



Province of Alberta

The 30th Legislature
Second Session

Alberta Hansard

Wednesday evening, July 22, 2020

Day 49

The Honourable Nathan M. Cooper, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

The 30th Legislature

Second Session

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Dang, Thomas, Edmonton-South (NDP)
Deol, Jasvir, Edmonton-Meadows (NDP)
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van Dijken, Glenn, Athabasca-Barrhead-Westlock (UCP)
Walker, Jordan, Sherwood Park (UCP)
Williams, Dan D.A., Peace River (UCP)
Wilson, Hon. Rick D., Maskwacis-Wetaskiwin (UCP)
Yao, Tany, Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo (UCP)
Yaseen, Muhammad, Calgary-North (UCP)

Party standings:

United Conservative: 63

New Democrat: 24

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Select Special Public Health Act Review Committee

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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

7:30 p.m.

Wednesday, July 22, 2020

[The Speaker in the chair]

The Speaker: Hon. members, please be seated.

Government Motions

Amendments to Standing Orders

31. Mr. Jason Nixon moved:
- A. Be it resolved that the Standing Orders of the Legislative Assembly of Alberta effective February 26, 2020, be amended
- (a) in Standing Order 7(1)
 - (i) by adding the following immediately after “*O Canada* (First sitting day of each week)”:
God Save the Queen (Thursday)
 - (ii) by striking out “Deferred Divisions (Thursdays)” and substituting “Deferred Divisions (Thursday)”,
 - and
 - (b) in Standing Order 32.1 by striking out suborder (3) and substituting the following:
 - (3) If a division is deferred, the Clerk shall conduct the division when “Deferred Divisions” is called during the daily routine
 - (a) if notice is provided under suborder (1) during a Thursday morning sitting, on that Thursday afternoon, or
 - (b) if notice under suborder (1) is provided at any other time, on the Thursday that immediately follows the day on which notice is provided.
- B. And be it further resolved that the amendments in this motion come into force on passage.

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Jason Nixon: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. This motion cleans up some language in regard to deferred divisions, mostly housekeeping language in there, but most importantly this will now enable the Assembly to sing *God Save the Queen* more often than for the throne speech. From this point forward, assuming that the Legislature adopts these new standing orders, we will sing *O Canada* in this Chamber on Mondays. Obviously, when COVID requirements are done, we’ll be able to sing with the singer inside this Chamber. And on Thursdays, the last day of the sitting week, we will sing *God Save the Queen* inside this Chamber going forward. Her Majesty’s picture is behind us. I’m proud of the oath that I took to Her Majesty. I’m proud to serve the Queen and her representative the Lieutenant Governor and, of course, my constituents as a member of this Assembly.

I do know that the NDP have had policies in the past and concerns with Her Majesty, or with the monarchy in general – not with Her Majesty, I should say; I mean, who cannot like the Queen? – with the monarchy and the direction that they would go. You know what, Mr. Speaker? They’ve stuck to those principles, refusing things like Queen’s Counsel and stuff, and I respect that. That’s their position.

But certainly the position of the government is that we’re proud of the monarchy, that we serve inside this Chamber, and proud of Her Majesty, Mr. Speaker, and we’d be happy in this Chamber to sing *God Save the Queen*. Long may she reign. I do hope that

everybody in this Chamber will support this important standing order change.

The Speaker: Hon. members, according to Standing Order 18(1)(j) this is a debatable motion. Are there any others wishing to speak? The hon. the Official Opposition House Leader. [interjections]

Ms Sweet: Oh, Mr. Speaker, I wasn’t going to stand and debate the motion, but I feel like tonight is going to be a fun night with the Government House Leader. I will just say that we support the government’s motion, and I hope that for the rest of the evening we can continue in this fine, cordial environment.

The Speaker: Team work does make the dream work.

Mr. Jason Nixon: Mr. Speaker, I . . .

The Speaker: I’m not sure. The hon. Government House Leader has already spoken to the motion.

Mr. Jason Nixon: I’m trying to move a motion, if I could.

The Speaker: Oh. You’d like to move a motion?

Mr. Jason Nixon: Mr. Speaker, I’d like to see if you could seek to find out if we could move to one-minute bells for the duration of the evening.

[Unanimous consent granted]

The Speaker: We are on Government Motion 31. Is there anyone else wishing to speak to the motion?
If not, I’m prepared to call the question.

[Government Motion 31 carried]

Government Bills and Orders Third Reading

Bill 31 Environmental Protection Statutes Amendment Act, 2020

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

Mr. Getson: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I’m pleased to rise for the third reading of Bill 31, the Environmental Protection Statutes Amendment Act, 2020.

The implications of the May 6 – actually, my birthday, coincidentally, Mr. Speaker – Alberta Court of Appeal decision contradicted the intent . . .

The Speaker: Hon. member, I’d just like to provide some clarity. Are you moving third reading on behalf of the hon. minister?

Mr. Getson: Yes, Mr. Speaker, if I could.

The Speaker: Please proceed.

Mr. Getson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The implications of the May 6, 2020, Alberta Court of Appeal decision contradicted the intent of Alberta’s current regulatory framework around sand. Bill 31 is a comprehensive solution that is in the best interests of our sand and gravel operators and will retain environmental protections within the province.

Without this bill, sand projects that would have been regulated as a pit, with a straightforward authorization process, will now be regulated as a quarry, with a costly and a time-consuming approval

process. Subjecting sand to the same regulatory oversight as minerals is unnecessary and creates more red tape.

This is unnecessarily complicated and unfair to our sand and gravel operators and creates avoidable challenges for future sand operators in the province, including about 500 applications currently under review that would now be considered incomplete. Given that it takes approximately 77 weeks to complete under the quarry act, it would literally stymie the entire system. The sand and gravel industry is already facing stressful times without the added burden of revising applications it will take months to process.

Bill 31 will reduce regulatory burden and provide clarity to the sand and gravel operators while instilling confidence in investors looking to do business in Alberta. It will avoid unnecessary work for activities within well-understood environmental impacts, maintain lower costs for industry and government, and maintain the effective and environmentally sound regulatory process for pits that Environment and Parks has had in place since 2004.

We've heard from the Alberta Sand and Gravel Association, from the rural municipalities association, and both were in favour of the amendments that we're presenting under Bill 31. We owe our job creators, and certainly we'll continue to balance economic development with our environmental obligations. Mr. Speaker, I'd like to send a shout-out as well to the Lac Ste. Anne reeve as well as the mayor of Parkland as well as the mayor of Sturgeon county, the head of the RMA and the Sand and Gravel Association, that all came together on a call to talk about some of the implications of this.

Again, I'd like to thank the minister for bringing forward Bill 31, which I believe is an elegant design and an elegant piece of legislation to come up with a reasonable solution to actually miss what could have been a major iceberg for the entire construction industry as it literally would have ground our work and efforts to relaunch the economy to a halt.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I'd like to ask everyone to vote in favour of this bill.

Mr. Wilson: Mr. Speaker, I need to be recused from the vote, please.

The Speaker: That's no problem. I would be happy to address you, in which case you could ask to be recused, which you have in some respects. But have patience. I'll be happy to do that. I appreciate you catching my eye. We'll vote at some point in time this evening, I would imagine.

The hon. Member for Lac Ste. Anne-Parkland has moved third reading on behalf of the hon. the Minister of Environment and Parks.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford has the call.

Mr. Feehan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker . . .

The Speaker: Okay. Thank you.

I'll allow the minister to recuse himself again, just to make sure that *Hansard* caught all of the text. My apologies to the hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

The hon. the Minister of Indigenous Relations.

Mr. Wilson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Sorry about the confusion. I'll ask to be recused from any discussion around this motion.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Hon. members, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford now has the call.

Mr. Feehan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the opportunity to speak to this, and I want to thank the Minister of Indigenous Relations for taking a very principled stance and recusing himself in this particular case. I don't know what the conflict may be for him, but I think that is the right thing to do when you believe there is a conflict. So thank you for doing that.

I want to on behalf of the opposition begin by saying that we support this bill and will certainly help to pass it in third reading. We've spoken to it in the past, but it also, I think, is important that I take a moment, before the bill passes, to speak to some of the underlying issues that I have had an opportunity to speak to a little bit before. I'll just do so in summary this time, and that is that this particular piece of legislation is somewhat unique amongst the legislation in that it is actually put together to deal with a particular decision of the court in the Big Molly development situation, in a case that's referred to as the Alexis decision.

7:40

The intent of this bill is to essentially exclude silica sand from the definition of a mineral, and it therefore allows this substance to be extracted from the land in pits and not in quarries; therefore, it does not need to go through the environmental assessment. It certainly effectively deals with, hopefully – I guess we'll wait to see what the court's decision is on that – the court decision from the point of view of the House, it appears, and therefore resolves a particular and narrow problem.

What I have mentioned in the past is that I have some concerns that there is a larger, underlying problem that isn't addressed by this act – and perhaps it's not the right place to have done it – but is still one that I think, since we are passing this act, should be addressed, and that is that this decision was brought forward by a member of the First Nations.

Now, as the Member for Parkland-Stony Plain – correct me. Is that right?

An Hon. Member: Lac Ste. Anne-Parkland.

Mr. Feehan: Lac Ste. Anne-Parkland. Thank you. Sorry.

The Member for Lac Ste. Anne-Parkland has rightly identified that this is not being brought forward by a First Nation, so it's not a challenge under the Charter or anything by the First Nations. I want to remind people that the courts have determined that First Nations rights exist in two parts, and that is that they do exist in the right in the existence of the nations themselves – therefore, they are collective aboriginal rights – but they also exist within individuals, and that is that an individual who is identified as a First Nations member is also someone who is able to claim aboriginal rights. So there are both collective and individual rights that are in question here.

We know, quite clearly, that in this particular case the nation is not against this particular development, that the chief and council have made it clear that they are more than happy to support development when it is appropriate although, again, they remind me, when I talk to them, that it isn't that they are either pro- or antidevelopment at all but, rather, that they simply wish to have a voice on decisions that are made that affect their communities. They would be more than happy to participate in pro-development activities if they ever could be at the table and have discussions about that and even, wherever possible, have some economic interest and therefore some economic advantage in the development. We know it's not a pro or anti stance that's being taken here, particularly by the nation. It's just simply one of wanting to have their aboriginal rights respected overall, and they're not standing in this case.

What did happen, though, is that an individual of Alexis First Nation by the last name of Alexis did make a claim in court that their aboriginal rights were being violated here. What they were most concerned about – and I think that’s what we need to speak about so that it’s out in the air as we pass this bill – is their individual indigenous rights to have protection of the land and the environment, on which they depend.

In this particular case, they’re very concerned that while you can refer to the excavation of sand as extracting from a pit and not excavating from . . .

An Hon. Member: A quarry.

Mr. Feehan: Thank you. I seem to be losing my words tonight.

. . . a quarry, it still has an effect on the environment, essentially that you have to strip off all the surface trees and grass and prairie and all the other things that are essential for the life of plants and animals in this environment to extract the sand. Therefore, this individual was very concerned that this is affecting their environment and therefore affects their rights.

Now, I think we’ve determined that in the case of sand and gravel, because the excavating is very shallow compared to quarrying ore, for example, that the remediation afterwards can essentially put back what was lost in there. We treat pits differently than gravel, and I think that that’s something that seems to be accepted practice quite widely around North America and the world.

But I also don’t want it lost that there are First Nations people who see the removal of trees and grass and plants and the prairie as problematic in its own right. So I would just hope that this government would consider that and as we resolve this one particular issue in this particular case, that we not lose sight of the larger concern that if we are going to extract sand or any other element – I can’t call it a mineral anymore – from the earth, we really do have a responsibility to go back and to reclaim that land in an appropriate way, and that means certain things.

I know that in my discussions with First Nations they often have said that the problem with reclamation they have seen so far, particularly in the oil sands areas but elsewhere throughout the province, is that reclamation does not truly return the land back to the place it was prior to the activity. You can put trees back on the land and so on, but the ecosystem is vastly more complex than simply trees, that often when plants are replaced, they’re not necessarily the same specific type of plants that were removed. Certainly, trees are put back, but are they the trees that were natural in that specific site prior to the activity? And the answer is often no.

They also comment on the fact that you cannot simply plant a tree and then call it reclaimed because there are a variety of other things besides, you know, the trees that are standing. Even the grasses are responsible for the development of a particular ecosystem and that, for example, you ultimately need voles to return to a land site so that the animals that live off those, which is quite a large number of them – hawks and eagles and cougars and wolves and so on – eat them, and if you do not actually create the conditions for voles to return, then you’re not actually reclaiming the land; you’re simply planting a tree, and that’s not sufficient.

Having been given this information from some elders who have tried to walk me through their understanding of what land reclamation is and fulfilling my promise to make sure in the House it’s spoken to so that the government can consider how they would best actually reclaim the land in a way that is consistent with First Nations, particularly First Nations elders’ judgment, that a land has returned to the state that it was in, I would hope that in further legislation they would consider the mechanisms for doing that and

try to lift the bar a little beyond just simply putting back any available trees, any available grasses that would be there. For example, planting Kentucky bluegrass in Lac Ste. Anne is not a natural plant, and it should not be used for reclamation purposes.

Having fulfilled my promise to the elders, I would commend to this House that the bill be passed at this time. Thank you.

The Speaker: Hon. members, unfortunately Standing Order 29(2)(a) isn’t available. However, I do see the Member for Lac Ste. Anne-Parkland rising in an endeavour to speak.

Is there anyone else wishing to speak to the bill this evening?

Seeing none, the hon. Member for Lac Ste. Anne-Parkland does have the option to close debate on behalf of the minister, provided that there are no other individuals wishing to speak. I am prepared to allow the hon. Member for Lac Ste. Anne-Parkland to close debate.

Mr. Getson: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. You know, it’s different as a private member to be able to carry some of these on behalf of the minister. I think it speaks volumes to the co-operation and the collaboration that we have on this side. Again, I understand through looking through some of the parliamentary procedures that this is probably the first time in 20 and some-odd years in this House that this has been afforded.

7:50

Oftentimes we hear that as, you know, quote, unquote, backbenchers, or, as we like to call ourselves, private members, we don’t have a ton of input into the government. I’m here to tell you – and you can see full well for those 10 or 12 people watching at home tonight – that we obviously do.

The fact is that when there was a situation that took place, you know, in my constituency that predicated this and we saw this iceberg coming, we immediately talked with the First Nations folks, with Chief Tony up in that end. We talked with the mayor of Lac Ste. Anne county. We were dealing with the Sand and Gravel Association and went into the minister’s office. His chief of staff is absolutely a rock star, so shout out to Pam Livingston on this one. They were all over it, as I said before, like a pit bull on a porkchop. It’s amazing how quick people moved and came together on this, understanding the impacts and the ramifications.

I can’t remember the riding or the constituency of the member opposite. I want to say Edmonton-Rutherford.

Mr. Feehan: Edmonton-Rutherford.

Mr. Getson: Edmonton-Rutherford. Right. I was going to say Edmonton-Decore. I always get the two mixed up.

What he was mentioning about the process and the consultation: it absolutely did take place through and through on this. Again, on this particular case when it was overturned, as the Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods had pointed out last night so eloquently, it was essentially a technicality of the court. It was an appeal to a decision. It wasn’t protesting the original decision. It was an appeal to a decision and essentially part of the understanding of how the judicial process worked. This clarifies, again, both sand, the gravel, marl, and clay. Again, we still have the ability to have the environmental impact assessment. Although it’s never been used for a number of years in pit operations, it still remains in effect in that act.

Coming back to this particular pit, why it’s of such interest, as the Member for Edmonton-Rutherford had pointed out on reclamation, the geological formation is actually unique in this area. We have a lot of opportunities for frac sand, so fractionation sand for the upstream side of the equation. It’s kind of a little-known

effect, actually, that essentially 70 per cent of the frac sands that we bring in are actually imported from the United States. We have two geological formations, being the Wisconsin formation or down in Texas. Here is a part of our economy being diversified.

Wayfinder themselves have two plants up in place, the one up at Glenevis, and the other one is actually sitting out in Obed in West Yellowhead. Now, the formation itself, when you look at the area and the co-operation and collaboration – and I'll say collaboration; it's not just consultation but collaboration – with the First Nations folks in that area as well as the local community, the county and the farmers, they took marginal farmland. The unique thing about this operation is that you're not removing tons of trees. You're not stripping off. It's literally marginal grasslands. So when you only have to strip about four to six inches maybe for the most part, use a pump to literally just suck out and vacuum the sand that's applicable for this defractionation process, have the wash station right alongside the highway, this is the epitome of economic diversification, weaning ourselves off importing materials for our energy sector. That's why it was kind of that catalyst, that tipping point, I guess, if you would.

The other really good side effect that came out of this was the Sand and Gravel Association and the RMA forming a new board that they have members sitting on, so that if there are any issues that rise up from those two organizations, they then take care of it before it gets to this point again as well.

With that, I really appreciate everyone's input on this. I really appreciate everyone's support, and it's been an absolute honour to open and close on this bill. Thank you.

[Motion carried; Bill 31 read a third time]

Bill 34

Miscellaneous Statutes Amendment Act, 2020

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Jason Nixon: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to move third reading of Bill 34, Miscellaneous Statutes Amendment Act, 2020, a self-explanatory piece of legislation. Let's get it passed.

The Speaker: Hon. members, is there anyone else wishing to speak to Bill 34?

Seeing none, I am prepared to ask the hon. minister to close debate if there are no others.

[Motion carried; Bill 34 read a third time]

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

Mr. Jason Nixon: Thank you. I rise just to seek some clarification to make sure that both yourself, Mr. Speaker, and the table understood that the unanimous consent motion I requested was also, from our perspective, applying to committee tonight. I just want to make sure that that was clear. If not, I'd be happy to seek that consent again to have one-minute bells also apply when we go into committee this evening.

The Speaker: Sure. Let's just ask for clarity's sake to ensure.

Hon. members, the hon. Government House Leader has requested unanimous consent, which has already been granted for one-minute bells, but in addition, that request would include upon entry into Committee of the Whole this evening.

[Unanimous consent granted]

Government Bills and Orders Committee of the Whole

[Mr. Hanson in the chair]

The Acting Chair: Thank you, members. I'd like to call the committee to order.

Bill 33

Alberta Investment Attraction Act

The Acting Chair: We are on amendment A1. The Minister of Environment and Parks.

Mr. Jason Nixon: Well, thank you, Mr. Chair. It's a pleasure to rise on this piece of legislation. Let me start by thanking the hon. minister of economic development and trade for her hard work on this piece of legislation as well as my friend and colleague from Cypress-Medicine Hat – I know he's from Medicine Hat; I always forget the second part of that constituency – of course, who's doing some great work inside the Legislature moving amendments on this piece of legislation.

I'm looking forward to significant debate on this legislation this evening, Mr. Chair. I suspect it will take place at two different portions of the evening, largely because I called this bill to committee a little bit earlier than planned and made a mistake. I do want to talk about the importance of the legislation. Then I'll actually rise and report progress on it, but we'll come back later this evening.

This is an important piece of legislation, though, working on the overall goal of getting our province back to work, Mr. Chair, a big goal, obviously, of this government, something, of course, the NDP have been resisting. I don't know if it's their policy to not get Alberta back to work, but certainly the government's policy is to get Alberta back to work. I'm not saying that it is for sure – they don't call me when they make their slogans up over in the Official Opposition – but they don't seem to be too excited about it. I do hope that they get excited about getting Albertans back to work.

As we proceed with this legislation, I will be looking with great interest to some of the ideas that the Official Opposition brings forward to, hopefully, strengthen this piece of legislation and help people get back to work.

With that said, Mr. Chair, I move that we adjourn debate.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

The Acting Chair: Go ahead.

Mr. Jason Nixon: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I move that we rise and report progress on Bill 33.

[Motion carried]

[The Speaker in the chair]

8:00

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Devon.

Mr. Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Committee of the Whole has had under consideration certain bills. The committee reports progress on the following bill: Bill 33. I wish to table copies of all amendments considered by the Committee of the Whole on this date for the official records of the Assembly.

The Speaker: Hon. members, does the Assembly concur in the report? If so, please say aye.

Hon. Members: Aye.

The Speaker: Any opposed, please say no. In my opinion, the ayes have it. The motion is carried and so ordered.

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 22: Ms Notley]

The Speaker: Is there anyone else who would like to provide debate on amendment REF1? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora has the call.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker and to my colleagues, for this opportunity to engage in debate tonight on the Health Statutes Amendment Act, 2020, a boring-sounding bill, but the bill is far from boring. I’ll tell you that much. Sometimes titles don’t speak to the excitement that the government has levelled in a piece of legislation.

I know the Government House Leader just spoke about slogans, and he definitely can come up with some slogans. I wish that there was the same momentum in response to the framing with regard to the actual action. While the member talks about getting folks back to work, certainly, this government hasn’t done that. More than 50,000 folks were laid off between when this government brought in their \$4.7 billion corporate giveaway and the beginning of the COVID pandemic in the world and specifically here in the province of Alberta, and then we know there are likely hundreds of thousands more as a result of that. So while it is, you know, a catchy tag line, there should be some momentum behind that tag line that is different from the failed ideological experiments that have been offered to this House.

Tonight we’re here to consider a referral motion. I have to say that I wholeheartedly support this. If what I’m to believe is true, from things that members of the government caucus have said, that they don’t want to cause a bunch of waves, and they just want to make things slightly more efficient – this bill is far from that. This bill is a huge erosion of the Canada Health Act and the protections that I think we all have come to express pride in as Canadians.

As the Leader of Her Majesty’s Official Opposition said earlier this afternoon, one of the things she does often when she goes to visit schools is talk about the vote that happened a few years ago about the greatest Canadian. That person was selected after many people writing in with many different, excellent ideas, including folks here from the province of Alberta. Somebody from the province of Saskatchewan was selected, and that was Tommy Douglas, for bringing forward the vision and the determination to fight for universal public health care for all Canadians. That’s something that I am proud that so many other Canadians recognized as being a strong legacy.

When I’ve had opportunities to travel outside of our country and I meet folks, they often think I’m American because of my accent.

One of the first things they say when I tell them that I’m Canadian is: “Oh, you’ve got public health care. That’s one of the big differences. Your accent is the same, but your values are different.” I’m very proud of the fact that we have different values and that we have forged our own path on our side of the border.

I have to say that this piece of legislation – I’m going to address a few of the comments that have been made by the members of the government caucus with regard to this just being a continuation of what had already happened when I was the Minister of Health just a couple of years ago. The question I pose to these members – and I’m sure that somebody has said that, and it sounded believable. If it was about just continuing things as they were, which is Conservative legislation, PC legislation that we didn’t mess with – we maintained the model and the mix that was in place around service delivery. We didn’t govern with ideology in this regard. Perhaps we should have. Perhaps we should have taken the same path that the Minister of Health now is taking, where he’s pushing for one specific ideology, one specific delivery model to be expanded. We didn’t do that.

We kept a steady hand. We managed to get health care increases, which under previous Conservative governments were often in the range of 7-plus per cent. We managed to get that down to a steady 3 per cent at the same time that we were expanding the types of drugs that were covered here in the province of Alberta. That’s one of the big drivers to the Health budget. We didn’t close any hospitals in the province of Alberta. I know that’s not something that even the Government House Leader has made clear to his constituents. He says he’ll lobby for them, but he doesn’t know if he’ll be successful in keeping their hospitals and their services available in their communities. As a result, we’ve seen virtually all of the doctors in Sundre, maybe all but one, give up their hospital privileges because they don’t feel supported or respected by this government or what’s happening in terms of rural health care. So we managed to maintain hospital services and in many areas to expand them, including many parts in the north and rural communities.

We managed to increase pharmaceutical coverage and the number of things that were available, including one that I’m really proud of, Neocate, which is now available by prescription in the province of Alberta through the nongroup drug benefit program for babies that are allergic to both their mother’s milk and generic formula – yeah, the Member for St. Albert remembers – babies who were suffering significant health episodes and were almost certainly set up for a lifetime of health ailments. We were able to get something like a formula that would keep babies well and keep their mothers from – I can’t imagine anything scarier, actually, than imagining your milk, which is supposed to nourish and support your child, making your child so sick. All the mothers that I spoke with who were impacted by that: that was probably the hardest part for them, that something that was supposed to be good for their baby – they wanted to do the best for their baby, and they weren’t able to do so. So we managed to do things like get Neocate covered and maintain and increase pharmaceutical and hospital coverage throughout the province.

The other big driver around cost in the Health budget is physician compensation. If you look at the pie charts over the years, those are the three areas that grew the most quickly. We managed to go back to the table with doctors and say: these are the biggest cost pressures we have in terms of your compensation, and we need you to come to the table and put some money back on it. It wasn’t easy. It’s never easy when you’re asking a partner to give something back, but we were able to do that. We did that because we negotiated in good faith, because we were open and honest with the data. We didn’t run attack ads against doctors. We didn’t try to disrespect them in

the communities that they've dedicated their careers to. I know that there are members of this House who have met with their local reeves, councillors, mayors and have had conversations about how hard it was to attract those physicians to their communities in the very first place. So the last thing we wanted to do was to put in jeopardy all of the good work that had been done in partnership with local governments by moving forward with something that would have been detrimental to the health and well-being of Albertans and Alberta communities.

This government has taken a different tack on pharmaceuticals, for sure. One of the first things they did was kick dependants of seniors off their drug plans, even if that dependant was – for example, this is a very common one. A couple might have an age difference. One person is over 65, one person is not, but the person who is not has always been in partnership as a dependant with the person who's over 65. For example, my dad turned 65 before my mom. My mom was still entitled to be part of his benefits package because they were a family unit, and he was eligible to be on that benefit plan. This government has decided: no; we're going to kick all of the dependants off the seniors drug plan, including – the spouses one irks me, but grandparents have reached out to me and said: you know, I'm caring for my grandchild, and my grandchild used to be on my benefits plan; now even though I'm the custodian for my grandchild, they're not eligible to be on my drug plan. How does that make sense?

8:10

So we managed to not upset the boat in terms of drugs, and we managed not to upset the boat in terms of docs. The third area, of course, is hospitals, something that many of us are proud of. No matter where you come from in this province, you probably know where the closest hospital is to you, and you've probably heard some stories about it. I'll tell you that when we lived in Castor when I was growing up, it had probably one of the smallest hospitals in this province. We lived there for four years, I think, when I was young. We lived literally across the hill. There was a hill, a river, and another hill between our house and the hospital. I knew the history of that hospital. Now it's Covenant Health, but before that it was a different health authority. The sisters had moved there to volunteer to make sure that the people in Castor had care, that they had somebody there to help them in their time of need. I think we had two doctors, maybe one and a locum most of the time, who took their responsibilities there very seriously.

When my grandfather, who was visiting from Manitoba, suffered a stroke, he lived in that hospital for weeks, probably close to months. It felt like an eternity as a kid. I know that my dad drove them home during Thanksgiving, and I think it happened at the end of summer holidays, so it was quite a while that they were there. Thank goodness, even though he had this significant stroke, that they were in our community. It was scary enough to see ailing grandparents, but at least I could ride my bike down the hill, across the river, and up the hill to go see grandpa and grandma at the hospital every day. If we didn't have the hospital in town and they were visiting another province, I can't imagine how difficult that would have been for my grandmother, in particular, but also for my grandfather: a very, you know, steady hand, but I'm sure that it was scary to be away from home and have that experience. We were able to go and visit. We were able to spend time with my grandparents because we had a hospital in town.

The doctor wasn't there all the time, of course. There was really only one doctor, maybe two, so having full-time physician coverage at the hospital wasn't always possible. But we had that facility there, and we had that level of care there, so that stability was given

to our family during that difficult time. I'm sure all of us know families who probably have similar lived experiences.

So this is why in this bill I find it so troubling that it has, you know, such a subtle title; it's just about amending statutes. But really what it is: it's about continuing much of the failed legacy around attempts to privatize and sell off portions of our health care system in the province of Alberta.

The other night I spoke to the third way sort of campaign that was under way and how effective and how motivating it was to see so many people push back and organize, and it stopped. Then there were other attempts to bring more privatization, and people organized, and it stopped. I can't help but wonder if part of why this is happening at this time is because it's July and July is not typically a time for legislative sittings but also because we're in the midst of a public health crisis, a pandemic, and not a lot of people are paying a ton of attention to what's happening in this building, to be very frank.

The fact that we still have the front doors of this Legislature locked to the public, that if you want to come in and visit, you have to register ahead of time – I get that those protections are being done in the face of the pandemic, but it also means that there are fewer people here engaging and watching and able to push back, number one, because a lot of people are trying to keep themselves and each other safe, and there was a big push, including from this government, to have people stay home until very recently, but also, of course, because infection rates are up. Now the government is bringing in a bill to continue the attack on our public health care system.

One area that I want to draw a particular focus on and that I think this committee that we're referring this to could do us all a huge service in exploring more is the impacts. Right now only people have the ability to get billing codes. When you are a physician and you want to practise in Alberta, you have to apply to the government to get a billing code or an ARP so that you can have a different relationship with the government and work more as an employee rather than as a contractor. That's fine. But it's a person, an individual person who has to apply to have that relationship with the government.

One of the biggest changes that I see in this bill is that it's not going to be a person anymore. It could very easily be a corporation. If you're not a person, you're a corporation, essentially. Some will say: well, doctors often are incorporated and have, you know, a corporation tied to them. That's true, but it's the individual doctor who gets the billing code, not the corporation. In this situation we can see that the government is creating a huge space for corporations to come in and set up health care and develop the relationship with the government rather than a doctor being in that relationship with the government. And why that's problematic is because one of the tenets of the Canada Health Act is around making sure that you're in the public system or you're not in the public system.

If you're in the public system, you can't go and bill privately unless a specific exemption has been granted, and there are some areas of the province where that's being done – particularly I think about cataracts; that's one area where there will be somebody in both systems working – and only very specific circumstances were granted to allow for that to happen. But what's being pushed here is the ability, essentially, for any corporation to come in and set up, and that corporation can develop a relationship with the government and also a relationship with the client or the patient. So individual patients can be required to pay out of pocket for services, and the corporation can bill the government for services, and sometimes there may be an overlap in that . . .

The Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available if anyone has a brief question or comment. The hon. Member for St. Albert has risen.

Ms Renaud: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd just like to offer some more time to the member. I was looking forward to hearing her comments, and she got cut off.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

Ms Hoffman: Thanks for that opportunity. Sometimes 15 minutes feels like an eternity and sometimes it flies by, so I appreciate the opportunity to continue with where I was going with this.

When a corporation has the ability to do that, they have different relationships with their employees whereas when an individual has a relationship with the government, with all of us and the government as the steward of that resource, it changes the relationship, and it creates more access and more opportunity for private interests to come in and straddle that space and operate in both worlds. When we say this, we don't say it lightly. We say this because it truly is an erosion of what Canadians said makes Canada so great and who we thought was the greatest Canadian, that being the father of universal medicare.

I will be the first to say that I don't think, actually, that our medicare system goes far enough. I think that we are one step towards true universal medicare. I think further pieces that would be required include comprehensive pharmaceutical coverage, because right now you get your drugs covered if you're in a hospital or, specifically, a long-term care facility, but not even the other types of care, only designated nursing homes or hospitals. So many Canadians and Albertans, of course, who are an important and big part of that population, don't take their medication as prescribed because they simply can't afford to, right? We hear that it's about 20 per cent in our country, and that's with us having some coverage in place already.

I think that if we were able to ensure that everyone got the medications that their physician prescribed and that it wasn't a barrier to be able to take it, then we would be able to support more Canadians in staying out of the acute-care hospital system, staying out of long-term care longer. I think a lot of fine economists of the Conservative persuasion have clearly stated that when you keep people out of the health care system, specifically out of the acute-care system by doing preventative and active care, there is less cost to the overall system. So I think it's not only good for the patient, I think it's actually good for all of us as citizens and taxpayers and contributors to our society at large.

Rather than coming into this place and saying, "It's just a continuation of what has already been happening," I ask members to consider: does that make sense? If it's just a continuation of what has already been happening, why would we change the law? If it's just about maintaining the very – a lot of people here say, you know, that there was a very good mix of private and public over the last four years while I was the minister. Then why are we changing the law? The reason why, clearly, is to create more privatization, not to maintain the current level of mix, because if it was just about maintaining, you wouldn't try to change the law. You would continue with the law as it is. You'd continue to push ideology at different times. That argument completely falls flat because it doesn't pass the nod test. If it's about following the same laws that are in place and having the same mix, then you wouldn't change the law.

8:20

That's the first thing I want to say, and I really hope that some folks are listening and are considering this because I think that we

do have an opportunity to do meaningful work in committees. I've seen it happen before. I know not every committee fulfills that desire for us, but we as members have the right to choose what goes to committee and what doesn't, and that is something I think – I know that there was a motion very early in the first year of this government for conscience votes. What could require more conscience than our health care system?

When I think about some of the things that are of key focus right now, of course: health, specifically in the face of a pandemic, but overall I think everyone knows that health is an important piece to all Canadians and all Albertans. Education is certainly top of mind for many people I've been speaking with, especially since the announcement yesterday. Parks – oh, there's another tagline. Don't Go Breaking My Parks. The Government House Leader was talking about catchy taglines. There's certainly one. We've heard a lot of concern from Albertans about the future of the parks system, and the number of people who have been signing up to get a sticker to be able to show their support for Alberta parks has been huge. Of course, jobs. We deserve to be in this place working on the mandate that this government campaigned for, which was focused on jobs and the economy.

There was indeed a very big public health guarantee signed, and this bill flies in the face of that guarantee. This bill is an attack on public health care, which is the exact opposite of what was promised to Albertans during the last election.

I urge all of us to consider referring this to committee.

The Speaker: Hon. members, is there anyone else wishing to speak to REF1? The hon. Member for St. Albert.

Ms Renaud: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to speak to Bill 30, Health Statutes Amendment Act, 2020. I would just like to say, you know, what I've heard a number of my colleagues say. I do believe that Bill 30 is actually opening the door for changes that we probably can't imagine just yet but that I think are chasing down a road headed towards an American style of health care delivery, and that should be alarming to most people.

You know, it was almost two years ago, Mr. Speaker, that my younger sister was diagnosed with breast cancer, and from the time that she received the diagnosis to the time that she finally got in to sort of firm up the treatment, it wasn't actually that long, but the kind of cancer was so aggressive that things had changed considerably in just a few weeks, so the treatment plan changed. There was surgery and drug therapy and radiation and all of those things. That was actually at the time that we'd found out that under the Health minister at the time, who happens to be in this Chamber, actually wait times for radiation had gone down fairly significantly, so we were certainly able to benefit from that.

The reason I'm bringing this up is that my sister and I actually used to live in the United States, so what we are aware of is how expensive health care is. I can remember one of the days waiting for – it's a lot of waiting for treatment. One of the days, waiting, she looked at me and she said: you know, I'm so glad that we live here. Her husband is American. He's from Ohio. She said: I'm so glad that we live here because I think had we been in the United States, I would be dead or homeless. I actually didn't laugh at that because it's not far from the truth.

My sister and her husband, like many other people, both in Canada and the United States, you know, are not a wealthy family. They're raising four children. They're doing their best, and they don't have a lot of extra money, so public health care is incredibly vital to them. And what we know, just because we understand what the insurance is like or what health care is like and delivery as well is like in the United States, is that it is very, very expensive. Not

only that, but I think the health care outcomes sometimes really depend on the kind of insurance you have, where you live perhaps, your access to money to speed things up, whether it's a test or whatever.

Those are the kinds of things that when we say, "You are opening the door to American-style health care," that's what all of these things mean, so I think it's important to look at the larger picture in terms of the United States and some of their outcomes and their health care system. These are not things that we should aspire to.

For example – and these stats are a little bit old, so it might be different now, especially with COVID. But the stats that I have: the United States has a lower life expectancy than all other wealthy countries. Now, again, I can't tell you what the cut-off is for a wealthy country, but their life expectancy is significantly lower than other countries. For example, compared to Canada, ours is 85 years, theirs is 78.5 years. Now, you wouldn't think that coming from one of the wealthiest countries on the planet with some of the most advanced hospitals and facilities and physicians and researchers. You wouldn't think that, but that is the case, that the life expectancy of an American is lower than other people in wealthy countries, significantly lower than Canadians'. There is a reason for that, and that is their health care delivery system and the coverage that they have.

For example, did you know – I didn't know this fun fact – that the United States spends more on their health care system, significantly more actually, than they do on defence? I don't know what the current number of their defence spending is, but it's staggering. That is a lot of money.

As well, another thing that people don't know is that there is a significant cost to employers in the American system. Of course, if you're looking for a job in the United States – I'm sure there are people here that have lived in the States – one of the things that you consider when you are offered a job, you know, after you look at the job, you look at the salary, but you look at the insurance and health coverage because that is one of the most important things when you are getting a job offer. You want to look at what is the deductible, what will my copay be, all of these things, what are the exclusions, all of these things that you have to ask.

What people don't realize is that there is a significant cost to the employer, and, as we know, things trickle down, right? If the employers are going to have to incur additional costs or higher costs to purchase this coverage for their employees, those things get passed down. What in turn happens is that – and these are not visible changes – the rates that employees are paid also go down. If there's more of a cost to provide coverage to an employee, chances are, that employee's salary or waged earnings will be lower. There are all of these things that trickle down. It's hard for me to understand why specifically, other than, you know, what I imagine cronyism is or fulfilling promises that were made – I don't know. Now, I've heard the government say that it's to reduce wait times, but I don't really know what the incentive is to go down this path that is leading to American-style health care because it's not a good system, especially right now.

It doesn't take much. I mean, you can just flick on the news and you can see commentary about the American health care system. I mean, the reality is – and I'm not going to comment on their leadership, but if you look at the difference between Canada and the United States, there are over 140,000 Americans who are dead in four months from COVID. Now, certainly, there are some leadership decisions that I have no doubt have contributed to that patchwork response to this disease in the United States, but what we're seeing is a failure on just an epic scale, and we're seeing the people that are impacted the most by this during this pandemic. We already knew – for those of us that have either lived within the

American health system or we have family or friends that live in the United States, we understand sort of what the real pitfalls are of that system. We know that not everybody has equal access, because it very much is about money.

It absolutely is about money. Even if you are employed in the same job as your friend, you both have the same coverage, it is still about money because there are still deductibles and copays, and if you want to speed things up or if you want to get a specialist, let's say, you are going to have to pay extra. That's the way it is. If you want a faster test, a faster MRI, a faster diagnosis so that you can have faster treatment, that costs money. It costs a lot of money. Then you get into all of the pre-existing conditions and it's really, really a complex system that at the end of the day makes it very difficult for patients to navigate in terms of finances, as I'm sure you can imagine.

8:30

I want to say that I'm very concerned that this piece of legislation does in fact open the door to some really frightening changes, in my opinion, when I do believe – and it's not perfect by any stretch. The Canadian health care system is not perfect, but I think it's something that we can all be proud of, and it's something that gets better all the time. You know, certainly, my American friends and family who have witnessed first-hand our Canadian system are pretty stunned at the level of care and how quickly that can happen, the comprehensiveness of the coverage. I know that it's something that I'm very proud of, and I will do everything that I can to support this.

I think if we – you know, sort of shame on us if we don't learn our lessons from the United States, particularly now. We're seeing the people that are really struggling. These are people that perhaps had poor coverage or lost their coverage when they lost their jobs. We're seeing black Americans that are dying at a faster rate. We're seeing people that are in, whether it's long-term care facilities that are essentially – they're just getting wiped out. I mean, it's horrifying what is happening in these facilities. Again, Mr. Speaker, I think shame on us if we don't recognize the weaknesses of those systems, of that system in particular. They're our closest neighbour. If we don't recognize that and then recognize the dangers of introducing similar things here in our country, in our province, then I think we have failed to do what Albertans sent us here to do, and that is to work for them and to protect their best interests and to do what's right for them, not what's right for corporations, not what's right for private entities but what is right for Albertans.

I think if you look at this, just on the face of this you will understand that this isn't about making life better for Albertans. I wanted to talk a little bit about some of the pieces in this legislation that I thought were really problematic. Since this piece has been sort of introduced here, there have been a number of articles written, a number of opinions, some on both sides. I mean, there have been some pro, some con. Mostly con. Some of the concerns that have been brought up by some of the experts, whether they are medical professionals or lawyers that specialize in this area, are some really serious concerns.

Now, I heard, I think it was yesterday or the day before during question period, I think it was the Premier that was talking about – I think it was the Premier; I'm not a hundred per cent sure. He was talking about one of the people that had written an opinion piece about this legislation. It wasn't very nice, what he said, but it's fine. He's entitled to his opinion. But I think the article that he was referring to is from July 16 from the *Journal*, and it really was an opinion piece that talked about Bill 30 as a gateway to privatization and cronyism. I'm guessing he didn't love those words.

What this article did was that it really broke down some of the pieces I think maybe that average Albertans, you know, aren't

paying attention to or don't understand, especially during a pandemic, especially during the summer. What this does is that this piece of legislation allows physicians, allows the government to sort of bypass the organization, the AMA, that physicians were working with in terms of getting an agreement. Instead, it allows for the proliferation of private operators.

We already know that this government just terminated the compensation agreement with doctors. I think we've seen fallout from that for months. I think, you know, the government likes to paint it as, "Well, they're the highest paid doctors ever," which they're not. I think the doctors have been really good and really patient about listening to this stuff and then breaking it down and then saying: "Well, yes, but you have to consider these things. You can't compare watermelons to stop signs. You have to consider these things when you're using this language." They've been very patient. They've talked about why those numbers are incorrect.

You know, what's incredibly frustrating is that through all of this, the fighting with doctors and "You're paid too much" and the arguing on Twitter, showing up to someone's house to argue, all of these things – all of these things – are happening during a global pandemic. Like, I think that we need to constantly remind ourselves of this. In over a hundred years this is the worst public health emergency that we've faced, and at this time we should be looking at our health care systems and saying: what can we do to strengthen this? Where are we seeing the weaknesses? Where can we bulk it up? What can we learn from this? How can we go forward?

Instead, we've got a government, like, dead set on: let's look more like America, or, you know, let's get into a fight with doctors when we need them the most. So by unilaterally tearing up their contract and then all of the other things that have come after that – the doctors have literally said: we don't trust you; we do not trust you. Now, I would hope that all of us in this Chamber or most of us would say that we trust our doctors, that we put a lot of faith in them because they help us to do what we need to do to take care of ourselves. So when you've got a group of doctors saying, "We don't trust this government. We don't want to work with that minister" – possibly; they're voting – I think that we need to listen. These are people. These are incredibly skilled people. These are incredibly dedicated people.

If I do have to thank the government for one thing, I will give them some credit for one thing. I do want to thank them. After what's gone on, I have never ever gotten to know so many physicians as I have recently, physicians that I've met from all over. They're incredibly smart. A lot of them are actually quite funny. They have given me insight into issues. I had no idea. I did not understand. They're incredibly fair, too. Where I would say, "You know, I think they're doing this," they would actually stop and argue both sides.

The Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available. The last 29(2)(a) was provided to the opposition, so we'll provide one to the government. The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

Mr. Neudorf: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate that, and I do thank the members opposite for their thoughtful comments tonight. It reminds me a little bit of what the member opposite from Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood was sharing yesterday, and I really found her arguments compassionate, caring, and articulate. I believe she was advocating completely for the position that she believes is best for Albertans, and I respect her for her debate and for her intelligent arguments, but I would also respectfully disagree in some areas. I thank the members opposite for bringing some of that debate back again tonight.

I did a little bit of research because of the comments that were made yesterday. There are many, many countries around the world that have a publicly funded health care system similar to Canada: Australia, France, Belgium, Japan, and Germany as well as the United Kingdom, Portugal, Spain, and Italy, just to name a few. There is a vast, vast array of approaches to this. Some, like Japan, require patients to pay 10 to 30 per cent of the cost of the hospital stay up front for whatever treatment they receive, yet the rest of it's publicly funded. Some have public insurance models, and some have private insurance models.

Interestingly enough, as per Wikipedia – and I can table the article tomorrow.

Almost every major country that has a publicly funded healthcare system has a parallel private system for patients who hold private medical insurance or [choose to] pay for treatment [themselves].

In fact, Mr. Speaker, what I found most interesting is that it goes on to say:

From the inception of the [National Health Service] model [in] (1948), public hospitals in the United Kingdom have included [what were called] "amenity beds" which would typically be siderooms fitted more comfortably, and private wards in some hospitals where for a fee more amenities are provided. Patients using these beds are in an NHS hospital for surgical treatment, and operations are generally carried out in the same operating theatres as NHS work and by the same personnel [at] the hospital and the physician receive funding from an insurance company or the patient . . . The NHS also pays for private hospitals to take on surgical cases under contract.

That's the end of the quote, Mr. Speaker.

8:40

Despite the often compelling and passionate arguments of the hon. members of Her Majesty's Loyal Official Opposition repeating the argument that our government is bringing in American-style health care, we in fact are bringing more of a United Kingdom style publicly funded health care system. We in fact have done some extensive research and found that this United Kingdom NHS model does serve 65 and a half million people in the U.K. It also serves about 83 million people in Germany. It serves 25 million people in Australia, 67 million in France, 11 and a half million in Belgium, 125 and a half million in Japan, 10 million in Portugal, 47 million in Spain, and 60 million in Italy. This total, approximately 495 and a half million people plus Canada's 37 million, is over half a billion people.

So in absolute sincerity, Mr. Speaker, while I respect the members of the opposition and their constituents and I respect their freedom to disagree with our legislation, ideology, decisions, or whatever they choose to name, blame, and shame us for, the fact is that the vast majority of half a billion people daily, minute by minute, second by second, use and trust a version of this very type of public health care system.

I know you're probably wondering: what about the other 7 billion people on the planet? Approximately half of them would be under the same sort of form of public or private health care system. The other 3 and a half billion? Well, they live under some dictatorship, a flawed democracy, a hybrid regime, or an authoritarian regime that strips them of all of their rights and all of their freedoms. We are incredibly fortunate here in Canada. We fight over which restaurant to go to while the majority of the world fights to have enough food to eat and clean water to drink. So while the NDP may be outraged and appalled at the legislation presented here at times, I would like to remind them how truly privileged we are.

I will not be supporting this amendment to shift this to a committee. I will be supporting Bill 30 and its intent to strengthen and serve the population and the people that live in Alberta.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Hon. members, there are only a couple of moments left in 29(2)(a), so I will be happy to call upon – yeah. There are literally three seconds left. We didn't ring the bell because there was such limited time available.

If there's anyone else that wants to speak to amendment REF1. The hon. Member for Edmonton-West Henday.

Mr. Carson: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's an honour to rise this evening and speak to this amendment and why I think that we should proceed with supporting it. First of all, just looking back to how we got here – and I appreciate many of the speakers who have shared the history. I had a short opportunity to do so a few evenings ago. I just want to recognize – and I think it's been addressed in this House. Once again, you know, the now Health minister back – I recognize that it was quite a few years ago, but it's something so fundamental, this issue and his change in position. Just looking back at a tweet that that member made in 2013, the now Health minister talking about physicians' compensation: "All this is to say that physicians are not living high on the hog . . . Many doctors are, frankly, underpaid." Once again, I recognize that that was from January 2013, quite a few years ago, but I just am interested to find out where the change of heart came for that Health minister. Maybe that's something that we can talk about if this is referred to the committee.

The fact is that this legislation has long-lasting implications that we have not even begun to have the opportunity to discuss. I, once again, recognize that we will have more time to do so this evening, potentially into next week and maybe even further, but the problem is that we are only one group of people in this Legislature. While we represent a variety of constituents across the province and, of course, we have representation from every community, the fact is that we are still only hearing certain sides of the story. So when we talk about making changes as widespread as this to physician compensation, to how physicians interact with our constituents and their ability or inability, because of the direction of this government, to move from community to community or from province to province or any which other way they desire, unfortunately we have not had the proper and adequate amount of time to discuss this legislation, which is why I will be supporting this referral amendment to committee.

Now, there are many things that have been discussed about why this legislation is concerning. You know, while we talk about the change to push for a more American-style health care system, at the same time this government is moving \$4.7 billion to the pockets of large corporations. They're telling physicians that they're part of the 1 per cent, which is, in most instances, absolutely not the case.

The Member for Edmonton-City Centre spoke about the compensation model before and the changes that this government has been making and the problems that that has caused for family physicians: caps on their ability to see a certain number of people in a day and the compensation changes that have been made even before this legislation was brought forward. That member did a very good job, as he has as the critic for Health done an incredible job, of advocating for these physicians in a time when we have a UCP government that is completely, you know, bent against working with these physicians.

We saw that from the very beginning, when this government passed legislation to rip up the contract negotiations that were taking place, further when they started changing the compensation

model even before this legislation. Thankfully, as the critic went on, some small changes to compensation were made because of whatever it may have been, blowback from rural MLAs, potentially, though we've heard very little of that in the discussion on Bill 30.

I truly hope that even if those members are not willing to stand in here and talk about how this is to the detriment of their community, how it's hurting their relationship with physicians and physicians' relationships with their community, they're at least standing up at the caucus table and at the cabinet table saying: look, physicians, a large number of them, are saying that they're going to leave our communities if you make these changes, and something needs to be done.

So while I'm very frustrated with this government's silence on a lot of these issues, which is why I will be supporting referring this to a committee, I am potentially even just as concerned about the way that this government feels they should be negotiating in, well, bad faith in this instance. I truly hope that they revisit their willingness to negotiate with these physicians. You know, this government talks a lot about building pipelines, but the only one I see being built right now is the pipeline of physicians out of our province.

Once again, I hope that rural MLAs are talking about this at the caucus table. It's frustrating for us to stand up over and over again, which is our job, of course, but we are not hearing those same things reflected by rural representatives in this House. You know, I spoke at some length about the decisions that this Health minister has made personally. I doubt it was anyone's direction that the minister go to somebody's house and berate them about a social media post or the personal attacks that this government has been making on certain physicians that have been willing to stand up, saying that they're, you know, part of the left when, really, these physicians are just trying to be heard. The fact is that at this point the only people that are willing to listen to them or reflect their comments back to the government, as far as we can tell, in this Chamber is the NDP opposition. While the government may not want to listen to those people, the fact is that these physicians have an important voice, and I truly hope that the government is at some point going to listen to them.

It's very concerning, once again, the timing of this legislation. It has been spoken about quite often. In the middle of a pandemic, when these physicians are doing their best to support their communities, under the changes to compensation models that this government has already put forward before Bill 30, now they have to deal with this, the idea of publicly traded corporations coming in and replacing these small businesses, these family physicians that have worked so long in these communities. I imagine that's very frustrating for them. On one hand these physicians want to be properly compensated and they want to stay in their communities to support the people that live in these rural municipalities specifically, but then on the other hand they have a government that is willing to do anything to undermine them, which is absolutely frustrating and infuriating to a lot of them, I imagine.

It's interesting. I believe the Member for Edmonton-City Centre, once again, the critic for Health, had brought up the fact that there were physicians talking about making the move to the Northwest Territories or moving to other jurisdictions. We heard heckles from the government: yeah, they're moving even though they're going to be compensated for less. Well, that says a lot about the direction and the relationship that this government is creating with physicians in our province, when they're willing to move to other jurisdictions to make less money because they have no respect left for the direction of this UCP government. So while the members may think

it's funny that a physician is willing to go and work somewhere for less, maybe they should consider why that is the case in the first place.

8:50

Just on the idea of corporations coming into our province, while in some instances we see some private delivery, I would, you know, advocate that we continue to strengthen the publicly delivered side of health care as best we can. I believe that the stats show that whether it's in providing health care services and family physician services or when we look further to things like long-term care and the, I would say, inadequacies in many instances that have been provided in these facilities, as we've seen through the pandemic, that's very concerning to me. I hope, as the Member for Edmonton-City Centre has raised several times in this Assembly and at committees regarding the Public Health Act, that we review why it is the case that more of these COVID outbreaks are happening at privately run facilities compared to publicly run ones.

On that point, when we talk about the idea of publicly traded corporations coming in and starting to provide this for-profit health care to our communities, first of all, I have concerns about the relationship. You know, I have no doubt that any physician that comes to our province is doing it for the right reasons, especially when they move into rural communities. They want to move into that community, they want to be part of the culture, and they want to build their family there and support the infrastructure and resources there. But when we talk about publicly traded corporations coming into our communities and setting up shop, with potentially none of them in that corporation actually being physicians and having them contracting that out to a physician, I, for one, don't think that's what the majority of physicians want in this situation.

When these discussions began, they made it quite clear that they wanted to be the small-business owner, that they wanted to do the payroll and that work. Looking back to the comments of this Premier and the idea of the 1 per cent – once again, the Member for Edmonton-City Centre spoke about this in his remarks – the fact is that when we talk about the costs of payroll and we talk about the costs of staffing and everything else, these physicians are not, in most cases, within the 1 per cent. The fact that this Premier is talking about it like that is the case, you know, like they deserve to have their wages cut and that everyone is hurting so physicians should hurt as well: that's very concerning for me.

What we should be doing and what was happening before this minister decided to unilaterally rip up those negotiations was bargaining and negotiating in good faith. As the previous Minister of Health, the Member for Edmonton-Glenora, had brought up earlier today, we were able to make some strides in bringing down those health care costs because we had a respectful relationship with these physicians. I'm sure it was contentious at times, but at no point did we go to the table and say, "We're done" and rip up the negotiations and say, you know, "We'll see you in court," which is essentially what this Health minister has said.

I appreciate that there was a more cordial relationship. As far as I know, the previous Health minister, the Member for Edmonton-Glenora, did not show up in anyone's driveway unless they were invited for coffee, which may have happened, I'm sure. By no means was that member ever yelling at somebody from their driveway. Once again, you know, besides what we're seeing in this legislation about the privatization and the move to allow publicly traded or unnamed corporations to come into our communities and provide health care, it's very concerning.

You know, all we can do, because we have not truly heard what this government's intentions are with this moving forward, is ponder what could potentially happen. I think about the court cases

that have been going on, and I believe the Alberta government has been a part of them. I think about the massive amount of prescription opioids that have gone out across Canada – I believe B.C. was potentially the first one to launch this court case, and I believe we followed suit as well – and the idea that opioids are being overprescribed and that we need to take action on that. Well, when I think about the idea of publicly traded corporations coming in, well, who are those corporations? You may consider the idea that pharmaceutical companies decide to come in and hire their own doctors. I will leave you to take from that what you may, but it is concerning, the idea of corporations that are for-profit, that at the end of the day the bottom line is the profit back to the shareholders and what that might mean for health care in Alberta.

I spoke to some extent at earlier stages of Bill 30. You know, in watching not only this legislation but, before this, the compensation changes and the decision to change how health care is provided in rural communities and town halls that happened with, specifically, members in rural Alberta, members of the government, and how those conversations went, there was an instance – unfortunately, I don't remember the specific community – where a physician raised the fact that with the compensation changes that were happening or being proposed by this government, since they were only delivering, you know, under 30 babies per year, there was a good chance they were going to lose their ability to actually have those services in their community. That is very concerning for me.

When we were in government, we talked a lot about the concerns about lack of health care services in rural communities, the idea that, you know, people living west would have to come to the Misericordia and that it's already incredibly oversubscribed and about the need to reinvest dollars in it, whether it be the emergency department, which we had committed to – and I believe we're still waiting for this government to follow through on that commitment. Either way, the fact is that rural communities have to drive for hours in some instances to get to their closest hospital. So instead of strengthening the system that we have built here in this province, this government is going in the opposite direction, and instead of ensuring that there are adequate dollars to fund not only physician compensation but the infrastructure of these hospitals to deliver babies or to take care of our seniors or whatever it might be, we are going to wipe our hands clean and say that it's up to private corporations to figure out how to do it for the least amount of money. That's very concerning to me, Mr. Speaker.

You know, really, it's just so frustrating that we have gotten to this point, where this minister really didn't even try to negotiate with these physicians. They came to the table with I believe it was a 5 per cent reduction in their costs, and the government just unilaterally said: no, we're not doing that. Instead of continuing that negotiation, they legislated their way past that. It's very frustrating because we've seen, not only in those negotiations but in other pieces and in other pieces of legislation that this government has brought forward, that they may do an initial consultation, if we're lucky, but when the results come back, it is very one sided. Even if the consultation process was done in a good way, the answers come back in a way that are completely one sided. In some instances that's because of the way this government writes their surveys, and we saw that with Bill 29, but I digress.

The fact is that even before the pandemic hit Alberta and hit Canada, nurses were being told that they were going to be laid off by the thousands. I've received a lot of correspondence to this issue, nurses who are potentially working . . .

The Speaker: Hon. members, Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available. I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora has risen.

Ms Hoffman: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. I know the member was talking about physicians saying that they're leaving because they feel disrespected, and I know that earlier today the member was talking about his experiences in his local IBEW as an electrician. I was just thinking about how you could be on a job site and get paid \$2 over the average rate, but if your employer is not consistent with you, not fair with you, not honest with you, how frustrating that would be. I imagine that even though you get that \$2 bonus, it might not be worth the working conditions for somebody to be in that kind of situation. I was wondering if he could maybe draw the other parallels between his own work experience or constituents' work experiences and what he's hearing from physicians and nurses.

The Speaker: The Member for Edmonton-West Henday.

Mr. Carson: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate those comments. That is most definitely an important piece. It reflects back to the idea of physicians considering leaving the province even though they're compensated at a fair rate here in the province. The fact is that we've also, specifically before the pandemic hit, seen a lot of job losses, but many people were able to receive fair compensation but also recognizing that the cost of living in our province is extremely high as well. That is also something that these physicians are taking into account and another important issue that we have not heard from this government on, from the Premier or the Health minister, recognizing – well, I guess 2013 was the last time the Health minister was willing to recognize that physicians were, you know, compensated at a fair rate, but by no means were they in most cases part of the 1 per cent. If anything, the Premier is trying to change the health care system to create a system where the 1 per cent can thrive even further. So it's relatively hypocritical, in my opinion, to take that position.

Now, once again, just getting back to the point, even before the pandemic this government was signalling that nurses were going to take a hit and promising that thousands were going to be laid off. Thankfully, that has been paused for but a moment through this pandemic. But all of those nurses and health care aides and health care workers are walking on eggshells right now.

9:00

I've received, once again, numerous e-mails on this issue, that they are working wherever they can right now to support Albertans through the pandemic. But they know, because of the writing on the wall, because of the decisions of this government and the talking points of this Premier, that as soon as we get through this, they are going to be the first ones to lose their jobs. In many instances these nurses are not asking for extra compensation. They're asking for better work conditions, whether it be extra PPE, even before the pandemic, or ensuring that there are, you know, enough people on the unit floor to ensure that there is not burnout, many different instances where this government could be working with nurses or in this case physicians to reduce the cost to Alberta's health care system.

The Member for Edmonton-Glenora raised the point of: why aren't we taking action on the cost of pharmaceuticals? This government, one of the first decisions they made when they came into power was to get rid of the copay coverage for people who would traditionally be able to support, say, grandkids, if they're a guardian of somebody and covering their pharmaceutical costs. Unfortunately, this government, in what I would say is a very cold-hearted decision, changed that decision, that, I believe, we had made in our time in government.

When we look at the direction of this government, the decisions that they're making, primarily to take away health care coverage for Albertans, whether it be in that instance of people dependent on guardians for their health care coverage covered – in other instances I raised the fact that the Seniors and Housing minister had scaled back funding for things like chairlifts and compression socks for people with high blood pressure. These ministers are looking in every nook and cranny in their ministerial portfolios or their budgets to find any way to take money that would primarily go to the health care of Albertans to, once again, give it to large, multinational corporations in the form of a \$4.7 billion handout.

I'm very concerned with the direction of this bill and many others that have been put forward by this government. Albertans are not buying that this is about making the system better. They see that this government is undermining the ability of our physicians to do their jobs so that they can move to an American-style health care system, and they are very concerned, which is why I support this going to committee.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Hon. members, that concludes the allotted time for 29(2)(a). Is there anyone else wishing to speak to the bill? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs has the call.

Ms Goehring: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise this evening to speak to Bill 30, the Health Statutes Amendment Act, 2020, specifically to the referral to the special committee. I would just want to start by thanking all of our health care workers that are currently working to support Albertans through this pandemic. This is definitely a time that is unprecedented, and I think our utmost gratitude and appreciation needs to be said. I know that they're not feeling it from government.

We've heard over and over in the Chamber of the many physicians and nurses and just health care practitioners in general that have reached out, pleading with government to support them, especially right now, when they're working tirelessly to support Albertans in the pandemic. The numbers are rising. It's not over. We keep hearing about the second wave, and we're seeing it, where the numbers are increasing. It's scary. I know that it's something that I take very seriously and I know that several of my friends that are in the health care profession also take seriously. They're doing this job because, number one, they care about people – that's why most people in the health care profession become health care providers – and they want to keep people safe. They want to be able to stop people from dying from COVID-19. So I need to start my comments with a salute to all of those that are out working tirelessly to keep us safe and well during this pandemic.

Specifically to the amendment for the referral, I think that having this piece of legislation referred at this time only makes sense. When we were in government, we created a panel for children's services. It was an all-party panel that came together to talk about concerns within Children's Services and with the office of the Child and Youth Advocate. Similar to what the committee is right now to deal with health care, it only makes sense that this piece of legislation go to that special committee.

I know when we had our panel, there were certainly no pieces of legislation that came forward during the time that we were deliberating and consulting with the community. It simply doesn't make sense to bring legislation forward when there's a committee that can clearly go through it and look at it. I know we took it upon ourselves to make sure that we did the most robust possible assessment that we could. We heard from community leaders. We heard from organizations. We heard from the director. We heard

from indigenous communities. We heard from so many that were impacted by Children's Services and the OCYA.

To me, that's what this referral does. It takes this piece of legislation and puts it to those tasked in the committee to deal with this and to look at it, especially in a pandemic. Why these really hurtful changes are happening right now doesn't make sense to me. In order to have it really thoroughly looked at and perhaps give physicians an opportunity to present their concerns and to be heard, I think a reasonable request is to have it go before this special committee.

We as members of this Chamber understand the importance of committee work. We all sit on committees at some point and listen to the very detailed proposals that come forward. We listen to suggestions, to recommendations, to concerns. Those individuals that are a part of the committee are tasked with that specific job: to listen to those concerns around the health care act. And to skip that process with this piece of legislation, the Health Statutes Amendment Act, 2020, which addresses, I believe, nine pieces of legislation, doesn't make sense.

This would allow that special committee to go through all of the concerns, to hear from stakeholders, to hear from patients, to hear from physicians, especially when we're hearing over and over that physicians have not been heard. They're not feeling that this government is listening. They want to be at the table. They want to be part of the solution. Yet they're being ignored. So having this referred to special committee only makes sense.

We could then have the special committee come back with a recommendation and tell us how they would like to proceed. Whether they take that advice and they decide to move on it and bring it to the Chamber or not, I think that that's the role of what a special committee should be doing. We've asked them to do that work, and I think referring this piece of legislation to them allows them to actually do that work that they've been tasked to do. When we have so many in the province that are really worried dealing with this pandemic, it just doesn't make sense to take this piece and separate it from a committee that's tasked specifically to look at health care.

We know that our physicians are frustrated and they feel attacked by this government. They feel that they're not supported, they're not being listened to. On July 10 that survey came out, and it indicated that 42 per cent of our doctors are considering leaving. Now, if this piece of legislation was referred to the special committee, I think that would show and signal to physicians that their opinions are important and what they have to say is being valued. It might restore some of that faith in those physicians that are so upset and frustrated, so they might consider staying in Alberta. I know that many want to stay in Alberta. They have their families here. This is their home. This is where their roots are. Some of the physicians are second-, third-, fourth-generation physicians that have been in communities for a very long time. They're known in the community. They're respected in the community, and they're feeling that they're being forced to leave the province.

Having this go to committee, I think, signals to our physicians that it's not a rush. It's something that needs to be thoroughly looked at and discussed and reviewed and have everybody on that special committee have a say in who comes to the committee to review it and what the recommendations are. Now, when we have committees that meet in the Legislature, they have that unique ability to really go through a piece of legislation and work through it, where sometimes we don't have that same ability in this Chamber. There's a special task that they're given, and I have faith in the ability of a committee to work through that and meet with physicians and listen to stakeholders about what their recommendations are. I think we need to trust those professionals

that every person in this Chamber at some point in their life has relied on.

9:10

I truly believe, Mr. Speaker, that it would signal to our physicians in the province that are very frustrated that what they've determined is not a patient-centred approach, could give a sign of hope to those physicians to say that, you know, this government is willing to listen and willing to take a step back from this legislation that is so damaging and consider what the physicians are saying. I believe that they have some absolutely intelligent insight into what the health care system is right now. If the government's intention truly is to reduce costs, the way that they're going about it is not effective. When you have 42 per cent of doctors saying that they want to leave the province, that leaves a huge deficit in our health care system, one that we already know we're struggling with. We know that there are already capacity issues within the province, that there aren't enough physicians as it is, and to have 42 per cent say that they want to leave is terrifying.

By having this referred, I think it would signal to the physicians to say that there's hope, there's that piece that perhaps their position will be considered, that it's not going to be rushed through, especially during a pandemic. Knowing that the numbers are rising and that there are increased people that are relying on our health care system, it's terrifying to think that to go into the hospital in your community, there might not be enough physicians there. There might not be the care that you need. That in itself, Mr. Speaker, is terrifying, and when you hear that doctors are considering leaving at this rate, the impacts on that, the financial impacts on trying to make up for that loss are astronomical. It's something that I don't know that we could ever recover from.

I think of so many physicians and their teams that work together. There are nurses that have worked with doctors forever, and if their physician left, they might leave, too. They've got this family, this community that they work with, and it has an impact. When someone that they respect and admire leaves, that might have been the only reason that they were staying at that specific spot. They might leave as well. We see it in every field. When there's an employer that someone looks up to, as soon as the employer leaves that company, that business, other employees tend to decide to retire at that point. There's just a domino effect that's going to happen, and it's really frightening. So I think that having this referral in place makes sense. Knowing that there's this committee that is set up to actually look at what's going on might give doctors that sense that someone's listening, someone might actually be paying attention and not trying to ram this through.

We know that the way the bill is right now is absolutely the wrong path for Alberta. We know that this fight that's been picked with doctors has gone too far. It started right when this government took office, and it's just been ramping up ever since. We're seeing those impacts. We're hearing the pleas from patients. We're hearing pleas from physicians and nurses to stop and to look at what the outcome is that they're trying to achieve.

The government is claiming that it's to reduce spending and cost, and that's absolutely not true. The cost of what is happening right now is going to be a human cost when we look at the impacts of not having physicians in hospitals, especially when it's being impacted in rural Alberta. We have so many hospitals that are losing physicians already and the risk of even more. Having it referred, I think, allows some of those physicians to maybe stop and look at this possibility of having it discussed further in a committee and not going through so quickly.

I know that I took great pride when I was on the panel and listening to so many that had a say in the decisions that we were

Dach	Goehring	Sweet
Eggen	Renaud	
Against the motion:		
Aheer	Nicolaides	Schow
Amery	Orr	Sigurdson, R.J.
Glasgo	Rehn	Singh
Goodridge	Reid	Smith
Horner	Rosin	Stephan
Loewen	Rowswell	Turton
Lovely	Rutherford	Walker
Neudorf	Sawhney	Wilson
Totals:	For – 8	Against – 24

[Motion on amendment REF1 lost]

The Speaker: Hon. members, we are at second reading of Bill 30, the Health Statutes Amendment Act, 2020. Is there anyone else wishing to debate the question? The Official Opposition House Leader has risen.

Ms Sweet: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's an honour to rise on Bill 30. It's actually my first opportunity to speak in regard to this bill, so I look forward to the dialogue. I just wanted to follow up on some of the conversation that's been happening with the hon. Member for Cardston-Siksika in regard to what he was referencing specifically around ARCHES, and then I'll move in a little bit more around the bill.

You know, I understand what the member is saying around the audit and the concerns that he identified within the audit. Mr. Speaker, I would just like to put on the record, though, that to say that the NDP, the opposition, were somehow involved in being corrupt is not something, I would say, that would be put forward to the opposition. Obviously, there was an audit that was done, and there were some findings within that audit. To insinuate that the opposition set up that service for individuals that have addictions in a way that would allow some of the things within that audit to occur, I think, misrepresents the reality of what was going on and the reality of the intent of the supports and services that are being offered within ARCHES.

I've been very clear on the record. I mean, there's no disputing it. I believe in harm reduction. I believe that if we truly want to support and provide good health care, which is what Bill 30 speaks to, we have to look at the whole person. I believe that looking at the whole person identifies and recognizes that we, at every different stage in our lives, move through our lives and our stresses and different aspects of our lives in different ways.

9:30

So I believe that if we can provide a service that supports people where they're at, that gives them a connection to something that keeps them alive every day, that gives them an opportunity to feel like someone cares about them, whether that be a social worker, a psychologist, access to addiction services, access to mental health services, or even medical services for physical health outside of that, surgical services – all of those things are fundamentally a part of our health care system. We have to as legislators acknowledge that through our different services we have to meet individuals where they are at. That includes everything from harm reduction to recovery to providing early intervention supports for developmental disabilities to providing medical interventions when it comes to emergency surgeries or other surgeries, depending on what the situation is. All of those things are part of our health care system.

I would encourage the government to not focus on one aspect such as ARCHES and try to use that as an argument to undermine

our public health care system, to undermine the supports and services that individuals with addictions and mental health need. In fact, if the government truly believed that supporting people with addictions and mental health was one of their number one priorities, which they say it is, there are other mechanisms that could have happened with ARCHES besides shutting it down. There could have been a public trustee that was put in place to oversee the grant that was being offered to the program. There could have been another agency, quite similar to what happened with the homeless shelter in Lethbridge. A new agency took that over and provided supports to ensure that the grant was being followed effectively. To say that it automatically should be shut down because of fiscal mismanagement without looking at other opportunities and other ways to provide that service speaks to the issue of this very bill.

The reason I say that is because if the mentality of the government is that it is a program or service that the government doesn't believe should exist because they don't believe in the philosophy or the way that the care is being provided, if the response by the government is to say, "I don't believe in harm reduction; I don't believe in supervised consumption sites; therefore, I'm going to shut them down," then Bill 30 is a problem because what that says is that the government at any point can decide: "I don't support that service. I don't agree with that service, so we're going to close it down. We have the overall authority to do that." They're demonstrating it just right now with the Member for Cardston-Siksika standing here and saying: "We closed it because, you know, of financial mismanagement. We won't look at the other options of getting a trustee involved. We won't look at seeing if another agency wants to provide these services. We're going to close it down because the government fundamentally does not believe in providing harm reduction." It's a problem.

When we look at Bill 30 and we look at all of the different things that are being changed to these pieces of legislation, there are significant impacts that are happening through all the health care services that are going to be provided to Albertans, every single one of our constituents. The biggest implication is, of course, changing the definition of a person to being able to contract insured health services. Now, we're seeing that the change makes it possible for private, for-profit companies to bill the public health insurance plan directly. Much of the detail will be left to regulation, but in essence this explicitly introduces private, profit-making motives into the health care system, and it raises some troubling questions about these providers and the accountability to Albertans, again going back to this philosophy that if the government doesn't agree and they can find a reason, they'll just shut 'er down: we're not going to offer the service anymore because we don't believe in it.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

There's no rhyme or reason within this piece of legislation that has clearly demonstrated to Albertans why this needs to happen. There is no demonstration within the budget. We haven't seen a fiscal update in a while, so, I mean, we wouldn't know, and Albertans sure wouldn't know. But when this government says that this is about redoing the health care system so that it's more cost-efficient for Albertans, I don't see it. I don't see where it exists. What I do see is an opportunity here for the government to arbitrarily decide when they like a service or when they decide that they don't support a service, which, for example, could be something like pharmacare. We hear the federal government is talking about a universal pharmacare program, yet very clearly we have seen, even in the Fair Deal Panel, conversations about the fact that many on the panel don't agree with the national pharmacare program. Because they don't agree, this legislation means that they

can interject and try to make it not happen. It actually contradicts the Health Act that Alberta has entered into within the federal system. It creates a lot of problems.

We've also seen in Saskatchewan, under the Saskatchewan surgical initiative, that when the Saskatchewan Party tried to do this similar thing, they tried to have an initiative to reduce surgical wait times – the pilot project ran from 2010 to 2014 under the Saskatchewan Party and allowed for private surgical facilities to bid on day surgeries, something that we clearly see is going to happen in Bill 30. Because of that, the Saskatchewan Party actually injected \$176 million of new funding into the Saskatchewan health care system, and as soon as that funding ran out, the wait times started to climb again, prompting the Saskatchewan Party, Saskatchewan government, to have to invest and inject another \$10 million into the health care system to ensure that these private companies would continue to offer those services. It didn't save any money. It actually cost way more money.

Madam Speaker, because of that, I am going to actually move an amendment on behalf of the hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview. I will wait to read it into to record if you would like.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. members, this will be known as amendment RA1.

Hon. member, please proceed.

Ms Sweet: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I will now read it into the record. I move on behalf of the hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview 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 because the Assembly is of the view that the government has provided insufficient evidence to prove that the implementation of the provisions of the bill, if passed, will not result in barriers to Albertans' ability to access health care.

Just so, you know, elaborate on this amendment, Madam Speaker, we've been asking the government for evidence. We've been asking for the government to demonstrate that through these changes that they are making through many, many different statutes and many different pieces of legislation, Albertans are going to still be able to get the same quality public health care that they would get today, that this won't change, that we will not see, through this government changing these pieces of legislation, a two-tiered health care system, that we won't see a government having to repeatedly, as we've seen in Saskatchewan, invest money over and over and over again only to support private surgical facilities and/or any other types of private facility. We haven't seen any evidence.

Actually, I have asked in the past around – you know, I will give the government credit. The recovery programs that they've talked about and the recovery centres that they are speaking about are something that I fundamentally agree are important. I think that the model exists for a reason and has strong benefits to individuals who are looking at being able to access the whole person and being able to address their mental health and addictions. My concern is that I see no evidence around whether or not this will be a hundred per cent publicly funded, and who will be able to access it. Will we see that it becomes a program where those who require financial assistance, those who may be struggling with homelessness, those who may be on income support, those who may be dealing with a variety of different factors such as Children's Services involvement and other things going on in their lives will be able to access these supports? Clearly, we haven't seen a plan from this government when it comes to all of the changes that are going to be happening in our public health care system.

9:40

The other piece of that is, again, like, when we look at the seniors' health benefit and whether or not the seniors' health benefit will continue to work. We've already seen this government make decisions around changing the seniors' health benefit, so now if you have a dependant, your dependant won't be able to access the same medical treatments as the senior. We're slowly seeing these changes where health care costs are being downloaded onto everyday Albertans.

So the reason that I think it's important that this bill not be read a second time is because of the fact that very clearly, as I'm sure the Government House Leader would agree with me, there is the fact that there isn't any evidence that supports that what the government is saying that this bill is going to do is actually what's going to happen. Where is the protection for public health care? Where can we ensure that when people go for surgeries, they're not being bumped by a private care provider? We don't have many emergency rooms in this province, so does a private care provider, who's providing private surgeries, bump someone who may be accessing it through the public health care system? We don't know. We don't have the answers to that. We don't have the answers to how much it's going to cost to set up through the government an injection of funds to create these projects, which will create these facilities so that these private entities can provide these services. Is the public going to have to pay for the start costs, or will the private companies that are bidding on these projects have to front all of it? If that's the case, then the wait times won't decrease because they won't have the facilities to access it.

Again, there are a lot of questions that have come up that the government has not been able to answer or been able to clarify for my hon. colleague for Edmonton-City Centre and many of my colleagues who have been asking these questions. I think it's important that this not be read a second time, that the government take this back and acknowledge that really this is about private health care; it's not about public health care.

We very clearly see that even from the 2019 convention, when the UCP voted down a policy proposing that any changes to the health care system in Alberta should comply with the principles set out in the Canada Health Act. The party in itself, the membership, the people that many of the MLAs have been supported by, clearly do not think that compliance with the Canada Health Act is something that needs to be followed. Well, the hon. members have heard it from their membership. Their membership helps support them. I would think that seeing this very clearly as a policy proposal within their 2019 convention sets a tone around how this government chooses to move forward.

Because of that, we see no evidence from this government that they're going to maintain the public health care system as it exists today. In fact, what we have seen is a downloading of services onto Albertans. We've seen an impact on seniors' health care. We've seen an impact on people being taken off seniors' health care if they're not classified as a dependant within the classification of the government.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. members, Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available. I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-City Centre.

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I was appreciating the comments from my colleague from Edmonton-Manning. Of course, I myself am eager to have the opportunity to speak to this amendment, but I believe she may have had a few more thoughts she'd like to share before I do.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning.

Ms Sweet: Well, thank you, Madam Speaker. I mean, I can always chat more, I guess. First off, I would like to thank the hon. member for allowing me to speak a little bit longer. Of course, I would also like to acknowledge all the hard work that he's been doing as our critic for Health to stand up for our public health care system. I know that with his relationship with doctors, they have a lot of concerns around Bill 30 and what's been happening.

We've heard from the AMA. I know that the hon. Government House Leader and many members on the government side like to say that the AMA is a special-interest group although, let's be clear, they actually within the legislation have a responsibility to protect all Albertans, to make sure that all of our doctors are regulated and are meeting their professional requirements. So I don't think necessarily they're a special-interest group. I think they are concerned professionals who see that the work that they are doing and the movement around Bill 30 will significantly impact how our public health care system is delivered. I'm thankful that I have an hon. member who has such a great relationship who has been able to have those conversations with the AMA and many doctors across the province and has been advocating for all Albertans when it comes to public health care. I believe that without his voice and him standing up in the House, along with all of my other colleagues, the government would choose to try to ram this bill through that impacts and changes significant pieces of different legislation in a very big, thick bill with the idea that the opposition won't be able to find what's going on. The benefit that we have is that we have an amazing critic and we have amazing staff who actually read the bills and spend a lot of time going through them, and we see what is actually happening.

We see the UCP fighting with doctors. We see the UCP looking at going after seniors' health care. We see the UCP talking about privatization and maybe following the Saskatchewan Party's model, which didn't work, just to remind everybody in the House. We see this government looking at addictions and mental health with one lens, trying to, you know, use the guise of financial audits to shut programs down that they fundamentally disagree with, all under the guise of different reasons. Instead of being open and transparent and just saying, "We don't want to provide this service," which this bill very clearly will allow the government to do, to get rid of whatever services they choose if they don't necessarily philosophically agree – it's a problem.

I think that – again, I just want to reinforce for the hon. Member for Cardston-Siksika – there were options when it came to ARCHES that could have been put in place such as a public trustee or another agency to take over the services. Instead, the program was shut down, and fundamentally I disagree. I think that Albertans have a right to that service. I think that it was the busiest supervised consumption site in North America. We've already seen significant people who have died over the last week since it has been shut down, and I think that we all have a responsibility to acknowledge that. It shouldn't be about the money. There were other options that could have happened. Although I appreciate the hon. Member for Cardston-Siksika trying to say that that was about the NDP's decision, the reality of it is that it's actually just about the people. I think we just need to focus on the people.

I will end it there and encourage the government to put in a public trustee and reopen ARCHES.

The Deputy Speaker: Any other members under Standing Order 29(2)(a)?

Seeing none, any other members wishing to join debate on amendment RA1? The hon. Member for Edmonton-City Centre.

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I appreciate the opportunity to rise and speak to Bill 30 and the amendment, the referral suggesting that this bill should not be read indeed a second time. When we take a look at the context of what has brought us here today, we need to consider what we have in fact seen from this government, what we have in fact seen from the United Conservative Party in regard to their intent for the health care system in the province of Alberta.

I cast my mind back to November 2019, the UCP convention. A motion is on the floor. That motion is a simple one, that any changes brought forward by the UCP government respect the five basic principles of the Canada Health Act. That seems a relatively simple proposition, Madam Speaker. That is not a complicated thing. The Canada Health Act, of course, is the piece of legislation which enables and serves as a guardian of public health care in Canada, one of the most valued policies that we have as Canadians. A simple motion which the membership of the United Conservative Party chose to vote down. They rejected the principle that any changes to the health care system in Alberta should comply with the five basic principles set out in the Canada Health Act.

Fast-forward to today, Madam Speaker. We have the Fair Deal Panel report and further reflections of where perhaps this government seems to stand on public health care in Canada and indeed the Canada Health Act.

9:50

The panel noted that in the past "the federal government has threatened to reduce funding through the Canada Health Transfer to provinces implementing," in their words, "new approaches to health care that are not considered, by Ottawa, to align with the Canada Health Act." They go on to exhort, "Yet rising health costs across Canada and an aging population will ultimately require innovation and creativity," Madam Speaker, "in health care delivery." They believe that Alberta should have, in their words, "more liberty to innovate in these sectors without the need to strictly conform to Ottawa's interpretation of federal policy."

So when members of this government, when the Minister of Health, when the Premier choose to stand up and protest that in no way do they want to make any changes that would jeopardize the public health care system or that would contravene the Canada Health Act in that regard, we have in front of us the very evidence that indeed they are at least very interested in flirting with that possibility under the guise of innovation, creativity. Well, I'll give them that, Madam Speaker. They've certainly come up with some innovative and creative ways to try to sneak another one past the goalie and the people of Alberta.

Now, of course, this isn't particularly new. This is an old wolf dressed in perhaps new sheep's clothing. As I've spoken about before, this has been that great brass ring that so many Conservative governments in the province of Alberta have tried for before, looking for ways that they can create more loopholes, more opportunities for their corporate friends and donors to be able to make more private profit in the midst of our public health care system. Indeed, I think back.

You know, there's an excellent article in *Alberta Views* magazine from back in 2006, Situation Critical: Ralph Klein Made a Mess of Health Care; Will His Successor Do Any Better? Reflecting back on Premier Klein's attempts to "break the back of Medicare," as they say, "in 1998 there was Bill 37, his first bid to establish private hospitals" in Alberta. "He pulled that bill" because of serious public opposition. Then in 2000 it says that he set about trying to establish private hospitals yet again. He had a nice little televised fireside chat to talk to Albertans about that one and said that "he was going to make it possible for people to bypass public hospitals if they

needed hip and knee surgery.” Despite the fact that there were polls at the time that showed a majority of Albertans didn’t want that, he pushed through Bill 11 at the Legislature, which, as I’ve mentioned previously, was my first political protest, standing out here in front of the Legislature to protest Bill 11.

Mr. Jason Nixon: First one that wasn’t antipipeline.

Mr. Shepherd: To the hon. House leader, the Member for Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre: I’ve never attended an antipipeline protest.

But the history of the Conservative governments in the province of Alberta chasing after those opportunities to punch loopholes in our public health care system, to make more room for that American-style private profit in our public health care system, is a long and lasting legacy in this province, and it is one that this government has decided they want to try to imitate. They’re trying to find their own way to work around the boundaries of the Canada Health Act.

You know, this article talks about the Holy Cross hospital in Calgary that was bought by the Huang brothers, their company Enterprise Universal Inc. They bought that hospital “for a mere \$4.5 million” on a fire sale, under Premier Klein, “shortly after a \$35-million renovation had been completed.” A nice little subsidy from the people of Alberta, Madam Speaker. Now, it says here that the Huangs were big supporters of Ralph Klein, donated generously to the Alberta PC Party. They have also been donating to the United Conservative Party, interestingly, part of that small group of ophthalmologists that actually failed to consult with the majority of their members and actually don’t represent a large chunk of others within the Alberta Medical Association, who have decided that they want to negotiate directly with this Health minister. The connections run deep and they run long with individuals who want to profit and receive more of their own private profit from our public health care system and Conservative parties in this government of Alberta, and this party is no exception.

Now, I spoke last time I rose in this House to speak to this bill about my concerns with Bill 30, in particular with making more room for corporations to bill the government directly as this government continues to look for ways that they can undermine doctors as actual providers of care and guardians of the public health care system, and I talked at length about the many ways in which this government has already demonstrated that they have far more interest in rewarding and providing benefits to corporate shareholders than actual individual family doctors.

There’s an interesting story along these lines, Madam Speaker, about another type of situation where this occurred with the company FYidoctors, which provides optometry services and laser surgery in the province of Alberta. Now, they came onto the scene with some lovely speeches and enticing promises. They promised to buy 51 per cent of doctors’ offices, promised to provide those doctors with human resources and salaries, just like this minister wants to generously enable more corporations to do because those poor little doctors don’t want to worry their pretty little heads about administration and staffing, according to this minister. FYi promised to provide those things. They promised that salaries would be unchanged. They promised they’d allow, say, 50 per cent. They’d allow doctors a 50 per cent say in which suppliers were selected for them to work with.

However, once the contracts were signed, the reality was starkly different from what had been painted for doctors before they signed. After they completed the transition from independent practitioner to an employee of FYi, the optometrists’ pay was immediately reduced by 30 per cent to improve FYi’s bottom line. Their office

staff were forced to accept a new, lower pay structure or lose their jobs.

Now, this will be familiar to anyone who’s a radiologist in the province of Alberta, Madam Speaker, because, of course, they signed a deal with this government to offer a significant reduction in their earnings, retroactive. And the moment their cheque cleared, this government gave them notice that they were in fact going to break their contract in one year and put it out to global tender.

But back to FYi. After one year FYi re-examined their deal on suppliers. Remember, they had promised doctors that they would have a 50 per cent say that resulted then, all of a sudden, in 80 per cent of the supplies having to be bought solely from FYi’s approved companies, due in large part to a contract stating that FYi corporate got an annual bonus if the FYi suppliers’ volumes increased. That had absolutely no improvement in patient care, Madam Speaker. Again, that was simply about padding the profits of corporate shareholders, more private profit out of the earnings from the public health care system, and of course all those financial gains were retained by those above the level of the mere doctors providing the service and their staff.

Now, of course, optometrists, you might say: well, they’re free to leave their contract; they could walk away at any time. But the fact was that doctors could only leave, thanks to that contract, if they sold their shares to another doctor coming in, and – guess what? – those sale prices were set by FYi, thus preventing any disgruntled employees from selling a cheaper contract to facilitate that transition. So if a contract was ever sold, the exiting optometrist was also bound by a gag order preventing them from giving any negative press about FYidoctors.

10:00

That’s what this government wants to enable more of in our health care system, franchise chains of clinics where doctors are employees signing contracts with corporate shareholders who then have the opportunity to grind them. You know, this minister has made many accusations over the months about doctors abusing the billing system, saying that doctors were incentivized to charge too much, to try to see too many patients to try to pad their profits. How much more so, Madam Speaker, is a corporate shareholder going to do to put pressure on the doctors that they hire as employees, to try to pressure them to see more patients, to bill more services, to take more advantage of the system?

Indeed, that’s the problem we’ve already had with some walk-in clinics and other situations in the province of Alberta, but instead of actually trying to just increase the audit to get the poor offenders, this government chose to spend months smearing every family doctor in the province of Alberta, claiming they had to tear up their agreement because those doctors could not be trusted and then imposing a new framework that, frankly, has caused chaos throughout the system. Now they want to, as they have done with Telus and the Babylon app, give more opportunities for corporations to replace doctors providing services. In the case of Telus it was at a rate that was twice what they were willing to pay doctors until they finally came around and corrected that.

Again, what we see is a repeated pattern of Conservative governments in the province of Alberta. I imagine that when I finish speaking, the Premier or perhaps the hon. Government House Leader will stand up and will be very offended and will speak about how I am lying – well, not lying because that would be unparliamentary; I withdraw that remark – or that I am misleading, that I am engaging in fear and smear, perhaps quoting one or two doctors that they’ve found that they’ve finally convinced to stand with them while the majority do not.

I stand by what I say, Madam Speaker. We have seen the history. We have seen how untrustworthy this government is when it comes to our health care, and with Bill 30 they are looking to open the door to create more room for American-style private profit in our public health care system that will not make one bit of difference in improving patient care. Indeed, I would say that it's going to lead to its degradation.

The Deputy Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available. The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Jason Nixon: Well, thank you, Madam Speaker. I appreciate the opportunity to rise on 29(2)(a). I'm not actually sure if I've had an opportunity to speak to this piece of legislation in second reading. If I have, I'll wait till Committee of the Whole. I have some more to say in regard to the importance of it shortly, but I do want to unpack a couple of things that the hon. Member for Edmonton-City Centre had to say in his remarks.

The first thing I want to talk about is that the hon. member indicated that he has never been to a protest associated with pipelines or to an antipipeline protest, Madam Speaker. I will table tomorrow some pictures of his attendance or pictures of the protest that he was at where he was supporting one Emma Jackson on August 28 of – hold on. Let me see here. On August . . .

Mr. Kenney: August last year, 2019.

Mr. Jason Nixon: August last year.

Now, Emma Jackson, Madam Speaker, you may not know, famously hung herself off the – sorry. Not hanging but, like, used ropes to hang off a bridge . . .

An Hon. Member: Suspended.

Mr. Jason Nixon: Suspended is a much better word, Madam Speaker.

. . . and blocked traffic on a bridge inside B.C. to protest against the Kinder Morgan pipeline. Yes, the hon. Member for Edmonton-City Centre then attended events with her that were antipipeline in nature, Madam Speaker. The reality is that – again, I don't think the hon. member would be untruthful to the Chamber. I'm not implying that at all. Maybe he forgot what protest he was at. I suspect that that would mean that he goes to so many antipipeline protests that he can't keep it straight where he's at.

Mr. Kenney: He forgot. Kind of like Trudeau in blackface.

Mr. Jason Nixon: Yeah. Exactly. People forget things, I guess, but so be it.

The main reason I wanted to rise was in regard to his comments on the principles of the United Conservative Party when it comes to the universal health care system and access to health care by the citizens of our province and ultimately of our country.

You know, today, Madam Speaker, you may not realize, is the third anniversary of the ratification of the unity agreement that brought the Wildrose Party and the Progressive Conservative Party together to create the United Conservative Party. Ninety-five per cent of our membership three years ago ratified the unity deal. I'm proud to have been one of the authors of that agreement along with a few members that are in this Chamber: the hon. the Minister of Transportation, the hon. the Minister of Health, and, of course, the hon. the Premier, who had a significant role in that, as did the former leader of the opposition, Mr. Jean, and several different members who got to participate in the drafting of the unity agreement. It is one of the coolest things that I ever got to participate

in in my political career. I'm pretty proud of it. I have a personalized copy that I keep in my Sundre office at home on the farm that was personalized by the now Premier, and I'm proud of the work that we did on this document.

There are lots of things I could talk about in that document. When you look at what's called section 3 of that document, there are the founding principles, which are the founding principles of the United Conservative Party, which is now the party that has been given the privilege to be the government to the great province of Alberta. About one, two, three, four, five down, so pretty high up on the founding principle list, is "universal access to high quality, publicly-funded health care." Right there in the document that forms the basis of our party, right there in black and white in that document it makes it clear that we stand for universal health care and publicly funded health care and Albertans being able to access health care. That was so important to this party and to the people that put together that unity agreement that we put it right in our founding principles, Madam Speaker. And guess what? As I said, 95 per cent of our membership voted to approve that document, which still governs the direction that we take with our party today.

So the reality is that the Member for Edmonton-City Centre has no idea what he's talking about when it comes to the beliefs of the Conservative Party or the principles of the Conservative Party, and that's fine. He's a member of the NDP. Why would he know that in any great detail? But he's wrong when he says that we don't stand for universal health care. It's right there in our document.

Now, that may be – actually, you know what? I'm almost out of time, so I just want to focus on one other comment that he made there. He talked about the difference between sheep and wolves, and I think at this point it has to be pointed out to this Chamber that the NDP in the last 48 hours put out graphics of coyotes and called them wolves. Clearly, the NDP don't know the difference between a coyote and a wolf. Granted, to the Member for Edmonton-City Centre, they don't see a lot of wolves roaming around downtown Edmonton.

Mr. Kenney: Not a lot.

Mr. Jason Nixon: Not a lot, to be fair. They do see the odd coyote, but we've got lots of wolves around Sundre, and you can definitely tell the difference, Madam Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. members, are any members wishing to join debate on amendment RA1 on Bill 30? The hon. Member for Edmonton-North West.

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I'm very pleased to take a couple of minutes to speak on the amendment to Bill 30. We know that always when we are speaking about health care, these discussions become heated, but I would always urge everyone in this Chamber – indeed, with more than a couple of eyes watching, I would suggest, for the general public, to make sure that we remain constructive in perhaps the most important thing that we are responsible for here as a Legislature, which is the health and security of Albertans to which our public health care system has the biggest responsibility by far.

I know that this issue always brings up a whole range of both history of public health care and how it unfolds in this province. Indeed, people fought hard every step of the way to ensure the integrity of our public health care system, so when you do have bills like Bill 30 coming forward, we know that it is very important to make sure that we're very careful treading and moving forward. The key, I would suggest, Madam Speaker, around the integrity of a public health system is to ensure that we are using precious public funds to make sure that they are being applied at every step of the

way as directly as possible to the delivery of health care, and one of the concerns that I have around Bill 30 is that it's moving the billing and the movement of those public monies to deliver public health care or health care on the ground – it still is public health care – but moving it through people that are not health care professionals.

10:10

This is a categorical change that we have not seen in this province, and we believe that it really does compromise the ability to put and to use public health care money, the scarce resources that we have here, to make sure that it's delivering health care on the ground. The categorical change that we see here is not insignificant, and I think that it warrants careful consideration every step of the way in which we will engage over these next few days and weeks.

With that, Madam Speaker, I would adjourn debate on this at this time.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Bill 32

Restoring Balance in Alberta's Workplaces Act, 2020

Member Loyola moved that the motion for second reading of Bill 32, Restoring Balance in Alberta's Workplaces Act, 2020, be amended by deleting all of the words after "that" and substituting the following:

Bill 32, Restoring Balance in Alberta's Workplaces Act, 2020, be not now read a second time but that the subject matter of the bill be referred to the Standing Committee on Alberta's Economic Future in accordance with Standing Order 74.2.

[Debate adjourned on the amendment July 20]

The Deputy Speaker: I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung.

Mr. Dach: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise to speak to the referral amendment now under discussion in the Legislature regarding Bill 32. I'd just like to start off by saying that any time that a piece of legislation is named something as blatantly as this one is as far as "restoring balance" being placed in the title, it quite often is actually trying to do the opposite. It's curious that the title begs to have the reader seek to find a new sort of balance being restored, but close examination of the legislation reveals the opposite in so many ways.

I know that in our tenure as government the NDP actually sought to restore some balance because the balance was tipped in favour of employers in so many ways. There are some who've argued that we perhaps should have gone faster and harder in that regard so that the trail that was left would have been perhaps more difficult for this government to unravel, to undo. They seem to revel in doing whatever they can to minimize the effectiveness of organized labour and workers' ability to organize in this province and also to oppose measures which act to their detriment. I'm thinking of labour legislation that was unravelled to allow youth workers to have their wages rolled back, for example.

There are lots of things in this legislation that deserve to be scrutinized much more closely, and the referral amendment is something that has my complete support. The fundamental or one of the most fundamental pillars of a healthy, functioning democracy, Madam Speaker, is the right, the unfettered right, for people in a society to form a labour union, for labour to organize and to form a labour union. The government, of course, suggests in their title of the legislation that this indeed is a piece of legislation which rebalances things, claiming that in the past, particularly legislation that we had passed, we had favoured the working people

of the province more so than this government thinks should have taken place. However, what indeed happened during our tenure was that the rights of people to form unions and to do so without undue restrictions and to make it easier to actually form a labour union was something that was a long time coming.

We've had successive Conservative governments in this province that I've lived under chiselling away at the rights of the labour movement and the right to organize. I mean, we had the 100-year anniversary in this country, Madam Speaker, in 2019, of the Winnipeg General Strike, which was a watershed moment in our country's history, where the rights of people in our society to actually organize into a union were finally established. A hundred years later we're struggling to cement those rights where they belong, and it's really unfortunate that we find ourselves in this predicament in 2020 in Alberta, going backwards in terms of our labour legislation.

We are a society that at least pretends to respect each other and to see the value in each other, and one of the ways that a society actually does that is to recognize the importance of a labour movement that's been freely organized. Labour movements and unions act as a conscience, Madam Speaker. They act as potentially a means of opposition to a government that would trample the rights of not only working people but all citizens. They are an organizational pillar of a healthy, functioning democracy.

Any government that chooses to attack that should seriously be questioned as to what their real motivation is: were they really looking at dissent as an opposition to their government? They don't have any appetite for dissent, so they look to chisel away at the rights of organized labour to organize and form a barrier to whatever policies they may wish to implement. There are many, many things in this piece of legislation, Bill 32, that are devastatingly calculated to limit dissent and to minimize the ability of organized labour and unions in particular to garner any traction in terms of opposing government policy.

I know that the government believes that Albertans are not watching in this pandemic summer, in July, when they're preoccupied with putting their children back into school. Many, of course, are super fearful about what that might mean because there's kind of no plan to really protect the health and safety of children in going back to school, and that's kind of the number one concern being expressed by many people that I've heard on radio stations and also in correspondence to my office. Maybe the government is just simply being shrewd at this point in time by bringing forward such a distasteful piece of legislation, distasteful to those who are champions of democracy in this country.

Having come from a family that was sustained and supported by my father, who was a union carpenter and worked in construction all his life, I certainly know the benefits of that union to the well-being of the family that I was raised in, and these attacks on organized labour don't sit well with me at all. I have been a member of three different labour organizations myself: the UFCW 401, for example, when I worked at Canada Packers; CUPE 30, when I was driving a little blue garbage truck for the city during summers going to university; and I've also been involved, when I had other summer jobs, with another labour union as well.

10:20

I know that the union's involvement most recently in supporting and campaigning and really advocating for the benefit and health and safety of the workers at the Cargill plant is something that I don't think Albertans are really going to forget any time soon because there was a situation at that plant where the government was claiming that the plant was safe to work at and we were seeing an increasing number of people getting sick with the COVID-19

infection, yet the expectation from the government was that the workers should continue to work and the plant should remain operational. The union, UFCW, advocated on behalf of the workers, was demanding that a closer look be taken at the conditions in the plant and that the plant be shut down because up to 1,500 workers ended up getting sick, and three people died as a result of that infection at that plant.

I'm just wondering how many other people might have died had the union not been advocating so strongly on behalf of those workers. When a government isn't acting in the best interest of the individuals who are, for example, in a plant like Cargill, where else are they going to turn? Had they not had that union there demanding that their health and safety be the priority against a government whose intent was to maintain that plant operational, what would have been the result, I wonder? How many other people would have been sick? How many other people would have died?

What would the long-term effect, in fact, be for the plant if indeed you would have had an even bigger infection rate? It was the biggest in North America. I don't know how much bigger it could have gotten, with 1,500 people, but it was a terrible outbreak of that virus in that plant. It was the unions that stepped forward, unions that the government refused to properly listen to for a long time. They wouldn't recognize or take into account or even meet with the unions to properly accept the message that the union wanted to convey, that they were very fearful that the members of their union who were working in that plant were at great risk of infection and perhaps death. Ultimately, finally, there was a response, and the plant was closed.

You know, had those workers not had representation by the UFCW in this case, who knows what they would have been forced to do by a company that is one of the largest corporations in the world and ultimately sees its shareholder benefits as the major motivator and not the health and welfare of their workers? They know that the most dangerous or one of the most dangerous places in the world to work at is a packing plant. I can attest to that. It's a significantly dangerous place to be. Notwithstanding the shoulder-to-shoulder contact that you have, which exposes you to, perhaps, viral infection at a time of a pandemic – that's a special circumstance that the packing plants themselves are unfortunately exposed to – the work itself is dangerous in many respects. My job took me to all parts of the plant when I was there, and believe me, there was ample opportunity on a daily basis to suffer a significant injury.

What I wanted to focus more on were some of the elements of this piece of legislation that really attack the rights of working people, and the Labour Relations Code changes that are involved with this legislation are shocking. It seeks, in my view, to damage the relationship between trade unions and their members and undermine the workers' abilities to bargain. That's a pretty shameful thing to have as an underlying tenet of one of the changes in a piece of legislation that you want to make, to damage the rights of workers, to negate their ability to bargain fairly. Why a government would like to do this or would want to do this, sees this as a benefit, I really can't fathom.

Like, as has been mentioned by previous speakers, Madam Speaker, successive Conservative governments seem intent to want to limit the rights of labour unions. For whatever reason they don't see the value of a labour union in terms of being a healthy part of a functioning democracy. Yet, demonstrably, it is. When you don't have labour unions that are able to effectively organize, you tend to see a domination of the workforce, you see wages lower, you see working conditions suffer, you see inability to oppose dangerous situations in the workplace, all signs that we're seeing showing up in Alberta under this Conservative government, where this attack

on the labour movement, on organized labour, on unions is contained in this legislation, in Bill 32.

Now, union workers know that they already have access to their unions' financial statements, but this bill unfortunately requires the statements to be more public and shared with each member of the Labour Relations Board. So you can see how these statements could easily fall into the hands of the employer. If the employer knows how much the workers have in their strike fund, for example, it pretty much gives a pretty strong advantage to the employer and limits the unions' ability to bargain.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. members, Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available. The hon. Member for Brooks-Medicine Hat.

Ms Glasgo: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I appreciate the opportunity to rise on 29(2)(a). I do believe this is actually the first time that I will get to speak to Bill 32, so I just want to start by thanking the Minister of Labour and Immigration for putting forward this important legislation, that will help to restore balance and make sure that our workers are protected here in Alberta.

You know, I have to start off with the Member for Edmonton-McClung. He made some initial remarks regarding the names of bills and how they could be potentially misleading. I would like to remind him of a bill that they passed, their Bill 1, which I do recognize, before somebody jumps on me and says that the opposition supported that – I know that. The act to renew democracy, the first NDP Bill 1: while they were renewing democracy, banning corporate donations – I'm sure, Madam Speaker, you remember that; you voted on it as well – what they forgot to do was close the union loophole that allowed Gil McGowan to spend \$1.8 million in the election. So if I was talking about misleading – that doesn't really sound like renewing democracy to me. That sounds like allowing big, dark, scary money into politics, just as the members opposite like to say is such an awful thing, and we would agree. Adding big, dark, scary money into politics is a thing, is a terrible thing. But to that end, I'm not a hundred per cent sure why the NDP kept allowing old Gab to keep spending \$1.8 million.

However, I also want to point to the NDP's omnibus Fair and Family-friendly Workplaces Act. I was just scrolling through *Hansard*, Madam Speaker, as anyone does on a Wednesday night, and I was looking through some of the debate from 2017 and found, actually, that the criticism of this bill largely was that it was an omnibus piece of legislation that affected many other pieces of legislation. The main problem was that it was called the Fair and Family-friendly Workplaces Act, but what it actually did was strip union members of their democratic right to have a secret ballot. Now, that seems a little strange to me.

Mr. Kenney: How's that fair?

Ms Glasgo: It doesn't seem fair to me at all.

But what I am hearing, Madam Speaker, is that this NDP opposition: one thing they don't like – they claim to be standing up for Alberta workers. They just don't want Alberta workers to democratically choose who represents them because that would get in the way of their own world view, and that's just too much for them.

To my second point here, I have issues with the way that the Member for Edmonton-McClung characterized the meat-packing industry. As the Member for Brooks-Medicine Hat I represent one of the largest meat-packing plants in the province, JBS Food. JBS Canada is an amazing organization that gives back to our community immensely. I know that the Member for Drumheller-Stettler also has a lot of interface with JBS. The hon. Premier came

with me last year to visit JBS, and we saw just how enriching they are to our community and just how much they really do.

I can guarantee you that it wasn't because UFCW sat down and wrote a letter on Easter Sunday that JBS was protecting their workers. In fact, I had a phone call, before that letter even came out, with JBS and Yonathan, a great friend of mine who works there – I know that the Premier knows him quite well – a fantastic man, and he was telling me about all the provisions that they had put in place to keep their workers safe. Their workers felt safe, Madam Speaker. They knew that if they were sick, they didn't have to go to work. They knew that there were barricades. They knew that there were separate lunchrooms. They knew there was room for distancing. They did an excellent job, and it wasn't because some union boss came in and batted the door down and wrote a strongly worded letter.

10:30

Anyway, what I really think is happening here, Madam Speaker, is that the NDP have a problem with democracy. They have a problem with the fact that this government was elected on a historic mandate. They have a problem with the fact that legislation will allow people like my mom, who actually is represented by the UFCW right now, and, I would say, quite poorly given that she was stuffing envelopes at my campaign office and got a phone call asking if she would like to support financially the now MLA for Edmonton-Strathcona – so I have to say that if we're talking about democracy, if we're talking about the rights of workers, my mom definitely has the right and her co-workers definitely have that right not to be bombarded during the election about who they should and shouldn't be voting for.

I also have a friend, Madam Speaker, who works for a company in Calgary, and his union phoned him the night before the election – and he was volunteering with us as well, I believe – and asked him to support the now MLA . . .

Mr. Kenney: A union list to raise money for the NDP?

Ms Glasgow: The union was phoning and saying: "You know, the NDP could use your help. You could make contributions. You can volunteer. Would you like to volunteer?" We know, Madam Speaker, that the Alberta Federation of Labour, with our friend – say it with me – Gil McGowan, actually was donating workers to the NDP's campaigns.

You know, what really bothers me, Madam Speaker, is this affront to democracy that's happening in our Legislature right now under the NDP. They feel as though they can tell workers who and what they believe in. That I have a problem with, and I'll stand up for that every day.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. members, we are on the referral amendment to second reading of Bill 32. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

Mr. Feehan: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I appreciate having a fresh opportunity to speak to my concerns about Bill 32. I have of course had an opportunity prior to this amendment to address a number of concerns at that time about the construction of some of the boards and so on and some of the concerns about the opt-in requirements, but I'd like to add a little bit to my comments on that and to address further concerns that I have with the bill.

I think, first, I'll start a little bit with some of the employment standards concerns that are there. Of course, we have to look at: what is the purpose of employment standards, and what is it that you're trying to achieve? Basically, the underlying notion of

employment standards is that fairness be constituted in the work site so that employees have a reasonable chance to define the work that they are engaged in and the conditions of the work that they are engaged in such that they do not find themselves in a place of being forced into or coerced into work that is, in their estimation, unfair, perhaps even unsafe. So I think we should always take it very seriously and stop for a bit when we're looking at making changes to employment standards.

I think that there are a number of things in there that are of deep concern to me, so I'll take a bit of time now to address some of them. One of them – and it has been mentioned previously in the House by some of the other speakers – is the fact that decisions around final pay for employees have been changed such that rather than paying an employee within three days of their final date of work, they are allowing the deferral of that final payment to a period of 31 days, basically a month. Now, this is of concern for a number of reasons. One is that we are talking about people who have just lost their work and are therefore in very precarious situations, who obviously are going to be very concerned about their pay and how they're going to get along until they're able to find new work. So it's a very stressful time for those employees.

Now we've just told them that not only do they not get the pay within three days so they can use that pay to make adjustments in their life – to find new work, for example, perhaps to move or to travel or to put out resumés and so on – but actually this section allows the employer to defer past their next pay period to 31 days. It may actually even be longer than a normal pay period. If their pay period happens to be on a two-week cycle, instead of receiving their pay in two weeks, which they would have had they continued their employment, now they have to wait two further weeks. Not only have they lost their job, but now they may be in a position where their budgeting is put further in jeopardy because they have to wait longer for their pay.

I'm very concerned about this. I know that the government has touted this as somehow saving employers millions of dollars at a rate of \$91 per person. If you calculate that out, how much they say they're going to save and the rate at which they're going to save it, at \$91, they're anticipating that somewhere in the neighbourhood of almost a million people will be laid off in the province of Alberta over the next year. Well, it tells me that they're not very hopeful about their job-creation policies if that's true. I'm very concerned about this because I think it is unnecessary, and it's, really clearly, rushed legislation that was not thought out and certainly needs to be brought back for clarity so that people are not put in worse situations than they would be if their jobs were being continued.

Further, in the employment standards section I have a significant amount of concern about the fact that the averaging arrangements are no longer going to be agreements. Now, up until this time averaging arrangements for pay and things that they relate to were agreements that were agreed upon between the employer and the employee, part of negotiations, part of that democratic process that members opposite keep referring to. Yet what they've done is that they've actually introduced a section in this bill to prevent a democratic process from occurring; that is, a process where workers, who would naturally in a democracy have the right to come to agreement over the conditions of their labour, will no longer be able to come to an agreement under the conditions of their labour or no longer be required to have that available to them.

As such, what we have is the employer making arbitrary decisions on behalf of the employees. Now employers can impose on workers, and they can make imposition of the agreements with as little as two weeks' notice, so very little time for employees to get together, have conversations on what they'd like, and to establish a negotiating process for them to have their voices heard.

It's clearly an attempt to diminish the ability of workers to control their own working situation, which is, I think, very problematic.

As well, within the averaging agreement there is a very specific and problematic part in that the averaging now can occur over a period of 52 weeks, a full year. They only have to balance your work over a period of a full year, not within a pay period, not within a month, not within a season but, rather, over a full year. Now, this has some very particular outcomes in terms of pay and work for employees in these situations, particularly in situations like oil and gas, which this government keeps telling us that they are supportive of. Yet here they are taking away the rights of workers in oil and gas to actually have their work averaged over a reasonable period of time.

The specifics of this are such that you can have workers work what we would normally call overtime significantly for months, then lay them off for a period of time, which diminishes the average time that they have worked, and then bring them back in, having had them work overtime with no overtime pay and then have a period of time where they have no pay at all because they've been temporarily laid off.

10:40

Now, this is not an unusual phenomenon in oil and gas. As everyone knows, rig drillers, for example, very often are laid off in the spring, when the weather is such that you simply cannot get in to drill because of the thaw and the water conditions around drilling sites. Workers in wireline, for example, or workers in drilling rigs and other kinds of activities will now be in a position where you can go out in December at 30 below, in January at 40 below, in February at 30 below and work extended hours for those months with no overtime pay because when it comes to March and April, you will be laid off. Therefore, your pay can be averaged over a period of 12 months. The experience for workers is that they work overtime with no pay and then they get laid off and have no income at all for a period of time. That's a complete disaster for workers and something I think is just completely unacceptable.

I think that we really, certainly, need to re-examine this bill and to take pause about what is becoming available for employers here and what the consequence is going to be. If you work in oil and gas and you're an outside worker, the chances of your pay being reduced in the next year over the pay you received last year has become extremely high. You're about to lose a lot of money. A lot of workers will tell you that one of the best things about working for oil and gas is the overtime pay, how much money you're able to put together because of the kind of work that you do.

I know that if you work in wireline, for example, you often go out to a site and you spend hours there, well beyond any kind of a normal shift. Sometimes workers are there for two days in a row because you have to keep working on the system until you resolve the problem. It doesn't stop when your shift stops, so as a result they often work right through the night into the next day. And they're about to lose all the overtime pay associated with that kind of dedicated employee behaviour. That's very problematic.

Not only that, but this has been compounded by this section of the employment standards changes in that the employer now does not need to give the two-week temporary layoff notice. They can suddenly just lay you off without the two weeks' notice for a temporary layoff, which is what is happening during spring breakup on most oil rigs in this province. There's no way for the employee to plan for the sudden loss of money in that way, and they are not being given the overtime pay so that they can float themselves through that temporary layoff time. That's what a lot of employees used to do before; they used to bank that money so that they could get through the time of no pay. Now there is no money to bank, so

getting through that temporary layoff time will become extremely problematic for a lot of employees.

I am very concerned about this bill, and I think that the implications of what is happening here are going to be felt by employees throughout the province of Alberta after this bill is passed. When that happens, they will be very upset about how that actually changes the quality of their life and their ability to have some power and sense of mastery over the conditions of their work.

I also want to speak a little bit about section 74 and my concerns that an extreme amount of power is being given to the director to issue exemptions without going through the minister, which means it doesn't have to go through a process here in the House at all. The director can make a variety of exemptions not well defined in this bill. We'll have to wait for the regulations to see what that's all about, but as far as we can see, that's including pay.

That means that if the director is able to make exemptions regarding pay, then they can start to make decisions about things like how much people will be paid, when people will be paid, what the mechanism of pay will be, how often pay cycles will be, all of these kinds of things. That means that employees will have less security and less stability in terms of their pay cycles and perhaps, again, be earning less than they had expected to earn even without a negotiation process or an arbitration process occurring, just on the direction of the director. That's a heck of a lot of power being taken away from the average person and being given to a person who has power over them.

Further in section 74 there are changes to the rest periods that are required within a work environment. Whereas up until now there have been designated rules to indicate when people are allowed to take a quick break, when they're allowed to take lunch, when they're allowed to have a cup of coffee – we're all familiar with that process – in this case you could now work a shift, let's say a 10-hour shift for example, and have no breaks, perhaps a half-hour lunch and no other breaks throughout the day. Now, for some of us that may be okay. In my whole career I've often worked long hours without taking significant breaks.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. members, Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available. The hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung.

Mr. Dach: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I'd certainly like to hear the hon. member finish his thoughts and add to the debate more than he already has.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

Mr. Feehan: Thank you very much. I appreciate the opportunity to finish a few thoughts. There are just so many things that are wrong with this bill that I can't get them all in the speeches that I give. We're just going to have to come at this over and over and over again.

As I was saying before I ran out of time in my initial section, you could work a period of 10 hours without breaks, and that's okay for some people. In my life, for example, I've been an academic, I've been an administrator of a nonprofit, I've worked in private practice, all of these situations where I was inside, and even though I often would work for 10 hours or 12 hours in a row without any actual break, what was possible for me was to grab lunch, have coffee, and do that at my desk while I continued to work.

It also did not have necessarily the physical toll on my body. That is much more the case for people who are engaged in physical labour. Having breaks in physical labour isn't just about getting a chance to kick back and put up your heels, something we all like to

do, but it's actually also about safety. It's about taking a moment to allow your muscles to relax, to decrease the strain on your body so that when you go back in, you are more sure of your behaviour.

I know that when you're engaged in an activity, after a while, even though you've done it many times before, it becomes harder to be careful, harder to maintain safety because you just have a physical body fatigue that begins to interfere with the work. I think that most people who have done some kind of physical work would know that. They would know that at a certain point it's just a precaution for your own well-being and your physical safety to take a break, to stop doing what you're doing, you know, get a cup of coffee or something, not just because you want to stop working but because you want to go back to working carefully and well, and if you go back to working carefully and well, you're less likely to be injured or hurt. I guess I'm very concerned about those kinds of changes.

10:50

I'm also concerned about the director having the ability to reduce vacation and general holiday pay without consultation with the employees. I'm very concerned that what has been established in this particular bill is the ability for the employer, without consultation with the employee, to choose the lowest possible option that's available. Now, of course, any employer in their right mind is going to always choose the lowest possible option, but the point of a whole negotiated agreement is that sometimes, every once in a while, workers should be able to make a request that the lowest possible option not always be taken and that the conversation between employer and employee should be maintained so that those decisions are indeed done with appropriate consultation back and forth.

That's the kind of thing that has made me very concerned about this bill, about taking the power away from employees to just even speak to their working conditions, to even be at the table while decisions are being made about their working conditions. I don't think that they should win all the time. I don't think they should always get what they want. I get that. I've been on both ends of it. I've been an employer and an employee.

I understand that the best possible thing for government to do is to encourage a relationship between those two so that they are sitting down to have negotiated discussions about the possible outcome, so that they can hear the reasoning on both sides as to why something should go in a particular direction, so that they can engage in some give and take, a little bit of: okay, I'm going to go your way this time to show you how much I am concerned for you and how much I appreciate the work that you do but next time not.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. members, any other member wishing to join debate on amendment REF1? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning.

Ms Goehring: Castle Downs.

The Deputy Speaker: Edmonton-Castle Downs.

Ms Goehring: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise this evening to speak to Bill 32, Restoring Balance in Alberta's Workplaces Act, 2020, on the referral motion. I'm sure members in this House have heard me speak many times about the importance of a referral to committee. Having been, when we were in government, a chair of a committee that received referrals from the Legislature floor, I can speak first-hand to the importance of that experience and the importance of being able to have a robust look through the legislation. When we're talking about working Albertans, I think

this is the exact piece of legislation that should go before a committee and that we should hear on from working Albertans.

I know that I've heard over and over that many feel that this is an attack on Albertans and the working people of this province. We've heard many comments and arguments about why this piece of legislation should not proceed, and I think our recommendation for it to be referred to committee makes absolute sense at this point. I think that having the opportunity to bring it forward to a committee to engage with Albertans in a much more meaningful way allows the ability to have people from all across the province engage in this process.

I know that we already hear from constituents. We hear by way of e-mail; we have conversations while we're out and about. I think that having an honest attempt to engage Albertans on this very important discussion is very meaningful. There are many ways that you can do this process. You can have people do online contributions. You can have them do written submissions. I know that in many cases there have been opportunities for stakeholders, individuals, to come in and present to committee.

I think this is a piece of legislation that impacts every single constituency in the province, and I'm sure there are many people that have a lot to say about some of these changes that this government is proposing. I know that I've heard over and over about concerns from employees, about the lack of the agreements that were in the previous legislation that this government had brought forward, and being able to express their concern about the arrangements that now are being imposed by employers. The real impacts that those decisions have on the working people in this province is something that I think this government needs to hear.

I know we're hearing it in opposition, and I can only imagine that all members of this Chamber are hearing the same things, especially right now with work being reduced because of the pandemic and people not having the same hours that they did previously. People struggling, taking jobs that are outside of what they potentially have normally done is a concern. Now taking money from those individuals is a bigger concern, and people are simply struggling to pay everyday bills.

You know, we have organizations that are indicating that there are closures because of the pandemic, that they're not able to afford their rent. Small businesses are closing all over the province, and that means people are losing their jobs. So those that have employment, I think, should have the rights that they deserve while they're at their job. Having the ability to bring them forward to a committee to express those concerns is an absolute solution to continue to hear from people in the province.

I think that having a committee that already works with the ministry of labour – I sit on that committee. We're equipped to deal with individuals that have concerns. I think we're all competent in that committee. We can come up with a strategy to reach out to the people of this province in very creative ways, especially with COVID. Having meetings where people can phone in, video in, do submissions in a variety of ways, I think, is a reasonable solution.

I'm sure that there are many people that would like to engage in this process, aside from just reaching out to their MLA. I know that our Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods, the critic for labour, has been working tirelessly to support working Albertans and hears from people all across Alberta about their concerns. Knowing what she's hearing, I can only imagine what every member of this Chamber is hearing, and whether or not they want to bring those honest conversations forward is their choice.

I think this would allow an opportunity for Albertans to come and have their say and talk about what this piece of legislation means to them and the incredible impact it has on their everyday life, their

income, their livelihood. When we're talking about restricting rights and reducing rights of workers and taking money out of their pockets, it's important that we hear from those individuals, and having it referred to a committee is exactly the avenue that that should go.

I know that in the past when we've had committees where we've had stakeholders come and we've had people that are interested in whatever piece of legislation we're debating, it's been a wonderful experience as an MLA to hear those very different opinions. You hear both sides of the conversation, and I think it allows the members of the committee to have a more robust, in-depth look at what the province is considering and looking at what Albertans are asking for and then coming up with a recommendation to perhaps enhance this piece of legislation and bringing it back to the Chamber so that all members of this House can benefit from that learning, that really robust, thorough, deep learning that we took away from that.

I don't understand what the rush is right now, especially in a pandemic, that we want to look at reducing people's income, look at reducing people's rights when people are struggling. People are hurting, and taking away those rights just doesn't seem fair right now. There's absolutely no rush for this. This isn't something that is pandemic related. It's not a piece of legislation that is directly related to the pandemic. In fact, it's a piece of legislation that should be slowed down because of the pandemic.

When we're talking about people's livelihoods and their ability to work, I think employers and employees should have the ability to negotiate and to have those conversations and, like the previous legislation said, to have agreements between both the employer and the employee. I know that when that previous legislation was brought forward, I heard over and over employees' concern about that power imbalance and coming up with that agreement, that people still struggled with that wording that was in the legislation. Now that language is completely gone from this legislation.

11:00

I know that hearing that should have an impact on government when they're making these decisions, that working Albertans are not okay with that. There is this great fear of the power that the employer holds and their ability now to make an arrangement that no longer requires input from the employee, which, to me, just doesn't make sense. When you have an employer that is a positive employer, this isn't going to be an issue. This isn't saying that it's going to be an issue with the majority, but there are employers out there that are going to take advantage of this and that power dynamic, especially now when work is so rare. People are struggling. People aren't going to feel that they have the ability to advocate for themselves or stand up to their employer because work is scarce. People all across the province are struggling right now, and to put this piece of legislation in and call it restoring balance just doesn't make sense.

I would hope that all members in this House would see the benefit of having more input from those working Albertans that this is going to impact, to maybe have a better understanding of what it means to literally work paycheque to paycheque and that fear about this power imbalance and the risk that we're putting employees at by reducing their rights and taking money away from them. It could have an impact on how this legislation works and moves forward. I know that having overtime is something that we've heard discussed in here, is something that many, many rely on right now. With a lack of overtime abilities in some of the sectors, it's having major impacts on people's ability to pay their mortgage, to pay their loans. Fortunately, there have been deferrals, but they still have to pay it back.

Right now, in the middle of a pandemic, it just seems so bizarre to me that we'd be putting this power into the hands of the employer and taking power away from the employee in a time when the government should be creating a place of safety and stability for working Albertans. This piece of legislation does not do that, and I think having it before a committee might show Albertans that there's some consideration being made to what they're actually experiencing in this time. Hearing from people that are telling us that they sometimes have only \$200 in their bank account or less, literally living paycheque to paycheque, I would hope that hearing these stories from hard-working Albertans might have some of an impact on the committee and that those in this Chamber might reconsider some of these positions that this government has taken.

[The Speaker in the chair]

It just doesn't make sense right now why we're pushing this piece of legislation forward. I think we can slow it down. We can take advantage of the ability to reach more Albertans through a committee, have those conversations, be able to listen to both sides, to hear the employer's side of what they see as the benefits to having this piece of legislation and the employee's and what their pros and cons are with this and making it better. I don't see any harm in looking at this piece of legislation and taking both sides and really listening to what people need right now in the province. I can tell you that what people aren't asking for is restrictions at work. There already are so many restrictions in place because of COVID and the ability to do the jobs that previously they were doing. It doesn't make sense, and having it referred to a committee makes absolute sense.

I would encourage every member in the Chamber to really consider listening to those working Albertans because I know I'm hearing from them and I know the impact of that. When we look at – people are asking right now, Mr. Speaker, to have some leadership in a time that is very uncertain. They're looking to government to set that tone, to set that stage. People are simply asking to feel safe. They want the ability to move freely. They want the ability to go into work and simply feel safe. They shouldn't have to worry about what sort of arrangements are going to be imposed on them by their employer. If they're not happy at their job, if they're being taken advantage of, if they are feeling that they're not being treated properly at work, the reality right now is that there aren't a whole bunch of jobs that they can turn to.

I know we heard the Member for Edmonton-Rutherford talk about breaks and the importance of kind of what that balance looks like at work. I know that I've had a career where a regular break wasn't a reality, and that was something that I fully accepted. I can't imagine telling my employer that I am entitled to a break for half an hour and two 15 minutes when I'm spending a day working on a very serious file, whether it's an apprehension of a child or helping a family flee domestic violence. I know that part of my job is working until the crisis is dealt with, until that family is feeling supported, and I know that my employer has that expectation of me as well. That's a reasonable agreement. But there are going to be situations where the employee doesn't have a say. They're doing work where they are entitled to a break, and they're not going to be given that same opportunity. It just creates an unfair power imbalance.

Working with this piece of legislation and what the UCP government is proposing, it means that there are no longer 12-hour workdays or 44-hour workweeks. That's something that is not being considered anymore. We know that Albertans certainly aren't asking for reduced rates in their workplace. They aren't asking for money to be taken out of their pockets.

I don't understand what the fear is about having this go to committee to hear those voices outside of the members on this side of the House, talking about those experiences and those first-hand stories. Having those people come to committee to explain it and share that, that human experience that they're going through right now, I think is something that might have an impact on all members of this Chamber. I mean, you can't look at this piece of legislation and really think that there isn't a need for it to be explored further.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Hon. members, Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available. I see the hon. Member for Fort McMurray-Lac La Biche has risen.

Ms Goodridge: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure to rise to speak to the referral amendment on Bill 32, the Restoring Balance in Alberta's Workplaces Act, 2020. I find that this is almost another piece where – we've had this conversation before, probably even tonight, about how the opposition is bringing forward referral amendments to bring forward pieces to send to committee. They're arguing for this. I remember that when they were in government for four years, we often made this argument, and I can't remember a single time where they brought a bill, that we had fought so hard to bring to a committee, to a committee.

Mr. Schow: Not once.

Ms Goodridge: Yeah. Okay. I think it happened perhaps once.

It's challenging because it's a thing – I appreciate the effort on this, but this is a good bill. This is a bill that, I think, really does restore balance in Alberta's workplaces.

I have the pleasure and the fortune to represent the riding of Fort McMurray-Lac La Biche. I remember that growing up in Fort McMurray, there used to be a billboard when you got into town for many, many years, and it had all of the different logos of a bunch of different unions. It said: this is a union town; welcome to Fort McMurray; we're a union town. That was very much the case. I went knocking on doors in the by-election, and I would be greeted by numerous union members. A lot of our oil sands workers are union members. I had one particular guy tell me a really troubling story. He was really upset. He worked for a particular union, and he paid his union dues on each and every single paycheque. Back in 2014 he found out that his union dues, the money that he had worked so hard for, were being used by his union to fight to make his job obsolete. Unifor was actually using money from oil and gas workers to launch a lawsuit against the Northern Gateway pipeline. They literally were fighting against their union workers' jobs.

11:10

An Hon. Member: Shame.

Ms Goodridge: It's absolutely shameful.

These union workers came to me, and they were really disappointed. They shared stories with me. I still remember one particular gentleman calling me over, really upset because he'd got a phone call from Jerry Dias, who was one of the representatives of Unifor, earlier that day asking him to campaign for the NDP in that by-election, and he was, like: no. He couldn't understand why Jerry Dias would call him to personally ask him if he would campaign for the NDP. He'd never been a part of the NDP. In fact, he'd always been a card-carrying Conservative member, but the Unifor union decided that that was what they were going to do. That's what Jerry Dias thought was a good use of his time, and many of these union guys were very frustrated with that. They would call me, and they actually came and volunteered on my campaign. They put up signs. They came door-knocking with us because they valued their

jobs, they valued the work they did, and they didn't want to see their union dues being spent irresponsibly to fight against their job. They belonged to a union to protect their job, not to fight against their job.

This is something that we campaigned on. This particular opt-in piece is something that we campaigned on. It was something that went over exceptionally well at the doors in Fort McMurray.

Mr. Kenney: It was in the platform.

Ms Goodridge: Yeah. It was absolutely in the platform. It went over very well when I would bring this up. They would say: "Yeah. You bring that forward. That is exactly what we are looking for because I am sick and tired of having my union fight against me and my jobs. They are telling me that my job is somehow not worth as much as someone else's, and that is really annoying."

The interesting piece – and I know that Gil McGowan has kind of become the piece, but he really needs to understand. I don't know if there's a pipeline he's supported. I know he's opposed Keystone XL. I know he's opposed Energy East, TMX, Northern Gateway, the Alberta Clipper. Most of these were good-paying union jobs. I really have a hard time understanding how a union leader would fight against creating union jobs. It is hard to say that you're a party for workers when you're not the party for work.

The Speaker: Hon. members, that concludes the time allotted for 29(2)(a).

Is there anyone else wishing to speak to Bill 32 this evening? The hon. Member for St. Albert has risen.

Ms Renaud: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to speak to the referral amendment for Bill 32, Restoring Balance in Alberta's Workplaces Act. Honestly, if anyone would have asked me, "So what do you think? What kind of legislation do you think you'll be dealing with in the middle of summer during a global pandemic, during a price crash on commodities?" my guess would not have been: let's attack workers' rights and call it restoring balance. Anyway, here we are. I would just like to say that I do believe this piece of legislation – and it touches on so many different areas. I'm certainly not going to be able to focus on all of them and why I believe the referral is important, but I am going to choose a couple of different pieces.

Number one, I do believe that, especially now but any time, we know – I think we can all see – there is a huge division between people that are low, middle income, particularly low income, and those that are not, those that are at the higher end. It is primarily front-line workers that struggle. They don't make a lot of money, and it's tough. I think we all saw this. I mean, if we didn't know it before, we saw it very clearly early on in the pandemic as we started to see what was happening in, let's say, long-term care facilities. We all learned – some of us already knew that because we sort of come from that area – that long-term care workers, for example, regularly work in multiple locations. That's just the nature of the work, and it's not because they can't get enough hours in one location. It is very often that those jobs don't tend to be good full-time jobs. They tend to be three-quarters or half-time, very often casual or part-time, so people are required to get multiple jobs, work in multiple places to be able to support themselves and their families.

We saw this very early on with the pandemic. One of the things, and rightly so – it was a great move – was to actually limit the locations that people could work at because, obviously, of the transmission. But what we saw is that these are important front-line workers. They don't make a lot of money, and they don't have a lot of access to things, and they were hard hit. Probably many of you

are hearing in your constituency offices that people are even still struggling with this new rule because they can't get, let's say, the same number of hours at one location.

The reason I'm bringing this up is that there is a big gap between – and I'm not going to call them what these guys like to call union people, big bosses. I'm not going to call them big, corporate bosses, but the people at the top, the top 1 per cent, earn so much more than the workers, and this piece of legislation really is a full on attack on workers. I mean, you know, it's couched in all kinds of legal language, but that's precisely what it is.

I think it's important for us to remember about the difference. Let's be clear here. This is the ability of a director to give an exemption to an association or an employer around labour standards. This is about overtime. This is about holiday pay. This is about not getting your earnings three days after you leave or are terminated, having to wait over 30 days. This is not about a lot of money for individual people who don't make much money, and for the most part the businesses that are going to be benefiting from this legislation have far more capacity to deal with the changes than an individual worker does.

Let me just give you a quick example from Canada. This is an analysis of five years of financial reports from 10 of Canada's largest companies. I'm not going to go through all 10; I just pulled out a few. On average at these 10 largest companies in Canada the CEOs made on average 227 times what the average earnings were of their workers. That's workers working for the same company as the CEO. That's an average of 227 times what the average worker makes. There's a bit of a spread, as you can imagine. The CEO-to-worker-pay ratio at Jean Coutu – probably some of you who have been to Quebec know it. I don't know if they have stores outside of Quebec. It's a big chain, and it's a group. In 2016 their CEO made 460 times what the average worker made. Telus: 224 times what the average worker makes. Canadian Tire: 173 times. Suncor – actually, Suncor went down, which is actually one of the better ones – is only 44 times what the average worker makes. You can see there is a huge gap. I think we all know this. It doesn't matter where we sit in this Chamber. We can agree there is a big difference between what CEOs, what the bosses – I can't believe I just said that – are making and what the average workers are making.

This piece of legislation, while I think it should go to committee and be discussed a little further – if indeed the UCP is bringing forward this piece of legislation to actually restore balance in the workplace, I would suggest they have some work to do, and maybe a referral to committee would give them the time to do that work.

Now, I'm going to give you an example, Mr. Speaker, because that's often the way that I understand life in general, pieces of legislation. I just want to give you this example. I know that currently there are a lot of moves under way because of, let's say, the MacKinnon report, the recommendations made August 2019. We heard specifically in that report that Community and Social Services is exploring alternate service delivery models related to direct operations, and it goes on and on. I'm going to explain a little bit.

I've been asking a number of questions in this place over the last few weeks about persons with developmental disabilities, that's a department, PDD, and the portion with which they provide services to people with disabilities, called direct operations. It's a tiny little piece out of over \$1 billion. It's only a \$42 million piece, but there are decades and decades of experience that go into this. These services have been around for a very long time. I actually couldn't even find the start date of some of the services. They include in Edmonton, for adults, RSS, Residential Support Services; GSS in Calgary, graduated supports; and in the Red Deer area, Michener services.

Now, in the latest move what we heard from government is that they're exploring alternate service delivery options for these folks. Now, understand that these people with disabilities, these are some of the most complex disabilities, I would say, in the province, and they're saying that they want to provide other kinds of services when they are safe where they are. We're in a global pandemic. For the most part they have very little staff turnover, and there's a reason for that. They are safe. There's a reason that they're doing that, I believe, and I believe it has everything to do with the union.

11:20

Now, AUPE, which is the Alberta Union of Provincial Employees, is the union that these workers belong to. Now, in fairness, I actually don't know much at all about unions. I've never worked with one. I've never been in one. So I have actually learned a fair amount getting to know some of the workers in these places, and I've actually had an opportunity to look at what specifically the government is looking to save on or looking to change. I would suggest that at first glance I thought that this was just about money, but when I look at the actual numbers, it is so small and minuscule that I find it hard to believe that this could be about money, so I actually think this is about something else. I can speculate. I certainly can't speak to the motivation of this government. But the money certainly is not what I thought it was.

Let me explain that. RSS is Residential Support Services in Edmonton, and what it is, basically, is just some houses. They're larger, probably, than your average single-family home, but you have people with disabilities that live there full-time, and you have staff in and out. Now, you can imagine that because of the severity of the disabilities, you have staff there 24/7. The total staff for all of those folks – and there are currently 48 people that live there full-time, most of those adults. Some of those adults actually came from Children's Services, went into adult services, and most of them have been there the majority of their adult lives. There are 48 of them. The total staffing complement for all of these homes in RSS in the capital region is 151. Now, that includes part-time staff. That includes wage staff or casual staff, let's say. We know what casual staff is. You call them in when you need them. This is 151 staff for 48 people.

Now, I have run an organization that supported people with fairly complex disabilities, so I am well aware of the staffing models that are required for homes, let's say, where you have two or three people living together. I understand how many staff it takes to run a home like that, how many casuals to have available to you, how many part-time staff, weekend, overnight, all of those things. I am well aware of that. So this is not a large number, and the total projected savings for this, for changing all of this, so taking all of these homes – people have lived there for decades. The staff are stable. They're well trained. To change all of that and to look at another delivery of service model, the total savings per year is \$900,000; \$900,000 to change all of that.

Now, you know, at first glance that's not chump change. You know, why not look at that if there's a way to save? But when you think about it and you look at it, there really are no savings. You calculate the risk to these people, to these men and women that have known those homes and those staff that support them for years. You look at the cost of training new staff, and it's large. I have run a nonprofit. Nonprofits and for-profits, actually, are not funded the same way that direct operations are. They are paid less. The average cost of training a new staff and then mentoring that staff through the probation, all of the training, from medication administration to nonviolent crisis intervention to all of the training that you can possibly imagine, I would put it at about \$10,000 a staff.

So if you calculate all of these costs and the risks to the individuals, you arrive at the place where you think that this can't possibly be about money. If it was about money, this government would not have left Michener services off their list. Direction operations include RSS, GSS, and Michener, and the biggest piece of that pie is Michener services, where there are about 127 people. They are the vast majority of that \$42 million budget, but they were left off the list. So if this was truly about changing the way services are delivered, explain to me why it's being done this way. I mean, I certainly have some ideas.

I actually didn't realize – and I didn't realize the extent. I knew that staff and direct operations were trained very well. They are part of a union. They have access to other things that community providers do not. They have access to far more training than community providers do. Actually, community providers struggle to keep up with the turnover to consistently provide the training. They also have to pay for all of that training.

AUPE staff that support people with disabilities have access to better training. They are paid better. They actually don't have to work multiple jobs to support themselves, but that is not the case in community. The vast majority of people that do that work work in multiple places. So when I hear this government constantly say, you know, "Big bad union" and "Oh, my gosh, they're doing this," – there is a place to protect workers. I mean, there is a need to protect workers. Now, I'm not saying that every disability provider should be the same as direct operations. What I am saying is that every single person that does that work should have access to the same wage and the same training opportunities and the same oversight and the same support as those workers. And those workers have that because they're part of a union. So that's my bit.

The other piece of this legislation that I find problematic – and I've said it a few times and I will keep saying this – is that government says: "Well, don't worry. We'll deal with it in regulations. We didn't really mean that." You know, it's vague words and legislation. I'm extremely worried about the exemptions. I'm extremely worried about what this government has given themselves in terms of the ability to create these exemptions that probably most of us can't even imagine at this point. Sadly, I have seen exemptions to labour standards, and I have seen what they do to people. I've said this in this place before.

Now, thankfully, Alberta doesn't do this very often, doesn't do it as much as we used to, that's for sure, where we used to have huge groups of people with disabilities doing contract work. Maybe that was cleaning headphones for airlines, maybe that was – whatever it was. There are all kinds of piecemeal work that they would get, that these organizations or companies would get contracts for and then bring on these big enclaves of people with disabilities and then pay them a couple bucks an hour. That's through an exemption, Mr. Speaker.

I will take my seat.

The Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available. I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-West Henday.

Mr. Carson: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's an honour to rise to speak under 29(2)(a). Of course, I think the member has done a good job, an important job of highlighting some of the concerns specifically in the industry that that member worked in, in supporting those with disabilities and often complex cases of that. For one, the importance of ensuring that the staff that are supporting those people are properly trained and properly compensated and in working conditions where they feel that they are taken care of. At the end of the day the most important thing is the people that are getting supports in those communities and ensuring that there is

stability from the workers that are there to support those people because, as the member mentioned, turnover in staff, especially in positions like that, is detrimental to the support of those people.

The same goes for, say, long-term care facilities, especially when we start talking about complex needs and seniors with dementia and the importance, once again, of having a stable setting where they are often supported by the same worker day after day. I can think of constituents in my own community who have benefited from those kinds of agreements. The last thing that we should be doing, as the member just spoke about, is creating more opportunities for exemptions, whether for the person with a disability or for the person supporting that person.

Once again, there are many concerns within this legislation. Even thinking further to somebody that may be accessing AISH, maybe finds themselves an opportunity for employment and works there for a period of time, and through this legislation all of a sudden they've been laid off with very short notice, and the government is telling the employer: "Oh, take your time to pay them back. Before it was a very short period you could pay them back in, but we're going to extend that to a month." Now this person, who potentially has to go back on AISH supports, is in between a rock and a hard place, where they no longer have support from their employer, they've been laid off, but they're not going to get paid their last paycheque for a month, and they're struggling to work with their caseworker or person providing AISH to explain: well, I was exempted, and the government has given employers the opportunity to not actually pay me for the next month. Well, you know, as far as we can tell, that's not necessarily going to fly with that program. Unless the government can reassure us that that won't be the case, we have many concerns, not only that one, of course, many others.

11:30

I appreciate the member bringing that perspective to the table because it is always important to reflect every day on how it will affect every Albertan, no matter where they're coming from or their ability or whatever it might be. So I appreciate that member bringing that forward, specifically in the cases that she brought up and the complexity of the relationship with certain support facilities with the government and the importance of ensuring that those relationships stay in place.

At the same time, this government, not only through this legislation but through the changes to the funding model and funding agreement for these organizations, is actually undermining the ability of these workers to take care of these people or support these people. It's very frustrating. You know, in this instance, in many other instances this isn't about us being for unions and the government being against them, though that seems to be the case through a lot of the debates, but the fact is that this is about supporting people in our communities, no matter their ability.

So it's frustrating that in the time that the government has had to speak to this, they've only spoken through 29(2)(a)s for the most part. Many of the members recognize that they haven't actually spoken to the bill, so it's frustrating that we are going to be forced to make a decision with very little input from the government past what's been put before us. That's very concerning and another reason why the member raised the fact that this needs to be referred to committee and the reason why I also support that as well.

Mr. Speaker, I think I'll have more opportunities to speak to this, but I appreciate the comments from that member, especially from their background as a business owner and somebody that worked in nonprofits and many more things, of course. Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. member has 30 seconds to respond should she choose to do so.

Hon. members, are there others wishing to speak to 29(2)(a)?

Seeing none, on amendment REF1, is there anyone else wishing to speak?

Seeing none, I am prepared to call the question on the amendment if there are no others.

[The voice vote indicated that the motion on amendment REF1 lost]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 11:33 p.m.]

[One minute having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

[The Speaker in the chair]

For the motion:

Carson	Feehan	Renaud
Dach	Goehring	Sweet
Eggen	Notley	

Against the motion:

Aheer	Lovely	Schow
Amery	Neudorf	Shandro
Barnes	Nicolaides	Sigurdson, R.J.
Dreeshen	Nixon, Jason	Singh
Fir	Orr	Smith
Goodridge	Rehn	Stephan
Hanson	Rosin	Turton
Horner	Rowswell	Walker
Kenney	Rutherford	Wilson
Loewen	Sawhney	

Totals:	For – 8	Against – 29
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[Motion on amendment REF1 lost]

The Speaker: Is there anyone else wishing to speak to second reading? The hon. Member for Edmonton-West Henday has the call.

Mr. Carson: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's an honour to rise again to speak to Bill 32, Restoring Balance in Alberta's Workplaces Act, 2020, though I would disagree with the title, that that is exactly what is happening here. I'll just start off once again by thanking all members for their comments on this legislation and specifically some of the comments from my colleagues about real-life instances where this might take place. I encourage members of the government to join in the debate past 29(2)(a) as they have a responsibility to their constituents to talk about why they're supporting this legislation, above and beyond, you know, attacks on character or whatever might else be happening throughout this debate in terms of talking about antipipeline and whatever else. The fact is that we should be talking about the substance of this legislation. Unfortunately, we haven't heard a whole lot of input from the government on this legislation, which is exactly what leads me to take an action that I plan to take in a moment, but I will get to that here shortly.

Just once again looking at this legislation, another omnibus bill from this government amending several pieces of legislation, and just looking at the government's website, they talk about a consultation that they did in the fall of 2019 gathering input from Albertans on employment laws that directly affect them. Once again, in the fall of 2019 they brought that forward. As the government website states, 5,400 responses were made available on the online survey. I mean, it's a fair amount. I would argue that daylight savings time under our government, brought forward by a private member, had about 34,000 responses, I believe. Hopefully, everyone was able to at least respond to this.

But the fact is that when we look at some of the topics that were discussed in that survey – I'm talking about vacation time, general holiday pay, youth employment rules, hours-of-work averaging agreements, group terminations, temporary layoff notices, termination pay, administrative penalties, employee statement of earnings, and variances and exemptions to employment standards rules – I mean, what was discussed in that survey and the, quote, unquote, consultations that this government did, as far as I can tell, all made it into this legislation.

The problem is that it's very one-sided. It's like all of that consultation – they only heard from employers or at least only took their concerns seriously and brought them forward, because really, as we look at this piece of legislation, there's nothing in here that is supporting Alberta workers. There is a lot in here that is undermining Alberta workers and supporting the ability of employers to – “negotiate,” I suppose, is one word to call it – negotiate agreements, very last minute potentially, in the middle of another agreement that was made with those workers. So it's very unfortunate that this is before us and that we're expected to move forward with this from very little input from this UCP government.

11:40

It's frustrating, once again, because we are in the middle of a pandemic and there were a lot of people out of work even before the pandemic – 50,000 job losses because of the inaction of this government even before the pandemic hit – and those numbers continue to rise. The fact is that we all in this Legislature want to do the best to get people back to work, but the problem is that this government believes that the only way to do that is to undermine the rights of workers and to give more power to employers, which is very concerning.

We saw that through the \$4.7 billion handout that this government gave to large corporations, but it just wasn't enough. You know, it wasn't enough for the Premier's friends in these big corporations, and he had to go further and start moving forward on averaging arrangements, forcing workers to take these. As I spoke of earlier, I have found myself in instances of this type of workplace relationship, where it comes down to crunch time and my employer at the time said: “You're going to work 14, 16 hours today because this project needs to be sent out tomorrow. Don't worry; you don't have to come in to work tomorrow. My treat.” Except, well, in that instance I am going to lose my overtime if I take that time off, which is what we're seeing more of and seeing this government encouraging employers to do.

Now, there's no doubt that these relationships are potentially – I don't know about commonplace, but they happen throughout different industries. But this government is pushing it further and giving employers more opportunities to undermine the power of employees in these relationships. Where before we saw negotiations between an employee and an employer to come to these arranging agreements, this government is stating through this legislation that that could be unilaterally imposed on those workers.

The same goes for changes that we made to workplace safety committees. We introduced the idea of that into legislation. I can't remember the exact number, but if a corporation had a certain number of employees, they would be obligated, if the workers thought it was important for that workplace, to create these safety committees. This government once again has undermined that idea, and we see the further undermining of Alberta workers through this legislation.

Once again, it's not specifically, throughout this legislation, about union or non-union. The fact is that this government is giving employers the ability to attack not only the negotiation ability of these workers but also the ability for them to get paid in a timely

manner if they were to be terminated and the amount of time that has to be provided if they were to be terminated, which is very frustrating. Once again I would ask – through the 5,400 responses to the online survey back in November 2019, it's hard to believe that the majority or all of the responses led them to believe that an entirely employer-side piece of legislation was what they thought balancing Alberta's workplaces should be all about.

I remember even campaigning back in the previous election, and the idea of taking away overtime from workers, these averaging agreements, was something that the then leader of the UCP had brought forward as an idea, and it was not popular. I will tell you, Mr. Speaker, that there were a lot of doors where that was their main concern. People in the oil and gas industry, who were already struggling from the downturn in the price of oil, were being told that if you do have a job and you do have the opportunity to make overtime, we are going to limit that ability or at least empower employers to make that decision for you and make these averaging agreements on your behalf with very little, if any, consultation.

Once again, when we talk about the fact that this piece of legislation is not ready to move forward – I'm sure that employers would argue that it is, but it has not been consulted on by the broader public. The survey that was sent out and responded to was one piece. Of course, we've had this before us for a very short period of time, and we'll have some more opportunity to debate it. But the fact is that it is simply not ready. It has not had the time for my constituents to review it, the time for workers in this province to review exactly how it will affect their ability to get overtime, how it will affect their ability to get paid in a timely manner.

I raise just one instance of that, when we're talking about citizens of Alberta who might potentially be accessing AISH who find themselves employment but at some point, for whatever reason, find themselves to be laid off. Now, once again, they want to get back on that program, and that's their right. The problem is that if an employer, you know, can wait 31 days to pay them back, they are going to find themselves in the situation, potentially, of poverty, Mr. Speaker, and that's very concerning. That is not something that we as a government should be encouraging, these loopholes or these opportunities for employers to take time to pay their workers. This exact same thing happened to me at a job site that I was working at. The fact is I didn't actually get paid at the end of that, which is unfortunate.

But we talk about this idea of prompt payment. I remember not that long ago the Minister of Service Alberta came to a meeting with, I believe, the Electrical Contractors Association of Alberta. It was the president's ball and the Minister of Service Alberta committed to prompt payment for contractors. There are many instances – and the Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie fought hard for this and consulted extensively on this idea – that contractors were working, and they were not getting paid in a timely manner.

Well, this UCP government said that they would take action, which I commend them on doing because it is the right thing for them to do. But on one hand they're offering prompt payment to contractors, and on the other hand they are taking prompt payment, or the idea of it, away from employees in those relationships. It's very frustrating. I do not know how they came to this idea. The minister of labour brought up the idea that the changes proposed in this legislation would save employers \$100 million a year. For one, I question where that money is coming from. If it's not coming from the workers, exactly where is it coming from?

Mr. Speaker, with that being said, I would like to move an amendment to Bill 32.

The Speaker: Hon. member, if you can pass that through to the LASS. Once I have a copy and the table has the original I'll have you read it into the record and we'll proceed.

Hon. members, this will be referred to as amendment RA1.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-West Henday has approximately four minutes and 45 seconds remaining.

Mr. Carson: Thank you very much for that reminder on time. It's inadequate, but I will find more time hopefully to speak to this.

Once again, it says, the member moves that the motion for second reading of Bill 32, Restoring Balance in Alberta's Workplaces Act, 2020, be amended by deleting all of the words after "that" and substituting the following:

Bill 32, Restoring Balance in Alberta's Workplaces Act, 2020, be not now read a Second time because the Assembly is of the view that a thorough consultation by the Government with Alberta's workers for the purpose of identifying all potential impacts of the proposed changes is required before the Assembly can further consider the Bill.

This idea and this amendment that I've brought forward goes along with my concerns that there has not been adequate consultation on this legislation through the survey that they put out with, as we've seen many times from this government, very pointed questions that are leading them to decisions. We saw it with Bill 29 even though they didn't actually bring those survey submissions forward, which is very concerning for all Albertans, especially when it comes to our democracy. Once again, we see that through this survey and the quote, unquote, consultation process that they did that they did not come to the conclusion that finds an actual balance in Alberta's workplaces.

11:50

I think Albertans deserve an opportunity to have their voices heard when it comes to these averaging agreements, where they may be told that they need to work 14-hour days for a certain period of time, and, you know, if they don't – well, it's happened to me in the past – they will be threatened with job action or to potentially lose their job. Especially in a time like this, when workers are extremely vulnerable, not only to the pandemic but also to the idea of job scarcity, we should be doing everything in our power to protect those workers.

With the many questions that we have raised over this debate, specifically on how they've come to the conclusions about this, around extending the time for final payment of wages earned upon termination of an employment – I spoke about that earlier. The idea of how many workers did you actually hear from, the survey results from that consultation, and how many of those workers actually supported the idea of changing the calculation of general holiday pay, where they would actually receive less pay, are very important questions that we have not heard any response from the government on.

Once again, I went on to some extent about that being an issue that happened to me in a workplace in the past as an electrician, that we would be scheduled in a certain way that would actually remove our opportunity to get paid for that holiday pay. The concern is that employers, as best as they can, should not be doing that. There are always going to be circumstances that come up, but to actually schedule people in a way to take away their ability to get holiday pay is very concerning. This government has not answered why they made those changes, how there's any balance in that.

Once again, the idea – and I believe the Member for Edmonton-Rutherford brought it forward – of it being necessary through this legislation to give the director the ability to issue exemptions to employer groups or associations: I mean, this government is giving employers incredible amounts of power at a time when workers are

more vulnerable than ever across all industries, when they're just trying to simply make enough money to pay for their family through this pandemic. This government is tipping the scale towards the employer. It's very concerning, Mr. Speaker.

There are a lot of pieces within this legislation that are unfair to Alberta workers. We saw this coming, as I said, during the election. People at the doors: in many instances this was one of the biggest issues for them, that a government would actually come after their overtime benefits, come after their holiday pay, come after their paid leave, and, even further, if they were to be terminated, to actually extend the amount of time that an employer could pay them at a time when these workers – you know, being terminated, they need time to go find a new job, but this government is telling them: well, you might not get paid in 31 days, so hopefully you can find a job in a couple. It's very frustrating.

You know, creating loopholes for employers: once again, in the instance of EI this government is creating a loophole, leaving less money in the pockets of Albertans at the same time as giving \$4.7 billion to large, profitable corporations. But that wasn't enough for this Premier and his friends. He had to go one further, well, actually several further.

The Speaker: Hon. members, the hon. Member for Edmonton-West Henday has moved a reasoned amendment, RA1, and Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available. The hon. Government House Leader on Standing Order 29(2)(a).

Mr. Jason Nixon: Yes, please, Mr. Speaker, and thank you for the opportunity under 29(2)(a). I do hope that one of my colleagues, if they have an opportunity, could get a page to send that hon. member a briefing on the bill because everything that he just spoke about is not part of the bill in any way. In fact, most of the things he referred to would be illegal and certainly not a position of the bill. His content in regard to overtime agreements: the reality is that overtime agreements have existed in this province, before the NDP messed with them when they were in power, for years. An employer cannot force you to enter into an overtime agreement.

Mr. Speaker, that member just spent an incredible amount of time basically accusing multiple employers of crimes. The reality is that the NDP clearly doesn't trust job creators inside the province. We do. We appreciate job creators. I can tell you, certainly, that my constituents want us to do everything that we can to be able to encourage job creators and to be able to put the province back to work. It's quite shocking to see the members continue to grasp at straws like that, speak about things that aren't even in the legislation. You know why they're doing that? I think that they've been getting calls from Gil McGowan. I do. It's the only thing that makes sense. I mean, their big union boss . . . [interjections] The hon. members are laughing across the way here on the NDP side.

Ms Sweet: It's a smile.

Mr. Jason Nixon: Oh, they're smiling, Mr. Speaker. Maybe they enjoy getting calls from Gil McGowan, letting them know that they better vote this way. "This is a big panic. You better stand up in the Legislature all night and accuse job creators – you can't trust job creators. They're not going to pay you. If we pass this bill, they will not give you overtime. Everything is going to change. It's a big crisis. The businesses in the provinces are going to go crazy and hurt their employees." It's ridiculous.

At the end of the day it comes down to this. They know that the big problem with this bill that they have is that our government is going to follow through on the promise that you will no longer have to pay union dues to a union that will then take it and then invest it

in political causes that are against your interest. You will no longer have to give union dues to Gil McGowan so he can use it to attack pipelines, for example – many union employees depend on pipelines – or to attack, as he did, religious families who choose to home-school their kids. What did he call them? He called them "nutbars." Mr. Speaker, I know you used to home-school your kids, and I certainly do not think that you're a nutbar.

I think it's unfortunate that Gil McGowan, the union boss for the NDP, the head of the NDP, the guy who is calling and begging the NDP to filibuster this bill to be able to make sure that hard-working union members have to still give him union dues to spend it on his political interests, is campaigning against things that are against their interests, Mr. Speaker.

But you know what? I can assure Albertans through you, Mr. Speaker, to them that this government will not forget their promise. Despite how hard the NDP fight and how late at night they fight, eventually, I think, this bill is going to get through the Legislature, and hard-working union members will no longer have to give their money to Gil McGowan to go spend on his political hobby projects. That's good news.

So fight all you want, but in the end we're going to win, and Gil McGowan is not going to get his paycheque no more.

The Speaker: Hon. members, there is approximately one minute remaining in Standing Order 29(2)(a). I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford has risen.

Mr. Feehan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the opportunity to speak to this amendment.

The Speaker: Sorry. Correction, just to make sure you're aware that you are on 29(2)(a). There's approximately one minute remaining.

Is there anyone else wishing to speak to the amendment? Correction. Now, that concludes the period for 29(2)(a). It appears that nobody else would like to speak to that.

I believe the hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford would like to speak to the amendment.

Mr. Feehan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I apologize for the correction. I have to take out my hearing aid when I'm in the House, so sometimes I don't catch things.

I am happy to spend a few minutes talking about the amendment because I think it is fairly important that we take the time to re-examine what it is that's happening in this particular bill. It seems to me that one of the things that is often said and was repeated by the previous speaker that one of the primary causes or needs for the government to bring in this bill was to create a circumstance under which that after a democratic vote within a union to spend money on a particular subject, people should be allowed to withdraw from the democracy and deny the majority vote and plead that whenever they don't find themselves on the winning side of any vote that they can simply then say that they do not wish to participate at all. It's an unfortunate decision by this government to engage in this particular choice because democracies would never really work if every time you didn't happen to win a democratic vote, you were able to say: it doesn't apply to me. And I'm very concerned about that. If in this House, for example, the government were to spend money on something, you know, very ridiculous like a war room, and I didn't like it, for me to be able to say, "Well, it doesn't apply to me, so I don't have to pay my taxes as it relates to the war room" – it is unfortunate that sometimes money that comes from our hard-earned paycheques is sometimes spent on things that we . . .

Mr. Jason Nixon: Mr. Speaker, point of order.

12:00

The Speaker: Hon. members, a point of order has been called.

**Point of Order
Relevance**

Mr. Jason Nixon: I hesitate to interrupt the speaker with a point of order, but I do rise on Standing Order 23(b). The hon. member may have missed that we are on a reasoned amendment moved by his party and his side of the House. I'd be interested to hear his comments on the bill that's before the House, but I think that we need to deal with the reasoned amendment. I would be interested in hearing his comments on the reasoned amendment.

The Speaker: The hon. Official Opposition House Leader.

Ms Sweet: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I believe that the member had only been speaking for all of a minute and a half, maybe two. If the lovely Government House Leader would like to just maybe give him a few minutes to get there, I think that would be very helpful.

The Speaker: There is no point of order.

Debate Continued

Mr. Feehan: I think I made my point, which has been proven by the fact that – oh, sorry. Did I miss what you said? I can keep going? Okay. Sorry. When I take my hearing aid out, sometimes I can't hear the Speaker's comments.

I think I made my point by the fact that the Government House Leader felt it necessary to jump up and cloud the issue. I think I will leave it at that, and I would move that we adjourn debate for this evening.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

**Government Bills and Orders
Committee of the Whole
(continued)**

[Mrs. Pitt in the chair]

The Chair: Hon. members, I'd like to call Committee of the Whole to order.

**Bill 33
Alberta Investment Attraction Act
(continued)**

The Chair: We are on amendment A1. Are there any members wishing to join debate? Seeing the hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. I was here and enthusiastically engaged in the debate when the Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat moved the amendment A1, as a government caucus member, to Bill 33, and I was inspired to propose a subamendment, which I am happy to distribute.

The Chair: Hon. members, this will be known as amendment SA1. Hon. member, please proceed, noting that you're moving on behalf of another member.

Ms Hoffman: Thanks. I move on behalf of the Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview that amendment A1 to Bill 33,

Alberta Investment Attraction Act, be amended by striking out part B. Part B, for everyone's reminder, is around expanding the number of individuals on this – is it an agency, a board, or commission? I think it's an agency. But it is an ABC, and the mover originally of amendment A1 proposes that we expand the number from seven to 11, a substantial increase, a more than 50 per cent increase, to the number that the government originally proposed to have on the committee.

I think the other pieces and the rationale that the Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat put forward I can get on board with, but the idea of adding four more people to the board that will be compensated – we know that we've seen in the past, particularly under the rule of Premier Redford, exorbitant expenses for members on agencies, boards, and commissions.

I was proud to be a member of the government caucus and around the cabinet table when we brought in a number of parameters to have greater scrutiny around expenses, but one of the best ways you can avoid excessive expense is by avoiding having an even bigger number of people on agencies, boards, and commissions. As a government we worked hard to streamline and reduce redundancy in the numbers of ABCs but also to look at the necessity of the different sizes for the composition on these different agencies, boards, and commissions. I'm simply saying, through this amendment, that I stand by the proposal in the original bill, the government bill, for seven. I think expanding that to 11 could incur more cost.

Also, I haven't been overly enthused by some of the appointments by this government in recent weeks. One of the greatest examples I can think of is the appointment of former MLA in this place Dave Rodney. His single greatest accomplishment – some might refute – I will say was probably the fact that he resigned to create way for the now Premier to have a seat in a by-election, which the Premier clearly was successful in winning and then won the next election. It did take about two years from his resignation to be rewarded with this cushy appointment and \$250,000-a-year direct compensation. I am sure there are other compensations that are less direct that go along with this appointment as well.

Again, under the time of Alison Redford I recall there being huge private school tuition bills for folks who were appointed to international appointments, something that not a lot of people could understand, why it was that we were paying for huge private school bills for individuals when education should have been better funded here locally for Alberta children.

I think, especially in the light of what we are hearing from parents in response to the announcement to not just reopen but to reopen without any increased support, protection, or enhanced funding to support Alberta students when school resumes this fall, I would far rather see – and it might not seem like a lot of money, going from seven to 11, you know, increasing by more than 50 per cent the number of people on this agency. I would rather see that money aligned towards increased supports for kids in classrooms. If that were to be enough to hire another custodian to keep a school safer and cleaner, I would like to see that money aligned there.

I think that there are merits, again, to the amendment put forward by my colleague the Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat, but I think expanding this agency is not one of them. For that reason, I am proud to move this subamendment, which, again, is clearly just to say that the government got it right the first time: seven is enough; don't need to expand it all the way to 11. Let's show some fiscal restraint in limiting the numbers of folks on agencies, boards, and commissions.

I think that we should also consider if there are more opportunities to streamline the existing agencies, boards, and commissions because we definitely saw a lot of expense and redundancy under past Conservative governments, so a reminder

that I think it's a good opportunity for us to ensure that we are focused, streamlined, and focused on the task at hand.

Probably didn't expect me start by saying that the government got it right, but I think government got it closer to right on the first draft of this than the amendment with regard to the size of the agency, board, or commission. That's why I'm happy to move on behalf of my hon. colleague for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview that we strike out part B from this amendment.

Thank you.

The Chair: The hon. Government House Leader on amendment SA1.

Mr. Jason Nixon: Yes. Thank you, Madam Chair. It doesn't surprise me for an hon. member of this Chamber who once referred to Albertans as sewer rats, that she would summarize a career of a former member of this Legislature, who served for about a decade and a half as an elected member inside this Chamber, including in cabinet and out of cabinet, in the Official Opposition and in the government, on behalf of his constituents, before that was a school teacher – I don't even know how she's going to get up and talk about Dave Rodney. She's got to at least mention that he climbed Everest not once but twice. The reality is: that's what you expect from the Official Opposition. This is all they can do.

12:10

To attack this current government when it comes to appointments is also quite shocking, Mr. Speaker. That hon. member served with Marg McCuaig-Boyd, who's the former Energy minister of this province, who this government has appointed to boards. This government has appointed two former leaders of the Alberta Party, and the list goes on and on. The reality is that the government of Alberta has done a great job, and I'm actually proud of the work that we've done to make sure that we find balance with our appointments. That hon. member was part of a government that instead appointed people like Tzeborah Berman, who is dedicated to shutting down the energy industry, to panels that would decide the future of the oil sands. It is ridiculous. Again, with her comments just about Dave Rodney and belittling his career like that inside this Chamber is unbecoming of a member of this place, and it does her argument no good to do that.

In addition to concerns around wages and compensations and around boards and commissions I agree with that, which is why this government took steps when we came into power, Mr. Speaker, stuff like the Alberta Energy Regulator, where we've reduced compensation for the members who serve on that board as an example; Alberta Health Services, who has seen reductions in compensation for the members that are on that board. This is the difference between the NDP. They talk and belittle people, fear and smear individuals' names. This government actually takes action on issues, Mr. Speaker, makes adjustments. You know what, Madam Chair, I should say? It would be nice if the opposition just for a few minutes could not attack people personally. You know what? They can't because they're angry at Albertans. They're angry that they were fired. They're angry that they don't get to continue to sit on this side of the House and put in policies that hurt Albertans each and every day.

Madam Chair, I urge all my colleagues to vote down this ridiculous amendment, and I urge that hon. member to stop attacking people personally, particularly those who can't be in the Chamber to defend themselves from that behaviour.

The Chair: Hon. members, I was confused there for a while with all the Mr. Speaker comments, nine to be exact.

Hon. members, anyone wishing to join debate on amendment SA1? Seeing none.

[Motion on subamendment SA1 lost]

The Chair: We are back on amendment A1. Any members wishing to join debate on amendment A1? Seeing none.

[Motion on amendment A1 carried]

The Chair: We are back on the main bill, Bill 33, in Committee of the Whole. I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-City Centre.

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you, Madam Chair. Appreciate the opportunity to rise and speak to Bill 33, Alberta Investment Attraction Act. We certainly have had some robust debate here this evening. Just reflecting briefly on the comments from the hon. House leader expressing his deep concern about members in this House attacking other individuals, I would note that that has been a habit of this government indeed and of attacking people who have never actually sat in this Chamber. Certainly, I think Drs. Melanee Thomas and Jillian Ratti would appreciate if they weren't attacked in this House by this Premier and by ministers of this government, women who simply chose to participate in the political process and express an opinion that this government disagreed with. So there's plenty of that to go around.

Now, speaking to Bill 33, the Alberta Investment Attraction Act, we've had a fair amount of discussion about what the intent of this bill is and the decision of this government to create a corporation which seems somewhat redundant given the already existing supports and given the already existing programs that are set up through the ministry of economic development and trade, indeed the work of the minister herself. It seems that creating the invest Alberta corporation, at least from our view in the Official Opposition, is not something that seems wholly necessary.

Now, of course, as we've said, we certainly support the attraction of investment to Alberta, and certainly there are many tools and many means at the government's disposal and through the minister's office and through the mechanisms that are already in place by which to accomplish that work. We've had some robust discussion just now talking about the makeup of this corporation, about the fact that the government just decided that they needed to add four additional appointees, who will be paid by the taxpayer, to do this work, which, again, largely should be already being done by the minister and by the staff of the department and by the other existing mechanisms that are already there. We've been clear in our thoughts on that and that even now we are adding additional members that will be paid by the taxpayer. It's incredibly important that we have an appropriate level of scrutiny applied.

Now, certainly, we've seen that this is a government that in many respects is quite fond of generating reports and putting together panels to put together reports and provide information, which at times is certainly of questionable value, for Albertans, with certainly some questionable numbers and statistics. In many cases in which we've seen those panels, one could question the actual independence of the result. But, that said, the general idea is a correct one, that Albertans should be provided with clear information and, certainly, transparency about what is being done with dollars that are spent by the government.

In this particular case, where we have something of, at least at this point, it seems, questionable value, if the government truly believes that what it is putting together here is truly going to be accomplishing good work on behalf of Albertans and is indeed going to do the work it says that it can do and is a necessary step, then it seems reasonable that the government would be willing to

report on that to Albertans and that this government would want to brag about that success. Certainly, the government has looked for opportunities to brag about success that, in fact, does not exist yet. If indeed creation of the invest Alberta corporation is going to be the tool that is going to truly increase investment in the province of Alberta and perhaps get the government closer to its promise of creating jobs and boosting the economy, on which it has largely failed so far, then surely they would be wanting to share that with Albertans. Clearly, they would want Albertans to know this great success that they have achieved.

For that reason, Madam Chair, I would like to move an amendment. Would you like me to wait to read it till you have a copy?

The Chair: Yes, please.

Mr. Shepherd: This amendment is intended to help the government in this respect, to assist them in demonstrating to Albertans the great value that they are bringing by taking this step, by appointing 11 Albertans on the public payroll to do this work, which they say is . . .

The Chair: Hon. member – sorry – I hesitate to interrupt, but as you have noted that you’re moving an amendment, I have now received the amendment. I will ask you to read it into the record.

Mr. Shepherd: Absolutely. To assist the government, Madam Chair, I am moving on behalf of the Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview that Bill 33, the Alberta Investment Attraction Act, be amended by adding the following immediately after section 11(5):

- (6) The Corporation shall, as soon as is practicable after the end of each fiscal quarter, prepare and make public a report summarizing the activities of the Corporation in carrying out its mandate.
- (7) Each quarterly report referred to in subsection (6) shall include a summary of
 - (a) any grants or contributions made by the corporation under section 3(5), and
 - (b) any activities undertaken by the Corporation under section 3(6).
- (8) A quarterly report made public under subsection (6) shall not include personal information as defined in the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act, information relating to labour relations or a trade secret, or information of a confidential commercial, financial, scientific or technical nature.

12:20

As I was saying, Madam Chair, this amendment is intended to make this bill a little bit better, to assist this government in showing Albertans, indeed, the value of the dollars that are being spent. Now, we know that this has been a challenge for the government in some respects. For example, with the war room, with their \$30 million a year, we have no transparency for Albertans, and indeed this government went to great lengths to ensure that it was set up in a such a way that no transparency would be provided to Albertans about where that \$30 million a year was being spent. So far what we’ve seen – like, today I just saw that dollars are being spent to fund a Facebook ad for retweeting a political cartoon from 2015. Great use of our dollars and, unfortunately, no transparency on how those dollars are being used. We occasionally see the output, which has been, shall we say, somewhat less than impressive so far.

Here’s an opportunity for the government to demonstrate that the invest Alberta corporation will at least be of a higher calibre than that somewhat of an embarrassment run by a former failed UCP candidate. Certainly, we are hoping that we will see a higher quality

of individual appointed to this board by this government and this minister.

We’re working to help the government to perhaps provide a little bit of accountability, a little bit of encouragement to do a little better with this one by providing Albertans with a quarterly report, a quarterly report which would show any grants or contributions made by the corporation so that Albertans would know, indeed, where the dollars are being invested, how they’re being used, how they’re being used to attract new investment to the province of Alberta.

Now, unfortunately, we know that we have been spending some money, certainly, through Mr. David Knight Legg and through other work, but so far we have not seen any actual returns on that. We have not seen any demonstration of what we are actually achieving. We have heard the Premier and others speak many times about the many conversations they’ve had with significant investors but indeed no actual results from that work so far.

However, this would provide an opportunity quarterly for the government to let Albertans know about the dollars, through grants or other contributions, that are empowered in this act and to demonstrate how those are being invested on the part of Albertans, where those dollars are going, so that indeed we can see the great success that is going to yield for the government.

Now, of course, we know that so far with quarterly reports this government has not been a big fan of those. Indeed, we saw delays on the AIMCo report. We’ve seen this government pass legislation to exempt themselves from reporting on time for the financials for the year. But perhaps on this one occasion, Madam Chair, we can help the government provide some of that transparency to which they have been somewhat allergic so far.

This would allow Albertans to see where those dollars are going. Indeed, in some cases, I guess, we have seen the results of the government’s investment. We saw the \$4.7 billion corporate giveaway, and we did see where those dollars went as many major companies took those dollars and immediately took them outside of Alberta.

In this case, we’ll have the opportunity for Albertans to see where these dollars are in fact being invested, which companies are being chosen. After all, this government has often said that they do not intend to pick winners and losers. Here is an opportunity, on a quarterly basis, for the government to demonstrate, in fact, how they are, then, making use of these grants and contributions if they are not selecting particular businesses or industries as winners. We’ll have the opportunity for Albertans to see the wise decisions, which I’m sure this government intends to make, through the invest Alberta corporation.

I think that’s a reasonable step and reasonable transparency, and if the government should choose to vote this down, Albertans would have good reason to question what the actual intent of this government is in creating this corporation, to which they will appoint 11 members and give great latitude to bequeath money on behalf of the people of Alberta to, in the government’s view, attract investment.

Now, of course, we did take a moment here in section (8) to make sure that it would not breach anybody’s confidentiality – no personal information – nothing to do with labour relations or trade secrets, so not jeopardizing anything that would be about actually attracting that investment and the opportunity to bring dollars into Alberta, or any information that’s confidential in terms of being “commercial, financial, scientific, or technical.” Really, this would be a very simple and clean report, just giving the basics to Albertans about how the government is using dollars from the taxpayer through the invest Alberta corporation and where those dollars are going. That seems to me to be very much in line with at least the

principles that the government says it supports, and I guess we will see when they vote on this amendment whether they truly support them in practice or not.

With that, Madam Chair, I would move to adjourn debate on this amendment.

[Motion to adjourn debate lost]

The Chair: Hon. members, are there any members wishing to join debate on amendment A2 on Bill 33? The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Jason Nixon: Well, thank you, Madam Chair, for the opportunity to rise and respond to a few comments. I do think that the minister of economic development and trade will have some comments in a moment in regard to compensation.

I do think that it's worth addressing some comments from the Member for Edmonton-City Centre in regard to Facebook ads. I know that he has a lot of concern with the Canadian Energy Centre sticking up for the energy industry, Madam Chair, but that shouldn't surprise us as we realized earlier in the debate that he does attend antipipeline protests and certainly does not support our energy industry. I suspect that's what it's about. But I think it's a little bit rich to attack the Canadian Energy Centre for using Facebook ads to be able to promote and defend the energy industry, exactly what they have been hired to do, when that member's leader has been using caucus money to advertise things like her new puppy dog.

Now, I like dogs – I have three dogs – but I don't use caucus money or MLA money to advertise the dogs. I've got a big dog at the farm, as you know, Madam Chair, Yukon. He's an English mastiff. He's about 250, 260 pounds. Every time he gets in a picture anywhere near Facebook, it goes viral. But I can assure you that I have never allowed my staff . . . [interjection] Yeah. I don't have to pay for it. He's photogenic enough. He just carries it away. I've seen the Leader of the Official Opposition's puppy dog. I saw it from the Facebook ad, paid for by the NDP Official Opposition caucus, not the party. It was a cute dog. I don't think they needed the ad. I think it would have carried it on its own.

I see that there are ads running tonight, different Facebook ads, associated with parks. I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora had one of those ads up on this issue, Madam Chair, where she had a picture of a coyote but said that it was a wolf. I don't know if that's the best way to advertise it. It's confusing. I intend in the coming days to offer up some Alberta Environment biologists to teach the difference between coyotes and wolves. And the most shocking tonight: there's one coming out from the NDP – get this – showing a red stag, which can't be found anywhere in Alberta or in Canada or in North America naturally although there are a few places that farm them, that the NDP have out in pictures that are being paid to go across the Internet calling it a deer. That's what they're using money for when it comes to Facebook.

I think I will take the Canadian Energy Centre advertising to defend the oil and gas industry, just like I will take the work that the minister of economic development and trade is doing to put together a process to create investment in this province to be focused on investing in that and getting people back to work, not putting out Facebook ads to say, "Hey, here's my puppy dog" or "Hey, here's a wolf" that is actually a coyote or "Hey, here's a deer" that's actually a red stag, which, by the way, would be an invasive species. I certainly hope that the NDP is not planning to put an invasive species in our parks. In fact, Madam Chair, I would appreciate it, if they had a moment, if maybe they can move forward a motion – I would support it – making it clear that if the NDP were

ever to form government, they promise they will not release invasive red stags inside the provincial parks system in the province of Alberta. That would be very, very helpful. But it is rich. It's just rich to see that hon. member stand up in the House and talk about Facebook ads in that context and – I'll close with this – yet again attack somebody who can't defend themselves in the Chamber, an employee of the Canadian Energy Centre, saying that he wasn't qualified. No backup for that. I don't even know if he's read that employee's resumé. He's spending his time at 12:30 a.m., while we are debating legislation in the Legislature, attacking an individual who cannot even rise in this House to defend himself from that attack. Madam Chair, it is unbecoming of a member of this Legislature, and that member can do a lot better.

12:30

The Chair: I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning.

Mr. Jason Nixon: Red stag.

Ms Sweet: I hope you weren't directing that at me, hon. member.

Okay. Thank you, Madam Chair. I just want to rise because I see that the temperature has decided to increase for some reason although I think we're moving towards an end to our evening.

I would just like to comment on a few comments made by the Government House Leader. Then, hopefully, we will be able to refocus on the bill at hand and the amendment that is currently sitting in front of us, because I think we have somehow managed to completely go around the amendment and actually talk about the bill. I recognize that the hon. Government House Leader was probably trying to get some time so the amendment could be read by the minister, who will probably want to respond.

But just so I can be real quick, although I appreciate the Government House Leader standing and talking about Facebook ads and the very cute puppy that our leader has, there is a significant difference – a significant difference – Government House Leader, between \$30 million that is being used by taxpayers with no accountability, no transparency, and no ability to audit. So although the Government House Leader likes to stand and make comments and try to make jokes out of pictures, there is a serious conversation that is lacking in this Legislature around fiscal responsibility when it comes to some of these things, specifically the war room and the \$30 million that is being used, that Albertans see no transparency on, that we don't actually have the ability to know where the money is being spent and who is being hired.

Again, when we look at the amendment that is in front of us right now, the main focus of this amendment is transparency, asking to ensure that this government spend some time focusing on the money that is being spent out of the public dollar on behalf of the taxpayers and actually being accountable to taxpayers, being honest, being open, talking about how many people are being hired, how much money is being spent on all of these different satellite offices across different jurisdictions, and what is actually happening.

Again, although the Government House Leader would like to jest about Facebook ads, there is a serious issue that Albertans care about, which is \$30 million for a war room that they don't have any transparency or openness about, and this very amendment, which is asking for that very thing to happen under the minister in regard to the different trade offices that are going to be set up and what that means and if Albertans will actually get a return on that investment – I think it's very fair. In a time when clearly the government keeps saying that we need to be fiscally prudent, we're not paying for health care, when we're looking at, you know, kids going back into schools in September that won't have access to maybe potentially safe

classrooms because of the fact that there's not enough money to be able put all of those resources in place, the Government House Leader wants to stand and make jokes about the dogs on Facebook. The reality is that this is a lot of money at a time when Albertans are losing their jobs, are worried about their economic future, and want to see a return on the taxpayer dollars that are currently being spent.

So I would just ask – and I would like to hear, if possible, from the minister – if we could talk about the amendment, focus on the fact that Albertans have a right to know that they're getting a return on their investment, bring the tone back down in the House, and just get through the business of the evening.

The Chair: Hon. members, while the chair normally does not side with any member in this House, I would tend to agree with the sentiment of sticking to the debate at hand, which is amendment A2 to Bill 33. Are there any other members wishing to join debate?

Seeing none, I will call the question on amendment A2 as moved by the hon. Member for Edmonton-City Centre on behalf of the hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

[Motion on amendment A2 lost]

The Chair: We are back on the main bill, Bill 33, in Committee of the Whole. Any members wishing to join debate? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning.

Ms Sweet: Thank you, Madam Chair. I would at the will of the House and the Government House Leader adjourn debate.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

The Chair: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Jason Nixon: Well, thank you, Madam Chair. I move that we rise and report progress on Bill 33.

[Motion carried]

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

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

Mr. Hanson: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. The Committee of the Whole has had under consideration a certain bill. The committee reports progress on the following bill: Bill 33. I wish to table copies of all amendments considered by Committee of the Whole on this date for the official records of the Assembly.

The Deputy Speaker: Does the Assembly concur in the report? All those in favour, please say aye.

Hon. Members: Aye.

The Deputy Speaker: Any opposed, please say no. Carried.
The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Jason Nixon: Well, thank you, Madam Speaker. I move that we adjourn the Assembly of Alberta until 1:30 p.m.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 12:37 a.m. on Thursday]

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