern was to level the ground, if that is truly their intent, if their concern was to attract folks from various backgrounds, the number one thing they could have done in the changes that they made in 2019 was to ensure that incumbents don't have that massed war chest. But they didn't do that, and that speaks volumes. That tells everything you need to know about the motivation for the members opposite. The right thing, I think, that they should have done was to make sure that there was flexibility for folks to be able to raise money and remove a lot of administrative bottleneck so that those folks that they are concerned about have the opportunity to focus on their campaigns. They didn't do any of those things. None of those things did they do. None. That tells you that all of their interests boil down to legislating for their big union friends.

You know, again, Mr. Chair, I am very disappointed that the NDP Member for Calgary-Buffalo, who is supposed to be my critic on this particular file, who declared this legislation to be a windfall for big money, opposes this Bill 29. After all, he called Bill 29 – and never had that bill been debated before on the floor of this particular House – bad for Alberta and bad for the people of Alberta. This shows that this member, who is my critic in the Chamber, isn't at all interested in getting this right.

Listen, I know that the Member for Calgary-Buffalo means well, you know, when he says that he is interested in making sure that we level the ground, but the difficulty that I've always had with the NDP is that oftentimes they say some of the things that you would want to hear. I have said that talk is the easiest thing to do. Action is a more difficult thing to do. I have heard them in this Chamber. I have sat here for the last one-and-a-half years and listened to each and every one of them. I will give it to them: they like to talk about the things that ordinary folks can follow. But when it comes to doing those same things, it's a different question entirely. I will use the example of carbon as a particular example. Beginning from 2015 to 2016, '17, '18...

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. minister.

I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-City Centre has risen.

Mr. Shepherd: Well, thank you, Mr. Chair. I appreciate the opportunity to rise and speak to Bill 29 and the amendment in front of us looking to change from \$5,000 per as many candidates as the individual wishes to \$5,000 in aggregate. Now, I appreciate the debate I've heard so far from members of the government this evening. Indeed, I know that the Minister of Municipal Affairs means well when he says that he wants to level the ground and level the playing field. Indeed, sometimes members of the government say some of the things that people want to hear, but as the minister said, actions speak louder than words. Now, I appreciate that the minister may in fact feel that this bill he has brought forward and the actions that he has taken are doing the right thing and that this, in fact, is the way to increase diversity, to make it more challenging for incumbents, but in my view I think – I apologize; that's the minister's view, but I have to disagree.

Now, I begin by talking about the fact that we heard the Minister of Culture, Multiculturalism and Status of Women talking earlier about the need to make things more challenging for incumbents, that you can't have too many incumbents, that we've got to make sure that we don't have folks sitting in office for too long. The

Minister of Municipal Affairs has talked about this several times, too, in the media and again here in the House. I would note that their leader, the Premier, first ran for office in 1997. He ran in seven consecutive elections as an incumbent, holding a seat as an MP, serving as a cabinet minister, a parliamentary secretary, and sitting in opposition.

8:50

The thing is, Mr. Chair, it's not that the government is concerned about incumbents. They're concerned about incumbents that don't agree with them or that they don't like. That's why we keep hearing them talk about Mayor Nenshi. They cannot stand the fact that Calgary has had a progressive mayor. That's why they complained about some councillors on Calgary city council. That's why they choose to meet with only particular councillors sometimes when they're there, only the conservative ones.

Let's be clear. This bill is not about some idealistic view that we want to lower incumbency, because that is indeed not the legacy of Conservative governments in this province. What did we see when Conservatives had the opportunity to decide the playing field for funding in this province and for political fundraising? We saw no efforts to try to level that playing field for 44 years, Mr. Chair, way back when individuals were able to contribute \$15,000 in a nonelection year, an additional \$15,000, a total of \$30,000, during an election year. No effort from the Conservatives in this province to level that playing field, to make it easier for incumbents to be beaten.

Now, I appreciate what the minister was talking about. I, too, beat an incumbent, someone who had held the seat for 18 years. I didn't expect to win, but I had that opportunity, and I've been thankful for it. Then I had the position of being the incumbent in 2019. Those tables turn very quickly, Mr. Chair. What we choose to do in the time that we're in office and in between – as the minister said, actions do speak louder than words.

Now, the minister was also speaking about how this bill makes it easier for newcomers to raise money with less red tape. He talked about how this was going to increase diversity, and he gave an example, saying: well, with this bill, now friends from across the province could donate to support his campaign. Indeed, that's a laudable thing, Mr. Chair. I've had the opportunity to do some fundraising across the province, too. That is a helpful thing, and it was perfectly possible before this bill was introduced. This bill does nothing to change that other than raising the amount of money that could be donated. It was perfectly possible for a candidate, any candidate, to solicit donations from their friend in Grande Prairie or from Calgary or Medicine Hat or here in Edmonton before this bill was introduced. However, there were limits on the amount of that money.

Let's be clear, Mr. Chair. Money does not equal democracy. As I said, we saw under previous Conservative governments where Alberta was the Wild West for political donations. Corporations, unions, everybody could donate. Limits were sky-high, party spending was sky-high, and we got the same party in government for 44 years, multiple incumbent MLAs serving in their seats for years. It was considered a legacy. You want to talk about people feeling discouraged about participating in the political process in the province of Alberta? That's what it was like in the waning years of the PC legacy here in the province of Alberta. That's one of the reasons I got involved, because people felt so hopeless and discouraged and felt that there was no possible way they could unseat that government, in part because of the deep pockets and the corporate friends and all of the people who were pouring money into that party and their political campaigns.

Money does not equal democracy. Money does not equal opportunity. Money is not the great leveller of the playing field, at least not endless amounts of it. In my view, Mr. Chair, having reasonable limits on the amount that can be raised, the amount that can be spent, amounts that are attainable by all individuals, whether they have corporate friends with deep pockets or the support of a union or whatever, that is what levels the playing field, particularly in our municipal politics, which is the most basic level, which in Alberta generally has been free of party politics and party interference. Now, let's be clear. I'm not naive. I'm well aware that there have been municipal candidates at multiple levels in multiple jurisdictions who have been supported by one party or another, and certainly people have drifted between provincial and municipal politics. But in general municipal politics has been more free of partisan politics.

What we have in this bill is trying to open those floodgates again to allow those who have the deepest pockets, who have the most money, to have more influence. Sure, it could be anybody, I suppose, from any background who might have those friends, who might get the blessing of the corporate donors or the friends of the government or the friends of the UCP, the kinds of people that contributed to the shaping Alberta PAC or perhaps Merit Contractors, maybe some of the folks from the used car association of Alberta. Those folks were there, too, through you, Mr. Chair, to the Minister of Municipal Affairs. A few people opening up their homes to hold a political fundraiser is not dark money. Don't try to tell me that there were no businesspeople doing exactly the same thing in support of this member. Let's not be naive here.

What I see when I look at this bill is this government trying to set themselves up to put the thumb on the scale in the next election for the kind of kamikaze campaign we saw, that co-ordination between the Premier's leadership campaign and Mr. Jeff Callaway's, a well-documented one. This bill basically sets up the opportunity for that to happen in any race, with any candidate, any mayoral race across the province of Alberta by saying that anyone can donate \$5,000 to as many candidates as they want. Those that can afford to donate to multiple political campaigns, which I can tell you is not many Albertans, Mr. Chair – it isn't me – they get to wield more influence and more democracy.

And let's talk about third-party advertising, Mr. Chair, ripping the cap off that as well, a significant increase in the amounts that can be spent and can be put in. Again, putting in more money does not equal more democracy. It does not equal a more level playing field. Reasonable limits on spending do that because that keeps it within the grasp of everyone. As I was saying, municipal politics is the closest to the ground, the most available opportunity for individuals to get involved in their democracy, and what I see this government doing is trying to make it more like the PC days of old, more like the provincial level. That is where people are getting jaded and turned off.

If this government, if this minister truly wants people to feel more engaged, then lower the bar, make it easier, and take the big influence out. These members have been talking about, you know, their door-knocking and their community engagement. Indeed, I did that, too, Mr. Chair. That's why I got involved in this, because I was tired of people feeling that politicians did not listen to them, that there was no point in getting engaged because they could not make a difference because they didn't have the kind of money and influence that friends of the government did.

9:00

I'll tell you, Mr. Chair, that having higher donation limits in 2015 would not have made it easier for me to run, because I didn't have those connections. I'd been a party member for less than six

months. If you want to get more people engaged, if you want to get a wider diversity of people involved and able to run, then make the money less important. That is why Parity YEG spoke up and why they wrote and why they made their submission. I think we can trust them to know what they're talking about. I have not heard a single group devoted to diversity and expanding engagement and opportunity in this province speak in favour of this bill. Not one. I invite government members to correct me if I'm wrong.

I think many of these members, Mr. Chair, know exactly what they're doing. They can stand and they can make excuses, and perhaps they can even convince themselves that "this is the right thing to do because we need to get more of the right people in charge, like we are," but it doesn't mean that what they're doing is right. It certainly does not mean that this is going to do anything to improve democracy in the province of Alberta. Indeed, I'm quite convinced it'll be absolutely the opposite.

But, hey, this government has the majority. They have the ability to push this legislation through, and I suppose we will see in the election next year – of course, we won't see until the election is actually done because they're taking away the transparency. That's red tape, Mr. Chair. Let me tell you that that does not encourage diversity or more engagement. I can tell you that your average Albertan would probably like to know a lot more about who is donating to a particular candidate before they vote for them than afterwards. Seeing someone getting into office and then finding afterwards that they were supported by a bunch of corporate interests or a bunch of individuals who have way more money and influence than you: there is something that's going to give you a jaded voter and turn people off from voting and convince people that they don't want to be involved in the democratic process. That is the cynical decision that this government is making.

I truly hope that this minister and this government truly believe what they're saying and that they are just badly mistaken. I do not have that trust in this Premier, not after we've seen how he operates and how he runs his elections and how he runs his campaigns. But I suppose we will see next year, Mr. Chair, what kind of democracy, what kind of action the results of the actions of this government will take, and then I suppose we'll see their true intent.

Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: I see the hon. Government House Leader has risen.

Mr. Jason Nixon: Well, thank you, Mr. Chair, for the opportunity to rise on this important piece of legislation. It's my privilege to be able to speak to it. I certainly support it. I do not support NDP amendments that are coming forward on this legislation today, but I did listen with interest to the hon. Member for Edmonton-City Centre's comments this evening.

I found quite shocking some of the things that he had to say, particularly the fact that he continues to gloss over the NDP's role when it comes to dark money in politics. As well, that hon. member was a member of the previous NDP government, the government that, of course, was fired by Albertans just over a year ago, but some of the new colleagues, on both sides of the aisle, that are in the Chamber won't know some of the things that took place in the 29th Legislature, when election laws were handled by the former NDP government.

The former NDP government, Mr. Chair – you, of course, were not a member of the 29th Legislature, so you would not have seen it, but one of the standing jokes would be: what is the electoral reform bill of this session from the NDP? Every legislative session they would bring in an election reform bill, and then they would come to the next session and have to bring in another bill to try to

fix the mistakes that they'd made in the last bill or in a couple of the bills along the way where they tried to stop the hon. the Premier from uniting the conservative movement or being able to bring together the largest provincial political party in Canadian history, which ultimately, of course, was the demise of the NDP. They would bring in a bill every time to try to stop the process.

But most famously, when they started, Mr. Chair, their very first bill was around when we all voted to get rid of big money in politics. It was supported by the legacy Wildrose Party and by the legacy Progressive Conservative Party inside this Chamber as well as by the NDP Party, and it was done by an all-party committee. I happened to be a member of that committee, that worked over a summer to be able to come up with the reforms that we saw around donations that would ultimately fit within that legislation.

Unfortunately, though, Mr. Chair, the NDP at the time spent the entire summer in that committee attempting to get motions passed to get them to the Chamber floor to get taxpayers to pay for their campaign expenses. That was their focus at the time. They wanted to get taxpayer-subsidized campaign expenses for the NDP. Nothing bigger, no bigger money in politics than government money in politics, and of course the opposition fought tooth and nail and managed to convince the NDP that they should not do that. I suspect it was the backlash that was happening all across Alberta about the idea of them having big money in politics; i.e., taking taxpayer dollars to pay for their campaign expenses. Now, it was shocking.

I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-Whitemud smiling. She probably really wished that they'd gotten that passed. It would have been a little easier, probably, to fund raise in Edmonton-Whitemud if you're an NDP candidate if you had the taxpayers paying for your expenses. But they did not.

Now, what they did do was that they left loopholes to make sure that their NDP union friends – I had the interesting experience of having to be an observer once at an NDP convention a couple of years ago. I and a couple of staff had to be assigned to do that. They do the convention a little differently than we do it. It was interesting. They put their observers kind of in the middle of the room, not quite in the middle but about three-quarters of the way up, and they surround you by a rope. For those of you in the Chamber who know him – he's not going to be happy that I put his name in the *Hansard* tonight, but I'll do it – it was Matt Wolf and my press secretary and me who snuck into the NDP convention. It was interesting. We enjoyed it. They were very good to us, but they kept us in behind a rope. We do let the NDP observers move outside of the rope, but we're just different.

It was shocking, Mr. Chair, that the entire place was union representatives. I'd never seen anything like that in my life. I'd heard stories of what it was like. I knew the legal structure of the NDP Party, because I've spoken about it in this Chamber many times, the fact that they're the same party as the federal party legally. They're connected one hundred per cent, the same organization, and guys like Gil McGowan have automatic seats on the board. I mean, individuals who call Christian and other religious families who want to send their kids to religious schools nutbars: they have automatic seats there. But to see it with your own eyes, to see it just packed with union representatives, you knew within minutes who was in charge inside that assembly. It was the unions, and that's the big money that the NDP continued bill after bill after bill to keep in politics.

In fact, that committee, which was struck at the beginning of the 29th Legislature and dealt with election issues like we're talking about today, actually voted unanimously, including NDP members – and there were a lot of different members, Mr. Chair. It's not like this Legislature, where we have the governing party and the

opposition party. Back then we had multiple parties inside the Chamber at different times during the 29th Legislature. I think we had four or five different parties inside this Chamber, but every one of those parties' representatives on that all-party committee voted to deal with PACs. They voted to deal with PACs. In fact, they sent a recommendation to the Chamber and to the government of the day to deal with PACs, and the NDP chose to ignore that recommendation, to shut down that committee for doing their work. They even shut down their own committee members who voted for it to block them from dealing with PACs.

Now, why was that, Mr. Chair? Well, as we've seen already with some of the things that are on the record in this Chamber – I won't get into them today – it shows the fact that the big unions continue to put millions of dollars into the political system to support their NDP friends. Now, did it work? Outside of Edmonton it certainly did not work. We already knew that, though, which is why, I've got to tell you, we weren't too concerned about it, but it could have worked in a different environment, where the union could have been able to interfere with it. That's big money in politics. They don't really want to get big money out of politics. Otherwise, they would have dealt with it then.

But what's even more shocking is that that hon. member spent the entire time talking about provincial politics, and the piece of legislation that's before this House is municipal politics, not provincial politics. That hon. member referred to nominations. The NDP don't even have open nominations, as far as I'm aware. Their candidates can't fund raise for themselves. They have to fund raise through the central party, a socialist process. That's their process. Good for them.

9:10

Our party does things differently. We have open nominations – that's why we end up with great candidates – and we fund raise for ourselves inside our constituencies. We work with volunteers, and we build political operations inside our constituencies and create movements inside our constituencies. The NDP do it a different way, and that's okay. There's nothing wrong with that. That's having differences within the political system, you know. The NDP focus on rigged nominations and central control of the money it takes in. We do know about whipping all their votes. We have free votes.

There are differences with that party, but the reality is that this has nothing to do with the piece of legislation that the hon. the Minister of Municipal Affairs has brought forward in the Chamber. For 20 minutes – 20 minutes – you listened to that hon. member talk about provincial politics and not about the bill. You know why that is, Mr. Chair? It's because he has got no argument about the bill: the \$5,000, the donations, putting in rules to make sure that the donations will be handled appropriately and that we can have municipal elections. The reality is that the NDP just want to talk about anything except for the bill that's before the House, because they've got no argument against the bill that's before the House, which is why he spent 20 minutes talking about provincial elections.

I'm happy to talk about provincial elections, particularly the last one, where the NDP got fired by Albertans, and about the United Conservative Party, a party I'm proud to be a founding member of, in fact the lead negotiator for one side of the unity agreement that created that party. Happy to talk about that any time that you want to talk about that. It's a great memory for me, a great memory for many people inside this Chamber but has nothing to do with the hon. the Minister of Municipal Affairs' bill.

But that's all the Member for Edmonton-City Centre can talk about. That's all he can talk about because their approach, Mr. Chair

– and it's unfortunate that this is their approach because it does a disservice to the process. It does a disservice to their constituents. It does a disservice to Albertans because if they don't focus on the legislation and make sure that we can get it right – they have an important job, Mr. Chair. They are Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition. They are the Official Opposition in this Chamber. I know they struggle with it because they're still very angry with Albertans for firing them, and they don't trust Albertans. They're Team Angry, but we need them to get over that because we need them to help the Minister of Municipal Affairs get a good piece of legislation through this House. We're depending on them to do their job, but when they come into the Chamber and they spend their time talking about issues that have nothing to do with the legislation, it does it a disservice.

Mr. Chair, in closing, I will say this: congratulations, through you, to the hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs. If that's all the NDP can come up with, you must have brought a pretty good piece of legislation through the House, and I suspect that it will pass shortly, because from what I can tell, there are no concerns with it at all. If we're going to spend all our time talking about the NDP's old process from when they tried to manipulate provincial elections, that clearly means the Minister of Municipal Affairs' bill is excellent. I certainly hope everybody here will support him in that piece of legislation. I do hope that the NDP will take some time to actually read the legislation that they're debating in the House to understand and to know, in closing on this bill, that this bill is about municipal elections, not about provincial elections.

This bill is about municipal councillors and municipal politicians that will run in elections, not about provincial politicians and not about provincial elections. It's about municipal. There are no nominations in municipal elections, so I'm not sure why we would talk about that here, but one day I'd be happy to talk about the process the NDP did to try to derail nominations, Mr. Chair. But as you can see from the great colleagues that I have with me now inside the Legislature, it didn't work. They weren't able to derail our nomination process, and we brought some of the best MLAs that have ever served inside this Chamber. I'm proud to be here with them.

Mr. Chair, I just want them to know that if they could take a few moments maybe to step back and look, they'll see it's a municipal election act, not a provincial election act. They should look at it to that effect because they'll be able to help the Minister of Municipal Affairs. Again, through you to him: a great job, because all the NDP can come up with is talking about an act that has nothing to do with this act. So I suggest, "Why don't we pass it?" because it seems they agree with it.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. minister.

I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-Whitemud has risen.

Ms Pancholi: Thank you, Mr. Chair. It's a pleasure to rise in Committee of the Whole on Bill 29, the Local Authorities Election Amendment Act, 2020. Now, I actually thought that I would have the opportunity to speak right after the Member for Edmonton-City Centre, and I was going to say that it's quite a daunting task to speak after the Member for Edmonton-City Centre because, as the members in this House know, he is a formidable debater, formidable communicator, and sometimes it can be quite intimidating to speak after such a persuasive and powerful speaker. Luckily, though, I don't have that concern because I got to speak right after the Government House Leader, and, considering that his debate skills are severely lacking, it's no problem at all. I don't feel daunted or intimidated at all to speak after the so-called hon. Government House Leader.

On that note, Mr. Chair . . .

Ms Glasgo: Point of order.

The Deputy Chair: I see a point of order has been called.
The hon. Member for Brooks-Medicine Hat.

Point of Order
Language Creating Disorder

Ms Glasgo: Yeah. Mr. Chair, on 29(h), (i), and (j). I know that the Member for Edmonton-Whitemud wouldn't honestly be doing this, but it seems to me that she's trying to create disorder with language like "the so-called hon. member," which is directly referring to the Member for Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre and the Government House Leader. I would expect that she would retract that, but I guess we'll see.

Ms Pancholi: I retract and apologize, Mr. Chair.

Debate Continued

Ms Pancholi: Mr. Chair, as I was saying, it is a pleasure to rise and speak after the hon. Government House Leader because certainly I already had a number of remarks that I hoped to make with respect to the amendment put forward by my colleague the Member for Calgary-Buffalo, but the Government House Leader and several of the government speakers, actually, have given me a lot more to comment on.

I'd like to begin just responding to a couple of the comments from the Government House Leader in particular. It was very entertaining, Mr. Chair, to hear him speak so spiritedly so early on in the evening – I'm sure he will get more spirited as the evening goes on – about his absolute shock and horror, and I don't even know exactly what he was referencing, but something about a party taking taxpayer money for partisan purposes.

Now, Mr. Chair, I'm just trying to think: do we have a more – I don't know – direct and recent example of that currently in this session? I do believe we do. In fact, although the government doesn't like to speak about it, I think Albertans are fully aware and Canadian taxpayers across the country are fully aware that they actually, through their taxpayer dollars, did support the United Conservative Party through the federal wage subsidy. They were very happy to take taxpayer dollars for their partisan purposes, so I'm not even sure what the Government House Leader was speaking to, but apparently it's something he's in support of, and apparently the entire government is in support of taking taxpayer dollars for partisan purposes. I don't think that Alberta taxpayers or Canadian taxpayers support that, and certainly we've seen lots of correspondence to that effect.

Also, it was interesting to hear the Government House Leader raise a number of times, apparently, when the NDP was in government that they made changes to the Election Act, you know, bringing it back a couple of times. Again, Mr. Chair, it's just been over a year since the current government was elected, and yet how many times has the Public Health Act come before this Legislature for amendment? In fact, we also have a committee reviewing it, but, of course, every time that the elections-related legislation was changed by the NDP was because there was consultation and discussion, and – guess what? – those changes to the legislation at the provincial level and, yes, at the municipal level made significant changes to level the playing field with respect to elections. I, again, don't see why the Government House Leader has any concerns with bringing legislation repeatedly before this House for amendment; his own government has done it a number of times already, and we're very early on in the session. So thank you.

I'm simply responding, Mr. Chair – I see a little bit of a question on your face – to the comments of the previous speaker.

But today I'd like to speak to the amendment – because, of course, it was brought forward with very thoughtful consideration – to Bill 29, the Local Authorities Election Amendment Act, 2020. It speaks to something that we have raised multiple times already, Mr. Chair, in this House. In fact, I had the opportunity to raise this concern already with respect to debate on Bill 29, and I'm doing it again because my colleague has brought forward a very thoughtful amendment to limit the total aggregate amount that an individual can make as a donation to a candidate in a local municipal election cycle.

Now, what's interesting, Mr. Chair, is that I think actually the government should be very much in support of this. This is simply saying what I actually heard the Minister of Transportation say repeatedly in Bill 29 debate – and I've seen a number of UCP staff circulate it on social media – about: "This is not such a big change in Bill 29. It's simply changing it from \$4,000 to \$5,000," and, "What's the big deal?"

9:20

Of course, what they don't talk about, Mr. Chair, is that the change in Bill 29 as it currently stands is not just changing it from \$4,000 to \$5,000 total that an individual can make in a donation in a year in a municipal election or a school board election, but actually it's about \$5,000 to an unlimited number of candidates in that year, so really it is actually an unlimited amount. They can donate to every candidate in every municipal election across the province if an individual would so seek, so it's actually a significant change. Not only that, of course, as you know, the change is also that they can make donations after election day as well, so an additional \$5,000.

So, really, despite the fact that we're not hearing a significant amount of defence of that provision of why it's necessary to significantly increase the amount of dollars that an individual can donate to a municipal or school board election in a campaign, it's – I assume the reason why we're not hearing a vigorous defence of that provision of bringing in large, large money to local elections is actually because perhaps the government didn't understand their own bill. Certainly, if you go by the words of the Minister of Transportation on this bill, he clearly didn't understand it. He thought the change was only increasing from \$4,000 total in a year to \$5,000, so we're here with a very helpful amendment to clarify and help some of the members of the government side who are unclear about the impact of this legislation.

Now, I listened with great interest, of course, to all the speakers on the government side this evening. I do actually want to make a quick shout-out because the Minister of Municipal Affairs did mention a number of the women candidates who ran for the UCP in the 2019 election. I know it's simply by omission, so I simply want to put her name on the record because Elisabeth Hughes was the woman who ran in Edmonton-Whitemud for the UCP against me in the 2019 election. I simply want to acknowledge that she was another strong female candidate who ran in the 2019 election for the UCP.

I'll share a quick story, Mr. Chair, about that. We had a very, I think, wonderful campaign and election period in Edmonton-Whitemud, for the most part very respectful, definitely between the candidates very respectful. About three weeks into that four-week formal election period there was a Saturday night fundraising event that I found myself at at the same time as Elisabeth Hughes, the UCP candidate. By this point, of course, as you appreciate – you've done this process as well – everybody was pretty exhausted. We'd been door-knocking furiously for months, even, of course, prior to

the campaign period starting. I remember looking at her across at another table – and Ms Hughes is also a parent of kids, a little bit older than mine, but she has three children. I remember thinking: “If anybody else in this room is as tired as I am, it’s her. She’s going to understand how exhausting it is.” I actually went over, and we had a wonderful conversation, commiserating about the fact that, yes, it is a long trek and it is a tough trek to go through an election period. So I would like to simply acknowledge Elisabeth Hughes as a strong woman candidate who ran in Edmonton-Whitemud, and I was proud to run against her.

I would also like to talk about a little bit of what I’ve been hearing and the comments made by the Minister of Culture, Multiculturalism and Status of Women about her experiences. She spoke about the provincial election significantly in her comments, and I don’t think the Government House Leader had any issues with that. Certainly, she spoke to it, and she talked about the support she provided to other female candidates and how important that was for her, and that’s wonderful. In fact, I think it is very important for women to support each other and to encourage women to run for office. It’s something that I’ve taken incredibly seriously in my own life. It’s work that I’ve done long before I decided to run for office myself, and it’s a job I get to continue on now in an elected capacity.

In fact, the Minister of Children’s Services and I both had the honour of serving as mentors for Ask Her YYC just last week. They’re putting on a prepare-her program, which is a series of workshops and seminars for women who are thinking of running in the upcoming Calgary municipal election, to talk about various issues. We very much – I thought it was a fantastic experience and something I hope to continue to do.

During that conversation it was interesting because, you know, we all went off in our breakout groups with these potential candidates, and we came back, and the Minister of Children’s Services was asked to comment on the changes in Bill 29 because, of course, Mr. Chair, again, it’s something we’ve been talking about quite a bit. Ask Her YYC as well as Parity YEG did put forward a joint statement indicating significant concerns about the changes in Bill 29. The Minister of Children’s Services commented that she very much appreciated the changes that had happened under the previous government, that did level the playing field for her to be able to run.

The reason why we talk about those changes, Mr. Chair, to the provincial Election Act, the reason we talk about it now is because those same changes, those same limits of \$4,000 per individual to donate in a year were applied at the municipal level, and that is what is being undone through Bill 29. What Bill 29 is doing is actually taking away the things that even the Minister of Children’s Services said levelled the playing field. It levelled the playing field by making sure that every candidate has the opportunity to run and not be disadvantaged by the fact that somebody they’re running against has access to very wealthy donors with deep pockets.

That is what we are concerned about, and that’s what the purpose of this amendment is. Because certainly every woman who ran and every candidate, not just women, every person who is in this room right now benefited to some degree because in 2019 there were individual caps, there were limits on how much an individual could donate. That was the same limit that was put in at local elections that Bill 29 is undoing.

Sometimes, Mr. Chair, I have to say that it feels like we are living in a time warp in this Chamber. I never anticipated that I would have to come into this Chamber and talk about the difference between equality and equity because, in fact, that’s something that has been legally recognized for decades in this province, in this country, but it’s not the same thing to have formal equality if you do not have substantive equality.

I know there are a number of lawyers on both sides of this House who will be very familiar with that construct because it’s something you learn. It’s very basic with respect to equality and how to interpret equality in the law. It talks about treating everybody the same. We know. We have decades of research to talk about how laws that simply treat everybody the same do not have the same impact on everybody. I certainly never anticipated, Mr. Chair, that I would have to come into this House and explain that to the government because this is decades of evidence, where we know that having a law that says that everybody has access to the same deep pockets, when we know that people don’t all have access to deep pockets. It’s not fair, and it’s not equitable, and that is why Parity YEG and Ask Her YYC came forward with this joint statement.

You know, the Minister of Culture, Multiculturalism and Status of Women said that she would think that Ask Her YYC and Parity YEG would be in support of Bill 29. Well, we have a written statement, which I’ve already tabled in this Legislature, and numerous members of the opposition have already talked about. They do not agree. They do not agree that Bill 29 is something that actually improves access to the political system by women. Why don’t they believe that, Mr. Chair? Because they have studied the research. They know the evidence. They know that women do not start from the same position as men when it comes to fundraising.

They know that women – again, this is evidence. I can’t believe I have to keep talking about this, but we do have to because apparently the government is not paying attention to the evidence. We know that there’s a large wage gap between men and women in this province. Women earn less. We know that there is a lower labour force participation rate of women. Why? Largely because they have to take themselves out of the workforce because they’re taking care of children or they’re doing other unpaid caregiving such as taking care of elderly or other family members. This is not partisan. This is actually a fact. We know this to be the case. So women do not start from the same place as men when they’re trying to seek political office. Most women face significant financial barriers, and that has been exacerbated extensively by the pandemic.

In fact, Mr. Chair, we know, for example, the Royal Bank of Canada just issued an assessment of the impact of COVID-19 and the pandemic on women’s participation in the economy. The conclusion – this is since the pandemic. Many of these factors existed prior to the pandemic, but they have been absolutely, astronomically made worse by the pandemic. That report indicates that:

- The pandemic has pushed women’s participation in the labour force down to its lowest level in three decades . . . 1.5 million women [across the country have lost] their jobs in the first two months of this recession.
- Women’s employment, which is dominant in the sectors hardest hit by the recession, has been slower to rebound as the economy reopens. . . .
- Women are more likely to “fall out” of the workforce. Nearly half of newly unemployed women who lost their jobs . . . were terminated and did not seek work . . .
- Employment among women with toddlers or school aged children fell 7% between February and May compared to a decline of 4% among fathers of children the same age.

We already had a situation, Mr. Chair, where women were financially disadvantaged, so it would be more difficult for them to run. They’re also less likely to have the social connections that a lot of men have based on the kinds of work they do.

9:30

These are generalizations, Mr. Chair – I’m aware of that – but it’s based on data. This is to explain the historical underrepresentation of women in politics. This data has to be paid attention to. It talks

about all of these disadvantages that women face financially to actually enter the workforce and to enter politics, and that has all been made much worse.

Now we have a bill, and we have a looming municipal and school board election coming up in just over a year. In that election we're going to have fewer and fewer women with lower and lower income. They may not have \$10,000 per year to self-finance their own election. It's going to be harder for women to participate because of the pandemic, and then the changes that have come forward in Bill 29 are going to make it infinitely harder.

Mr. Chair, this is not just me saying this. These are organizations that spend the time to do the research and to look at the evidence, and they put forward a clear statement. Despite what the Minister of Culture, Multiculturalism and Status of Women may wish, Ask Her YYC and Parity YEG have done the work and the research, and they said that Bill 29 makes it harder for women to run for political office.

Mr. Chair, this is based on evidence. That is why we're here today, and that's why we're bringing forward this amendment. It is absolutely the case that these changes are going to disadvantage women from running. That's why I chose to run. I wanted to see more women in politics and running for elected office. I was committed to that, and I will continue to be committed to that, not for partisan reasons but actually because it's based on evidence and data.

To me, this is something that the government members should be accepting because it seems to align with what they're already saying, that increasing from \$4,000 to \$5,000 isn't such a big deal, which seems to suggest that they actually do believe that there should be a hard cap on individual donations in a year and not what they aren't talking about, which is that there's an unlimited amount that an individual can donate across many, many candidates. Perhaps on that reason alone the government members would consider this amendment as a friendly amendment, but if not, if that's not the case, Mr. Chair, and the real purpose of this bill, to make the changes that they've made to the individual donation cap, is actually to encourage that candidates need to have more money and advantages, those candidates who have access to people with deep pockets, then we should be deeply concerned.

While we've heard a lot of patting of their own backs with respect to how much they've encouraged women to run for the UCP, the fact of the matter is that in the last election 31 per cent of their candidates were women. I am proud to say that . . .

Some Hon. Members: Forty-four.

Ms Pancholi: Well, according to the statistics that I'm reading, 31 per cent of their candidates were women whereas 52 per cent of NDP candidates were women. The point is, Mr. Chair, that certainly they did not reach the equitable level of representation of women.

While the minister of culture and multiculturalism said that the Premier told her that it was her responsibility to get more women to run, on this side of the House, Mr. Chair, we think of it as everyone's responsibility to get more women to run. It's not anybody's dedicated task; it's all of our tasks. Why is that? It advantages all Albertans when we have gender diversity and gender representation in politics. Why? Because the issues that need to be talked about around the tables need to have that diversity of views. It needs to have that diversity of experiences.

In fact, why it's so important, particularly at the local election level, is because we know that women tend to get more involved in local politics at the community level. That's sometimes where they see that there is a better opportunity to influence, a better opportunity to have their voices heard. We know that sometimes

the partisan nature of provincial and federal politics can be a deterrent. A lot of women are already very active in their communities, so they get involved in local politics. That's where they tend to go. Their views are critically important. We want to have their views around the table.

Now, I would argue that it's just as important to make sure that we have those representatives bringing forward issues that actually impact women. I have to say, Mr. Chair, and I'll put it on the record right now, that I'm deeply disappointed by the current government and how the issues that women care about such as – I don't know – participating in the workforce or having access to affordable, quality, accessible child care don't seem to be reflected in this current government. But the hope is that you have more women on there, and maybe those issues will break through. It hasn't broken through yet on this side of the House, but we continue. As my formidable colleague from Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood says: we continue to be optimists. We hope that at some point they'll take that seriously.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you.

I see the hon. Member for Calgary-East has risen.

Mr. Singh: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I oppose this amendment for many reasons. I rise to express my support for Bill 29, Local Authorities Election Amendment Act, 2020. I applaud the minister for introducing improvements to our local elections to ensure that rising candidates stand on equal footing with incumbents in more democratic elections for voters and citizens. The next round of municipal elections will be critical for the future of our province as we are faced with one of the most challenging situations in Alberta's history. Our economy has been battered on many fronts. Cities are faced with depleted revenues and increased expenses, and hundreds of thousands of Albertans have lost their jobs. This is why it is of utmost importance that we encourage the election of strong and smart municipal leaders who will be able to navigate their cities to recovery.

The process of conducting an election for local authorities could not be correctly fulfilled if the rules seem to favour only those who have already secured a seat or do not allow a more competitive race, thereby dismissing courage and chance of all hopefuls seeking to represent their communities. I'm not saying that all of the incumbent local elected officials are not suited for the office, but it would be better to see a local election wherein all the candidates are placed in a similar stance during the exercise of this democratic process, and in the end the will of the people shall prevail.

If passed, Mr. Chair, Bill 29 will play a crucial role in making the playing field even in the municipal elections, empowering new candidates and ensuring that the best candidate for local office wins. The changes made in this bill will help to create a level playing field for both challengers and incumbents and ensure that incumbents aren't unfairly advantaged.

Mr. Chair, we owe it to the voters and our citizens to bring more practical changes that enable fair and transparent elections. Under our current system many of these regulations make it difficult for new candidates to unseat an incumbent. This leads to incumbents having a near 100 per cent success rate in most communities in Alberta.

Municipal government is the only level of government where there is almost no change in elected members between election cycles. For example, in Calgary only three incumbents have been unseated in the past three election cycles, a meagre 6.6 per cent. That number is even lower in Edmonton, at just 2.5 per cent. The ward 3 councillor in the city of Edmonton knew first-hand the struggles of breaking into local politics in 2017. He unseated the

incumbent by the skin of his teeth in what was a contentious race among several esteemed candidates. Speaking to his experience, he believes that “these changes create hope and opportunity for all those seeking to represent their communities.”

However, when the members of the opposition were in the government, they failed to address many of the critical gaps in the local authorities election amendment act in 2018. The proposed changes that the bill carries were reached after extensive consultations with voters, communities, advocacy groups, elected officials, municipalities, and municipal associations.

One of the proposed changes in Bill 29 includes ensuring that campaign surpluses exceeding \$1,000 are donated to charity instead of requiring municipalities and school boards to open trust accounts to hold them. This will level the playing field for new candidates who have not previously had the opportunity to raise funds.

We will also allow Albertans to donate to as many candidates as they choose, up to \$5,000 per candidate, to ensure that those without public name recognition have more flexibility to raise funds and get their message out as well as an opportunity for candidates to self-finance up to \$10,000 annually for their campaign. Further, the candidates can wait until after the election to disclose funding information so that they can concentrate on their campaigns, and rules for third-party advertisers are changed by the bill to protect free speech and provide more open debates about issues and policies.

Finally, we believe that government should get out of the way of people's business to ensure the openness of debate, having important issues and policies decided by and for the voters. Also, Mr. Chair, we extend our commitment to freedom of speech to third-party advertisers like unions and corporations, who also compromise our voters with the equally burning desire to be heard at the ballot. These changes are healthy for democracy and our province as a whole, and what is good for democracy is good for Alberta.

9:40

Mr. Chair, it is more important than ever that we have the best possible candidates in office during these challenging times. This bill helps to ensure that local elected authorities don't get complacent in their duties and must work hard to keep their seat. Recently we have received overwhelming support from several urban and rural associations across this great province whose mandates are to serve their membership in good faith and to advocate for changes and renewed grassroots organizations.

The president of the Alberta Urban Municipalities Association states: “AUMA and our members support many of the practical changes to the Local Authorities Election Act . . . that enable fair,” transparent elections. The president of Rural Municipalities of Alberta also stated that the “RMA looks forward to working with members to implement changes to the act in advance of the upcoming 2021 municipal election.” These are just some of many organizations, Mr. Chair, who support this bill and its changes, that introduce more fairness to municipal elections. This should not come as a surprise as Alberta is home to many great local leaders who have done and continue to do exceptional work for their communities.

Calgary's councillor for ward 11 spoke to this perfectly as the “diverse field of candidates” like him. Mr. Chair, we do celebrate the diverse, competitive spirit that we expect of our local elections. Now the voters, candidates, advocacy groups have the ability to behave better and to be the change they wish to see in their communities regardless of political stripe. This, the Local Authorities Election Amendment Act, 2020, is for greater flexibility in campaign spending to ensure no dollar donated goes

to waste. By holding incumbents accountable, the bill provides a better opportunity to those struggling to break into politics and ensures that no voice in society is left unheard.

Let me conclude, Mr. Chair, by saying that it is important to support our local democracy and that Albertans deserve fair and transparent elections. If we allow leaving an advantage to some that creates barriers for others to compete, then fairness is defeated, and the expectations of Albertans should not be satisfied. I support this bill and commend the minister for making sure that the conduct of our local elections comes with fairness and transparency. I encourage all of the members of this Chamber to as well support the bill, which will make a better result to the exercise of the right to vote in our local authorities, that leads to a stronger governance of our communities.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

I see the hon. Minister of Children's Services has risen.

Ms Schulz: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. I know we have a lot of things to debate tonight, so I will keep my remarks on the short end. I did want to correct the record. I think we hear a lot of things that aren't always necessarily a hundred per cent accurate being debated in this House, and I did want to clear the record about some of my comments made.

Much like we heard the House leader tonight and the Minister of Culture, Multiculturalism and Status of Women say, there were pieces of the changes made over the last number of years that were helpful as a new candidate. However, you know, on a multipartisan platform where we were encouraging women to run, I was very quickly interrupted by the member opposite, who, I think, thought it was question period, so I didn't get to finish my comments on that front. What I wanted to explain was that as a newcomer to politics and a newcomer, certainly, to provincial politics in Alberta, the rules actually hurt me when every time I would meet a new donor, a new supporter, and they said: “Hey, I like your energy. You are hard working. You bring some new ideas. I'd love to support you, but I've already reached the cap.” I heard it over and over and over again. Despite what the member opposite says, not knowing the exact context of the comments that were made, I just wanted to clarify that I actually very much support this change.

I also know that in speaking to a number of potential candidates, whether that's at the provincial level or, certainly, at the municipal level, we know, Mr. Chair, that incumbents have nearly a 100 per cent success rate here in Alberta, across the province. What are new candidates intimidated by? The women that we've been speaking to: what are they intimidated by? Incumbency. So by reducing that ability for incumbents to carry over huge war chests, it absolutely does even the playing field.

For those people who are interested enough and passionate enough about supporting politicians, whether that is at the provincial level, whether that is at the municipal level, it's also making sure that they're not encumbered and that new candidates like me, whether you get in at the beginning or get in a little bit later in the game, as I did – by the time I was meeting those donors: absolutely not; you know, sorry; love your energy; love your work ethic; can't support you.

So despite what the member opposite said, I did want to clarify my remarks, and I would also say that sometimes that over-the-top, hyperpartisan rhetoric is also one of the things that dissuades women from running. The personal attacks, the decisions that members make to not debate policy, to not debate policy respectfully but instead to just attack each other personally, are sometimes what causes women to not want to run.

With that, Mr. Chair, I do support many of the arguments made by members on this side of the House. I do support this bill. I will continue to support this bill, and I will continue to support newcomers, including women, ensuring that we get diversity in elected positions, whether that's at the city level, the municipal level, the provincial level, or the federal level.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. minister.

I see the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo has risen.

Member Ceci: Thanks. I just wanted to get up to address a few things really, really briefly. You know, the Minister of Municipal Affairs cherry-picked some people who are successful. He talked about Mayor Nenshi and that he spent I think \$600,000 in the last election or something like that. I want to go back to 2010. The now Minister of Transportation was a candidate in that open election for mayor in Calgary and spent over \$1 million. It's in his declaration, in what he declared. Over \$1 million was spent by that Minister of Transportation. He wasn't successful, as we know, and he ran in 2012 and was successful at the provincial level. Bill Smith in 2017: I didn't get his disclosure, but I can tell you that it probably was around \$1 million again. That's kind of the entrance into mayoralty races in Calgary at this point in time. I don't think it's right. I think it's a lot of money. It's too much money. Nonetheless, the Minister of Transportation: \$1,084,020. He did that. Councillor Magliocca: it's well known that he spent over \$300,000 in the last municipal election. That's big money – isn't it? – for a city council position.

But what the amendment will do is restrict where money can come from. It will restrict it up to \$5,000 per donor in aggregate, and I think what you'll see is that those amounts – \$1 million, \$300,000 – will come down, and that's not a bad thing. An expert in local governance in Ontario, when that person saw this bill brought forward by the Minister of Municipal Affairs – to paraphrase what that expert said, something like: I have never seen a government walk back changes to weaken campaign donation rules. That's what's happening with regard to Bill 29, weakening campaign donation rules so that money, lots of money, can come into local elections, whether school board or council. As my colleague from Edmonton-City Centre said, this is absolutely placing the thumb, the UCP thumb, on the scales around this province for local elections, and it is not something that I support, that this side supports, and I would like to see it changed.

RMA and AUMA: my friend over here for Calgary-East talked about how they support all of this. Well, they also had a caveat, and the caveat was: we wish amendments to come forward with regard to Bill 29 and will review it at that point. Well, you can see that the Minister of Municipal Affairs has no amendments coming forward, and we will likely have to deal with the AUMA and RMA. They won't be seeing amendments to make this more fair, more local, and to ensure that we're talking about local issues, not ones that are brought forward by the UCP.

Thank you.

9:50

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

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

Mr. Madu: Thank you so much, Mr. Chair. I will be very brief. I just wanted to quickly respond to a few things that were said by the Member for Edmonton-Whitemud as well as my critic on this file. First, I want to thank the Member for Edmonton-Whitemud for acknowledging my friend who was our candidate for Edmonton-Whitemud in the last election, Elisabeth Hughes. Obviously, Elisabeth is someone that I think would have made a fantastic

member of the Legislature in this particular Chamber. Again I want to thank the Member for Edmonton-Whitemud for acknowledging Elisabeth Hughes tonight.

To be clear, you know, taken together, the changes reflected in Bill 29 do the opposite of what all of the members in the NDP say, the members who have spoken on this particular bill. Bill 29 does the direct opposite. That is why, when they had the opportunity in 2017-2018 to actually do the things that they are talking about right now, they did not do that. Earlier on I was talking about, you know, saying one thing and then doing something else.

At the last municipal elections in Edmonton there was only a 2.5 per cent success rate where a newcomer was able to take on an incumbent, and in Calgary it was 6.6 per cent. Across our province we have municipal leaders – councillors and mayors and reeves – having institutionalized themselves. The question that the members opposite ought to ask themselves is: why is that? It didn't start with Bill 29. Why is it that the participation rate, the voter turnout rate at the municipal level is so poor? All of these things are what Bill 29 seeks to address.

The one amendment that they have put forward: let me be clear that a particular donor is still restricted to giving a particular candidate \$5,000. Listening to them, you would think that a particular donor can give a particular candidate an unlimited amount of money. That is completely untrue. The amendment that the Member for Calgary-Buffalo put forward before you was actually a recommendation by the mayor of Calgary. You know, I took the time to meet with the mayor of Calgary to discuss some of the things he would like to see in Bill 29, and he told me two things. One of them, chief among them, was that he would like to see donors being able to donate to candidates across our province because under the current status quo it is unmanageable. He says that that is the one thing that he would like to see reflected in Bill 29. I have often talked about who the members opposite are listening to. I suppose that if the member picks up the phone and calls the mayor of Calgary, he will tell him: actually, your amendment goes contrary to my recommendation to the Minister of Municipal Affairs.

Again, I am not surprised because I've always said that we legislate for the people. We do not legislate for the unions. All I want to accomplish with this particular bill is to drive up the turnout rate in municipal elections. We want to be able to make it so that folks are able to compete based on ideas, not on a turnover rate of entrenched candidates election after election. So if we agree that that is a problem, again I ask you, Member for Calgary-Buffalo: why did you not make those proposals in 2017-2018? You did not.

The Deputy Chair: I'd like to remind all members of the House to ensure that they direct their comments through the chair.

Mr. Madu: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Again, I am not surprised that the members opposite, who called Albertans religious nutbars and sewer rats and Nazis, you know, would oppose . . . [interjections]

The Deputy Chair: Hon. members, I'd like to just note that the individual with the call at this time is the hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs.

Mr. Madu: Right.

The Deputy Chair: If you could please continue.

Mr. Madu: Mr. Chair, thank you so much. You know, the mayor of Edmonton on June 25 had this to say about Bill 29: they did listen to us on some of the more administrative provisions and keeping

the partisan angle out and keeping corporate and union money out of the campaigns, so those are positive steps that I do acknowledge. Again, coming from the mayor of Edmonton.

We have the mayor of Calgary saying that we have reflected many of the changes that they proposed to us. We have the mayor of Edmonton saying the same thing. We have the AUMA saying the same thing. I'm not sure who the members opposite take their instructions from.

Mr. Jason Nixon: Gil McGowan.

Mr. Madu: There's no question about that.

You know, Mr. Chair, one of the guys that has given his approval to Bill 29 is someone that has been critical of this government, Keith Gerein. Keith said that this bill will "finally address the advantage of incumbency and chronic poor showings at the ballot box." That is coming from a guy that doesn't often have much to write about many of our policies, but on this one he is at odds with the members opposite.

I would urge my colleagues indeed from both sides of the House to vote down this amendment put forward by the Member for Calgary-Buffalo. Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any hon. members looking to join debate on A1?

[Motion on amendment A1 lost]

The Deputy Chair: Moving back to the bill, Bill 29, are there any hon. members wishing to join debate? I see the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

Member Ceci: Yeah. Thanks very much, Mr. Chair. I have another amendment here. It's not very long. If you wish me to read it into the record, I can.

The Deputy Chair: Please feel free to read it into the record and continue with your comments.

Member Ceci: Thank you very much.

The Deputy Chair: For the record this will be referred to as amendment A2.

Member Ceci: I move that Bill 29, the Local Authorities Election Amendment Act, 2020, be amended in section 17 by striking out clause (c).

10:00

If you've turned to page 7, you'll see that clause (c) under section 147.4 is amended by the bill by striking out subsections (8), (9), and (10). If you look over at the explanatory notes, (8), (9), and (10) have to do with enabling powers of municipalities. What Bill 29 is trying to do is take the enabling powers of municipalities away from them so that they can't pass bylaws in advance of elections to ask all candidates to declare where their money is coming from, who is donating their money to them. We've heard from stakeholders, of course, that they want to retain this bylaw, enabling power of making that authority. What the bill put forward by the Minister of Municipal Affairs is doing is taking that power away from municipalities.

Now, you know, that's certainly the right to try and do something like that, but usually things go in the other direction, trying to enable municipalities to take more actions at the local level to address the needs of their citizens, and that's seen as a good thing, seen as a thing that empowers people, both citizens in communities and municipalities. The pre-election disclosure statement allows

electors to see who is backing candidates in their area, in their ward, in their riding, in the area that they're going to the polls. Albertans have a right to know that information. Seeking to find that information out only after elections really doesn't empower anybody.

I mean, there is influence in local elections when you understand who is giving money to a candidate. It can be quite significant. As we know now, it could be from a few individuals who are giving money to each of the candidates that they want to support in that area, and that could have an effect on people's desire to vote for, say, somebody who's not supporting the slate of candidates. By removing that authority, anyway, you're taking away the elector's right, as I said, to know who's supporting elections and candidates until after the election. Local elections should be based on local issues, and that knowledge of who is supporting candidates will assist in making informed decisions about who is supporting who.

For example, if an individual who lives outside of a jurisdiction, say, in Calgary is making contributions to a candidate, say, in Grande Prairie or somewhere else, you've got to be wondering: why? What's it to that person in Calgary? Why are they doing that? I certainly want to see this go back to municipalities across this province, and there are a lot of them who want enabling legislation so that they can put the rules in place that are identified under sections (8), (9), and (10) here that are being removed by the minister. I think that's in the wrong direction.

I do want to say that it's more transparent. I know the minister talked about transparency. It's more transparency when you know who is contributing to campaigns before, not after. It keeps individuals knowing what the local candidates are running on, who they're receiving money from. I'm not sure who requested the removal, and maybe the minister can tell us. Who requested the removal of this enabling legislation that municipalities around the province currently use?

The other thing I want to say about this, in an attempt to try and be brief, is that enabling legislation is something you can use if you want to. Calgary uses it. Other places use it so that candidates have to declare their contributions. As an elector, as somebody who votes and is very interested in elections around this province and has voted in every election, I volunteer for people I want to see elected. I try and find out what support they're getting, who they're getting support from, and that tells you something about the motives of people.

Mr. Chair, that is the substance of my motion, my amendment, that there's greater transparency, there's greater accountability, and there's greater focus on local elections if we leave this enabling legislation in place for municipalities.

Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

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

Mr. Madu: Thank you so much, Mr. Chair. I just wanted to quickly respond to this amendment. Essentially, what this amendment is all about is to restore a rule-making power that was given to municipalities in 2018, to make bylaws requiring pre election day disclosure. Just to be clear, no jurisdiction in this country has that provision in place.

Number two, since that rule-making power was put in place in 2018, no municipality in this province has passed any bylaw to that effect. You know, the Member for Calgary-Buffalo talks about Calgary having utilized that rule-making power. Again, that is not true. There isn't any bylaw in Alberta requiring pre election day disclosure.

The question, then, is: prior to 2017-2018 have we had documented problems with nondisclosure of financial records? At

the provincial level the rules which the members opposite comply with: they do not have to disclose their contributions before election day. The rules require that each and every one of us makes that particular disclosure post election. Very simply put, I am not going to enable a situation whereby you have 341 municipalities in our province making bylaws, all kinds of different bylaws, with respect to different disclosure standards across the province. That would be chaos.

But then the issue ought to be transparency. That is, I believe, at the heart of what the members opposite are trying to drive at. If that is the case, then why is it that no jurisdiction in Canada has that in place? If that was a big deal, if that was a big problem that we must legislate on, why is it that in 2017 no single jurisdiction in all of our country has that in place? Why is it, if it was, too, a big deal to anyone in this province, that since that particular bylaw-making power was granted, not a single municipality has taken advantage of it? I think the answer is very simple. We do understand that this has nothing to do with transparency. This has something to do with being able to disclose your finances because we already have an elaborate process in place to do just that. What the members opposite want to do is to further create an environment in which folks are not able to focus on the subject matter of the election, which is running a municipal campaign on the basis of issues that are important to our local residents.

On that particular basis I would urge all members of this particular House to vote against this amendment. Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview has risen.

Ms Sigurdson: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. I'm pleased to rise and speak in favour of the amendment that's before us. Of course, as my hon. colleague described, the amendment addresses the issues found in section 17 of the bill, which proposes to remove the bylaw-making ability of local authorities to require the filing of pre-election disclosure statements with the local authority regarding campaign donations. That is to reverse what this legislation, this Bill 29, does, which is to make it so that that disclosure is not necessary.

10:10

We have heard from multiple stakeholders that they want to retain this bylaw-making authority. The pre-election disclosure statement allows electors to see who is backing candidates in their area. Certainly, Albertans have the right to know who may be seeking to influence the local elections, and the removal of this bylaw-making authority means that electors will not know this until after the election.

I want to just comment on some of the arguments made by the Member for Calgary-East. He indicated that it was important to not have this requirement to actually have to disclose before the election because candidates need to focus – “concentrate,” I think, was his word – on the campaign. Well, my goodness, Mr. Chair, we certainly need to have the ability to know who is donating to our campaign, to disclose that in a transparent manner, and to be able to run our own campaign, too. These are just, you know, the multiple roles that we have as candidates, and it's not something that's too much for us to handle, and it shouldn't be not done. It needs to be a vital part of our democratic process. It's not like, you know, we have to make special provisions for us delicate candidates because we have to concentrate on the campaign. That's ridiculous. That's a ridiculous argument. So I just really challenge that member for those comments.

Certainly, there have been various experts who have commented on Bill 29, and they've taken particular umbrage at this piece that doesn't make the ability for that pre-election disclosure statement. There's a Professor Lisa Young at the University of Calgary, and she says that it's important for voters to understand who a candidate might be beholden to. She identifies the development industry group most wanting to make contributions to candidates. Corporate owners and associates can make individual donations to press this influence. I certainly concur with what Professor Young is saying. When money is donated, sometimes there can be some desire for that person to move forward a project. Sometimes there could be backroom deals. We need to have that transparently shown to us as voters so we can know what influence is there. Certainly, the public has a right to know who is seeking to influence our candidates.

Another expert – and my hon. colleague from Calgary-*Buffalo*, I think, referenced him – the director of the Centre for Urban Policy and Local Governance, expressed serious concerns on this Bill 29: this is the first example I've come across of a government basically weakening provisions rather than strengthening them. He said that for years western Canada was known as the Wild West for campaign finances but that the rules were tightened in the last five years. Well, guess what? Who was government in that time? It was us, the NDP. We certainly tightened many rules for campaigns and made sure that democracy was respected in this province. Certainly, we began that with Bill 1, which took, you know, big money out of politics, corporate and union donations.

Also, you know, my colleagues on this side of the House have referenced a few times Parity YEG and Ask Her YYC. They did a joint statement identifying some serious concerns with this legislation. They talk about transparency in the electoral process. They say that “transparency in the electoral process encourages transparent governance” and that “removing requirements for financial disclosures until after election day [provides]... advantages for incumbents by incentivizing them to leverage their powers of influence while in office.” Of course, we are talking about municipal office here. This bill has to do with municipalities.

We know that in Edmonton, if you're looking at the representation of women, only 15 per cent of city councillors are women, and in Calgary it's 20 per cent, so we know that obviously the majority of city councillors are not women, and they don't have that influence. This bill does, you know, make it again harder for a disadvantaged group like women, who are not equally represented in politics as their male counterparts. This amendment goes a long way to making it much more fair and just. This bill can make a big difference. As I said, it doesn't give that advantage to incumbents. This is also in the joint statement. Parity YEG and Ask Her YYC are putting forward this argument.

Certainly, I ran provincially, obviously, but I can see how this would impede candidates who – it would be overwhelming to think that this isn't disclosed and that there could be very significant money collected by candidates without ever knowing who is supporting them. Women often don't have access to relationships with this kind of big money. This certainly was true for me. When the deck is stacked against you as a member of a group underrepresented in elected office, it's challenging to step up.

I think we are hindering the inclusion of diverse groups, and I really ask the minister to think seriously about this. If he really wants greater representatives of diverse groups, then this amendment is something that he should be voting in favour of.

I mean, we heard earlier, too, from the Minister of Children's Services. She said that over and over again, you know, she heard from supporters that they would've loved to donate to her

campaign, but they, sadly, had already maxed out. Well, I didn't hear those kinds of stories, so I think my world is very different than hers. Many of the people who supported me had the same values as I do, as my party does. Maybe they were making donations for the first time. They certainly weren't maxing out. That's what I counted on. I think that a lot of women aren't dissimilar from me. We don't have access to that big money. So I would say that this amendment goes a long way to supporting groups that aren't proportionately represented in elected office to be encouraged to run.

I ask that all members support this amendment. Transparency is a key principle of a healthy democracy. Keeping donations secret until after elections gives dark money influence. You know, we don't want that. We don't want there to be secret backroom deals. There should be transparency and fairness in our society. Voters have a right to know who's supporting candidates. That can affect how they vote in turn. Again, I will just say that this amendment does, you know, make the bill much more fair, and I encourage all members of this House to support it.

Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other hon. members looking to join debate on amendment A2?

Hon. Members: Question.

[Motion on amendment A2 lost]

The Deputy Chair: Moving back to Bill 29, are there any hon. members looking to join debate on Bill 29?

Seeing none, are you ready for the question?

[The remaining clauses of Bill 29 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

The Deputy Chair: Shall the bill be reported? Are you agreed? All those in favour, please say aye.

Hon. Members: Aye.

The Deputy Chair: Any opposed, please say no. That is carried.
I see the hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Jason Nixon: Yeah. Thank you, Mr. Chair. I move that we rise and report Bill 29.

[Motion carried]

[Mr. Milliken in the chair]

The Acting Speaker: I see the hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake-St. Paul.

10:20

Mr. Hanson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Committee of the Whole has had under consideration certain bills. The committee reports the following bill: Bill 29. I wish to table copies of all amendments considered by the Committee of the Whole on this date for the official records of the Assembly.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

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

Hon. Members: Aye.

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

Government Bills and Orders

Third Reading

Bill 23

Commercial Tenancies Protection Act

The Acting Speaker: I see the hon. Minister for Economic Development, Trade and Tourism.

Ms Fir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to move third reading of Bill 23, the Commercial Tenancies Protection Act.

We are facing unprecedented circumstances as Albertans, as Canadians, and as members of the global community. Over the past few months our province has been grappling with the greatest threat to public health in a century, the COVID-19 pandemic. While our first priority is protecting the health of Albertans, we cannot ignore the real impact that the pandemic has had on our economy and Alberta businesses. Over the past few months we have been working to do all that we can to provide businesses with relief so that they can restart our economy and pave a path to recovery.

[The Speaker in the chair]

Alberta has one of the most generous support models for small and medium-sized businesses in Canada. However, we've heard from businesses that there's more that can be done and that the existing supports, particularly when it comes to federal commercial rent programs, are not enough. Bill 23 would protect eligible commercial tenants from evictions and rent increases while we continue our economic recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic. Rent increase, penalty, and late fee protections will be retroactive to March 17. To clarify, under the legislation any late fees, penalties, or rent increases imposed on a commercial tenant by their landlord between March 17, 2020, and August 31, 2020, must be reimbursed.

This bill will help landlords recoup missed rent as it requires that landlords and tenants work together to develop a payment plan that works for both parties. However, the protection from eviction is not all-encompassing. The legislation also ensures that landlords retain the right to evict tenants in the event that a tenant breaks terms of their lease that are not covered by the act such as damage to property.

Mr. Speaker, if this bill is passed, it would further strengthen our provincial supports, filling existing gaps in the system and helping businesses to reopen and rehire staff during this critical time. This is not the only support for small businesses that our government has introduced. Having a small-business relief package with multiple components is critical because there are so many varied and unique situations in the small and medium-sized business component of our economy. These businesses make up a huge component of our province's employment.

I want to talk about some of the other government supports for businesses. Our government has also launched the small and medium enterprise relaunch grant. We designed the grant so that businesses and non-profits can use the money in order to relaunch and recover more quickly. It provides financial assistance of up to \$5,000 to Alberta businesses and nonprofit organizations that were ordered to close or curtail operations and have experienced a revenue reduction of at least 50 per cent due to the COVID-19 pandemic. We are not being prescriptive with how businesses use these funds. We know that business owners, our job creators know their own business and their needs better than the government does. The grants can be used to purchase necessary PPE, to pay employee wages or commercial rent, to purchase inventory, or anything else that business owners need in order to relaunch safely. One business

owner said of the grant: I believe it has been the hand up that has made the difference that was so desperately needed; I will never forget what your government has done for this Alberta business and the family that relies on it to sustain its livelihood.

Since this legislation was introduced, this government also announced the massive economic recovery plan, which outlines billions of dollars in initiatives to get our economy up and running. We have already provided \$14 billion in support, more than any other province on a comparable basis. Alberta's recovery plan builds on our strengths with timely, targeted investments and bold policy reforms that will build, diversify, and create jobs.

Our infrastructure build, which is the largest in Alberta's history, will immediately create tens of thousands of jobs and will make our economy more productive on a long-term basis. Our plan includes \$10 billion in projects that will move people from unemployment to good jobs. Albertans will be building roads, bridges, overpasses, water projects, pipelines, gas lines, new and revitalized schools, hospital projects, long-term care homes for seniors, addiction recovery infrastructure, tourism projects, and much more.

We also accelerated the job-creation tax cut to get Alberta what is by far the most attractive environment for new business investment in Canada, moving the general business tax rate from 10 per cent to 8 per cent on July 1. This will accelerate the creation of an estimated 55,000 new full-time private-sector jobs and stimulate as much as \$13 billion in economic growth.

We developed the economic recovery plan with input from Alberta's economic recovery council, of which I am an ex officio member. The council is chaired by one of Canada's most highly regarded economists, Dr. Jack Mintz, and includes many of Alberta's most prominent leaders in business, labour, and public service, including the Rt. Hon. Stephen Harper.

As part of the economic recovery plan we are also creating the invest Alberta corporation. It will focus on driving high-value, high-impact investment to Alberta, targeting our key growth sectors. The invest Alberta corporation will also be responsible for leading a global marketing strategy promoting Alberta's investment opportunities to investors in Canada and key global markets.

Mr. Speaker, the legislation we are debating now is just another piece of relief. The Commercial Tenancies Protection Act will create the conditions for businesses and landlords to work together in a respectful and fair manner during this challenging time. The successful relaunch and recovery of Alberta businesses is in the best interest of all Albertans. The small and medium-sized businesses are the backbone of our economy, creating the jobs that Alberta communities and families depend on, and they will be important partners going forward as we move through the phases of relaunch and recovery and eventually back to prosperity.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Hon. members, the hon. Minister of Economic Development, Trade and Tourism has moved third reading of Bill 23. Are there any members wishing to speak? The hon. Member for Edmonton-South.

Mr. Dang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise tonight and speak to Bill 23, the Commercial Tenancies Protection Act. Now, the NDP opposition and all of my colleagues have been calling on this UCP government to take action on commercial rent to support tenants and landlords during this global pandemic, and for months this government dithered. Now they've brought a bill that is, in our opinion and in the opinion of our stakeholders, fatally flawed. Frankly, it's going to make a bad situation worse.

Now, Mr. Speaker, I believe the minister actually knows this and the government members know this as well because we've seen

tenants and landlords across the business landscape from all corners of this province make this clear. They've written to us in our e-mails, they've called us in our phone boxes, and frankly, we've been hearing over and over and over again that this bill does nothing. For tenants this bill does nothing to fix the Canada emergency commercial rent assistance program. That has been broken since day one. This bill won't help businesses who are tenants, tenants who need additional runway to get back on their feet. Frankly, for landlords this bill is going to redefine the legal terms over a hundred thousand leases and, in fact, \$7.4 billion of the commercial real estate industry. The government did not fix the CECRA. Instead, they're bringing in legislation that is going to create a mess, and they've messed up so many of the incentives already existing with this bill while creating whole new problems.

To be very, very clear, Mr. Speaker, we absolutely support a commercial tenant eviction ban, but it has to be done right, and this government has completely dropped the ball. They have failed to consult with experts in commercial real estate. They have failed to talk with business owners. They have failed to talk to landlords. Instead of actually amending this broken legislation and actually trying to get assistance out the door, they are leaving businesses behind once again. The future of Alberta businesses and jobs depends on them getting it right, and they've failed Albertans, they've failed businesses, and they've failed families. How many businesses have had to close down because this government took this long to try and implement a failed eviction plan? How come there's no plan for moving past September? We're only a couple of months away now.

Mr. Speaker, it simply doesn't make sense that this government would leave so much on the table, that this government would ignore the calls of so many Albertans, that this government would ignore the concerns of so many people they purport to stand up for, the very small businesses that this government purports to stand up for, the very Albertans who are working jobs that this government purports to represent. Instead of actually listening to their concerns, instead of actually consulting with businesses, instead of actually going and talking to constituents, this government is ramming through a piece of legislation that does nothing to support families, that does nothing to support businesses, that does nothing to support landlords.

10:30

Mr. Speaker, quite frankly, this is going to make the situation worse. It's going to make an already tenuous position for many commercial landlords and for many commercial tenants worse, and indeed what's going to happen is that we're going to be in a situation where these businesses will suffer. How many businesses will not reopen because of this government's dithering? How many businesses will not reopen because this government failed to act and because even now they have failed to act properly? Frankly, that is unacceptable to the opposition. It's unacceptable to Albertans. It's unacceptable that this government will not take the time to get this right, that the government will not actually stop and reflect on what they are doing and understand the actual consequences this will have for Alberta businesses and Alberta jobs.

For a minister who is the Minister of Economic Development, Trade and Tourism, this is actually going to stifle that economic development. It's going to stifle our recovery as we come out of the pandemic and as we move through the pandemic, and that is something that we know Albertans are going to be disappointed about, that we know Albertans are going to suffer from, and that we know we're going to see further job losses from. Mr. Speaker, this government has a failed track record on jobs. Even before the global pandemic this government lost over 50,000 jobs this year.

And now, at a time when they are able to try and support those businesses, at a time when they are able to try and support those commercial landlords and tenants, Mr. Speaker, instead of actually taking action, instead of actually going out and trying to support businesses, what we see is a failed bill coming in months late that will make this situation worse, that will actually alter the landscape in a way that may actually drive more businesses under.

And government members know this. They must be seeing this because I've received and my colleagues have received hundreds of thousands of e-mails from business owners talking about how this is a bad bill. The stakeholders are writing in nonstop, Mr. Speaker, to all of us – I see that they are CCed as well as we are CCed on these e-mails – that this is fundamentally not going to fix any of the problems. In fact, it will actually make it worse for many of these business owners. So it's very clear that this government is not listening to Albertans. It's very clear that this government is not listening to the people they represent, the people they purport to represent.

We know that this is going to be a failure – we know it's going to be a failure – we know it's going to cost Albertans their livelihoods, we know it's going to cost many businesses the opportunity to reopen their doors, and we know it's not going to work. We know that this government has failed Albertans, and, Mr. Speaker, I would implore every member of this Assembly to vote against this legislation and for this government to bring back a working piece of legislation, for them to go back to the drawing board, actually consult with the stakeholders, actually talk to business owners, actually talk to landlords, understand the landscape, and bring in legislation that may actually help save some jobs.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Hon. members, is there anyone else wishing to join in the debate this evening?

Hon. members, if there are no others, I am prepared to allow the hon. the Minister of Economic Development, Trade and Tourism to close debate.

Ms Fir: Waived.

[Motion carried; Bill 23 read a third time]

Government Motions

Racism

24. Mr. Kenney moved:

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly

- (a) condemns racism and all forms of bigotry and hatred;
- (b) affirms the commitment of Alberta to human dignity and equality of all before the law;
- (c) acknowledges the pernicious and durable nature of antiblack racism;
- (d) acknowledges a tragic history of racism directed at indigenous people in Canada; and
- (e) urges the government to consider these issues in its ongoing review of the Police Act.

Mr. Deol moved that the motion be amended by striking out clause (e) and substituting the following:

- (e) urges the government to ensure that these issues and the voices of racialized communities are considered in its ongoing review of the Police Act by immediately establishing an advisory panel

- (i) to conduct hearings throughout the province to examine and make recommendations in respect of systemic racism in Alberta,
- (ii) that consists of members of the Anti-Racism Advisory Council, provincial indigenous leadership, and Black Lives Matter chapters of Alberta, and
- (iii) to publish a report with its findings and recommendations no later than October 1, 2020.

[Adjourned debate on the amendment July 13: Mr. Dang]

The Speaker: Hon. members, we have before us Government Motion 24. Is there anyone else wishing to speak on the amendment? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Whitemud.

Ms Pancholi: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the opportunity to rise and speak to Government Motion 24. I understand that we're currently considering a proposed amendment to the government motion. Since it's been some time since this Assembly has considered this motion, just as a reminder this is a consideration of the motion brought forward by the hon. Premier, and it states:

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly

- (a) condemns racism and all forms of bigotry and hatred;
- (b) affirms the commitment of Alberta to human dignity and equality of all before the law;
- (c) acknowledges the pernicious and durable nature of antiblack racism;
- (d) acknowledges a tragic history of racism directed at indigenous people in Canada; and
- (e) urges the government to consider these issues in its ongoing review of the Police Act.

Now, as you will recall, Mr. Speaker, the opposition brought forward a motion of its own that we felt was critical to address broader issues than were set forward in Government Motion 24. That motion brought forward by the opposition was voted down. We are currently... [interjections] Oh. I thought it was voted down. Maybe it's not. Okay. My apologies. I thought that was voted down. I realize we are limited today to the debate on this motion before us and the amendment that has been brought forward. That amendment that we brought forward was specific to essentially providing some concrete action behind the statements that are in Government Motion 24.

I want to begin by saying, Mr. Speaker, that there's absolutely no doubt that all Albertans would support what's stated in Government Motion 24 as principle. Of course, certainly, condemning racism is something that we should all be committed to in Alberta. Affirming the commitment to human dignity and equality: all of us should commit to that. Acknowledging the durable and pernicious nature of antiblack racism: of course. And acknowledging the treatment of indigenous people: of course.

My concern, Mr. Speaker, is that this government motion does not go far enough. We have to meet the moment, if I may use that phrase, that we are faced with right now. I think that across the globe – and Alberta has certainly not been immune to this – we have seen an overwhelming expression of the need for real, concrete action with respect to racism and systemic racism most importantly. Certainly, we know that the impetus for the most recent conversation was the death of George Floyd in the U.S., and we've watched the riots that have taken place, that are still taking place, across the United States now months later. We are all, I'm sure – all of us in this Assembly, our families – glued to the TV, watching what's going on. But, of course, what's notable about the moment is that it's a moment that is not new. It's a moment where the outpouring of voices saying, "We must take action now" might seem unusual, but really this has actually been a culmination of

decades, centuries of racism in the U.S. and that we are not immune from here in Alberta and in Canada.

Of course, this is not the first time in the last few months that we've talked about and that Albertans have talked about racism against black people in Alberta and, of course, our long and very shameful, frankly, history with respect to indigenous people in this province and in this country. We all bear responsibility. We've all accepted responsibility because of how much it has been a part of, unfortunately, the fabric of how our country came together, and we need to take concrete actions to overcome that.

I'm struck, Mr. Speaker, by the fact that I am a parent of young children, as many in this House are, and having those conversations with my children and trying to explain our history is a complicated task for any parent. I've tried to initiate age-appropriate conversations with my children about this. We talk about indigenous people. I'm so proud that at their school they do a treaty acknowledgement regularly. They talk about First Nations people and Métis people. They talk about our long history in a way that I know I did not when I was in school. I'm glad that those conversations are happening within the education system, and it provides a platform for myself as a parent to also have those conversations.

We've also talked in my household about antiblack racism, again trying to be age appropriate because I don't want to scare them, but I want them to know that they have an obligation as young citizens who are coming up in this world to also stand up for justice and equity.

I'm struck, Mr. Speaker, by the fact that I might get emotional here, so I'm just going to try to bring that back a little bit.

It's a very important conversation that many Albertans are having right now in their households, are having with their children, are having with their families about the importance of equality but, most importantly, equity.

10:40

The simple statements that we see within Government Motion 24 are important statements in that they state a commitment, but what they lack, Mr. Speaker, is a commitment to action, and that is what I believe the amendment that was brought forward by our opposition with respect to Government Motion 24 is intended to do. It's intended to put some action behind the statement, because I think we are at the point – well, actually, we've been at this point for decades – where we certainly at this point in time cannot simply rely on statements and affirmations. It's been too much. There's too much going on, and to simply respond to what's happening right now and the outcry for action by simply affirming our commitment to antiracism is not enough.

I think that was true even at the time when this government motion was brought forward, but I think it's more true even now. Even within the last, well, few months – and I think this government motion was brought forward quite a while ago now in terms of this session. Since then we've seen and I've heard a number of things even within this Chamber, Mr. Speaker, that confirm for me that it is not enough to simply say that we are antiracist or to say that we acknowledge that there is antiblack and indigenous racism that has been systemic in our system, that we need to take action.

Earlier this evening, Mr. Speaker, I spoke a little bit with respect to Bill 29 and how there's a difference between equality and equity and how I didn't think that I would have to in this Chamber talk about those issues. I thought it was understood that simply treating everybody the same does not result in everybody being treated the same. We know that, and that's fact, but I've had to say that in this House because I've heard comments from members on the government side, I've heard statements in this Chamber that make

me question whether or not we're all really talking about the same thing in here, whether or not we're really talking about saying that everybody should be treated the same or whether or not we really want equality and equity of opportunity and experience and access and ability to attain the same outcomes for everybody. I don't feel like that's what's happening and what I'm hearing in this Chamber.

Government Motion 24: I think that, unfortunately, in this House we've seen that it's not enough to simply state that there's a commitment to antiracism by this government, because when they had the opportunity to take real, concrete action on racism, this government so far has chosen not to. They chose not to consider an amendment, for example, to the parole board bill that would have ensured that there was representation from indigenous and black people on that parole board, a very simple change that would have reflected what we know to be the case, which is that the criminal justice system disproportionately impacts indigenous and black Albertans. To reject that because it was viewed as some kind of tokenism or that those people did not have merit to take those positions shows me that there was a misunderstanding about why it's important to address systemic racism, particularly in the criminal justice system, from all facets.

Then we saw in this House, Mr. Speaker – I read some of these statements myself and was horrified – that the Premier's office and the Premier continue to employ a speech writer who has a long and very extensive, documented record of racism against indigenous people, transphobia, sexism, some of the most vile things that we've ever seen. It's a long and repeated record, and the Premier won't remove this individual from the Premier's office.

Again, it is not enough to simply say that we have a commitment to antiracism. We need to see action. Again, it is not a significant or difficult action for the Premier to say: it is not acceptable in my office that I would have somebody with those views. Instead, it was defended repeatedly, and that individual continues to remain employed in the Premier's office. We've seen that the Premier is not willing to take action, simple action, not even a very substantive move to distance himself and to remove from his office somebody with clearly racist views.

Similarly, Mr. Speaker, we had a situation where there was a government-appointed member to the Provincial Court Nominating Committee, a lawyer with, again, very well-documented sexist views, racist views. Instead, while this individual did resign – the government didn't remove them – the Minister of Justice stood up and still defended that person as having diverse views.

Mr. Speaker, when this government motion was introduced, I believed then that it wasn't enough because it was simply a commitment to a principle that we should all be assuming by now. The statements that are in Government Motion 24: I mean, those are basic tenets by now of our understanding around diversity and racism, human rights, equality. Those should be, honestly, a given. Yet when they had the opportunity to take action, this government has chosen not to, so now more than ever I think what we need in this province and what I think Albertans need to see from this government is concrete action around racism, actually taking some deliberate measures.

The amendment that we brought forward urges the government not only to consider these issues but to hear the voices of racialized communities by establishing a panel that would conduct hearings throughout the province, that would include the voices of the Black Lives Matter movement, that would include voices of indigenous communities, and that would publish a report. One of the issues, Mr. Speaker, is that certainly we can't have a real discussion about racism, particularly targeted towards black and indigenous communities in Alberta, without including those voices and without hearing that. Doing these panels, giving individuals from

communities the opportunity to speak their truth is, again, I actually think a bare minimum. That's really where we should be starting from. That is what the lesson is right now. The lesson is to listen, the lesson is to hear, but it's also to take action.

I think this amendment is a very reasonable amendment, Mr. Speaker, and it really will demonstrate what I think Albertans would really like to see from this government, which is a real commitment to take action against racism, not simply make statements and, honestly, not simply review the Police Act. The Police Act is an important place to start, no doubt about it. We're hearing a significant amount of concerns, particularly lately around actions of police. Of course, we saw, I think probably every member in this House saw that, frankly, heinous video of Chief Allan Adam, who was arrested and, frankly, brutalized by police, and I think we were all horrified. We certainly have significant issues that need to be heard and that need to be considered within the Police Act, but we need to hear it from the people around this province who experience it. That's the lesson that we have learned or that we should be learning from the moment that we're in right now.

This is not new. This is not new information to us that there is systemic racism within the structures and institutions of our government, particularly within the criminal justice system, but I believe that we can show Albertans that we are taking this incredibly seriously, that we're taking, again – I don't believe it is a big hardship for government to do this, to do these panels and to do these hearings and to show that they are taking this matter seriously. I still think that's just the beginning of an enormous amount of work that we need to do in our society and in our institutions and in our government. Having these panel hearings is simply just the beginning, but it is the very least I think we should be able to commit to as a government right now to try to meet the moment that we're in.

Mr. Speaker, I sincerely hope that this government will take this amendment in the spirit in which it is intended, which is really to listen to Albertans and to take action on those things that Albertans are asking us to do. We've had a number of opportunities in this House to do the right thing, and I'm asking the government members today to consider to do the right thing and, as I've said, almost the bare minimum they can do, to try to hear legitimately from Albertans across this province who have experienced antiblack racism, anti-indigenous racism, and start to take real concrete action. I hope that the government members will be willing to consider and maybe vote in favour of this amendment.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Hon members, Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available if anyone has a brief question or comment for the member.

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

[Motion on amendment A1 lost]

The Speaker: Hon. members, we are on Government Motion 24. Is there anyone else wishing to speak? The hon. Member for Calgary-McCall.

10:50

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to speak to Government Motion 24, and I also want to move an amendment to the government motion. I can distribute that amendment and will make some comments on the amendment.

The Speaker: Hon. member, if you'd just grab a seat just for a moment, and we will get the amendment to the table.

Hon. members, this amendment will be referred to as amendment A2. The hon. Member for Calgary-McCall.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I can read it into the record. The Member for Calgary-McCall to move that Government Motion 24 be amended by striking out clause (e) and substituting the following:

- (e) urges the Government
 - (i) to consult with racialized communities as part of its review of the Police Act,
 - (ii) to consider the issues that arise from the Government's consultation in respect of its review of the Police Act, and
 - (iii) to report to the Legislative Assembly on the matters set out in subclauses (i) and (ii) no later than October 1, 2020.

Mr. Speaker, the motion that the government proposed is simply an acknowledgement of something that racialized communities, that indigenous communities, black communities have been painfully experiencing for decades. With this motion at the same time we also proposed a motion that was actually focused on doing something meaningful. We believe it's a critically important issue, and we need to move beyond just condemning racism; we need to move towards action. Government should not need their own motion to affirm their commitment to this work. Just acknowledging the pernicious and durable nature of antiblack racism, acknowledging the tragic history of racism directed at indigenous people is not enough. I think we have done that many times. I think it's time that we should move beyond just acknowledging it and condemning it. We should move towards some practical actions and steps that send a message out to these communities who have been experiencing racism, who have been living with that experience that their government is there to work with them on issues that matter to them.

What this amendment is doing is that – after the death of George Floyd in the States we have heard everywhere across the world, in Alberta as well, what the experience of racialized communities, indigenous communities, black communities has been with police and systemic racism. We saw protests everywhere in the province as well – Edmonton, Calgary, in particular – huge rallies, people asking for change, people asking for action.

I think we do know the issues by now, that it exists in our structures, and we need to take action. The only meaningful action, if we want to get it right, will be that we engage with these communities, we learn from the lived experience of these communities, and then we take steps that we identify based on those consultations. But with this motion I think that the government is just simply acknowledging something that we as people of racialized communities, people of black communities, people of indigenous communities have been living for decades. If we talk about actions, I think that there are many things that the government can do.

Since that incident in the United States I have engaged with community leaders in my community, in my constituency. Even prior to that, when we were in government, I was part of that antiracism work that was led by my colleague the then Minister of Education, the MLA for Edmonton-North West, and there were things that were recommended by these communities: setting up an Anti-Racism Advisory Council, and in one year it's my understanding that they didn't have more than two photo ops. Then there were recommendations that we increase supports for the human rights tribunal and the initiatives they were engaged in with ethnic and racialized communities. What we saw from this government is a cut for those programs.

I think if this government wants to be taken seriously in this work, they can start with something that will save them some money immediately. They can fire Paul Bunner, who has a history

of writing things that are offensive to indigenous communities, that are offensive to Muslim communities, that are offensive to LGBTQ communities, and if the government wants to be taken seriously, that's the first step. That's where they should start. That would send a clear signal that, yes, the government is serious about taking steps on racism.

The second thing. When I talk to my friends, my constituents, community leaders in my riding across northeast Calgary, especially on this issue, every time they will bring up the long history of our Premier from the time when he was the minister of citizenship and immigration. Even some of them will refer to the Premier in conversation as the minister of censorship and deportation. Those will be the kinds of things that they will use. They will describe the Premier's record as repressive because under the Premier's watch, when he was minister, we saw that refugee and family sponsorships drastically dropped. We saw temporary foreign worker numbers going up and their exploitation as well. They bring up things like the then minister and now Premier pulling Canada out of the Durban World Conference Against Racism. In particular the Muslim community, my community, they bring up the barbaric cultural practices hotline. They bring up the niqab ban at citizenship ceremonies. They bring up health care cuts to refugee health, those who are the most vulnerable.

11:00

Well, if we talk about racism, if we talk about elimination of racism, I think there are international conventions. There is international customary law. There is a lot of jurisprudence. There is a lot of research out there that calls for steps, structural changes that will promote understanding among all races, among different cultural groups. They urge to take steps on hate speech. They urge to criminalize memberships in racist organizations. Here I think we have seen many groups like Soldiers of Odin, like Edmonton infidels, Rebel media, and the like in the rank and files of the UCP. During the election campaign in 2019 there were 30 different candidates who had to be purged because of their views, extremist views, on all these issues.

Again, with this amendment I think it will give this government an opportunity to engage with racialized communities, to engage with those who are living with these experiences. This will be an opportunity for the government to learn from those experiences what their experience has been: how they have been excluded; how they have been discriminated based on their race, based on their colour, based on their descent, based on their national or ethnic origin; how their experiences have been nullified; how their basic dignity has been impaired; how their fundamental rights and freedoms have been restricted; and how they have been excluded from participating in the social, economic, cultural, and political life of our society, of our province, of our country. Only those who have lived through that will be able to share what it's like, what are the ways they are excluded, what are the ways they can be included.

Without engaging them, just putting a government motion on paper that we condemn racism, that we acknowledge racism doesn't mean anything. We have heard this before. Without meaningful action this doesn't change anything. In order to change these things, I think not only that we have to acknowledge this; I think I will urge the Premier to acknowledge the things that I described earlier and still come up in my conversations in my communities. The Premier can apologize for all those things, for banning niqabs at citizenship ceremonies. Many of those things, again, were challenged based on peoples' Charter rights and tossed out by the court, rightfully so, but at least to show goodwill, the Premier should accept, take some responsibility, acknowledge these mistakes, and apologize to those who have been impacted by these decisions.

That's the important first step, to show some goodwill, good gesture to these communities. Then the most important thing is to engage with these communities, learn from these communities, learn about their experiences. By only doing that, we will be able to identify what needs to be changed. I think that on both sides of the House we can agree that it's something that we all agree that we need to deal with. We should stand up to racism and bigotry in all its forms. As a House we can agree on that, and as the people's House I think it's reasonable that this amendment be supported, that the work we are doing on this be reported back to this House, to the representative of Albertans.

With that, I urge all members of the House to support this amendment. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Hon. members, Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available if there's anyone that would like to provide a brief question or comment for the Member for Calgary-McCall.

Seeing none, on amendment A2, the hon. the Minister of Culture, Multiculturalism and Status of Women.

Mrs. Aheer: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and thank you very much to everybody who's contributed to this really important discussion. There's been a lot of really great information that's come, and I actually very much appreciate the discussion. I just wanted to chat. The privilege that I've had being in this House and meeting with so many people and especially in this ministry, although I have to say that in opposition I had the same experience: having the opportunity to meet with minorities across the province and other organizations and what it is that they're looking for, how it is that we engage and involve these incredible, incredible organizations and groups of people that have contributed to the fabric and beautiful tapestry of this province since the beginning.

It was interesting. I had an interview probably about a year ago. An organization was asking about the history of Punjabis, actually, in the province. My husband is Punjabi. Hearing about when they first came to the province and their contributions and the contributions of the Sikh community and the contributions of the Arabic communities and the contributions of the Ukrainian communities, the Chinese community – and the list goes on. In fact, I believe that in B.C. right now they're passing a motion to talk about the importance of the Chinese community and the contributions that were made when they first were arriving in Canada, especially to the business sectors in Vancouver.

There's just so much incredible information out there about – and I could go on and on. I could talk about a bazillion different cultures. I myself: my dad is southeast Asian, and my mom is Irish, English, Scottish and Scandinavian, so I have a whole lot mixed in there. I always say that it's probably the best confusion. I was raised with a Hindu father and an Anglican mom.

Interestingly enough, they very much switched places. My mom, who was an only child, embraced the Indian culture because she didn't have any brothers and sisters. My dad comes from a family of 11, so he came to Canada and completely embraced the Canadian culture and just jumped in. He joined a choir and a bridge club and just sort of threw himself into Canadian culture. He met my mom in that choir and fell in love with her. My mom actually was really the major contributor to my love of the southeast Asian culture. She taught me how to cook the food, how to put on a sari, how to appreciate the deep, deep, meaningful family relationships that are in the southeast Asian cultures, that are uniquely different and beautiful and something that I appreciate every single day of my life.

There are a few mentors that I've had in my life outside of my family. One of them is more of a recent mentor. This is Grand Chief

Willie Littlechild. For those of you who have met him, he's one of the most genuine and, certainly, probably one of the most – he has this propensity for being able to put language to situations. He talks about walking shoulder to shoulder with people, walking through the difficult discussions. He says: you know, when we have challenges like this, let's talk about it, see how we find a solution, and it will serve us much greater if we actually walk this path together. That was, like, a life-altering comment for me, coming from somebody who lived through some really, really incredibly difficult times.

Or Adam North Peigan, who is a child of the '60s scoop: at the RAM, before COVID we had a really incredible installation that honoured Adam Peigan and many of the others who had lived through the '60s scoop to really share the story and to acknowledge what had happened because we don't ever want to see something like that ever happen again. These are people – or even Martin Luther King, who says: you can't fight hate with hate; you have to fight it with love.

I think about all of the incredible situations that I've been exposed to. I mean, we all have stories that we can tell about various things that have happened to us, barriers, and especially – I know this sounds really strange, but I'd never considered myself an ethnic female until I was elected. All of a sudden that was something. I always saw myself as this person who had the privilege of growing up in Canada with a father who came from – I'm a child of an immigrant, but I'm also a child of a fourth-generation Canadian. It's a really interesting position but actually more common than you would think.

11:10

I also want to acknowledge a man who is sitting in this room who has changed the way I think of things, and that's our Minister of Municipal Affairs. When I think about his story and how he came here and how he wanted to come and give his family a different life and the barriers that he went through and how he succeeded and then to be sitting in this House now as a minister of the Crown, being able to make legitimate changes and being the face for so many in his own culture that can look up to him and see, "I belong here, and I can have arrived yesterday, or I can have arrived, you know, 50 years ago," they will look at the Minister of Municipal Affairs and go: I can do that. I've heard him speak about some of the situations he's been through.

You know, one of the things I think that was the most disturbing for me is when he was denied the opportunity to speak. Black Lives Matter was one of those moments in time – and I think the Member for Edmonton-Whitemud actually, really said it quite well. She called it: meet the moment. Our Minister of Municipal Affairs wanted to meet the moment. He was given the opportunity and asked actually to come and speak about his background and who he is and the incredible story and journey and stand shoulder to shoulder, brother to brother, with somebody from a different party, different ideology. It didn't matter. What mattered was that they were there together, to be able to stand in racial solidarity, to talk about a movement that has forever changed the lives of every single person.

I've never been more proud of our province than to see all of these incredible human beings standing up together for a culture, for a group of people that deserved that love and that understanding and that respect as the result of the death of George Floyd. It is so sad that that death had to occur in order for this to happen, but sometimes it is the outpouring of love and understanding – the opposition talks about riots; I talk about movements of love, movements of change. I look to the Minister of Municipal Affairs with such deep admiration, that even given those circumstances he

continued to make sure to work with the organizations to make sure that those voices are heard. I want to thank you from the bottom of my heart for doing that.

One of my other mentors is – maybe some of you know her. Her name is Noor Al-Henedy, and she's actually from the Al Rashid mosque. I consider her like a sister. I just love her. She's actually the communications director. I went to go and see her the day that the mosque had had the spray painting on it, you know, when there was that white supremacist spray painting on there. I went that evening to go and speak with her and with Brother Adil and Imam Sadique Pathan and Brother Khalid and have a discussion about racism and how they were dealing with that and how they were going forward. You know, the opposition was talking about concrete action. That is concrete action because concrete action isn't about just broad-spectrum ideas; it's actually about dealing and talking with all of the different beautiful minorities that are in our province and other groups about how it is that they see themselves being represented and what they need.

For example, you know, Imam Soharwardy in Calgary – some of you might know him – actually started an interfaith group with Judy Shapiro from the Jewish centre because they wanted to create education between the Jewish communities and the communities of Islam. They created, along with a bunch of other imams and other organizations for the Jewish communities, this interfaith group. Did you know Imam Soharwardy spent six months walking across Canada to talk about race, to talk about antiracism? He has this incredible story. It just makes your hair stand up when you think about this beautiful soul with this greater purpose about understanding faith and what part that plays in all of this and the desire to love beyond the borders of your own understanding. Those are the things that changed for me.

I wanted to talk about concrete action because I think that's what this amendment is about. I'd like to give you some concrete action. I sure would have loved for the members of the opposition to have shown up to our declaration against female genital mutilation – they were all invited and never came – or to Black History Month, that actually the Minister of Municipal Affairs and I hosted both here and in Calgary, which we had panels on, which had – right, Minister? – people from all different backgrounds and ideologies. It was a really, really very strong and beautiful conversation, not to mention the fact that we flung open the doors of the Federal Building and McDougall to welcome all people. Whether you've been walking on this Earth for thousands of years, like our indigenous brothers and sisters, Métis and Inuit, or whether you just came yesterday, this is your House. I say to anybody who might be listening right now: this is your House. The faces that are in here reflect you, or they should, and we're trying to do better every single day to make sure of and do that.

I remember that when I was in opposition, I brought this up quite a bit with the status of women minister at the time: honour beatings and honour killings and child marriage. These are things that happen in Canada. Do you know there are 20,000 honour beatings or honour killings that happen in Canada? Little girls are still sent overseas to have their genitals mutilated because of a thousands-of-years-old practice. This is something in Canada that we can actually deal with and help our families that are coming here to understand the power of a girl, the strength of our girls, and how it is that we elevate those girls in all of these different cultures. It's absolutely imperative.

These are some of the concrete actions. We have a new grant called the multiculturalism, indigenous, and inclusion grant. The entire purpose behind that grant is to actually build capacity in communities to really, really elevate some of the incredible work

that is going on that brings our communities together. Because isn't this about unity?

You know, if you look at what actually causes racism, what causes bigotry, what causes discrimination, it's fear and divisive behaviour and the ability to make people second-guess the person standing beside you, unconscious bias. When people go out of their way to create that, they are part of the problem. When people create fear from one organization to another, they are part of that problem. If they go out of their way to make people feel that they are being discriminated against, they are part of the problem, Mr. Speaker. Creating unity, friendship, and relationships is way harder than creating division and disparity and despicable acknowledgements about what people believe to be true about somebody else. That is what creates division. That's what creates discrimination. That's what creates racism. It hides in those little corners.

Walking this path together means difficult discussions. It means sitting down and talking with somebody who may disagree with you and having the conversation. How many times do you sit around your Thanksgiving table or any table? How many people in this House get along with every single member in their family and agree completely with everything they say? Anybody? I doubt it. I know that I've had some interesting discussions at my table. Here's the thing. We don't hate that person. We don't throw them under the bus because they have a different discussion than us. We talk about it, and we figure out where we land, how it is that we bring people together. Isn't that what family is all about? Isn't that what building a strong province is all about? Isn't that what building a strong country is all about? Unity: the decisions to actually bring ourselves together, not to divide.

This side of the House will fight division. We will fight bigotry, we will fight discrimination, but we will also be willing to have those difficult discussions because that is how you evolve. If you do not give people the opportunity to evolve, it will not happen. Lookit, I'm turning 50 this year. I think about what I've learned in my lifetime, who I was 25 years ago, 30 years ago, and how I've evolved as a human being with my husband, my family, all of us together. I'm not the same person that I was 25 years ago, not even close. I don't think that anybody in this House could say that they are.

This job and this place that we are in right now really, really gives so much pause to think about things that you haven't thought about before. We're constantly being questioned, and that's a good thing. That transparency and that accountability actually builds better legislation, and all of us become better as a result of that.

You know, I could point fingers at the toxic comments that come from the opposition, but actually the truth is that I believe that we're all here for the same reasons. I truly believe that everybody in this House has the same purpose here. I can honestly say that on this side of the House we actually have actions. We have action items. You know what's interesting is that when you talk about antiracism – I think the Member for Edmonton-Whitemud was saying that this is about action.

11:20

I wanted to talk about the MLA for Calgary-West, who had brought up last week when he was in here about his work with Black Lives Matter. He was the only person willing to talk about that and about carding and about the incredibly interesting legislation that had actually come from the opposition, when they were in government, completely questioning whether or not those were racist decisions.

The Speaker: Hon. members, Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available if anyone has a brief question or comment for the minister.

Seeing none, is there anyone else wishing to speak to amendment A2? The hon. the Minister of Justice and the Solicitor General.

Mr. Schweitzer: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I wish to move a subamendment to amendment A2 to Government Motion 24.

The Speaker: Hon. members, this will be referred to as amendment SA1.

The hon. the Minister of Justice.

Mr. Schweitzer: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I move that amendment A2 to Government Motion 24 be amended in the proposed clause (e) by adding "and" at the end of subclause (i), by striking out "and" at the end of subclause (ii), and by striking out subclause (iii).

Mr. Speaker, I think that this is consistent with the work that we're undertaking with our expedited review of the Police Act. We are already in the process of consulting with racialized communities and minority groups in this province, indigenous communities, black leaders in our community, and then we will definitely take their thoughts and feedback into consideration as we bring forward the Police Act amendments in 2021.

When it comes to the report to the Legislature, I don't believe that we'll be sitting on October 1, 2020. You never know in these times, Mr. Speaker, if we will or won't, but when it comes to the timing of it, the consultation on the Police Act would take much longer than that. Typically consultations on police acts take three to five years. We're expediting that work to get it done quicker so that we can bring forward an act, and I look forward to the robust discussion and debate that would occur at the time when that act gets brought forward.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Hon. members, the hon. Minister of Justice and Solicitor General has moved a subamendment, and we are now debating that under Standing Order 29(2)(a), which is available if anyone would like to provide a brief question or comment for the minister on SA1.

Seeing none, I believe the hon. Member for Calgary-McCall has risen.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I will briefly speak to the subamendment to the amendment I moved. I think in the aftermath of George Floyd's death in the United States, governments around the world are engaging or at least committing to take steps to address systemic racism issues in their institutions, in their law enforcement. Certainly, in Alberta we have seen people rallying for those changes, people asking for those changes, people demanding to have those conversations.

If I talk specifically for my riding, and it's predominantly a riding that has an ethnic mix of more than 70 per cent. Certainly, their experiences with police, their experiences with law enforcement are such that they demand changes, that they want to be part of these conversations, important conversations, and when they're engaged in these conversations, they want to see the outcome of these conversations as well. I do understand that the Police Act and other reforms may take longer than the date that has been suggested here, but if the intent was to cover for that period, I think the government could have simply removed that October 1, 2020, deadline and kept the rest of the provision in there that requires this government to present those findings before this House, to make those findings public in a way that we can see those conversations, we can see what steps government is taking, and we can debate those things for and on behalf of our constituents.

I think the amendment that the Minister of Justice moved takes that accountability piece away, takes that transparency piece out of

this amendment, and certainly that's not acceptable. I will urge my colleagues: let's be transparent, let's commit to working with these racialized communities, let's hear those concerns, and let's openly and transparently report that back to the public and their representatives so that they can see what the government heard, what the conversations were, and what the steps are that are needed and necessary to address this issue.

Taking out the requirement to report to the Legislative Assembly on this important issue, I think, is washing the hands from accountability and responsibility to this House, and I will urge all my colleagues to vote down this subamendment.

The Speaker: Hon. members, Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available if anyone has a brief question or comment for the hon. Member for Calgary-McCall.

Seeing none, on SA1 is there anyone else wishing to provide a question or comment? Seeing none.

[Motion on subamendment SA1 carried]

The Speaker: We are on amendment A2 as amended. Is there anyone else wishing to provide comments?

Seeing none, I am prepared to call the question.

[Motion on amendment A2 carried]

The Speaker: Hon. members, we are on Government Motion 24. Is there anyone else wishing to speak? Government Motion 24 as amended. The hon. Member for Red Deer-South has risen.

Mr. Stephan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm grateful for the opportunity to stand briefly and speak in support of Motion 24. From time to time in this Legislature we have the opportunity to stand together on a matter which transcends politics on the basis of our shared humanity. Racism is such a matter.

Albertans agree and share a common desire for our land to be without racism, and these Albertans in a large majority elected this United Conservative Government. Thus, this government motion not only represents my views and our caucus's views but, most importantly, the views of Alberta individuals and families who elected us.

While government, the police, and our laws play an important role, the ultimate solutions to racism will never come from government. Racism cannot be legislated or enforced into extinction; moreover, hate cannot be vanquished through contention anymore than two wrongs can make a right. Love is the antidote to racism and fear. While choosing love over hate is an individual choice, love of neighbour is supported in the truth of our collective humanity with each individual having intrinsic great worth. The correct application of a true understanding of this pre-eminent common heritage is incompatible with racism.

11:30

Our Premier has described racism as a sickness of the soul. He is right. Government cannot legislate, compel, or force the healing of a soul. Love works from the inside out. The world works from the outside in. The world can only try to legislate and punish bad behaviour. Love takes bad behaviour out of people, and then they themselves choose good behaviour. Love is the better, more durable solution to the healing of the soul. Individually in our families and in our communities love will always have a more powerful effect on the mind and lead to doing what is right than the rough fist of the state. Love is the noblest trait one can aspire to. Love is not just a feeling. Its meaning is found as it is acted upon. Love is expressed as we serve our neighbours regardless of our individual differences and then even especially because of them, as we set good examples

for our children, generously forgiving others and speedily seeking to correct our mistakes. Solutions to racism for our families and communities will come as we open our hearts to those whose lives are different than our own and as we work to build bonds of genuine friendship with unity and love.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Hon. members, Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available if anyone has a brief question or comment for the Member for Red Deer-South.

Seeing none, on Government Motion 24 as amended is there anyone else that would like to provide debate this evening?

Seeing none, I am prepared to call the question.

[Government Motion 24 as amended carried]

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Jason Nixon: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise pursuant to Standing Order 3(1.2) to advise the Assembly that there will be no morning sitting on Tuesday, July 21, Wednesday, July 22, and Thursday, July 23.

Government Bills and Orders Second Reading

Bill 30 Health Statutes Amendment Act, 2020

Mr. Dang moved that the motion for second reading of Bill 30, Health Statutes Amendment Act, 2020, be amended by deleting all of the words after "that" and substituting the following:

Bill 30, Health Statutes Amendment Act, 2020, be not now read a second time but that the subject matter of the bill be referred to the Select Special Public Health Act Review Committee in accordance with Standing Order 74.2.

[Adjourned debate on the amendment July 15: Ms Gray]

The Speaker: We are debating amendment REF1 that was proposed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-South. Is there anyone that would like speak to the amendment? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. Schmidt: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to offer some comments on the referral amendment that we are debating here today and give some points as to why I think it's important that Bill 30 be sent to committee for careful consideration.

I just want to take a minute and offer a comment, if I can, on comments that the Member for Red Deer-South made with regard to Government Motion 24. He talked about love and the need to have love to overcome racism. When I was listening to his comments, it reminded me of a statement. Forgive me; I can't recall who this is credited to. There is a saying that justice is the public expression of love, and I think there is no better public expression of justice in Alberta than a public health care system. It's fundamentally important to me that we maintain a strong public health care system so that the people of Alberta can be treated justly, that we show through our collective actions that we love one another here in the province of Alberta and that we're willing to take care of each other. There's no better way of expressing that than through a strong public health care system.

In referring this bill to committee, I think there are two things that I would like the committee to consider if it were given the opportunity to examine this bill in close detail. The first is the impact that these changes that are proposed in Bill 30 could

possibly have on Alberta's pandemic response, perhaps a rather daunting task for a legislative committee, one that would look at the ethical implications of Bill 30.

First of all, I want to address some of the issues regarding Alberta's pandemic response and how public health care has improved the health care response and my concerns regarding the changes that this bill may have with respect to how we can respond to the pandemic. It is quite clear from the data that was revealed by Dr. Hinshaw earlier this afternoon that the pandemic has not gone anywhere. We are now recording higher levels of daily COVID cases than we've seen since the 1st of May. I don't know if this is the beginning of the second wave of COVID infections or what's going on, but it's quite clear that right now Alberta has the highest per capita rate of COVID infections of any province in the country, and that should trouble all of us.

This government, while initially being able to show leadership on the COVID file, has now fallen behind the rest of the country with respect to managing this outbreak. So it's very troubling to me that at the very time that we're letting Albertans down in dealing with the COVID pandemic, we are now entertaining a vast expansion of the private health care system in our province.

One only needs to look at the experience of our neighbours in the United States to suggest that private health care is not an adequate way to deal with a global pandemic like COVID-19. The primary reason is that private health care focuses not on looking after people but on looking after profits for the corporations that provide that health care to people. How has that impacted the American response to COVID, Mr. Speaker? It has impacted it in a number of ways. First of all, when you create a system that's centred on profit and not patient care, you're creating incentives for the health care system to run at maximum capacity at all times. What we've seen in the American response to the pandemic is that the hospital system there has been completely overwhelmed with patients because there's no spare capacity. Beds are full, doctors and nurses are running around the clock to look after all of these millions of additional patients that have been thrust onto the health care system because there's no additional capacity.

Now, I don't know what impact Bill 30 may have on the capacity of the health care system to deal with issues like COVID-19 or any future pandemic that might strike Alberta, but what I do know is that right now under our current public system we have the ability for the government to manage capacity. We've seen in this pandemic that elective surgeries have been delayed. COVID-19 has been treated as a priority, and other lower priorities in the health care system have been deferred. So I'm curious, Mr. Speaker, as to what impact opening up private clinics, as proposed in Bill 30, will have on Alberta's COVID response.

11:40

Now, I expect that members opposite will say that this will have no impact on our COVID response, that the private health care system that they're proposing to set up will not be charged with dealing with the COVID pandemic and the patients that that disease is creating. While that may be true, Mr. Speaker, we all recognize that we have limited resources that we can spend on health care, and if they're establishing private contracts with corporations to conduct elective surgeries or what have you, what will be the ability of the government to reallocate those resources under the contracting arrangements that they will develop if this bill is passed? So one of the things that I would like the committee to consider, if it were given the opportunity, is the impact on the hospital capacity system.

Now, one of the other issues that we've seen in the United States' response to the pandemic is the incredible shortage of testing

supplies, personal protective equipment, and ventilators. One of the great benefits of Alberta's public system is that all of those things are centrally managed and planned. We can distribute personal protective equipment to where it's most needed, and we can make sure that there are ventilators in the hospitals and that we don't discriminate based on anything other than need. But when you create a private, for-profit system, as is proposed here in Bill 30, you are setting up a whole bunch of private actors who will begin to compete with each other for the purchase of this vital equipment, potentially. We don't know how this vital equipment – personal protective equipment, ventilators, testing – will be allocated to private facilities. That's another issue that I would like the committee to look at if it were given the opportunity, how we would deal with these issues of allocating scarce resources in the time of a pandemic given the fact that we're setting up a parallel private system.

We also have to realize that the creation of a profit incentive may have a negative impact on testing. I'd like to just reinforce to members of this Assembly that even under our centrally managed, centrally planned Alberta health care system we have yet to achieve the testing capacity that the Premier set out in April. In April the Premier said that we would be able to scale up testing to 20,000 tests a day, and here we are in the middle of July, and we're averaging fewer than 5,000 tests a day. What happened to the Premier's promise to conduct 20,000 COVID tests a day? What impact will the creation of a parallel private system have on the allocation of this kind of testing? What will what I suspect will be the siphoning off of scarce public resources into the private system – what impact will that have on Alberta's ability to conduct even the 5,000 tests or fewer that we're currently seeing?

Now, members opposite might say: well, the member is fearmongering. I know that we don't often hear that charge from members opposite, but occasionally we here in the NDP get accused of exaggerating the negative aspects of some parts of public policy.

I think it's instructive for us to look at the experience of long-term care here in the province of Alberta and their inability to effectively deal with the COVID pandemic to determine whether or not a massive expansion of the private system, as being contemplated here in Bill 30, will have an effect on our ability to deal with the pandemic. Almost all of the COVID-related deaths in the province of Alberta have occurred in long-term care facilities, and of those it's my understanding that the bulk of them have been in private facilities. Now, why is that, Mr. Speaker? Is it that patients in private long-term care facilities are more prone to dying of COVID than residents of public long-term care facilities? I don't think that's true.

What we do know is that the profit incentive changes the behaviour of private health care providers to cut corners when it comes to safety. For a very long time we saw multiple health care aides and health care professionals in long-term care centres working in multiple facilities. It was only when the government issued an order to prevent that from happening that that practice ended. We've heard anecdotes from health care professionals working in the long-term care sector that it hasn't been as easy to get personal protective equipment, to take the time needed to effectively deal with the patients. It costs money to effectively deal with the COVID pandemic, and long-term care providers just weren't interested in doing that.

It baffles me, Mr. Speaker, that we would be intentionally undermining a strong public health care system that has served Albertans reasonably well in preventing COVID from being worse than it's already been and massively expanding a private health care system that has been shown to fail in the United States. I have yet

to hear from a single constituent of Edmonton-Gold Bar that says: "You know what? Those Americans are really on to something when it comes to dealing with health care."

For this reason, Mr. Speaker, I strongly recommend that all members vote in favour of this amendment.

The Speaker: Hon. members, Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available if anyone has a brief question or comment for the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar, and it would seem that the hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood has just that.

Member Irwin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar for his comments. I always appreciate when he speaks because he brings a lot of wisdom to this House. When I first spoke to Bill 30 the other day, one of the things I talked about is sort of the pattern of undermining our public health care system that we've seen from this government. Of course, they will deny it, but we can point to things like the privatization of labs in a pandemic, we can point to – it's fresh on my mind from this morning – the move to basically sell off blood through the private member's bill that was discussed in committee, and the attacks on doctors. You know, 42 per cent of doctors are planning to leave, and we know that those numbers are likely to rapidly increase.

What I wanted to ask the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar is that, you know, I'm hearing from a lot of my constituents about their concerns regarding the attacks on our public health care system and how important health care is to my constituents. I'm certainly not hearing about things like Senate elections, campaign financing. These are things that I'm not hearing about. So what I'd love is for the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar to maybe just talk a little bit more about what he's hearing from his constituents, whether it's in relation to health care or just sort of why it is that we need to be standing up for public health care at this time in the midst of a pandemic.

11:50

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

Mr. Schmidt: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I want to thank my friend from Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood for the compliments, first of all. I seem to recall that she said that I bring a lot of wisdom to the House. I suspect that she was using "wisdom" in place of some more unparliamentary words that would be more accurate in describing what I bring to the House, so I thank her for maintaining decorum and being incredibly charitable with her descriptions of me.

Her question was on what I'm hearing from the constituents of Edmonton-Gold Bar, who have views on public health care during the middle of a pandemic. One of the things that I have to say is that as the representative for Edmonton-Gold Bar, I represent one of the oldest communities in all of Alberta, and that's in terms of the demographics. The residents of Edmonton-Gold Bar are on average older than most Albertans. In fact, I have the oldest urban riding in the entire province of Alberta, so health care issues are top of mind when it comes to what's concerning the residents of Edmonton-Gold Bar, particularly with long-term care.

I have no shortage of people reaching out to me who are concerned about the care or lack thereof that their loved ones are receiving in long-term care facilities. Especially during the pandemic, I'm hearing from many people who are afraid to send their loved ones into a long-term care setting. Even though they desperately need some kind of continual care, they don't want to send their mom or their dad, their aged loved ones, into a long-term care setting because our long-term care system has a high risk of being a death sentence for that person.

What they're telling me is that instead of moving existing parts of the health care system into a private system, what we need to be doing is moving those aspects of health care in Alberta that are privatized into the public system. They are telling me that we should be taking long-term care and moving into the public system and taking the profit motive out of caring for people in long-term care so it reduces the likelihood of their loved ones dying because some corporate shareholder registered in the Cayman Islands is more concerned about whether or not they're going to turn a profit in this quarter than whether or not mom or dad has died.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Hon. members, is there anyone else wishing to speak to REF1? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview has risen.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise to speak to Bill 30, the Health Statutes Amendment Act, for the first time. I will be speaking to the referral amendment, of course, that my colleague put forward, which, of course, refers this bill to one of our standing committees to review the bill. I think there are significant problems with this bill, sweeping changes that the Minister of Health is proposing and honestly taking our health care system in the wrong direction.

I can tell you, you know, that we've heard from doctors. We've heard from health care professionals around the province. Quite frankly, I've never heard from so many professionals talking about how the government is completely mucking up our health care system. As well, this bill is adding an additional level of chaos to quite a bit of disarray that, quite frankly, the minister introduced, again, picking fights with doctors at a time when the world is facing a massive pandemic and trying to paint our doctors in a way that is, I think, disrespectful to their practice, disrespectful to the work they do, especially at a time when we're so reliant on these very people to help us through the pandemic.

As my colleague the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar pointed out, Alberta actually was doing quite an incredible job of keeping our COVID numbers low in the first few months of the outbreak. There is cause for concern now that we're seeing Alberta's numbers spike quite rapidly, quite frankly, Mr. Speaker. I think, you know, number one, that changes to our health statutes are not going to be beneficial, but it's also – my frustration is that day in and day out the Premier gets up and talks or states that doctors aren't leaving the province. What's frustrating is that the AMA did a survey, and there is a significant and alarming, actually, number of doctors that are threatening to leave the province.

[Mr. Amery in the chair]

We've also, you know, essentially told doctors from other jurisdictions: you're not welcome here. That's the signal and the message that is going out, quite frankly, around the globe, Mr. Speaker. I know Alberta is a relatively small jurisdiction compared to other countries around the world, but I can tell you that people do pay attention to what goes on here and, really, especially when governments put out markers or indicators and send messages to the world. Let me tell you, the message that's been sent has had a chilling effect on the very providers that we rely on, and this bill is taking us further in a direction that Albertans rejected.

Over the past 40 years, in my lifetime, there have been a couple significant attempts by previous governments to privatize our health care system. You know, I recall former Premier Ralph Klein bringing in the third way in the '90s, and Albertans en masse rejected it. If you want to look at either outcomes or costs, let's just compare Canada to the U.S. The U.S. health care system is much

more costly to the U.S. taxpayer, yet they get a fraction of the outcomes and deliverables that we get in Canada.

Now, I'll be the first person to admit, you know: can our system improve? Are there areas of improvement? Absolutely, a hundred per cent. We can get much more. We can get better at delivering our health care. We can find efficiencies. We can increase patient outcomes while looking at ways of reducing costs, but I can tell you, Mr. Speaker, that the approach that this bill is taking and that this current government is taking is not doing that. It's not looking at working with our current health care providers.

You know, I mean, when we formed government in 2015, I recall having a conversation with the then Minister of Health, who talked about the increase that the former PC government was spending on health care. Health care was increasing. I think it was around by 9 per cent a year. I may have to go back and double-check that number – my brain feels a little foggy – but it was an unsustainable rate of growth of costing. I mean, when your largest budget item – about 40 per cent, I believe, of the Alberta budget is on health care – is increasing by just under 10 per cent a year, that's staggering. When we formed government, we looked at ways to bend the cost curve and actually reduced it significantly from that 9 per cent.

12:00

Now, the reality, Mr. Speaker, is that Alberta has always been a province that many Canadians are envious of, that many Canadians choose to move to. We're attractive not only to the international community, but we're also attractive within our own country. Alberta has very high net positive migration stats. I can tell you that even in the middle of the global collapse in the price of oil Alberta still had families moving here. I believe our migration was still positive even when, of course, the energy sector took a significant hit.

You know, we do need to factor in, obviously, population growth and inflation when we're looking at our Health budget to ensure that we're continuing to deliver the quality of health care that Albertans have come to appreciate, have come to respect, and deserve, quite frankly. You know, we have before us a bill, and I can tell you, Mr. Speaker, the reason that I am supporting this referral is that I think the government needs to go back and consult with many more doctors. I mean, I appreciate that the government may stand up and say: well, you know, the AMA doesn't necessarily speak for all doctors. No. Fair enough. But I can tell you that they do speak for a significant number of doctors. We've also heard from other doctors that feel that this bill and this direction and this government are attacking the very fibre of our health care system.

I can tell you that, you know, there have been a lot of studies done on privatizing health care or two-tiered health care and on what that looks like and how that is delivered. Mr. Speaker, for example, here's a statistic, right? The minister will talk about how private surgical clinics can make things better, that that will help alleviate pressure on the public system. I'll talk about why that's a fallacy for a couple of reasons. For example, 97 per cent of Calgary's cataract surgeries are actually done privately; 66 per cent of Edmonton's surgeries are public. Okay. So you have a majority in Calgary that are done privately, a majority in Edmonton that are done publicly. I can tell you that Calgary's wait times are 50 per cent higher than Edmonton's. You know, I think that's an example of where, in this case, the private sector is not going to do a better job of delivering outcomes than the public sector.

In fact, our health care system is the envy – the envy – of so many jurisdictions around the world. Alberta is unique, Mr. Speaker, because we are one of the only jurisdictions – we are the only one in Canada and one of the only in the world – that has a single health

care delivery mechanism. You know, one example that I learned of when comparing our health care in Alberta to other systems, say in Ontario, for example: you have hospitals in Toronto that are down the street from each other that don't share anything in common, from their filing system to their data. Nothing is shared between them. To me, it seems absolutely absurd that there's no co-ordination, and this is within the same city; I mean, not even in the same province.

[The Speaker in the chair]

Here in Alberta we have an incredible health care system. Again, I will say, you know, that I do believe we can make improvements; we can make the system better. But taking it down a path of picking fights with doctors, of looking at bringing in more private delivery is not the way to go. Now, I can tell you that what's shocking to me, Mr. Speaker, is the fact that it's one thing to, quite frankly, have the audacity to propose the changes they're proposing to our health care system, but to do it in the middle of a pandemic, you're attacking the very people that you need to help you through this pandemic. That's the time that you picked?

I can tell you, Mr. Speaker, that so many health care professionals that I've talked to are disappointed – that is an understatement – in the job that the Minister of Health is doing. Quite frankly, they're awestruck at one thing after another: picking a fight with the very people that we need to help us through this. You know, the system needs stability, and I can tell you that what this government is introducing is grave instability.

You know, again, we're seeing the number of cases in Alberta spike. There were many that forecasted a second wave later in the fall just because of how COVID predominantly is reacting in warmer weather. If we're already seeing an increase in the number of cases, that's really concerning, Mr. Speaker, for what could lie ahead. Of course, as you're well aware, there are no vaccines at the moment. Our health care professionals around the world are still studying to what extent this pandemic will impact and affect people's health and lives. It's scary, quite frankly. There are more and more studies that are rolling out. In fact, there have been recent studies on young children, on how it's impacting them, that it's having devastating consequences for their health.

You know, when we look at this bill – I'll try to dive into some of the sections here – I can tell you that what this bill will do is that it'll streamline the chartering of private, for-profit clinics, on which, of course, we've heard from different professionals, Mr. Speaker. For example, a quote from a U of C professor said that private clinics tend to take less complex, less sick, cheaper-to-treat cases from the public system, and then of course the public system is left with those more complex, expensive cases. I guess, then, that it's true that it will alleviate some of the cases from the public system, but again the private system is going to cherry-pick and leave the most complex, the most expensive, and the most delicate surgeries and treatments for the public system. Essentially, what we're doing is subsidizing the private sector as opposed to looking at ways to strengthen our public system, which, of course, has been a pillar for this province.

I can tell you, you know, that as minister of economic development and trade, when I went down to Silicon Valley, as I did on a number of missions, one of the reasons companies were looking to Canada and to Alberta was because of our health care system. Like, in every one of those conversations I had with Apple, Google, Amazon, not once did they talk about the tax rate in Alberta and that that would be the reason they come here. They talked about talent, and then they talked about quality of life. We're talking about good-quality schools. They looked to our education system

as, again, a stellar example of the work of our teachers and educational assistants and speech pathologists and all the supports that we have, and that's one of the reasons that they are looking to Alberta. This bill needs to be referred and go to a committee.

The Speaker: Hon. members, Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available. I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar would like to provide a brief question or comment for the Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Mr. Schmidt: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I want to thank my friend from Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview for his insightful comments on some possible implications with respect to Bill 30. Now, I'm not overly familiar with the neighbourhoods in Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview, but I have spent a little bit of time in that part of the city, and I know that he represents some communities that are definitely less well off than many communities in Alberta. Certainly, the Beverly neighbourhood, the Abbottsfield neighbourhood: these are some communities that have had some very difficult economic challenges for a long period of time, and that doesn't look to change in the near future.

I'm wondering if my friend from Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview could tell the House what impact the expansion of private health care could have on his constituents, who, by and large, probably can't afford to get health care through a private system.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

12:10

The Speaker: I'm sure he'd be more than happy to provide comment on how that pertains to the amendment, not necessarily just the private health care or otherwise but how it pertains to the amendment. I'm sure he'd be happy to provide a brief question or comment.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'll thank my friend the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar for the question. Of course, you know, the move to privatize health care would have devastating effects, especially on neighbourhoods within my riding, and for that reason amongst others I'm strongly recommending that members of this Chamber support this referral to send it to a committee, to be able to engage with communities like the communities that I have in my riding, where, you know, people are struggling to make ends meet. If our health care system goes down this path, if this bill is passed, it will take good people out of the public system. It'll increase wait times for those who can't afford to pay for medicine and seeing doctors and specialists with their credit card, will weaken overall the general system, and actually put more of a strain onto people and their families.

You know, I can tell you that I have not met, since I was first elected on April 23, 2012 – coincidentally, the birthday of our 11-year-old – a single constituent who has said: we really need to privatize our health care system. I mean, look at how successful the U.S. is when it comes to health care. Again, the fact – and I don't have the stats in front of me, but I'll endeavour to get them when we debate this bill in committee unless, of course, the House all agrees to vote this to the special committee, in which case then I'll pass that information on to my colleagues. But you look at the staggering costs of health care to the U.S., and honestly it's worth looking at, Mr. Speaker, because the quality of care that they have is a fraction of what we deliver.

Again, you know, Americans have to supplement their own policies with private health care, which is costly, more costly than our system, and again they're getting a fraction of the care. You know, you look to jurisdictions that have tried to go down this path, and I have not seen success stories from it. In fact, again, we have

doctors and academics and those who have experienced this path of privatization on health care and looked at the quality of the care that's delivered, and again we see wait times going up, we see quality going down, and we see costs going up, where now the public is subsidizing the private health care delivery model, yet we're not getting the benefits of it, Mr. Speaker.

You know, on this bill, we are seeing hundreds of letters come in opposing this bill, and for those reasons, Mr. Speaker, I will urge members to vote in favour of the referral.

The Speaker: Hon. members, on amendment REF1, is there anyone else that would like to provide some debate? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadows has risen.

Mr. Deol: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for the opportunity. It's my honour to rise in the House and speak on behalf of my constituents in favour of this amendment to Bill 30, which reads that

Bill 30, Health Statutes Amendment Act, 2020, be not now read a second time but that the subject matter of the bill be referred to the Select Special Public Health Act Review Committee in accordance with Standing Order 74.2.

Why this is very important, Mr. Speaker, the piece of legislation in our hands – I don't know which word I should use right now to express my views and feelings I'm having after looking at some of the proposals in this bill. This bill, if it is passed as it is proposed, without having the opportunity to send it to the select committee and providing a more broad range of feedback from the stakeholders, the public, professionals – because what this bill is going to do, in my view, in what I see, is going to have a massive, massive effect on the lives of Albertans if it's passed.

I was just listening to one of the radio talk shows where the member of the government House was really speaking on this bill. I did actually hear the debate, the Premier's argument on this bill. I was not in the House; I was listening on the TV. I was wondering how this bill or the changes in this bill were being framed. The member on the radio was saying: Alberta health care is already privatized; we are not doing anything different; this bill is not going to make changes. How the member was also, you know, relating the individual doctors, the clinics run by those doctors to the facilities run by multinationals – what that member was saying: Alberta health care is already privatized. If you wanted to see, the Premier has said, go to Jasper Avenue and walk into one of the privatized clinics owned by the private doctors.

There's a huge change. I think the government members do not want to talk about the evidence of the actual changes they're proposing in this. If this bill is passed, instead of the AMA – the AMA is already fighting with the government, or the government is not having to sit with those professional organizations representing thousands of doctors, Alberta doctors, so they are still waiting. They are suing the government. Alberta is the only province where the medical association does not have a contract right now. So where their elected professional organization actually finalizes the agreement with the government and the doctors in this province work within that agreement while they're running their, you know, individual clinics, it's upon them. They can just sign the agreement as an individual, or they can sign the agreement by establishing their limited corporation.

12:20

The member was explaining that there was no difference in having a clinic operated by an individual professional or the corporations coming from out of the country or the corporations that have nothing to do with this profession, but they want to run the health care and hospital and clinic as profitable entities, where doctors will be left to work for them to generate the profit for the

corporations. So that's a very serious concern, not only that this bill also has a provision and a proposal, the government's wanting to increase the privately delivered surgeries from 15 per cent to about 30 per cent. It's not only that we have proof in Alberta.

I remember when I moved here in 1993, and the government, then under the leadership of Premier Klein, wanted to make changes to health care. I still remember. I was living in part of Mill Woods. More than 25,000 people came on roads and marched to the hospital, demonstrated against these proposed changes, and with those very actions the closure of that Grey Nuns hospital was stopped. Similar action actually happened in front of the Misericordia hospital, which pressured the then Klein government to step back from some of those proposals, changes they wanted to bring in.

But even though those hospitals were saved, the Grey Nuns hospital and the Misericordia hospital, we still had concerns that Edmonton's south has grown since 1993 by four, five, six times, and our communities are, you know, constantly asking for increased capacity of hospitals or more hospitals. The government: when they took office, one of their very first steps was to delay the proposed hospital in Edmonton-South West.

Going back to my point, the public pressure forced the Klein government to step back on some of the proposals, but they still moved ahead on some of the work, some of the changes, the directions they wanted to go by creating – one of those, I think, actions was establishing and creating a private Health Resource Centre. I think that facility was working from Calgary. That was, obviously, a very failed experiment. The facility itself went bankrupt and closed, and there are information codes from the health care professionals, people who are, you know, part of it, the people who were engaged to save that facility. So there are lessons to be learned.

But then we see, when we're talking about this bill, that it seems we are not, you know, really willing to read what is written on the wall. Not only this, my biggest concern is that the government actually conducted their own survey before drafting or proposing this bill to the House to know what Albertans say about these changes, and I'm very surprised. The results of those surveys have not been released. This is very concerning. This is also very concerning when we wanted to, you know, conduct or open another experiment. But I would say that the government members believed that would really help actually take some of the pressure off public health care and reduce the wait list.

At the same time government is moving in this direction by weakening the public health sector. We have seen – and my colleague actually brought it very effectively into his arguments. I have read a number of those articles about American health care versus Canadian during this COVID-19 pandemic. They're not all written by Canadian professionals or Canadian journalists, but a number of those analyses and articles from south of the border: the conclusion in those is that the biggest difference in how Canada was able to contain this kind of coronavirus differently than in the U.S., one of the biggest key factors, not in one view – but a number of those articles published from both sides of the border came to the conclusion that the public health sector in Canada was one of the key factors in the way we were able to contain the spread of the coronavirus in this country.

After all those evidenced arguments and information the government did not release, the government is still moving forward to privatize more surgeries, to open the doors for large corporations to come in and open for-profit health care facilities and hire doctors not to serve and focus on the patient care they need but to work for the for-profit care centres as workers.

Another thing I will say: I just wanted to suggest, when we are talking about the proposals written in the documents, on a piece of paper . . .

The Speaker: Hon. members, Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available if anyone has a brief question or comment for the hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadows.

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

Ms Sigurdson: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise and join my voice to the debate. Certainly, we're looking at amendment REF1. This amendment is saying to refer the contents of Bill 30 to the Select Special Public Health Act Review Committee in accordance with Standing Order 74.2. I want to speak in favour of doing that.

12:30

Certainly, you know, I've lost count now, but we have had several omnibus bills put forward by this government, and this bill is no exception, so having a more in-depth look at it through that committee process, I think, would be beneficial to the members of this Assembly to help us more fully understand this bill and to dig deeper into it. We know that there are nine pieces of legislation that are impacted by Bill 30 and thus this amendment is advocating for sort of a deeper dive in the committee process into this to understand it. We know that the Health Quality Council of Alberta Act, Health Professions Act, Health Care Protection Act, Alberta Health Care Insurance Act, Regional Health Authorities Act, Hospitals Act, Public Health Act, Health Governance Transition Act, and the Provincial Health Authorities of Alberta Act are all impacted by this legislation, and that's a lot of legislation, Mr. Speaker.

I do certainly support this amendment and think that we would all benefit from the committee process going further into that. I mean, we have heard a lot of response to this in the public sphere. We just heard today, in fact, that someone on the Health Quality Council of Alberta, Dr. Ubaka Ogbogu – I might have said that wrong. I apologize if I've butchered his name. He's a law professor from the University of Alberta, and he has now resigned his position with the Health Quality Council of Alberta. He says that this is because he feels that the Health Quality Council had a very key role in the system that, because of this legislation, has now been decimated. The council cannot function as it's meant to, as an independent body supporting the health system to make sure that Albertans have the best health care. It strips the Health Quality Council of its arm's-length relationship with the provincial government and allows the Health minister to interfere with the work of the committee. Obviously, it no longer is an arm's-length council.

I went to the website today just to look at that, actually, and it says this "is a provincial agency that brings an objective perspective to Alberta's health system." Unfortunately, with this proposed legislation it is now completely eroding that, and there isn't kind of that watchful eye. I think that's an important thing about the systems in government, that we do have those checks and balances. This quality council was absolutely created to make sure that that kind of oversight and good advice to all legislators was given by the Health Quality Council. Of course, this legislation has taken away that independence of the body as it will now report directly to the minister. I think this is something very much that this committee should look into to understand it more. I mean, obviously, Dr. Ogbogu's resignation – he's done that on a matter of principle because he feels that he's unable, because of this proposed

legislation, to actually fulfill his role. He was appointed back in 2018, and, you know, things have changed so dramatically. Obviously, the legislation hasn't passed yet, but I suppose it will be imminently.

It is, you know, kind of disturbing that this erosion of the independence of this body, which really benefits all Albertans, is being put forward in this legislation, so that's a concern certainly of this member – now he's no longer a member of the Health Quality Council of Alberta – and I think it should be a concern for all Albertans. Certainly, it is a concern for me as a member of this Legislature. I suppose it wouldn't – well, I mean, it's still a concern, but it becomes a more profound concern as we see that it's a pattern of behaviour by this government. They are eroding systems that are set up to support our public health system, for example, maybe our social services system, these kinds of systems. They are being controlled much more by Executive Council, particular ministers.

I mean, there are other examples of this that we could talk about. The Seniors Advocate was completely eliminated by this government. They said: oh, well, the Health Advocate will just take care of that responsibility. Of course, we know that only a third of the issues that the Seniors Advocate did look into on behalf of the citizens of this province were to do with health. There were financial concerns. There were housing concerns. There were social service concerns. This was the bulk of the concerns. Now Albertans don't have that opportunity to get support from an advocate in that way.

Even more egregious, Mr. Speaker, is that the appointment of the Health Advocate is actually a partisan appointment. It is Janice Harrington, who was the CEO of the UCP Party. She certainly didn't get that job on any kind of qualifications of merit. This makes it even more disturbing that we are going along this road sort of with the quality council of Alberta. We're sort of eroding their ability to give advice to the government in an independent manner. You know, these examples that I've used, like the Seniors Advocate being eliminated, the Health Advocate sort of saying that they're going to take care of seniors' issues but, really, it's only one-third of concerns, and then very clearly having a political partisan appointment. Of course, this isn't the only example. We know that Tom Olsen was a failed UCP candidate in the provincial election, and he now, of course, is the CEO of the energy war room. Another partisan appointment.

This is really cronyism, and we don't want that in politics. We want to make sure that people have positions and that these leaders are informing the government in a way based on, you know, expertise and independence, all of these things. But, I mean, this legislation, of course, is eroding it, and that's why it's so important that the committee look at this in more detail to help Albertans understand it.

Another aspect is also the Health Professions Act. I don't know what it is. About 30 health professions are governed by this act. These colleges, you know, ensure the ethics. I know in my own college, the College of Social Workers, we have a code of ethics, standards of practice, and a council. I mean, this is all governed through this health professions amendment legislation. And now the government is in this bill changing the membership, the public members on all of the councils for the regulatory colleges, moving it from 25 per cent public members to 50 per cent. That's a pretty significant jump. People may argue: oh, well, that's okay because we want to have public members sort of providing, again, some checks and balances to the colleges. But the thing is that a public member is appointed by the government, and, as I've just identified, this government, sadly, isn't looking for the best candidates, the candidates that have expertise, the candidates who have something

significant to offer. They're just taking care of their political friends.

This really concerns me, that the regulatory colleges of 30 professions will have partisan appointments of this government. I mean, that is concern enough for this committee to look more deeply into what is going on with the changes that this Bill 30 is suggesting.

12:40

You know, those are for two of the amended acts out of the nine that they've talked about, but sort of speaking more generally, we know that this bill does sort of open the door to sort of more American-style health care, where profits take priority over patients. Certainly, we already have a model of this here in Canada and Alberta, and some of my colleagues have already spoken about that. That's the private delivery of long-term care, and we know that that's been plagued with difficulties across Canada, including here in Alberta, for many, many years.

We know that the COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated this significantly. In Alberta 73 per cent of the total COVID deaths were in continuing care facilities. We've also heard from, you know, experts like professor Carole Estabrooks. She was the chair for the report that just came out by the Royal Society of Canada regarding the failures of the long-term care system in Canada, that these are preventable deaths. These are preventable deaths that didn't have to happen, but a lot has to do with just how the private systems work.

One of the key issues in the private system is staffing. These are vulnerable workers, often very low paid, sometimes minimum wage. Because of oftentimes not being able to cobble together a full-time job, they work at many different locations. We know through COVID-19 that that was a key issue in the spread of the virus, that workers were working at many different facilities, and they would spread it from facility to facility.

How come this was happening? How come people are working at several facilities and not having, you know, sort of one job? Well, it has to do with the private model. The private model wants to save a few bucks, so they don't give full-time positions to these vulnerable workers, and therefore they have to work at different facilities. They don't get benefits. This makes it very difficult for them. These are vulnerable workers. This private system, you know, because the motive is profit, not so much care, creates these kind of challenges, and this is just one difficulty that we, of course, have seen play out in our province and be exacerbated by COVID-19.

Other examples that some of my colleagues have talked about are that we know there has been some experiment with privatization with orthopaedic procedures, but we found that it costs more to treat cases in the private system than in public facilities even though the public system took the more complex cases. Even just looking at the economics of it, it didn't make a heck of a lot of sense to have that in the private domain.

Why are we concerned about the medical care delivered in corporate-owned facilities? Because of quality of care. We're worried about that because the care may suffer in corporate facilities, when sometimes there are incentives to cut corners in order to maximize shareholder profits, and I gave you that pretty clear example in the long-term care system. It puts greater demand on the public system as the most difficult cases are left often to the public system, so it, you know, demands more, and then the private system skims off the simpler cases and makes a profit, and that creates a two-tiered system where those in the public system must wait longer for care.

These things are pretty significant, and we don't want American-style health care here in Alberta.

The Speaker: Hon. members, Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available if anyone has a brief question or comment. I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

Member Irwin: Yeah. I always appreciate when the Member for Edmonton-Riverview speaks. She has a lot of experience and knowledge. She was just starting to talk a little bit more about her concerns around American-style health care and was rudely interrupted, so if she could just finish her thoughts.

The Speaker: Those pesky timelines for debate.
The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

Ms Sigurdson: Well, thank you very much, and thank you to the hon. member for the opportunity to just talk a bit further about why I'm in support of amendment REF1, that "the Bill be referred to the Select Special Public Health Act Review Committee in accordance with Standing Order 74.2." You know, I guess I just want to start with saying that we are in a situation where we are in the throes of a global pandemic. Certainly, the office of the chief medical officer and the chief medical officer herself, Dr. Hinshaw, said that the reason that we're doing well – you know, this was earlier on. Like, we didn't have large numbers of people in intensive care, we had an abundance of respirators for people, and we were working through a co-ordinated response. She said that one of the key reasons for that here in Alberta is because we have such a robust public health system.

I agree with that. I think that the public health system is important and strong. A co-ordinated approach, instead of having disparate private businesses delivering health care, creates a much more cohesive response, and there can be a much more co-ordinated effort on this. I mean, I think that that is very important, but this bill certainly is eroding that, and it is a direct attack on our public health care system. You know, it kind of boggles the mind. Some of my colleagues on this side of the aisle have spoken about this already.

During a global pandemic, you know, we should be grateful and thanking our health professionals for the amazing work they're doing, and certainly let me do that right now. They are in harm's way every day, and they are serving vulnerable Albertans, people who have various health concerns. They need to take extra precautions to make sure that the spread of the virus, which we know spreads quite easily – we're learning more and more about how it's spread. They do tremendous work for Albertans to keep us safe and to keep the pandemic controlled, so I just want to say thank you so much for what you're doing to support Albertans.

My point, though, is that in the middle of a pandemic it's confusing to me why with this bill certainly the Minister of Health and this government would really decide to go to war, basically, with doctors in our province. We know that earlier this year the government unilaterally terminated its compensation agreement with them and refused to participate in binding arbitration. Bill 30 goes further in allowing that the contracts can be directly negotiated with physicians, which undermines AMA's collective power. That is a direct assault on an organization that represents doctors. This government, you know, is cavalierly going ahead to, again, challenge and attack doctors and their collective bargaining power.

We know that doctors are, frankly, furious about what's going on, so much so that they're closing their clinics, they're leaving our province. The AMA just did a survey and found that 42 per cent of the doctors who responded to their survey indicated that they're thinking of leaving our province. This is not what we should be doing during a pandemic or perhaps any time. We need to be respecting doctors, and that's not what this minister is doing.

12:50

The Speaker: Hon. members, on amendment REF1 is there anyone else? The hon. Member for Calgary-McCall.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to speak to this referral motion to the special select committee, where we can deal with the subject matter of this bill in detail. When I was in government, many times I heard very able arguments from the opposition then about how important these referral motions are, how important this committee process is. Oftentimes examples will be brought from the federal committee process, how there is a committee process that invites the public, invites stakeholders, and essentially gets things right.

Based on all those good arguments, I think here we have a bill that is an important piece of legislation, and it makes fundamental changes to our health care, makes changes to how we deliver our health care. Certainly, I will argue – and I will give further reasons as well – that we will all benefit from referring it to the select committee and from hearing from Albertans, from professionals, from doctors, their representative organizations, experts, academia, and all those who have interest in this piece of legislation. Mr. Speaker, I can say that, basically, this piece of legislation makes very significant changes to how we deliver health care, and all Albertans have a vested interest in the outcome of this legislation, in the outcome of these changes that government is proposing through this piece of legislation.

For instance, in the Alberta health system as it exists now, we know that only members of these professional colleges, only doctors are able to bill AHS for the service they provide. Sure, they oftentimes have professional corporations that they own and that they use to manage their practice, but at the end of the day it's the doctors who can bill AHS. This piece of legislation, if it's passed, I think, will change who can bill Alberta Health Services. The way it's drafted, it's fairly clear that any corporation, whether they're doctors or not, directors or executives of those corporations, will still be able to bill Alberta Health Services. So somewhere in there somebody will set up a business corporation, will hire certain professionals, doctors, nurses, other health professions that they need. In delivering those services there will be a profit motive that that corporation will be set up to make money off of public dollars that need to go for health care. If we are injecting that profit motive in our publicly owned, publicly delivered health care system, that's certainly a huge change.

Having a committee process will certainly help us look at that process, hear from experts, hear from professionals, doctors on those countries, those jurisdictions where they have that kind of two-tier system, public health and parallel private health care, how they have done, what their experience has been. Personally, I think I can say that I have seen the two-tiered system – private health care and government health care – and based on my observation, based on experience, based on what I have seen, I can say with absolute certainty that in those jurisdictions people get the care based on the size of their pockets, based on their ability to afford that.

Sure, government is saying: no, it will still be publicly funded. But I'm trying to understand: if it's publicly funded, why are we creating profit motives here so that private corporations will benefit from public dollars? If somebody argues that somehow, without compromising the quality of care, without compromising the pay that doctors are getting right now, you will deliver that more efficiently than the public system and still make profit out of those dollars, I'm not buying that argument.

There is, I guess, no such research out there, there is no such evidence out there to prove that somehow private delivery will pay

better, will deliver better, and still make profit, and somehow the public system wasn't able to do that. It's just, I guess, the government's ideological agenda, that they are motivated towards market-driven solutions.

As my colleague from Edmonton-Riverview mentioned, we have seen that in our senior care. Certainly, there were reports out of Ontario as well, and there is a body of literature out there, there are experts out there, and there's public opinion moving on that side that we need to review whether that's the best model to deliver senior care when profit motives are there. We have seen senior care compromised in many instances.

Another thing is that we know that the wait times in Alberta health are an issue. We knew that they were an issue when we were in government. Certainly, we invested in health care, we invested to address those wait times, and still there are many issues that remain. I will be the first one to admit that, but in order to fix wait times – again, that's not the solution, that you're moving it to private corporations who will make profit out of public dollars and somehow magically will help us reduce the wait times without compromising the quality of care.

Again, another significant change in how we view our health care system, what value we put on our public health care system – it's a significant change, and I think we will benefit from a committee process where we can hear evidence, where we can hear from

doctors, where we can hear from academia, where we can learn from other jurisdictions who may have gone down that route. Again, another important change, and sending this bill to the committee will certainly help us learn about the outcomes of profit-driven delivery.

Mr. Speaker, there are many other things; for instance, adding 50 per cent public representation. I'm all for public representation, but someone needs to help us understand why adding more representation on these professional colleges will help us improve the quality of care.

In short, it's a piece of legislation that will have lasting impacts on our health care system, and referring it to a committee is certainly a wise step that will help us all to look into the details of this bill and these changes.

With that, I move to adjourn debate.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Jason Nixon: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I move that we adjourn the Assembly until tomorrow at 1:30 p.m., which I believe is July 21.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 1:01 a.m. on Tuesday]

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