



Province of Alberta

The 30th Legislature  
Second Session

# Alberta Hansard

Tuesday evening, November 17, 2020

Day 66

The Honourable Nathan M. Cooper, Speaker

# Legislative Assembly of Alberta The 30th Legislature

Second Session

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Copping, Hon. Jason C., Calgary-Varsity (UCP)  
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Dang, Thomas, Edmonton-South (NDP)  
Deol, Jasvir, Edmonton-Meadows (NDP)  
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Glubish, Hon. Nate, Strathcona-Sherwood Park (UCP)  
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Goodridge, Laila, Fort McMurray-Lac La Biche (UCP)  
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Long, Martin M., West Yellowhead (UCP)  
Lovely, Jacqueline, Camrose (UCP)  
Loyola, Rod, Edmonton-Ellerslie (NDP)  
Luan, Hon. Jason, Calgary-Foothills (UCP)  
Madu, Hon. Kaycee, QC, Edmonton-South West (UCP),  
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Pon, Hon. Josephine, Calgary-Beddington (UCP)  
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Turton, Searle, Spruce Grove-Stony Plain (UCP)  
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Walker, Jordan, Sherwood Park (UCP)  
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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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Martin Long	Parliamentary Secretary for Small Business and Tourism
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Deputy Chair: Mr. Getson

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Glasgo  
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Jones  
Phillips  
Singh  
Turton

### **Standing Committee on Alberta's Economic Future**

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Bilous  
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Rosin  
Stephan  
Toor

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Dang  
Fir  
Goodridge  
Nixon, Jeremy  
Pancholi  
Rutherford  
Sigurdson, R.J.  
Smith  
Sweet

### **Standing Committee on Families and Communities**

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Deputy Chair: Ms Sigurdson

Amery  
Carson  
Glasgo  
Guthrie  
Neudorf  
Nixon, Jeremy  
Pancholi  
Rutherford  
Sabir  
Yao

### **Standing Committee on Legislative Offices**

Chair: Mr. Schow  
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Rutherford  
Shepherd  
Sweet  
van Dijken  
Walker

### **Special Standing Committee on Members' Services**

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Deputy Chair: Mr. Ellis

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Deol  
Goehring  
Goodridge  
Long  
Neudorf  
Sabir  
Walker  
Williams

### **Standing Committee on Private Bills and Private Members' Public Bills**

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Glasgo  
Horner  
Irwin  
Neudorf  
Nielsen  
Nixon, Jeremy  
Sigurdson, L.  
Sigurdson, R.J.

### **Standing Committee on Privileges and Elections, Standing Orders and Printing**

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Deputy Chair: Mr. Reid

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Deol  
Issik  
Jones  
Lovely  
Loyola  
Pancholi  
Rehn  
Reid  
Renaud  
Yao

### **Standing Committee on Public Accounts**

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Deputy Chair: Mr. Gotfried

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Dach  
Guthrie  
Reid  
Renaud  
Rosin  
Rowswell  
Schmidt  
Stephan  
Toor

### **Standing Committee on Resource Stewardship**

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Deputy Chair: Member Ceci

Dach  
Feehan  
Fir  
Ganley  
Getson  
Loewen  
Rehn  
Singh  
Smith  
Yaseen

## Legislative Assembly of Alberta

7:30 p.m.

Tuesday, November 17, 2020

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

**The Deputy Speaker:** Good evening, hon. members. Please be seated.

### Government Bills and Orders Second Reading

#### Bill 45 Local Authorities Election Amendment Act, 2020 (No. 2)

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

**Mrs. Allard:** Thank you, Madam Speaker. I'm pleased to rise this evening and move second reading of the Local Authorities Election Amendment Act, 2020 (No. 2).

The Local Authorities Election Act, or LAEA, is used by 338 municipalities and 61 school boards across the province. Bill 29, the Local Authorities Election Amendment Act, 2020, came into force September 1, 2020. The bill focused on the campaign period, the nomination process, contribution limits, and third-party advertising. Since then we've completed further analysis in an effort to align with work done by the Department of Justice and Solicitor General with respect to a broader review of elections legislation as well as our 2019 election platform.

We're proposing additional changes to have a Senate and referendum vote on the same day as a municipal general election under the LAEA. This means a municipality will no longer have the flexibility to change its local voting date to a Saturday in years where a Senate election or provincial referendum is intended to be held at the same time. This ensures all votes are held on the same day, the third Monday in October, to reduce costs and avoid any confusion for voters.

Additionally, to support transparency and accountability in municipal elections, we are proposing to establish contribution limits of \$30,000 per donor per third-party advertiser. This will create general consistency in third-party advertising between provincial and municipal elections. If passed, the donor contribution limit for third-party advertisers will be added to the list of items for which you can be fined if you donate more than \$30,000 to a single third party, often referred to as a PAC. With general elections approaching in October 2021, it is critical that these changes are made soon to ensure local jurisdictions have enough time to both understand and implement the changes.

As such, the amendments are proposed to come into force on January 1, 2021. Educational resources and training will be made available to raise awareness of the changes, and municipalities will be encouraged to include this information in their election resources. If passed, these amendments will help reduce confusion for voters, reduce costs associated with holding elections, and help renew democracy by supporting transparency and accountability in municipal elections.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

**The Deputy Speaker:** Are there any members wishing to join debate on Bill 45 in second reading? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

**Mr. Feehan:** Thank you, Madam Speaker. I certainly appreciate the opportunity to speak to this very worrisome bill. But before I

start my comments, it's my first opportunity to welcome the minister back to the House since her time being ill. I'm glad to see you appear to be quite healthy and happy here today. Glad to see you here. You know, COVID has us all very worried. Happy there was no serious consequence for you. Unfortunately, that's the last nice thing I'm going to say to you for the next 15 minutes.

I certainly want to take time with this bill because I have deep concerns, and the concern that I have is that the bill is actually part of a larger package of activities that this government is engaged in, and I think the citizens of Alberta need to understand what's going on here. In fact, they're engaged in, I think, a very devious political manoeuvre, but they have spread it out over a number of bills so that it would be easy for people to miss the intent behind this action and perhaps even slough it off, saying: well, it's just a small change in some donations in one particular bill. But that is not what's happening.

It just turns out that this bill was necessary to accomplish one of about four different aspects of a larger agenda by this government, which appears to have made a decision, since it came into office, to engage in taking over the governance of many different areas within the province of Alberta, municipalities being one of them. At some point you begin to almost wonder whether or not school boards, municipalities, and other groups will ever be able to actually make decisions that won't be undermined or overridden by the government of the day, and I think this is one of the examples of that.

I mean, we know that this government has already impinged on people's rights through Bill 1. I can tell you the First Nations community are still very concerned about that. They're literally saying that it would be illegal to participate in protests around issues that are important to them – land and other kinds of things – and I understand that there are even potential lawsuits with regard to that bill. They have interfered with municipalities in terms of linear assessment and taxation of companies in their area. We know that they've interfered with unions' ability to establish themselves and to enter into bargaining. We know that they have deeply interfered with a very neutral process on curriculum that has been in place in this province literally for 50 years, and now they've introduced themselves into that process as well.

So we know that this is a government whose intent it is to thwart the voice of anyone but themselves, and that's the concern in this particular bill, that this is designed, in conjunction with a few of the other bills that we're debating in this session, to override the ability of any other voice in this province to be heard equally in elections. On this particular case, what they've decided to do is that they've decided to bring provincial issues into the municipal elections. Now, they will tell you, as the minister just did, that the intent of this bill is to allow for Senate and other votes, referendums to be conducted at the same time as a municipal election. What they're not telling you is that that's the whole intention here, to bring other issues into the municipal election so that they can bring in large dollars and influence in a way that they're not allowed to in other elections such as provincial elections.

In the provincial elections there are limits on how much people can donate. For example, it's just over \$4,000 right now provincially, and in this case they're allowing donations to move up to \$30,000. They tell you that it's \$30,000 per person. What they don't tell you is that they can donate \$30,000 to every single municipal race in the province. So it's not really a limit of \$30,000. It just means that you have to develop a number of PACs, and you can donate \$30,000 to each of them, and as a result you could literally donate a million dollars into these kinds of elections. You sort of ask: why is it that they want to do that?

I can tell you that I had opportunity to sit in committee and talk to the members opposite about their intentions with regard to a number of bills that are conjoint with this bill, which is the point of my concerns here this evening. We have, for example, in another bill a proposal to bring citizens' petitions forward. I asked the members of the committee: will this also – we were arguing about whether or not it would – include issues such as federal issues, such as the equalization payments? Of course, that's exactly why they're bringing it in. They want to have a referendum on equalization payments even though they can do nothing about it legally. They just want to be able to throw a lot of money at it, which is a political ploy, use it to create a fervor in the population around an issue even though they can't actually directly deal with it and, in fact, even though the evidence recently has come out again that Alberta is not at the bad end of the stick with regard to that particular equalization question.

But when I asked them, "Why are we trying to interfere in federal issues?" they said, "Because this government thinks they can run every government." Then I also asked them, "Well, if you're allowing citizens' petitions for federal issues, are you also allowing them for municipal issues?" It turns out the answer was yes. So now we know. What they've done is that they've created a situation in one bill where they're allowing people to bring forward issues into the legislation that are not going to be ostensibly brought forward by the government of the day but certainly by their partners in the PACs.

7:40

The money put into those PACs will not be transparent because they've eliminated a number of different pieces here. For example, they prevented pre-election disclosure laws being put in by municipalities. They've allowed people to donate excessive amounts of money. As a result, they'll be able to bring lots of dollars into the election that will influence issues that are favourable to this provincial government that have nothing to do with the municipalities that have set up the elections. I know that the mayors and reeves across this province have expressed deep concern. I was standing in front of the House while many of them came and arrived and protested this issue out in front of the Legislature, and they were deeply concerned about this government's intrusion. I can tell you that I'm deeply concerned about this government's intrusion.

One of the things we asked in the committee about this desire to bring in citizens' referendums, that will now be allowed under this act, was the fact that we said that we would like to see an amendment that would prevent them from doing anything contrary to the Constitution of Canada. We listed the dates from its early establishment till the current date, and they said no. They changed it and said that they would only protect the Constitution up to section 35. We had to ask: "Why is it that you would only want to protect the Constitution up to section 35? It doesn't stop at 35; 36, 37, 38 are all very interesting." It turns out that there are some very interesting things in that part of the legislation that this legislation is allowing people to bring forward. For example, did you know that for Catholic schools being covered under the Constitution of Canada here in the province of Alberta, the right to have them protected is actually covered in section 37? So they made a decision not to protect Catholic schools from citizens' referendums.

Now in this act they're putting in the ability for people to put those referendums on municipal politics and then put in unlimited amounts of money without transparency and without the ability of municipalities to put in preventative pre-election disclosure acts. They're hiding the money, they're bringing in tons of extra money, and they're doing it on things that are actually going to challenge minority rights here in this province. That's very concerning to me.

This is a very nefarious set of actions by this government, and it spreads across a number of bills, so it's harder to see. I would want people not to get lost in that.

What's happening in this particular bill is only a small sliver of the larger intent here. It's something I absolutely cannot support. I cannot support the lack of transparency. I cannot support taking governance away from the municipalities, interfering in other levels of government, and doing it all so that they can have their belief system be imposed on the people of the province of Alberta without having to take any responsibility because they can say: "This is not provincial legislation. This came from somewhere else. This is a referendum brought forward by a citizen of the province of Alberta." Now that can be brought forward by a PAC, which has its own secret agenda, which we don't have to know about. We don't even have to know who's involved in the PAC until after the vote has occurred. They can bring that in, they can put millions of dollars into it, and they can push their anti-Albertan agenda without actually taking any responsibility for what they're doing, and that concerns me a lot.

I just want people who are hearing about this bill and wondering why we are very concerned about this bill to hear that that's what we are concerned about. We are concerned about the larger intent, where they're going with this and how they have divided up their sneaky behaviour into small sections so that each one by itself seems a bit innocuous but added together are actually quite dangerous to democracy in this province. It's something that I simply cannot abide, and as a result I think that all the members of this House should take a step back, should think about this legislation, and should make the decision that we should not have the provincial government using municipal elections to run through parts of their agenda which they don't have to take responsibility for and which they don't have to be transparent about. That's completely unacceptable in a democracy. If you have a value that you care about, you should have the guts to bring it here in the House and have it debated, and you've set it up so you don't have to do that. You've set it up with your big-money friends to put millions of dollars into PACs and to push forward your agenda on issues that you know that you can't deal with because they aren't even provincial legislation half the time.

We know that you purposely did not protect the full Constitution of Canada in your other bill because you wanted to attack the Constitution of Canada, attack some of the minority rights that have been established since section 35. That will allow you and your group to bring forward legislation, put tons of money into that legislation, and then begin to claim that the citizens of the province of Alberta believe X, Y, or Z, when it's clearly been an unfair election because you've allowed an excessive amount of money to come in on one side of the question and not on the other side, and you've allowed people to do so secretly and without transparency. All of that is completely unacceptable in a democracy, and I think you should be ashamed.

Thank you.

**The Deputy Speaker:** Any other members wishing to join debate on Bill 45 in second reading? The hon. Member for Calgary-East.

**Mr. Singh:** Thank you, Madam Speaker. I'm pleased to rise in this Chamber today to voice my support on a significant legislation that promotes fairness and transparency to all local elections, Bill 45, Local Authorities Election Amendment Act, 2020 (No. 2). I applaud the minister for introducing improvements to our Local Authorities Election Act by limiting third-party advertising contributions in the local elections, supporting referendums and Senate elections to be held on the same day as municipal elections

and to help our municipal partners in the preparation of the 2021 election. The changes in the act are consistent with the principle of democratic reform included in the 2019 United Conservative Party election platform.

Madam Speaker, members of the opposition were unsuccessful when it came to addressing many of the critical gaps in the Local Authorities Election Act in 2018. The last amendments to the act were made through Bill 29, which was passed last July and called for greater flexibility in campaign spending to ensure that no dollar donated goes to waste and to ensure Alberta, home to many of the great local leaders who have done and continue to do exceptional work for their communities, is supported. These changes were made after extensive consultation with voters, community advocacy groups, elected officials, municipalities, and municipal associations. By holding incumbents accountable, it will provide a better opportunity for those struggling to break into politics and ensure that no voice in this society is left unheard.

The next round of municipal elections will be critical for the future of our province, as we are faced with one of the most challenging situations in Alberta's history. Our economy has been battered on many fronts. Cities are faced with depleted revenues and increased expenses, and thousands of Albertans have lost their jobs. Madam Speaker, this is why it is of the utmost importance that we encourage and support the election of strong and smart municipal leaders who will be able to navigate their municipalities to recovery.

Historically, municipal elections have low voter turnout due to the lack of engagement. Municipal and school board elections should be fair, transparent, and inclusive to all Albertans. Currently the general election day of municipal councils and school boards is the third Monday in October. Municipalities may also pass a bylaw prior to the general election to allow the general election day to be moved on a Saturday prior to the third Monday in October.

Madam Speaker, no municipality has actually made use of the authority to vary election dates, so the amendment that Bill 45 seeks to introduce will not be a burden for local authorities. It is also unlikely to have any practical impact, and I would hope the large majority of municipalities to be neutral with respect to the amendment. To be very specific, this will remove the ability of the municipality to change its local voting date to a Saturday in the years where a Senate election or provincial referendum is going to be held at the same time. So by maintaining that the conduct of a Senate election or a referendum in the same year with a general election should be done on the third Monday of October would save time, money, and effort for all.

7:50

Let me emphasize further, Madam Speaker, that the Alberta Senate Election Act and Alberta Referendum Act require municipalities to hold these votes on the third Monday of October. If a municipality opts to hold the municipal vote on a Saturday and in that same year a Senate election or referendum is set to be conducted, there would be a need to hold two votes, one for the municipal and one for the Senate or referendum, within a few days of each other. Having this situation, it will be impractical to hold two separate election dates, so it entails a significant increase in expenditure for the government. It will require Albertans to double their time and effort to proceed to their respective voting precincts.

Furthermore, this proposed modification is being made now to ensure that all of our local municipalities considering adjusting their election date will have ample notice that changing their local election date for 2021 is no longer an option. This important change will ensure municipal and school board elections are easily

accessible and cost-effective for Albertans by holding them on the same day as a Senate vote or referendum.

Madam Speaker, it also doesn't make sense for voters to waste gas and their hard-earned time voting twice in the same week. The large majority of municipalities will be unlikely to consider a Saturday vote given the significant increased cost for holding two separate election days. For example, the municipal election in Edmonton is expected to cost approximately \$5 million to \$8 million to run in 2021. Depending on COVID-19 requirements that amount would then be doubled if we are to hold it on a separate day for the Senate election or referendum. This would also be an opportunity to see a growth in voter participation in Alberta in elections, as we expect that having a Senate election and referendum questions on the ballot will increase the voter turnout and attract voters to come out to municipal elections.

Madam Speaker, changes to this bill will be a huge win for democracy and will support and help voters to be more engaged during the municipal and school board elections. The commitment is to ensure that the local authorities have the tools and measures they need for the 2021 municipal elections. I applaud the Municipal Affairs ministry for currently working on the educational materials and virtual training to further support municipalities across Alberta in preparing for the general election in October 2021.

Madam Speaker, Bill 45 also introduces contribution limits on third-party advertisers. It will establish contribution limits of \$30,000 per donor per third-party advertiser. In consultations held in February 2020, third-party advertisers had stressed the importance of clear rules and requested that any legislation or changes result in clear and achievable rules.

Madam Speaker, a public survey was conducted by Municipal Affairs from February 4 to March 4, 2020, with over 5,100 responses that were received. The results revealed that electors were likely to be supportive of setting limits on third-party contributions. The fixed limitation on third-party contributions aligns with the expected amendments or the Election Finances and Contributions Disclosure Act for the provincial third-party advertisers. This is a needed change as right now there is no contribution limit. So if a contributor wanted to make a million-dollar donation to a political action committee, or PAC, or third party, it could.

The amendments will also add a fine if you donate more than \$30,000 to a PAC or a third party. Section 193 of the act is also amended, which outlines the administrative penalties that may be levied by the Election Commissioner if there has been an infringement of the contribution limits under the act. Madam Speaker, these amendments will ensure that the amount of the administrative penalty cannot exceed \$10,000 for each contravention. Elections should be for Albertans and are to be decided by Albertans. These amendments will come into force on January 1, 2021, which will be just in time for the nomination period for municipal and school board elections in October 2021.

Let me complete, Madam Speaker, by saying that it is important to support our local democracy and promote the fairness and transparency Albertans deserve during elections. Now the voters, candidates, advocacy groups have the ability to provide better supports and allow the changes they wish to see in their communities regardless of political stripe.

Madam Speaker, if we allow to leave advantages to some that create barriers for others to compete, then fairness is defeated, and the expectations of Albertans would not be satisfied. We owe it to the voters and our citizens to bring more practical changes that enable balance and reasonableness to elections. These changes are healthy for democracy and our province as a whole, and what is good for democracy is good for Alberta.

Thank you, Madam Speaker. I commend the minister for making sure that the conduct of our local elections comes with impartiality and transparency. I encourage all the members of this Chamber to as well support this bill, which will allow amendments to make a better result to exercise of suffrage in our local authorities that leads to a stronger governance of our communities.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

**The Deputy Speaker:** Hon. members, Standing Order 29(2)(a) is now available. The hon. Member for Cardston-Siksika.

**Mr. Schow:** Thank you, Madam Speaker. That was an enthralling speech, and I really appreciated the Member for Calgary-East rising and giving those remarks today in the Chamber. I was particularly interested in talking about, you know, ease of access to voting on important issues for our constituents or, rather, for municipal constituents, so I was wondering if maybe he could elaborate a little bit more on that part of his speech. He talked a little bit about what this bill does to ensure that, you know, we're getting the vote out, and more people are participating in local municipal elections.

**The Deputy Speaker:** Any other members wishing to join in on Standing Order 29(2)(a)?

Seeing none, any other members wishing to join debate on Bill 45 in second reading? Seeing the hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

**Member Irwin:** Good evening. Thank you, Madam Speaker. That was, I mean, "enthralling" is one word for it. There were a few inconsistencies that I will need to address from that previous speaker's comments. I will not be as excited as my colleague from Edmonton-Rutherford, who presented a very good analysis of Bill 45 tonight, so I'm very grateful for him as always, and like him I would also like to say hello to the Minister of Municipal Affairs.

You know, this is my first time actually speaking in the House for a while, and every time I have a chance to speak for the first time in a week, I just want to give a shout out to our health care workers and to folks who are impacted by COVID. We had 20 deaths yesterday due to COVID, and as I said on social media yesterday, those aren't just numbers; those are real humans with lives and families. I know I can speak for everybody in this House; our hearts go out to them. Our hearts break for them, and we will keep fighting for them. Welcome back.

I best get to this bill. I know we have plans to really go into deep analysis and raise a number of questions in future debates in this House, so I will keep my comments a little bit brief as we have a robust evening ahead of us, but I want to just try to highlight a few of the things that my colleague did not touch on too much. The big one: you know, the previous speaker from Calgary-East seemed to imply that this had broad support. You know, respectfully, I'm not sure where that comes from. What I would like to do is that I would like to highlight some of the feedback we've heard on this bill, Bill 45, and some of the clear concerns from key stakeholders across the province.

8:00

I think, you know, the minister did a brief overview of the bill and in that overview referred to Bill 29, and I feel like in my comments tonight it's going to be a bit of déjà vu, going back to Bill 29. I had the, we'll say, pleasure of speaking to Bill 29 and highlighting a number of the concerns that we had with that piece of legislation. Of course, despite our best efforts to warn this government about the dire consequences of Bill 29 – what were some of those dire consequences that we warned of? The bringing in of big money into politics, the American-style PAC sort of

politics, setting up our province so that those who have the most benefit the greatest from this piece of legislation, right? We very much warned this government that this will very much support the wealthiest, and it will have negative impacts on marginalized folks. That's one of the first things I want to highlight with this piece of legislation.

Again, my colleague from Edmonton-Rutherford raised quite a few of the concerns that we're going to dig more deeply into in the coming debates on this bill. But one of the things I was proud to do in my debate on Bill 29 was to share the concerns of a few organizations that are very much alarmed about this approach of bringing big money into politics.

Myself: I can't speak for everybody in this House, but I know I can speak for my colleagues on this side of the House. We are very much working, and we are all huge advocates of increasing diversity, increasing representation in politics, right? We want to have more women in politics. We want to have more racialized folks in politics. I want to have indigenous folks in this Legislature with me. It's Transgender Awareness Week. It would be amazing if I had a transgender colleague to sit with in this House. Those are just a couple of examples. I flag that because we are very concerned that Bill 45, and of course its counterpart with Bill 29, will hurt those groups. This bill makes it so much harder for the average person to get into politics and to win a seat. Again, we need to warn about, you know, the long-standing impacts that this piece of legislation could most certainly have.

I want to echo just some of the comments that folks from Parity YEG shared with regard to Bill 45. One of the things that they mentioned was that a higher ceiling benefits wealthy folks, and it benefits incumbents, that are often male. They're not just pulling this from nowhere. They have a body of research to support their points. I just wanted to preface my comments by saying that.

We know as well that the body of research shows that women are often already disadvantaged when it comes to both entering politics and winning a seat. Again, the research supports that they're often responsible for unpaid labour, and they often earn less than men as well, right? Now is the time when we should be looking at how we can encourage more women and more folks from diverse backgrounds to get involved in politics, not adding additional barriers. Changing these current rules – and these are the words of the folks from Ask Her YYC and Parity YEG: changing those rules creates additional barriers. That's a fact.

The other concern that they raised was around transparency, particularly, as my colleague talked a little bit about, third-party advertising, right? With the doors being wide open to allow for more special-interest groups, what level of influence will those special-interest groups have, and will those special-interest groups be propping up the wealthy and folks that are already well represented in politics? Again, I can't say it enough, that this is a time where we're having conversations about Black Lives Matter and indigenous lives matter, and there are conversations around the world, and we have an opportunity to be leaders and to encourage greater diversity in our political representation. We don't do that by adding additional barriers. That's the first thing that I just really wanted to get out there in second reading, that major concern.

The second piece that I want to get on the record this evening is the concerns that have been raised by the city of Calgary, by Mayor Nenshi in particular. I think many of us are aware in this House that Mayor Nenshi has written a letter to the Minister of Municipal Affairs on behalf of city council outlining a number of their concerns. I want to quote a little bit from that letter, and I can certainly ensure that *Hansard* gets this.

One of the lines that really resonated with me in that letter he wrote was, "Alberta's municipal elections should be about who has



the best ideas, not who has the most money.” I couldn’t have said it better myself. What he’s talking about is the proposed restriction – he uses restriction in quotes, and that’s an important point – “of a \$30,000 contribution limit per donor per third party advertiser in Bill 45.” He notes that “the \$30,000 limit is arbitrary and doesn’t restrict anything. It does the opposite, opening local democracy to unlimited dark money.” Just as we warned with Bill 29: unlimited dark money. He goes on to say that “based on past experience, a \$30,000 limit will create an expectation among contributors to donate the maximum amount.” He goes on to say that “the result of changes proposed in Bill 45 will be a flood of big money in municipal elections, as multiple, indistinguishable third party advertisers receive massive contributions from wealthy individuals and run similar advertisements.”

He makes another interesting point. I think the Minister of Municipal Affairs would find this one quite interesting given her home community of Grande Prairie. He notes that the proposed changes “are not in the public interest. For interest, no candidate for mayor or council in Red Deer, Lethbridge or Grande Prairie spent \$30,000 in total on their campaign in 2017.” And he points out that “while we have not reviewed all the records, we believe that no candidate outside of Calgary, Edmonton or Wood Buffalo spent more than \$30,000 in total on their campaign, meaning” and his point being “that one single donor could spend more than any candidate outside of these major centres.” I think that’s a really critical warning from Calgary city council about what this is going to mean.

As my colleague from Edmonton-Rutherford pointed out, it’s the long-term impacts of these changes. Is this going to be – you know, we’ve seen Bill 29. Now we’ve got Bill 45. Are we going to see further amendments, further pieces of legislation introduced in this House that will further degrade democracy in this province? For me, you know, as the critic for the status of women and LGBTQ2S-plus issues, I’m very much concerned when I see pieces of legislation that make it harder for marginalized groups to get involved in politics. It’s just that simple.

Like I said, I wanted to get Calgary city council’s letter on the record here tonight because I’m very hopeful. While we’re not at the stage of introducing amendments, I’m very hopeful that this UCP government will heed the warnings of major municipalities. We saw with Bill 29 that they weren’t willing to heed our warnings. They weren’t willing to heed the warnings of multiple municipalities across the province. They weren’t willing to heed the warnings of groups like Ask Her YYC and Parity YEG. The list goes on.

**8:10**

So who are they listening to? That is the other question I want to get on the record tonight. Who are they listening to? We want to know who was consulted on this piece of legislation. Perhaps the minister can talk a little bit more about who indeed was consulted. Were civil society groups consulted with? Municipalities? Were they consulted with? If so, which ones? What did you learn? Is their feedback reflected in Bill 45? What impact will it have on First Nations communities, on Métis communities, right? We know that that’s in conjunction with some of the amendments under Bill 38.

Again, I said I wouldn’t speak ad nauseam at this point, but I think it’s a good opportunity. My colleague from Edmonton-Rutherford really laid out some of the other concerns, particularly around school board elections and around the connection with the Constitution as well. The list goes on. But I really am urging this minister to share what she knows about this piece of legislation, to share the process that she went through when it comes to consultation. I would love as well if we could answer some of the

questions around the impacts on underrepresented groups, and I’d love a longer discussion as well about third-party advertising and the possible detrimental impacts of that.

So with that, I think I’ve got most of my concerns on the record this evening for second reading, and I will conclude my comments. Thank you.

**The Deputy Speaker:** Hon. members, Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available.

Seeing none, any other members wishing to join debate on Bill 45 in second reading?

Seeing none, would the minister like to close debate? The hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs.

**Mrs. Allard:** Thank you, Madam Speaker. It’s my pleasure to move closing of debate.

[Motion carried; Bill 45 read a second time]

## Bill 46

### Health Statutes Amendment Act, 2020 (No. 2)

**The Deputy Speaker:** The hon. Minister of Justice, Solicitor General, and keeper of the Great Seal.

**Mr. Madu:** Thank you, Madam Speaker. I am very pleased to rise on behalf of the hon. Minister of Health to move second reading of Bill 46, the Health Statutes Amendment Act, 2020 (No. 2).

Bill 46 outlines the next steps to create a patient-centred health system. It provides the framework for moving forward with modernizing Alberta’s health legislation and addresses additional measures needed to further support and protect patients. These changes will help our health system and the health professionals working within it to be more adaptable, changing when required, and in a more timely way.

With those goals in mind, Madam Speaker, the Health Statutes Amendment Act, 2020 (No. 2) proposes amendments to four pieces of legislation: the Health Professions Act, the Health Information Act, the Health Facilities Act, and the ABC Benefits Corporation Act. The act also proposes repealing the outdated Hospitals Act.

The first act that we are proposing to amend is the Health Professions Act, which addresses Alberta’s regulatory colleges and the more than 100,000 health professionals overseen by those colleges. The proposed amendments include a number of important measures that strengthen protections for patients and ensure that both health professionals and the health system are focused on what’s best for Albertans.

This summer we presented a number of proposed amendments to regulatory colleges and other interest groups for their review. Based on their advice and feedback provided during this consultation, we are now bringing forward 10 amendments for consideration. The proposed amendments include the following. First, we are proposing to separate regulatory colleges from professional associations to ensure that these colleges always put patients and the public interest first. These two bodies have very different roles. Regulatory colleges are focused on protecting the patient, where professional associations are focused on serving their members and advocacy for their profession. A clear separation is needed to ensure that their mandates are distinct and the ability to fulfill those mandates is not impeded or influenced by competing priorities.

I would like to clarify, Madam Speaker, that members of a professional association would still be able to serve on a regulatory college board. Only senior employees or senior officers of a professional association would be restricted from being on the board of a college. In fact, currently there are two College of

Physicians & Surgeons of Alberta board members who are also section heads for the Alberta Medical Association. If these amendments are passed, they would remain on the CPSA's board.

We are also proposing a framework to regulate health care aides so that they are held to the same high standard as other health professionals in Alberta. Regulation is part of this profession's natural evolution as they continue to play a more important role in our health care system. Regulation also provides many benefits to Albertans such as ensuring that these professionals adhere to professional standards and codes of ethics, participate in ongoing education, and more.

Creating a centralized online public registry where Albertans can search for a health provider rather than having to search multiple websites is another amendment that is being proposed. This online registry will make it easier for Albertans to find a health professional and more quickly obtain the health services they need.

Allowing regulatory colleges to amalgamate if they choose is also being proposed. Amalgamation would support greater interprofessional collaboration and provide colleges with the ability to achieve financial and administrative efficiencies.

Bill 46, Madam Speaker, also proposes a number of process efficiencies that would enable regulatory colleges and health professionals to be more responsive to changing patient and health system needs. These administrative amendments include the following: restricted activities are high-risk health services that can only be provided by designated health providers. Nasal swabbing for COVID-19 is one example. Another would be to set or reset a bone fracture or to prescribe, compound, or administer blood products.

Currently restricted activities are listed in each profession's professional regulation. We are proposing to move this restricted activity list into one government regulation. Then this regulation would be moved under the Health Professions Act. Because of the number of regulatory colleges and professional regulations, scopes of practice cannot quickly and easily adapt to changing system needs. Having one restricted activity regulation with a separate section for each college would allow more timely changes and improve responsiveness. Having this ability has become very apparent in regard to the health system's response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Amending the common provisions of the act to include provisions commonly addressed by all health professions in their respective regulations is also proposed. Once again, this change provides for more timely updating.

8:20

We are also proposing to enable regulatory colleges to address their continuing competence programs and professional titles within their standards of practice. This amendment, Madam Speaker, will allow colleges to be more responsive to changing needs and best practices.

Lastly, we are proposing to provide for the approval of professional regulations by the Minister of Health rather than the Lieutenant Governor in Council.

Madam Speaker, this brings me to the Health Information Act, the second act we are proposing to amend. Health information is an important part of patient care, connecting health providers with common access to the most current patient information and enabling the most appropriate care. The proposed amendments would authorize Alberta Health, Alberta Health Services, and other authorized custodians like the Health Quality Council of Alberta, for example, to use this information for broader purposes such as health system planning and policy development. It would also enable more health professionals like medical examiners and health

providers in broader communities such as Lloydminster or Fort Smith to access critical electronic health records they need to properly care for Albertans receiving care in another province or territory.

I want to be clear, Madam Speaker. Privacy remains the top priority. None of these amendments will change Alberta's obligations under the act to safeguard patient health information or the legal responsibility for authorized health care professionals to protect the privacy of patients. In fact, the amendments propose tougher penalties for inappropriately accessing health information. Maximum fines will increase to emphasize the severity of these actions and discourage privacy violations. The maximum fine for an individual will increase from \$100,000 to \$200,000, and the maximum fine for an organization will increase from \$500,000 to \$1 million.

Bill 46 also proposes changes that would streamline the health legislation governing the operation of acute-care facilities. Amendments would repeal the outdated Hospitals Act and move any applicable pieces to the Health Facilities Act, combining all relevant provisions into one piece of legislation. The amended Health Facilities Act would better reflect the current health system. There will be just one act legislating how acute-care facilities should provide safe, high-quality care and regulate the operation of those facilities.

Finally, Madam Speaker, we are proposing to rename the ABC Benefits Corporation Act. The ABC Benefits Corporation is known to most Albertans as Alberta Blue Cross. We are proposing to rename this legislation as the Alberta Blue Cross act so that its name more clearly indicates its purpose.

In closing, Madam Speaker, Albertans want and deserve safe, high-quality health care provided in a system that is designed to serve patients. The amendments proposed today provide for improvements that take us closer to creating a patient-centred health system, a system that is highly efficient and responsive and better able to meet their needs. On behalf of the Minister of Health I ask for your support for second reading of Bill 46, the Health Statutes Amendment Act, 2020 (No. 2).

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

**The Deputy Speaker:** Are there members wishing to join debate on Bill 46 in second reading? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

**Member Loyola:** Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I completely understand that – well, first of all, I want to thank the Minister of Justice and Solicitor General for getting up and moving second reading of the bill and describing all the aspects of the bill that are focusing on changing different elements. What we essentially have here is another classic UCP omnibus bill that chooses to change a number of pieces of legislation and actually repeal one at the same time.

According to the Minister of Justice and Solicitor General on behalf of the Minister of Health, he states that this is what's best for Albertans. Fundamentally, I think that, specifically when it comes to the Health Information Amendment Act, what we see here is a problem. What, in fact, we are seeing is what I would go as far as to say is the infringement upon the privacy of Albertans, which is surprising, of course, because, you know, in typical conservative manner they tend to argue for the individual rights of people, yet here we see them, with this piece of legislation, actually weakening the privacy rights of Albertans.

You know, I see the minister across, and he's saying that that's not true, but in the minister's opening remarks upon moving the second reading of this bill, he didn't even enter into the fact that the

Information and Privacy Commissioner has actually stated in a letter to the Minister of Health that this Bill 46 should actually be pulled back. Didn't even address it. You'd think that a minister of the Crown, upon entering into debate on a particular bill, would actually address, at arm's length, of course, the office of the Information and Privacy Commissioner of Alberta and their concerns. The truth is that there are a number of privacy concerns that the Information and Privacy Commissioner actually brings up.

The question – I mean, the minister did make mention of it – is that they consulted with people, but we have no record of who the Minister of Health actually consulted with upon bringing these number of changes through this omnibus bill before us, Bill 46. We don't see who they actually consulted on all of these changes that they decided. It's typical of this UCP government that they – I would go so far as to say that, you know, they chat with a few of their friends, perhaps, and then they decide to make changes in the legislation and bring it here into the House, when they truly haven't consulted with all Albertans. Here we have a perfect example of the office of the Information and Privacy Commissioner actually raising the red flag on this government, raising the red flag and not only just saying: oh, we should be concerned. The commissioner is actually saying that the bill should be pulled back.

Now, when Albertans hear this, and many of them have – and some of them have brought it even to my attention – what is the response to Albertans when they're concerned about this? The minister didn't get up and speak at all to this issue whatsoever in terms of the letter of the Information and Privacy Commissioner to the Minister of Health. I wouldn't mind it if anybody in this cabinet would be willing to get up and actually address the concerns of the commissioner. The truth is that we have the letter in front of us. The Information and Privacy Commissioner made the letter public – made the letter public. That goes to show that it is such an incredible concern to the commissioner that it wasn't just a letter to the Minister of Health, but they actually made the letter public and I could almost say literally – but, of course, it's figurative – raising the red flag on this particular bill.

8:30

Madam Speaker, this omnibus health legislation actually amends four pieces of legislation while repealing one, as I mentioned. Of course, the first one is the health information amendment act. In doing so, it makes the Minister of Health the manager of Alberta's electronic health records – that is to say, for example, Netcare – as opposed to Alberta Health Services being the manager of these records. And in true UCP fashion, as always we see yet another example of this government concentrating authority within their cabinet and taking it out of the hands of other institutions that are at arm's length from the government. I've discussed this several times because it's a huge concern. It's one that I continue to bring up with my constituents, that they should be concerned about because with legislation after legislation after legislation that this government brings into this House, they further concentrate the authority into the hands of the ministers.

You have to ask yourself – and Albertans are asking themselves this – specifically about: why this concentration of power? Why put more decision-making power into the hands of ministers as opposed to the institutions that are at arm's length from the government that are supposed to be helping the government actually make these decisions, right? I've spoken before about the role of agencies, boards, and commissions and the way that they help out the government, but here we see yet another bill where this government is taking the power and the decision-making process out of the hands of agencies, boards, and commissions and putting it more into the hands of the ministers.

This is exactly what we see in front of us with the amendments that they are making to the health information amendment act. The minister will now determine the administrative, technical, and physical safeguards. He'll now determine who has access to health records. This I find incredible, that the minister will be in charge of determining who has access to all these health records.

Now, one thing that I will applaud is the fact that fines are going to be raised. The Minister of Justice did mention the fact that the fine would go from \$100,000 up to \$200,000 in the case of an individual. Then – pardon me. I can't remember off the top of my head.

**Mr. Nielsen:** Five hundred to a million.

**Member Loyola:** From \$500,000 to a million. Thank you very much, hon. member, for the reminder.

This is something that we see that is potentially positive.

Regardless of that fact, one of the things that we do see with this bill – and actually the Information and Privacy Commissioner does bring it up – is that health information would now be able to travel outside of the province and even outside of the country. So we can only ask ourselves: well, okay; what is it that this UCP government is up to? When you can actually take the health records of Albertans – are they going to go to the highest bidder, Minister? Is that the idea here? Is it going to be that people will – basically, we're going to have offshore companies in other places that are going to be actually having access and control of the health records of Albertans. This is something that we're really concerned about, so I would appreciate it if the minister, perhaps not the Minister of Justice himself but one of his cabinet, could get up and actually speak to these particular issues that we're bringing up before the House when it comes to specifically the health information amendment act.

Of course, this is not the only thing that this particular bill actually amends. I'll go into the next one, which is, of course, the Health Professions Act. The first major change here is to legally require that regulatory colleges be separated from professional associations. Now, I'm not too sure about any of the other members in this House, but I've already had constituents actually reach out to me on this particular issue – there are a number of questions; there's a lot of confusion – wanting to know exactly how all of this is going to work, because, of course, the regulatory colleges would focus on the public and the patients versus the professional associations, that would focus on members and are the members' advocates. There are currently six hybrid organizations that would essentially need to separate, and those are, of course, acupuncturists, chiropractors, dentists, physiotherapists, respiratory therapists, and, of course, registered nurses.

The second major change would be to establish health care aides as a separate and regulated profession within the College of Licensed Practical Nurses of Alberta. Of course, it's actually a constituent of mine that works at a long-term care home that brought this to my attention and asked me an incredible number of questions which, of course, we don't have answers to because none of that is actually stipulated within this legislation: what should actually happen, how all these things would actually function. Of course, this is something else that we would appreciate, if members from the other side could actually get up and speak to these particular issues.

There are a number of other questions that we have. Of course, I'll go back to the Information and Privacy Commissioner. I want to be careful with my words here, Madam Speaker, because, of course, I guess there's no other way to say it. I mean, the minister stated that he did in fact consult with the Information and Privacy

Commissioner, but then, lo and behold, the Information and Privacy Commissioner says: no, the minister did not consult with me. Perhaps I'll just leave it at that. It doesn't need to be stated.

Now, we would like some clarification on that because, of course, it is, I believe, the right of this House to know what actually happened. Did the minister actually consult with the Information and Privacy Commissioner or not? This is something that perhaps the Minister of Justice could actually get up and address as we continue debate this evening because, of course, I think this is really important for the people of Alberta to know. Did the minister actually consult with the Information and Privacy Commissioner although, you know, the Information and Privacy Commissioner says, "No, that did not happen"? Something is going on there. We don't have clarity, so I'd appreciate it if members from the other side could actually get up and provide some clarity when it comes to that particular issue.

Of course, if the Information and Privacy Commissioner is stating that they were not consulted, then the question becomes: well, then why didn't the minister actually consult with the Information and Privacy Commissioner on such an important piece of legislation, that's actually before the House? Of course, it makes me question, when the minister gets up in this House and says, "Well, we're doing what's best for Albertans" yet the health records of Albertans, which are in question within this piece of legislation – we know now from the Information and Privacy Commissioner that they were not in fact consulted. Let's bring some clarity to that. That would be fantastic.

8:40

The other thing, too, is that now that the Information and Privacy Commissioner has actually written the letter and addressed some of the issues when it comes to this here piece of legislation – and again I remind you, Madam Speaker, that the Information and Privacy Commissioner has actually stated that we should hold back this bill, hold back Bill 46, because we haven't sufficiently addressed the many, many, many, many concerns with this particular piece of legislation or proposed piece of legislation.

Then the question will become: can we see or will it be that eventually the government will provide its own amendments based on a letter that was actually written to the Minister of Health with all the issues and concerns of the Information and Privacy Commissioner? Can we expect to see some of those amendments coming forward? Is this something that we can expect as an opposition? It would be nice for the members from the other side to actually get up and address this issue, because obviously, as I stated, the Information and Privacy Commissioner has a number of concerns when it comes to the proposed piece of legislation.

It would be great if we could get some information from the other side on exactly that, if the government is going to adopt these recommendations, because – I'll be honest with you, Madam Speaker – if we don't get answers to these questions and it's being recommended by the Information and Privacy Commissioner that this bill actually be held back, then we'll be forced to provide our own amendment to suggest exactly that. Perhaps that's what we should be focusing on, actually. You know, perhaps I'm getting ahead of myself, but perhaps we should be focused on sending this here bill to one of our standing committees so that it can be addressed further, because obviously there are a number of issues here.

Of course, as was stated by the Minister of Justice, this piece of legislation will also amend the ABC Benefits Corporation Act. Of course, this is a small housekeeping change that modifies the ABC Benefits Corporation Act to Alberta Blue Cross act to reflect the public-facing name of the organization.

Then, as was stated by the minister, as a practical matter, of course, the Health Facilities Act and the Hospitals Act are going to be essentially amalgamated, and he imports the Hospitals Act in the Health Facilities Act so that there's one consolidated act governing operations of acute-care facilities. When it comes to this particular aspect of it, again we see another I would even state overreach of the powers that are actually given to the Minister of Health within the Hospitals Act, and I would hope that this government would be willing to address this particular issue. When it comes to revising these pieces of legislation, of course, they have this great opportunity, right? But, of course, as we see time and time again, we see this government putting more and more power into the hands of the minister as we move forward.

For that reason, I am unable to actually support this piece of legislation. I think that we need to – well, I believe that this government needs to go back to the drawing board when it comes to what they're proposing here, of course.

**The Deputy Speaker:** Any members wishing to join debate on Bill 46 in second reading? The hon. Member for Calgary-East.

**Mr. Singh:** Thank you, Madam Speaker. I rise in here today to take the opportunity to express my support on an important bill that would once again strengthen and modernize public health care and would readily respond amid the health care needs of Albertans, Bill 46, Health Statutes Amendment Act, 2020 (No. 2).

Before going further, let me thank the Minister of Health and the team for supporting and protecting Albertans by ensuring that health legislation pays significant focus on patient care. I would also like to express my appreciation to the health care professionals and to all workers in the health care system for all their dedication and for all their initiatives and spending countless hours working hard during this time of health crisis. A further thank-you to all Albertans who have been patiently and continuously following health measures and policies by the government towards the path of preventing the spread of the COVID-19 virus.

Last July Bill 30 was passed by this Legislature. It changed nine pieces of health legislation to strengthen the role of Albertans in our health system, help reduce surgical wait times, and modernize the system so it can be more effective. I just wanted to emphasize that it did not privatize Alberta's health care system.

Madam Speaker, Canada's health care system is considered to be one of the best health care systems in the world. It is publicly funded and provides access to a broad range of health services, including primary care, secondary, and supplementary needs. The proposed amendments in Bill 46 will continue to modernize the health legislations to make the health system more efficient and responsive. The strengthened protection for patients makes use of electronic health information in a more meaningful way for better patient care outcomes.

Madam Speaker, this summer 2020 the regulatory colleges were engaged and were able to provide feedback on all proposed changes that Bill 46 carries. The amendments will enable Alberta's regulatory colleges, health care professionals to support, strengthen, and protect our health care here in Alberta. In particular, the changes outlined in Bill 46 will enable key changes to the Health Professions Act, Health Information Act, ABC Benefits Corporation Act, Health Facilities Act, and Hospitals Act. The changes will improve regulatory effectiveness and efficiency and address concerns about red tape, inefficient processes, and regulatory barriers in the Health Professions Act. Bill 46 will allow for colleges to separate from professional associations and enhance the operation of governing councils and hearing tribunals. The amendments will also enable and enhance the regulation of multiple

professions within regulatory colleges to allow for union for more than one profession under one regulatory college.

Madam Speaker, the crucial changes to the Health Professions Act will allow for the establishment of a centralized registry of health professionals in Alberta and will permit authorization to health care professionals to perform restricted activities through government regulation rather than professional regulations. Also, this will enable and support health professionals to work with full scope of practice.

This bill will allow for the approval of changes to professional regulations by the minister rather than the Lieutenant Governor in Council, which will enable both the government and regulatory college to make changes quickly to support and protect Albertans. Bill 46 will also make health care aid regulated as a separate profession within the College of Licensed Practical Nurses of Alberta, CLPNA. The health professionals are accountable for the care they provide and abide by the standards and ethics. Madam Speaker, this change will allow the health care aides to be held to the same high standards as other health professionals. In turn, this will provide greater public protection, the introduction of mandatory registration, the standards of practice requirements, complaints and discipline processes.

8:50

Allowing these changes will support the health professionals to provide a number of benefits to Albertans and protects the public to ensure every Albertan receives safe and high-quality care. The changes to the health information amendment act will further support many Albertans to receive efficient and effective care in Alberta. It will deliver better results for Albertans by allowing health organizations and professionals to share health information more efficiently. The Alberta electronic health record, or Alberta Netcare, is a crucial component of the health system, and modernizing the rules that govern it will enhance patient-centric care. It will modernize the Alberta electronic health record based on the recommendations from the health information systems review last fall.

The Health Information Act came into effect in 2001. In addition, amendments to the act were brought forward in 2010 to form a framework for Alberta Netcare. Since then, Madam Speaker, there have been no other changes. Key changes being introduced will reduce the barriers when sharing information across the Ministry of Health, allowing for more patient-centric health care as well as allowing for better patient information sharing between Alberta Health, Alberta Health Services, and authorized custodians such as the Health Quality Council of Alberta to improve health system planning, policy development, and monitoring.

It will also update the legislation in terms of wording to reflect modern terminology. That will clarify and ensure that consistent interpretation of the act is upheld. Modernizing the Alberta electronic health record will bring Alberta into closer alignment with other jurisdictions in Canada. Changes will break down barriers, enabling authorized health care professionals such as medical examiners to access appropriate information in the Alberta electronic health record, Alberta Netcare, and better information sharing between Alberta Health, Alberta Health Services, and authorized custodians to improve health system planning and monitoring. Authorized health professionals will be able to access their patients' history anywhere, at any time. This could ensure that a patient's treatment is more effective and better aligned to the patient's need.

Protecting the privacy of Albertans' health information is and will be always a priority. These amendments do not change Alberta's obligation under the act to safeguard patient health information. The health information system review conducted last

fall highlighted the need to have tougher penalties for inappropriate access to health information. That being said, Madam Speaker, tougher penalties for inappropriate access to a person's health information as well as the breach-reporting requirements will be in place and will align with penalties under other similar legislation implemented in British Columbia and Ontario.

Overall, Madam Speaker, this would allow for better patient information sharing between health agencies in Alberta to improve health system planning, policy development, and monitoring. If this legislation is not updated, significant restrictions on secondary information use will continue, which will affect Alberta Health and the ability to improve system planning, performance, and health service delivery for all Albertans.

The ABC Benefits Corporation Act is another legislation that will simplify and undergo change to just change the name of the ABC Benefits Corporation Act to the Alberta Blue Cross act to clarify the purpose of this legislation. The ABC Benefits Corporation is the name of the legal entity that operates as Alberta Blue Cross.

In Alberta our commitment and promise is to support and strengthen the health care system so Albertans can continue to have access to high-quality, person-centred health services in a more sustainable and efficient manner. Bill 46 delivers that commitment, Madam Speaker, which provides change in Alberta's health care system that has been outdated and filled with many needless provisions.

The government continues to reduce red tape and streamline unnecessary burdens to improve more as it governs. So, Madam Speaker, once again, today I encourage everyone in this Chamber to support Bill 46, which will create a more responsive health system that can better meet the needs of the patients. This will in turn help our hard-working health care professionals and all health care workers as they continue to provide their best services to ensure Albertans receive the benefits and care they deserve.

Again, I applaud the minister and the team members that have been involved in the making of these changes and for all the efforts in ensuring that our communities, families, patients are being protected and supported. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

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

**Mr. Carson:** Thank you, Madam Speaker. It's an honour to rise to speak to what we just heard from the Member from Calgary-East. You know, for the second time this evening now we've heard that that member is willing to give this legislation the green light despite what experts in our province, specifically the office of the Information and Privacy Commissioner, have been saying is very questionable within this legislation. So it's frustrating to me that instead of taking that member's time to ask important questions, potentially ones that have been raised by the Information and Privacy Commissioner, instead of asking questions that need to be answered before saying that yes, we should pass this, instead of doing so, that member is once again saying things are good to go, using words like: we're modernizing the health system, reducing red tape.

Unfortunately, as I'll have the opportunity, I imagine, to get into a little bit further here this evening and possibly even within the next five minutes, I am very concerned with what this government believes is red tape, specifically, in this instance, the idea of changing what were important restrictions on protecting our information. When we look at some of the main titles within the office of the Information and Privacy Commissioner's letter to the minister and the public, one of the headlines is Increased Role and Responsibility for Alberta Health over Netcare.

I know that many members this evening and before this evening have spoken at length about the idea that we're taking away the responsibility from AHS and moving it over to the minister's office, which we've seen before. We've seen it a lot under this UCP government, as mentioned under Bill 10 specifically, which has caused a massive amount of backlash from the general public and, once again, from experts across our province. When this government takes things back into the minister's office, it truly shows that they are afraid to be accountable to the public, and they have in many instances a perceived willingness to not be transparent with the public.

So with that, I would ask the Member for Calgary-East what specifically he believes his ministers have told him that, you know, has made him think that the letter from the office of the Information and Privacy Commissioner should not be understood and explained by the Minister of Health.

Thank you.

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

Seeing none, any other members wishing to speak on Bill 46 in second reading? Big surprise, the hon. minister – hon. Member for Edmonton-West Henday.

**Mr. Carson:** Well, thank you, and I suppose my vision has come true now. But once again, it's an honour to rise to Bill 46 and speak to Bill 46, the Health Statutes Amendment Act. I want to start off very similar to the Member from Edmonton-Highlands Norwood, recognizing, since it's been a short period of time since I have spoken, that we are in the midst of a global pandemic, and we continue to wait for answers not only on Bill 46 but on the general direction of this government and the Minister of Health. Unfortunately, much like the earlier days of this government and that minister's talking points of, you know, in due course we'll have answers – the general public needs answers today. Whether we're talking about contact tracing, whether we're talking about paid leave for workers across this province, the silence from this minister and this entire front bench has been deafening.

9:00

Once again, leading into Bill 46 and the concerns that our province's, I would consider – top experts in the office of the Information and Privacy Commissioner have raised many concerns around this legislation, so the fact that there are members of the government without answers willing to stand up and say that we should pass this without delay is truly unfortunate. It's surprising, in my opinion, because, once again, as we are in a pandemic, we are seeing physicians across this province in rural communities, in Calgary, and in all municipalities across the province fighting back against this government as they're trying to make decisions to, you know, further privatize that work.

But at the end of the day, the most important part is that they're making it harder for physicians and health care workers to protect and take care of the constituents in their communities. Once again, it's unbelievable that instead of spending our time here this evening talking about paid leave for workers, talking about how we're going to get people back to work, talking about how we're going to strengthen the health care system, we are actually seeing, through Bill 46, a weakening of that very system. Just right off the bat I would like to say that there is no way that I could support this legislation.

None of the questions, once again, that have been brought forward by the office of the Information and Privacy Commissioner have been answered. As many members on this side of the House

have already raised in conversation through this Legislature, the Health minister said very clearly that through this process the office of the Information and Privacy Commissioner was consulted, but that has not been the case through that Privacy Commissioner's own letter, that was shared with the public a short time ago, that made it very clear that there was absolutely no consultation on this.

It takes me back to the time when the Finance minister said that he consulted with the Auditor General. Specifically, I believe it was around changes to AISH that were happening and more recently about the \$1.6 billion accounting error, that we've heard so much about. Of course, it's not surprising coming from the province's worst Finance minister in the history of time. Unfortunately, it's very hard to take legislation that this government is bringing forward at face value when we're seeing a willingness to come to the House and make statements like that, when it truly has been shown to not be the case in both of those instances. I'm not sure how I'm supposed to once again accept that the minister has done all of his due diligence to make sure that this is ticking all the boxes at this point.

Once again, we heard from the Information and Privacy Commissioner that that indeed was not the case, and to this date in the Legislature we have heard zero response to that letter, to the very important questions that were raised in there. You know, hopefully, I'll have an opportunity to get to that letter and some of the things that were brought forward in there.

But, once again, when we look at the decisions that this government has made – you know, they call it red tape reduction – and when we look at Bill 30 and the further allowance of the privatization of our health care system to allow corporations who have nothing to do with medicine potentially come into our province and contract out doctors, totally, fundamentally, in many instances, changing the way that health care is provided in our province, it will have drastic effects once again specifically on rural communities, who right now more than ever need those physicians and are unfortunately losing them because of the decisions of this government. It's very surprising to me because, once again, many of the members in the government represent those communities and no doubt are hearing from their constituents that they are headed in the wrong direction. Unfortunately, they've been given a direction from this Premier, and they are unwilling to back down to do what is right for their constituents and the people who've put them in this very Legislature.

Once again, the Member for Calgary-East talked about how they're strengthening – strengthening – privacy within the health system. That goes completely against what the office of the Information and Privacy Commissioner said. Once again, just going back to, you know, one of the headlines being the Increased Role and Responsibility for Alberta Health, putting more power into the minister's hands, making it easier to make decisions without Albertans knowing, to make decisions without AHS having any involvement: this is the wrong direction, especially right now.

Another one of the headlines is Termination of Information Manager Agreement... and Information Exchange Protocol. Because of the decision to put more power in the Health minister's hands, they're having to go back and change these very important information exchange protocols, that have been put in place for a very good reason. Somehow that is reducing red tape to this government. Somehow it is, you know, a good idea that we do this. It's absolutely unbelievable.

Further, the Information and Privacy Commissioner goes on to talk about reduced clarity in the recommending function of the Health Information and Data Governance Committee. This government is changing the description of what this multidisciplinary data stewardship committee could recommend to

the minister. They're fundamentally changing the ability and the work that this committee does.

It goes on to say, "The prior authority for Alberta Health to be the information manager of Netcare was derived at least in part through the execution of the IMA signed between Alberta Health and . . . participating health service [providers]." It goes on to talk about that. There are many holes left because of these changes, that will have to be done through regulations, which is absolutely the wrong direction. For such an important piece of legislation to be making changes to how our privacy is collected and at this point, because of the changes in here given to parties outside of our own province, to leave some of this important work to regulations behind closed doors, as most likely will be the case, is fundamentally wrong. There is just no way that I as a representative for my community in Edmonton-West Henday could ever go back to my community and justify why this is okay.

I've had constituents come to me, and I can tell you that even family members have been concerned about, in the past – you know, there are systems in place where, as far as I know, doctors, if they decide to retire, are able to pass the information of their clients or of their patients on to another physician, potentially, and that could come, as far as I know, with financial compensation. Now, the Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie raised the point that we are talking about physicians that could potentially be selling patients' information to organizations or, because of the changes through Bill 30, to corporations that are outside of our province, that are outside of our jurisdiction here in Alberta.

It makes me think about other conversations that we're having right now about the influence – and I've spoken about this in the House before – of data mining programs. Whether it be social media like Facebook, there's no doubt that there is a lot of money to be had in data mining people's information. More recently the conversation around TikTok and having foreign ownership of programs that are collecting information on people in our community: while on one hand we are having this conversation about, "How can we ensure that that information is not being collected and not used against people?" on the other hand we have this government saying that that is indeed what they think is a reduction of red tape in this instance. They think that is modernizing, in their words, the health system or strengthening privacy within the system. Once again, it's – I've said "surprising," but I'm not sure that it really is that surprising, considering the direction of this minister up to this point in his willingness to sell Albertans to, well, whoever wants to pay, I suppose. Unfortunately, I believe that it will lead to the weakening of our health care system.

Now, once again, in the Information and Privacy Commissioner's letter it goes on to talk about expanded access by health service providers outside of Alberta. This is something that we should all be concerned about, and that is exactly why I asked the Member for Calgary-East, after that member gave the full green light to this legislation and said that, you know, we shouldn't hesitate to pass this, how his constituents feel about the idea of their health information leaving the province and potentially even leaving Canadian jurisdictions. It's very concerning to me.

**9:10**

Boy, once again, at a time when we should be talking about how to strengthen the health care system, how to strengthen the collection of our data, how to keep it in our own jurisdiction and ensure that it is not leaving our own health care system, this government has made the decision to move it outside of the province. Once again, it goes along with their decisions to further privatize the system, to allow corporations to come in and hire physicians under their own corporations, to fundamentally change

our health care system here in the province. Unfortunately, we have not heard any real answers from this government on this legislation and really, back to the discussions on Bill 30, on that legislation, how it was actually going to strengthen the process.

We continue to ask: why didn't the minister truly consult with the Privacy Commissioner, and why did the minister feel that it was okay for him to come into this very Legislature and tell people that that consultation had happened? Or if that consultation did, then show us the receipts, because without those it's hard to prove that that minister was indeed telling the truth.

We ask again: will the government adopt the recommendations of the Privacy Commissioner? Instead of trying to rush this through the Legislature, if the minister really wanted to get this right, really wanted to strengthen privacy and the way that we collect and give out health care information for Albertans, if the minister was really concerned about that, why are we not working to adopt the recommendations of the Privacy Commissioner? Why aren't we seeing amendments to this legislation before us? We have time, so I really hope that the minister will find time to bring those important pieces forward. But really what we need is to see this legislation moved to committee or just taken off the table altogether and to come back when the minister has actually done the consultation that he said he has done.

Why, once again, does the government feel it is appropriate to send Alberta's health information outside of Alberta? It is fundamentally, I believe, against the wishes of most Albertans to change the health care system in a way that would allow corporations from outside our province to collect this information, to pay for it to be used in whichever way that they see fit.

We know that this government has made decisions to further include applications like Babylon in our province. You know, while I'm not against the idea of moving towards that, especially in situations of, potentially, rural communities or isolated communities, unfortunately the government is moving in that direction because they are doing an absolutely horrible job of keeping the physicians in their own communities. So we're seeing a need now from this government to actually move in with these applications that are administered through technology because they can't actually keep their own health care providers in their community because of the horrible job that they've done with their relationship with those health care providers, with those physicians.

Instead of going back to the table and trying to reflect on the horrible decisions that they've made and the disaster that they've created in our health care system, this government is just moving on, moving on from protecting those front-line workers in our health care system and saying: "Don't worry, people in our rural communities who are potentially an hour away from a physician. You can just call in to our Telus Babylon app. That's just as good, right?" Unfortunately, I don't think those Albertans are going to accept that it is good enough.

Once again, we've heard praised the one thing that we can praise in here, that we're seeing fines increased for improperly accessed health information up to \$200,000. If we're going to point out one thing that's good, at least they got that right, I suppose. We will see how often or if there is an increase to that information being used improperly because of the changes that they are making.

Madam Speaker, there is just so much in this legislation and in the letter that was sent . . .

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

**Member Irwin:** Thank you, Madam Speaker. I wanted to thank the Member for Edmonton-West Henday for his comments. I think he

gave a really clear analysis as to why we are so concerned about Bill 46.

Again, I was intrigued, I might say, by the comments from the Member for Calgary-East. It appears he's the only MLA on the government side speaking this evening. It's unfortunate we didn't get to question some of his comments, but maybe he'll rise again. In his comments he very much claimed that this is what will benefit Albertans and that this is what, I presume, his constituents have asked for. I can tell you, just like the Member for Edmonton-West Henday and the Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie pointed out as well, I have heard from a lot of constituents on this piece of legislation, Bill 46, and they are very concerned about their privacy and about the power being given again to this government.

This government might say, as they have – and, again, I feel like it's déjà vu once again in this House. You know, I recall that on previous pieces of legislation – Bill 10 comes to mind, Bill 30; oh, gosh, I could probably name all of them – this government was basically just asking Albertans to trust them, to just trust them. I think Albertans are waking up and saying that they're not willing to trust this government, and we could talk about things like parks, where there's certainly not a level of trust. We could talk about privatization of health care. We could talk about the laying off of health care workers. We could talk about attacks on education.

I can say, you know, that in Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood I've heard from multiple constituents who are incredibly concerned about the overreach within Bill 46 and that such significant changes would be made to a piece of legislation that impacts our health care system so greatly in the midst of a pandemic – we cannot forget where we're at currently – and at a time when, again, we should be putting all of our efforts into strengthening our health care system and into supporting our health care workers.

I can also point out that I've heard from health care workers who are concerned about this piece of legislation. I mean, they're concerned about a lot of things right now, and I can truly tell you that I've had health care workers share messages with me of absolute despair right now. And for any of those health care workers who are perhaps between shifts right now and watching us, you just need to know that we stand with you and that we support you, and we will continue to fight back against the UCP's cuts on health care and their attacks on health care . . .

**An Hon. Member:** Hear, hear.

**Member Irwin:** Exactly.

. . . including a piece of legislation like this.

Again, you might argue – and, hopefully, we will hear from some of those members opposite other than just the Member for Calgary-East. I think we will hear from them that they will seek to minimize this piece of legislation, and they will seek to minimize the impacts of this piece of legislation. Again, coming back to my first point around trust, how can we ask Albertans, not just health care workers but Albertans across this province, to trust a minister who introduced Bill 10? How can we expect Albertans to trust a minister who has continuously attacked our hard-working health care professionals, including our doctors?

So I wanted to respond to the Member for Edmonton-West Henday and really underscore the fact that we are all hearing, on our side of the House, the grave concerns of Albertans around this piece of legislation. Admittedly . . .

**The Deputy Speaker:** Any members wishing to join debate on Bill 46 in second reading? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs.

**Ms Goehring:** Thank you, Madam Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise tonight in the House to speak to Bill 46, the Health Statutes Amendment Act, 2020. I'd like to join my colleagues in just acknowledging that we are currently in a pandemic, and I want to express my sincerest gratitude for all of those health care professionals that are working tirelessly to support Albertans, whether that's doing testing, whether it's working in the ICUs, whether it's doing incredible amounts of supporting each other within this pandemic. I know that we're listening. We hear you. We're so grateful for the hard work that you're doing in these really, really, difficult circumstances, especially when we have a government that isn't taking the health care of this province seriously.

**9:20**

I think that it's important that we get up and we talk about the concerns that we're hearing from Albertans about this government and their record with health in the province. This specific piece of legislation is quite concerning, especially when we have a minister who has said that he did consult with the Information and Privacy Commissioner. She was so moved to respond publicly that she absolutely did not consult with the Health minister and has some grave concerns about this piece of legislation moving forward the way it is.

I can tell you, Madam Speaker, with my time in this Chamber as a private member who had the incredible privilege to move a piece of legislation under a private member's bill, that I know the importance of doing consultation when it comes to moving pieces of legislation forward. It's imperative that we get legislation right. As a private member I did a robust consultation about PTSD Awareness Day and talked to as many people as I could about the impacts of PTSD, about pieces of legislation that they felt would help, wording that would help, small nuances in a legislation that would be effective and be most impactful to those that we were trying to include in that piece of legislation. So when I think about my private member's bill, creating a day in the province where we recognize PTSD, and the consultation that I took, I'm just really, really disappointed to know that this government didn't speak to perhaps the most important individual, the Information and Privacy Commissioner, about this piece of legislation that impacts their ability to do their job. It baffles me that that wouldn't be a consideration.

The other piece that I find really concerning is that she came out very clearly with recommendations, and the most important piece of that was that this piece of legislation not move forward. She has concerns and has asked that this piece of legislation be pulled back until it can be properly amended to address the privacy concerns of Albertans. Now, when you have someone in this position, who is separate from the Legislature, a third party, giving advice about her job, which is actually privacy, saying that the legislation the way it is is a breach of that privacy and that it impedes her ability to do her job effectively because once information leaves the province, she can't properly investigate if there is a concern, that, to me, should clearly signal to government that this needs to stop. Yet here we are tonight speaking to this, without any information coming from the minister or anyone on that side of the House that they're taking that recommendation seriously and that they are considering pausing this legislation to get it right.

I know that many Albertans are concerned with the record that this UCP government has when it comes to privacy. We've seen this very minister collect information, private information about doctors, their phone numbers, so that he could call them and yell at them. He also took it upon himself to attend a private residence of a doctor and yell at him in his driveway. I mean, these are very, very



concerning behaviours from someone who's supposed to be leading this Ministry of Health. He hasn't shown the ability to build trust within Albertans.

I can tell you, Madam Speaker, that one of the things that I'm continuously hearing from Albertans, specifically in health care professions, about their concerns is that they don't trust this government. There have been many, many professionals with clear recommendations coming forward of how they can help. Part of a doctor's mandate is to do no harm. They get into this profession because they genuinely want to help people and make life better for them. Their health is their priority. When you have a government that is not taking that seriously, is actually attacking those health care workers, it makes it really hard to trust that they've got Albertans front of mind.

I'm not sure if all of the members in this Chamber are aware, but reservists within the Canadian Armed Forces – the number one employer for reservists in the province of Alberta is the government of Alberta, specifically under Health, that ministry. What that means is their full-time job is with Health. Whether they're doctors, nurses, or paramedics, they're working in some capacity within the Alberta government under the Health portfolio. Their part-time job is being a member of the Canadian Armed Forces as a reserve.

Many of these members that I've heard from have served in theatre. They've been to Afghanistan. They've dealt with trauma. They've dealt with war-torn countries and conflict. These same doctors and nurses that have been in Afghanistan didn't express the fear that they're seeing right now with the state of where our health care system is in this province. That, to me, speaks volumes, when you have a member of the Canadian Armed Forces who has served in Afghanistan in a medical capacity coming here, saying: "We're scared. We are worried. We fear for our ability to effectively keep Albertans safe, to effectively care for them."

[Mr. Milliken in the chair]

We're seeing that it's not just COVID right now that's causing stress in the health system. Anybody that had surgeries, anybody that has other health concerns that are coming forward, they're not getting the services that they deserve. Their surgeries are being cancelled. There's testing that can't occur because of the backlog of health impacts because of COVID. It's not just the one piece of the health care system that's being impacted, Mr. Speaker. It's having a domino effect. I'm getting phone calls from nurses who are crying. They're scared. They're afraid for their ability to do their job. They're afraid of being in a situation where they don't feel supported by their employer, which is the government. They're seeing these layoffs, they're seeing these cuts, they're seeing these arbitrary decisions made that are impacting their ability to care for Albertans.

Now we have this piece of legislation that is also putting the privacy of Albertans' health care records at risk. We can't trust this government to be transparent and to make good decisions. We've seen it over and over. They have a record of confirming that they can't be trusted. We've seen what happened with doctors and their lack of ability to negotiate. Doctors were pleading with this government to come back to the table, to listen to them, and what resulted in the government not responding and not listening to doctors and not sitting down and consulting with them was that many doctors fled. We saw over the summer and the fall doctors all over the province, specifically in rural Alberta, leave. There are communities that don't have access to their family doctors. They're driving into the city, they're driving to other areas to access health services. We see maternity wards not being accessible, so if you're

having a baby, you would have relied on your local hospital. That's no longer an option.

This isn't a government that has a really good record when dealing with the Health Act. We have Albertans that don't trust this government. We have physicians, health care workers that don't trust this government. Now we have the Information and Privacy Commissioner who has come out very clearly saying that this piece of legislation is inadequate.

9:30

It actually weakens privacy rights for Albertans. It weakens the ability to investigate anything if it comes up as a concern. They don't have the jurisdiction to investigate if something outside of Alberta happens, which is very concerning. We know that we have a government that has a history of misleading Albertans with information. The example specific to this is that this minister said that he had consulted, and he didn't. So the result is that we have the Information and Privacy Commissioner coming forward pleading to pause this legislation.

I'm so dismayed that we're here in the House tonight debating this piece of legislation when there are so many things that we could be doing to enhance our health care system, to show our health care workers that they are important, that they matter, and that Albertans' health is important. By attacking doctors, nurses, and anyone in the health profession, in essence that's saying that Albertans' health isn't a priority. So not only is their health not a priority, but their privacy about their health isn't a priority.

I know that I have a really incredible relationship with my physician, and I trust my physician. I trust that the information that they're putting on my record electronically is accurate, and to know that there's the ability that that information can be accessed outside of the province and that it could potentially be sold is very concerning. I think that when we're undermining the privacy of our health care, we're doing so much to put the health of Albertans at risk, to have Albertans question whether or not their health is actually a priority to this government. We see it. It hasn't been a priority.

I've spoken before about the importance of having a voice in this Chamber and the ability to represent the voices of my constituents. I can tell you, Mr. Speaker, that my constituents do not trust this government with their health. They're watching this global pandemic unfold.

There are so many concerns about the lack of transparency, the lack of leadership, the lack of information that's being shared from this government. They have access to data that they're not sharing. So what are they going to do with the data and the information that they have under this piece of legislation? What is the end result? What is the purpose of having this piece of legislation put forward? We're not hearing the positive sides of this. We're not hearing the reasoning why this minister is going against what the recommendation of the Information and Privacy Commissioner is. He's not defending his reason to continue putting this piece of legislation forward.

We're asking these questions, Albertans are asking these questions, and we're not getting answers. To me, that's pretty concerning because I think that every Albertan has the right to know where their information is being held, what happens to their information if there's a leak, and we have the commissioner saying: if there is a leak outside of the province, they have no jurisdiction. She is giving clear recommendations about how this can be fixed, how it can be remedied, and, at minimum, asking for it to be paused. I don't think that that's an unreasonable request considering that that's who we should be looking to for direction on privacy. Their

whole job is to ensure that Albertans' information and privacy is kept safe, is kept secure.

We have a government that isn't very transparent with information and data and has used information for their own personal agenda, if you will. I think that it's very concerning when we have people who are advocating that this stop, at least pause to look for further consultation. I don't think that that's an unreasonable request. I know that we have many Albertans that are active in their health care, and they participate in the app that allows them to seek that information. I just hope that this government listens.

Thank you.

**The Acting Speaker:** Thank you, hon. member.

Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available, and I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore has risen.

**Mr. Nielsen:** Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I just want to say that I'm always so appreciative of the Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs' remarks when she's talking about legislation and how it affects actual, real day lives of people. I'm curious if the member might be willing to share, from her travels through her constituency in her job as the Official Opposition's liaison to the military and also in her role as critic for culture, what kind of, I guess, response. You know, were people running up saying: please, can you advocate to the government some way so that our private health information can be available to the minister and potentially can be shipped outside of the jurisdiction? I'm just wondering what kind of feedback she might have heard during that time.

**The Acting Speaker:** I see the Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs.

**Ms Goehring:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the hon. member for the question and the positive comments. I appreciate that. I definitely have been hearing from people all across the province about their concerns when it comes to health care in this province and their privacy. I know many of my constituents have come forward with very, very complex health matters, whether it's them personally or whether it's their children, and they're very tuned in to what's happening in this province when it comes to health care.

One of my very best friends' son is a heart transplant recipient, and she is very active in all of his medical goings-on. She is constantly updating numerous physicians, and she understands the importance of having the data electronic. She appreciates that that information needs to be able to be accessed by different physicians. Her son has very, very robust activity with many physicians in many different specialties, whether it's dietitians, whether it's physicians that are dealing with a stroke that resulted as part of his transplant with the transplant team, with his pediatrician, with numerous professionals, and they all need access to that data.

The importance of having data electronically available is so essential because it's real time – it's right now – but the fear of having that data accessed by someone who shouldn't be accessing it is terrifying. I've heard from individuals who have accessed services that are very private and very personal. I know that with my work through Planned Parenthood I've counselled women who have had to have an abortion based on a sexual assault or someone who, heartbreakingly, was married but in extreme domestic violence and knew that a pregnancy would cause a potential for death with her husband. So she had an abortion, and if that information got to the wrong person, the consequence of that is devastating to not just the individual that has their health record breached but to the family members.

There's a ripple effect when someone's health care is breached, and to think that this government isn't taking this seriously is very, very concerning. I know that so many constituents have expressed significant concern with how they're handling the health of Albertans in this province. People are afraid. There isn't trust, and to see that there's an option available for this government to remedy this piece of legislation, to step back, to meet with the Information and Privacy Commissioner to talk about her recommendations, and to take this piece of legislation and make sure that it's the most robust, safe piece of legislation going forward I think makes sense. It's just baffling to me and to so many other Albertans why they wouldn't do that. I'm so appreciative that the Information and Privacy Commissioner made her letter public. It's something that she felt compelled to share with Albertans. It is that important. It didn't just come to this House. It didn't just come to the minister or to the government. It went out as a public letter identifying that there is a major concern with this piece of legislation and that there's a fix. There's an opportunity to sit down, to have consultations. I just really hope that this government is listening.

Thank you.

9:40

**The Acting Speaker:** Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other members? I have already seen the hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore.

**Mr. Nielsen:** Mr. Speaker, your ability to pick me out of the throngs of people jumping up to speak to this bill this evening is just incredible, and I so appreciate the opportunity this evening to be able to add some initial comments here around Bill 46, the Health Statutes Amendment Act, 2020 (No. 2). You know, I have to say that I'll probably focus most of my comments around one subject. There are a couple of things I do want to also bring up around this, but I do want to start off with one little note. I couldn't help myself.

I remember, Mr. Speaker, that in the 29th Legislature members of the government bench and members of the government caucus, when they were serving so well in the Official Opposition, would constantly berate the former NDP government when a bill was presented in this fashion, as it is right now. I remember the comments along the lines of: well, clearly, they were rushing the legislation; they couldn't even get it printed properly, in a proper form. I know that doesn't sound very relevant, but it probably will in a minute here as I expand on my comments.

When we're talking about one of the sections here with regard to privacy in Bill 46 – and, of course, the Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs was just mentioning that the Privacy Commissioner did release a letter publicly with some very, very serious concerns around this information. Now, we have to keep in mind that the government has been very, very adamant about taking the advice of the chief medical officer, as they should. She is the expert. So when it comes to information on privacy, why would you not take the advice of the number one expert that you have access to?

Mr. Speaker, if it's necessary for me to table this, I'm happy to do so. Let me know if that's the case. But out of that I couldn't help but notice the comments right near the end, where it says, "I am hopeful that the government will either make amendments to the bill or ideally pause deliberations to allow for further consultation on the implications these proposed amendments have for the protection of Albertans' health information." Was it, then, indeed the case that maybe the government was just rushing their legislation, hence why maybe we saw it not even printed properly, as they were always so adamant to point out to the government?

That kind of leads me, of course, to some of the initial comments. I appreciate the Minister of Justice opening up debate here on this

bill in second reading and providing some initial remarks. I did catch a few things here. One of the things that I caught was around: the government wants to create an efficient health system. One of my first questions, then, is: how do we create an efficient health system by allowing the minister to have access to Albertans' private health information?

Again, something that I remember is that members of the government bench, members of the government caucus who served in the 29th Legislature were almost beside themselves at times when they felt the previous NDP government was giving too much leeway, too much power, too much authority, too much decision-making to a minister. So I have to just hammer this point over and over and over again: if you're going to complain about that kind of thing or complain about something, you can't then turn around, when it's your turn to show how to do it better, and then do the exact same thing. That's called being a hypocrite.

One of the other comments I noticed in the opening remarks was addressed around privacy information, that it was the government's top priority to protect that information. If it really was indeed your top priority, according to this letter at least, you didn't even take the time to consult with your number one expert that's available to you.

I always get hung up, Mr. Speaker, as you've heard time and again, I get hung up on the language. The language I'm hearing in the opening remarks isn't jibing with what I'm seeing presented here in Bill 46. It's probably no surprise, and I might as well just be upfront right now. In that instance it's impossible for me to be able to stand here and say: well, maybe with some slight amendments or something, maybe this might be more palatable. I can't support this, you know.

I think about my spouse, Mr. Speaker, who in her former job was part of records management, you know. That also touched on privacy of information and everything like that. When I look at the ability for Albertans' private health information to not only necessarily be available to, maybe, individuals, do they really need that? It was alluded to by some of my colleagues here in the opposition that these records could now move out of the province and potentially even out of the country, which means that it's no longer within Alberta's jurisdiction to be able to do something about. When I shared some of this information, as you can imagine, she almost exploded. That was one of the craziest things she'd ever heard that a government would actually be willing to do.

Almost, in a way, on behalf of her as an Albertan, as one of my constituents: have you done any kind of a study? Have you consulted in such a fashion around the storage of this information that goes out of province or out of country? And, more importantly, who will have access to that information and where it's being stored? These are very key, fundamental things when you're talking about records management. So I will be, you know, very intently listening – and I realize the minister can't really pop up in 29(2)(a) to try to thoroughly answer that. I get that. I don't expect that. But I do expect it once we get to Committee of the Whole on this.

You know, I guess, there seems to be this whole assertion around: well, just trust the minister; it will be fine; you'll be all right. I can't help but think about Bill 10, which gave absolutely sweeping powers to ministers to be able — if in their opinion they thought it was in the best interest of Albertans, they could create legislation, they could amend legislation, they could delete legislation. I mean, it's no surprise that it was almost immediately challenged, and thankfully the government saw the light and said: "Yeah. Okay. Maybe that wasn't such a great idea, and we'll be repealing that." Now, I have to wonder why it can't be repealed in this session, that we have to wait until next year. If indeed you actually believe you're offside on it, it should be no problem. And I would bet you — I would of course never presuppose other members, even within

my own caucus — that we'd probably help to speed that through and repeal that section, because that's certainly something that Albertans are not looking for.

9:50

You know, we always hear about stories around privacy breaches, information getting out that shouldn't have gotten out, and unfortunately I only thought about it just a few moments ago, before I started speaking, Mr. Speaker. There was a company that just recently got in a lot of trouble because they were taking pictures at a kiosk, booth in a mall or something like that, and the whole defence essentially around it was: oh, we put up a sign; we put up a sign that people could see. But they didn't actually do their due diligence to check if that was enough, which of course, according to the story, it wasn't.

So here we are. You've now been informed that what you've done is not enough. Hopefully, maybe somebody will jump up almost immediately and say: "You know, maybe we should just send this to committee. That's probably a good idea. We should consult further; we should consult thoroughly." Let's answer some of these questions if this information is indeed going to be going out of province or out of country. Where is it going to be stored? How is it going to be stored? Who has access to the storage and who doesn't? How long will it be retained for, and at that certain point, if you're going to get rid of it, how will it be gotten rid of? Have these questions been answered? If they have, I would be very, very interested to see that information. I think Albertans would be very, very interested to see that information.

There's unfortunately just a little bit too much history here so far, which is why I absolutely have to disagree with what's being provided around this, among some other things, too. I do, of course, recall the minister in opening remarks. We're talking about how they can create — and I'm paraphrasing a little bit — I believe it was interprofessional efficiencies and allowing professions to be able to interact between themselves much better, which by the title sounds great. But here we are. We're saying one thing, yet just earlier we did something where we took away diagnostic imaging abilities from chiropractors and physiotherapists. That doesn't seem to promote interprofessional efficiencies, and I'm already getting reports from those colleges that patient care is suffering because of it.

These individuals, who spend a lot of time in school learning musculoskeletal information, now can't treat their patients because they can't get this diagnostic imaging done in a timely manner. I'm even hearing some reports now of patients going to them in pain, looking to get help, and it's two, maybe three weeks, unless of course you just want to pay for it out of your pocket. But I thought you were supposed to be on the side of Albertans and trying to help them, trying to create an efficient health system. That's not efficient. That's actually red tape. You've created an extra step now, so if somebody does need a diagnostic image, either they need to go to their doctor or they need to go somewhere else to pay for it themselves so that they can then bring it back and get treatment. That's an extra step. That's red tape, and I hope that maybe the associate minister will take a really hard look at that and correct that.

So I'm at a place, Mr. Speaker, based on what I know just simply on the privacy information, where I can't get by it.

**The Acting Speaker:** Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available. I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford has risen.

**Mr. Feehan:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am just having an opportunity to hear some very interesting points from the Member

for Edmonton-Decore, and I really appreciate some of the comments that you've been making about some particular things. I know that you have some insider knowledge, a little bit, on records and record keeping and some of the concerns about taking those records and making them available to people other than who should normally see these records and the fact that those records can go outside of the country, and are really questioning the issues of privacy, which, I know, of course, the Privacy Commissioner has also spoken to, so I'm very interested in those points.

Now, I'm also equally interested in some of your concerns about, actually, the effects on patient care with some of these centralizing decisions. I'd certainly love to hear a little bit more about your concerns about how the health care of individuals in this province will be affected by the decisions of this bill.

**The Acting Speaker:** The hon. member.

**Mr. Nielsen:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the Member for Edmonton-Rutherford for that question. You know, I guess I have to refer a little bit back to the Privacy Commissioner's letter. While many jurisdictions around the world are introducing new or enhanced privacy laws to build public trust and ensure that accountability mechanisms are in place to protect personal or health information, many of the proposed amendments are heading in the other direction.

When we talk about a person's health information, you don't want just anybody to have access to this. Certainly, as I was talking earlier about the storage of this information, that is absolutely critical because you don't necessarily – gosh, we've seen so many times in the news of somebody who's gained access to information when, really, they shouldn't have been able to. By enabling legislation and people getting access to it, sometimes they might not necessarily try to take it to do something – although that's usually what the case is – but do we now run the risk where somebody might be trying to alter one's health information?

So if you find yourself in a situation where you maybe don't at that moment have access to your regular doctor, who knows your case and doesn't really need to look at your file, but you find yourself with a health care professional that needs to look this up and then all of a sudden starts getting inaccurate information and now potentially starts providing inaccurate treatment: that negatively affects the health of Albertans. You know, next thing you know, a patient is in trouble and they're in the health care system for a lot longer. It starts costing us money because we decided that – I don't know – some kind of red tape or something that we want to reduce and make this information more available.

I think my colleague from Edmonton-West Henday was talking about how companies are looking at this information, quite honestly, to profile people. You know, that's not necessarily a very good thing. So I really, really hope that the government is going to rethink their position on this. Their number one expert, who they have access to freely – probably all they had to do was pick up the phone – is saying: "You need to backpedal on this. You need to stop. You need to rethink this." Albertans' health information should not be travelling out of province. It should not be travelling out of this country. Now, if we want to start looking at how to maybe work interprovincially here a little bit, I think that's a bigger conversation to have that, certainly, the Privacy Commissioner needs to be a part of, but that's another conversation for another time. Right now what we have here before us in Bill 46, one that I think has been rushed here a little bit, is not what to do.

10:00

**The Acting Speaker:** Thank you, hon. member.

I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford has risen to join debate on Bill 46.

**Mr. Feehan:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the opportunity to rise and address this bill, this very deeply problematic bill. I'm sort of in danger lately of becoming repetitive of myself because the issues related to this bill are similar to the issues related to other previous bills. While I do enjoy the opportunity to get up and roundly condemn this UCP government with every opportunity that they provide to me, it must be getting tedious for the people of the province of Alberta to just hear that which they already know, and that is that this government is extremely fond of severe overreach and disregard for rights of the citizens of this province.

You know, it's really unacceptable that here we are debating things of this nature when we should be focusing our attention on a very serious situation we are living in in this province with both COVID, which is, unfortunately, taking a devastating number of our citizens to their deaths, and of course, the difficulties around the economic downturn that has been extremely exacerbated by this government's failure to address things in any appropriate manner whatsoever. In fact, it would seem to be increased by this government's actions rather than decreased in terms of job losses, in terms of a decrease of manufacturing, in terms of a decrease of sales of goods and services in this province, a devastating government making the decision that it wants to poke its nose further into the lives of Albertans and devastate them more.

I just can't understand why they haven't learned the lesson from the many things they've done up till now. Previously I had the opportunity to talk about how they had poked their nose into various areas, like limiting the right for people to gather collectively to protest issues under Bill 1, how they've interfered with the rights of unions to engage in bargaining, how they've interfered with municipalities' decisions around their own elections and around their own taxation like linear assessment, how they've interfered with curriculum. Now here they are wanting to interfere with your personal health records.

For no apparently good reason this government has made the decision that they are going to give the Minister of Health the right to open up the file that says what you have been talking about privately between yourself and your doctor. That's what's happening here, and there's no reason for it. Why would a minister need to have that kind of power? There is no positive, good reason why a minister would want to look up to see what kinds of health issues I have, what kinds of procedures or practices I've undergone, what kinds of choices I've made around my own personal health and have discussed all of these in the privacy of the examination room between myself and my personal doctor. Yet this bill is allowing the minister to intrude on that place.

Now, up until this time we have put some protections in. We have made sure that the people that open up those files are people that need to see what's in there because they are contributing to the practices and procedures that will provide you with good health care. Now that assurance of your own privacy is being destroyed by this government with no clear explanation as to why they would choose to do that. I can only believe that their intent here is negative, that their intent is to do something horrendous to the people of this province because why would you want to seek a power that can only hurt people if you have nothing to contribute with the use of that power?

So I'm very concerned about this legislation. I think this government should be very ashamed to have brought this into the

House, particularly without consulting the very person who has been given the responsibility by the citizens of Alberta to protect their privacy. We know from the other members here in the House that the Privacy Commissioner in this province has said very clearly that she was not consulted on this bill and has asked that this bill be significantly altered or, better yet, be withdrawn. I think that is the only respectful thing for this government to do, and that is to withdraw this legislation, to admit the terribleness of their intent, and to go back to protecting the well-being of citizens in this province in the way they should.

I'm very concerned about them allowing the minister to have access to individual files for no apparent reason. I'm very concerned about them removing the role of the local custodians in maintaining the access logs. It used to be a neutral person, who had a responsibility for maintaining the logs, kept the log of who actually looked at the files, so someone who had the ability to make a good judgment as to whether or not it was reasonable that somebody accessed the files was in place to help protect your privacy, to ensure that when you sat down with your doctor and had that conversation about something that was intimate to you as a human being, only you and those people, your doctor and perhaps a few other medical personnel, would look at that information for your benefit. Now not only have they said that that person can be a nonmedical person, in fact a minister of the government of the day, but the record of who is actually accessing that file has been removed from the local custodians and placed in the hands of the government. So not only are they the peepers, but they are the keepers of the record of who is doing the peeping.

That is completely ridiculous. How can you possibly give the overview, the supervision of the behaviour to the very person who is engaged in the behaviour you are trying to supervise? That doesn't make sense on any level. Nowhere in our system would we allow that to happen, and I can't imagine what is going on in the minds of this UCP government that they would want to intrude in my personal records.

I'm also very concerned that they have made changes to the multidisciplinary stewardship committees. They have removed the public members from that committee here in this bill. We have a situation where a couple of people who are just Albertans, who could bring the everyday common-sense approach to what's happening in our health records, who were on this committee so that they could be there to say, "Look, as somebody who has no vested interests beyond being a citizen of the province of Alberta and wishing the best for all of my co-citizens," are no longer there to bring that kind of intelligent second thought to the questions that are being asked at that committee.

So we have this government intruding deeply – deeply – into the lives of everyday Albertans. I can't imagine anybody who believes in the freedoms that were brought to us by the Constitution in Canada, by the implementation of the Alberta Human Rights Commission and individual freedoms would stand here and listen to this without being terribly aghast. I mean, it was a Conservative government that brought in the Alberta individual rights protection act. Now we have a Conservative government that is making one of the worst intrusions into your individual rights in the history of this province. I think the people of Alberta need to be very concerned about that because you know there is no legitimate policy reason why the minister should be doing this, why citizens should not be on the committee to supervise this, why the record of the logs should not be maintained by someone who is neutral.

**10:10**

All of these things are of deep concern, and this government has made the decision to move ahead to intrude yet again on Albertans.

They absolutely firmly believe they are the only ones who should make decisions for people in this society, and they are intruding on municipalities, they are intruding on unions, they are intruding on public associations like health care, nursing unions, and so on. They keep doing it time and time again, and it's really completely unacceptable. I absolutely am strongly recommending to this government that they take a step back from this kind of assault on human integrity and civil liberties in this province. It's time that they listen to their Privacy Commissioner. Withdraw this bill. Stop it now before you actually commit this horrendous act. Review the information, sit down with the Privacy Commissioner, find a reasonable place to land, and bring it back into the House so that we can have a reasonable discussion.

I'm very concerned that they have also introduced sections into this bill that allow those records not only to be viewed by the minister but also to be sent to other people who have a financial interest in providing you health resources, to organizations and business that are even outside not only of Alberta but outside of Canada, that will now suddenly have the ability to have access to your personal health records. Now, what could be the purpose for this?

Again, I'm back to their intent and back to the fact that I think this is all nefarious. There is no good reason for this, and in this case it seems that what it is that the government is trying to do is trying to, in baby steps, move toward the privatization of your health care and move toward the corporate decision-making around the decisions that should be made between you and your doctor. The things that happen in the privacy of an examination room are now going to be subject to international foreign interests who have access to your health records through this bill, moving that first step in that direction, the small edge of the wedge that is moving us toward private health care and toward having American corporations and other corporations involved in your decision-making, in your health and your well-being. This is completely unacceptable. It's unacceptable to me and should be unacceptable to all Albertans.

I am also very concerned that they are moving ahead on separating regulatory bodies into two separate divisions, one that is the regulatory function and one that is the advocacy function. The only purpose for choosing to do this is that they are unhappy with the fact that people who have your best interests at heart such as the nurses are actually making public statements about policy and are coming forward and saying: we think that the choices that are being made by this government are not good for you. They don't want to hear that voice anymore, so they're going to separate it out into two separate units so they can suppress the advocacy, so that they can tell the nurses: you can control the behaviours of your members for ethics and so on, but you cannot actually advocate for the well-being of the citizens of this province as an institution, as an organization. I know that some organizations will be quite devastated by this. It will really change how it is that they function and perhaps even reduce their numbers.

At one time I was a member of the Alberta College of Social Workers, and they have both of those functions together in the same unit. They have both the regulation of its members and the advocacy together because under the code of ethics of social work advocating for the well-being of your clients is paramount to your practice; that is, good practice and good ethics go together. Good practice and good social policy go together. They are not separable. You cannot have good practice if you are undermining the well-being of citizens through structural problems, through problems that don't recognize the issues that the citizens face.

And of course advocacy must be tied in to good practice. If you are a family therapist, you not only want to work with a family to

help that family get better, but you want to make sure that the policies in society are not damaging that family, are not making it harder for that family to be well. Those two are intimately tied together, and they're tied together in our code of ethics. They actually say that together, that your advocacy is part of the work.

**The Acting Speaker:** Thank you, hon. member.

Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available, and I did see that the hon. Minister of Justice has risen on this.

**Mr. Madu:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. You know, I have sat down here and listened to the comments by members opposite with respect to Bill 46, the Health Statutes Amendment Act, 2020 (No. 2). A careful review of all that they've said tonight focused on one thing – there are nearly four or five pieces of legislation that are being amended by Bill 46 – which is the comment by the Privacy Commissioner that her office was not consulted. That really sums up the totality of what we've heard, I mean, the entire night. You know, I have no doubt in my mind that the folks at the Minister of Health's office will be following up with the folks at the Privacy Commissioner's office to sort out where this is coming from. But I am confident that ultimately the bill before this particular House is one that has not given the Minister of Health any powers to access any Albertan's personal information.

This bill, the amendment we are talking about, is one that will ensure that for health professionals, health bodies, and Albertans who are seeking medical assistance from broader communities, their health information is able to be used in a way that ensures that they are taken care of. That really is the crux of all of the noise that you've heard from the members opposite tonight.

But, Mr. Speaker, these are the members opposite who in 2016 had the Privacy Commissioner come hard on them for, you know, the various tactics that they employed to frustrate the work of that particular office. I've always said that we will always hold the members opposite to account, and we will never allow them to get away with wanting to choose what is convenient for them while ignoring the actual substance of the bills before them.

You know, Mr. Speaker, in 2016 the Privacy Commissioner wrote: the access to information in Alberta is fast approaching a crisis situation, warns Information and Privacy Commissioner Jill Clayton in her annual report released Tuesday of that particular year. That was in 2016 under the NDP, under the same NDP that have looked at Bill 46, that is amending five pieces of legislation, and are focused on just one aspect of the Health Information Act amendment. Of all of the amendments that were considered in that particular bill, that is the one that has preoccupied them tonight.

I am confident, Mr. Speaker, that this government and the Minister of Health and folks in his office will be following up with the Privacy Commissioner to understand where this concern is coming from.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I move that we adjourn debate on Bill 46.

**The Acting Speaker:** I am going to just put it out there that a substantive motion like that cannot be raised in 29(2)(a), so I will look to see if there are any other members looking to join debate.

**Mr. Madu:** Sorry.

**The Acting Speaker:** That's okay.

10:20

**Mr. Schow:** Good evening, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to be here this evening with you and all of the members in this Chamber. I think we've had some great conversation on Bill 46, the Health Statutes Amendment Act, 2020 (No. 2). I'm grateful to our hon.

Health minister for bringing this bill forward and for the tireless work that he does in defence of our province in ensuring that we have safe, high-quality, and affordable health care.

But with those things in mind and having those things being said already by other members in the Chamber, I will simply conclude my remarks by saying that I move to adjourn debate on Bill 46.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

## Bill 47

### Ensuring Safety and Cutting Red Tape Act, 2020

**The Acting Speaker:** I see the hon. Minister of Labour and Immigration has risen.

**Mr. Copping:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is a pleasure to rise to move second reading of Bill 47, the Ensuring Safety and Cutting Red Tape Act, 2020.

Mr. Speaker, our government was elected to bring balance back to Alberta's labour laws. We have taken numerous steps to deliver on that promise. Last year we introduced Bill 2, An Act to Make Alberta Open for Business. That was a key piece of our commitment to restore prosperity, get people back to work, and attract investment. This summer I was also pleased to introduce Bill 32, an act to restore balance in Alberta workplaces. This bill provided support to job creators and the province's economic recovery by restoring balance to labour laws and saving job creators time and money in order to help them keep businesses open and Albertans employed.

I know the last eight months have been difficult and stressful. The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and the plunge in global oil prices have caused a financial crisis like no other in Alberta's history. That is why our government launched Alberta's recovery plan. Even before the pandemic hit, our government promised to restore balance and get job creators to invest in Alberta, and we committed to cutting red tape by one-third to reduce costs and help job creators get Albertans back to work. Now more than ever, health and safety in our workplaces and getting Albertans back to work are critical as we continue to navigate this COVID-19 pandemic and the economic recession.

Mr. Speaker, we remain committed to protecting lives and livelihoods, and Alberta's government is working hard to bring balance, fairness, and common sense to our labour laws. We need to have laws that benefit both job creators and workers to ensure that our workplaces are safe, fair, and healthy. That is why I stand today to highlight Bill 47, the Ensuring Safety and Cutting Red Tape Act, 2020. This bill is all about restoring balance to Alberta's labour laws, improving health and safety, and getting Albertans back to work. It also delivers on our platform commitment to provide additional benefits for fallen first responders and their families.

Mr. Speaker, through this bill our government is updating labour legislation to make workplace safety laws easier to understand and to create a more sustainable workers' compensation system to support Albertans now and into the future. Changes to occupational health and safety laws focus on improving health and safety outcomes while reducing red tape. One of our approaches is reducing the prescriptiveness of the law and moving it to where it belongs, into the code. Workers will continue to have the same rights and protections, including the right to participate in health and safety committees. This framework remains in the act. The new rules will be more flexible so that job creators and workers can focus on identifying and addressing risks in the workplace as opposed to filling out forms.

Radiation protection laws will be incorporated into the OHS Act to provide clarity for job creators and employees.

Mr. Speaker, changes to the Workers' Compensation Act will ensure the system is sustainable, affordable, and fair. The proposed amendments will help Alberta's job creators to be competitive and support the province's economic recovery by improving processes and reducing red tape. These changes will ensure that job creators can continue to provide jobs for hard-working Albertans. Workers deserve a compensation system that treats them fairly and supports their recovery and return to work should they get ill or injured on the job, and job creators need a sustainable workers' compensation system with affordable premiums so they can stay viable and keep providing good-paying jobs to Albertans.

This balanced approach enables job creators to find and develop a skilled workforce while protecting the health and safety and rights of working Albertans. Mr. Speaker, through this bill our government will help job creators be more competitive and support our economic recovery. We are also following up on our platform and our commitment with the creation of the heroes fund.

Now, Mr. Speaker, I'd like to highlight a few of the changes that we are making to occupational health and safety. The previous government made extensive changes to occupational health and safety laws in 2018. Over this past summer our government engaged with workers, job creators, and health and safety professionals to get their ideas for improvements. We heard from Albertans that the changes that were brought in by the previous government are frustrating, with overly prescriptive rules that create unnecessary red tape.

Occupational health and safety laws should be easy to understand and follow to ensure workers and employers can work together in keeping workplaces safe and healthy. At the end of the day everyone at a workplace has a role to play to ensure that we can all go home to our loved ones. Through this legislation workers will continue to have the same rights and protections while job creators will face less red tape. If you look over the past number of decades, there has generally been a steady decline in lost-time injury rates. But in the last five years, Mr. Speaker, the improvement has stopped despite changes made by the previous government, so we are making changes to ensure that health and safety professionals can focus on outcomes rather than process and checking boxes.

No two workplaces are the same, so we simply cannot prescribe a blanket health and safety law with the expectation that everything will be covered adequately. We will empower workers, professionals to identify the risks specific to their workplace and determine the best way to ensure everyone is working in a safe and healthy manner. Mr. Speaker, Bill 47 will remove the requirement for a health and safety committee of representatives on work sites with multiple employers and a prime contractor. Now, the previous government had made changes that made work-specific committees or representatives mandatory on multi-employer work sites depending on the number of workers. This includes work sites with a prime contractor.

Now, Mr. Speaker, these current rules simply do not make sense and are impractical for sites with a prime contractor. Frequently individual workers are on these sites for a very short period of time, so they cannot realistically participate in the committee or be the representative. An example is a residential construction site where the work would last a month or six weeks. The company and its workers installing the windows would only be on site for a few days or maybe a week out of those four to six weeks. They obviously can't participate in the committee, so there's no need to prescribe the rule for this situation. If Bill 47 passes, the prime contractor on these types of sites would be required to establish a position to co-ordinate health and safety issues between workers and employers

and different contractors that come onto the site, and this position would be in place for the entire job as opposed to rotating, which many of the worker representatives do now and this actually creates a risk in safety.

Mr. Speaker, even under this system workers would still have access to their employers' health and safety committees or representatives, and an OHS director will still have the ability to require a committee or a representative for any work site if needed. These proposed changes will eliminate an impractical rule while still maintaining a mechanism for health and safety on a multiple employer site with a prime contractor, and workers will retain their right to participate in health and safety.

Bill 47 will also simplify how the number of workers is calculated for deciding when an employer requires a committee or a representative. Mr. Speaker, Alberta's job creators told us that the current calculation method is overcomplicated and confusing. The current rules count volunteers and require a health and safety committee if there are more than 20. We heard from a number of organizations, including not-for-profit organizations, that said that the rules regarding election and training of committee members was extremely difficult because of the high turnover of volunteers, and that is just the nature of those organizations. This highlights the need for a different model.

The new calculation will be based on the number of workers regularly employed, which will exclude volunteers. This new method more accurately reflects worker numbers in normal conditions, and it also provides more flexibility so that workplaces can adjust their committees or representatives to respond to changing conditions such as staffing reductions. The requirement for a committee if you have more than 20 workers or for representative between five and 19 workers will still remain the same. The framework remains in the act.

Now, Mr. Speaker, when it comes to potentially serious incident reporting, employers told us that current requirements the opposition brought in are confusing, create unnecessary administrative burdens, and do not help improve workplace health and safety outcomes. We heard that employers were reticent when it came to reporting investigations because they worried that they would be penalized for a near miss, even though we all know that by investigating and reporting potential incidents, it could help identify areas of improvement and then improve outcomes. We are fixing that problem by making it clear that information from potentially serious incident reports will not be used for enforcement purposes. We are also streamlining the process, and the new rules will align Alberta with B.C., Ontario, and Saskatchewan and will encourage more reporting and make our workplaces healthier and safer.

**10:30**

Mr. Speaker, through this bill we are also streamlining the process for dangerous-work refusals to help ensure that these serious health and safety concerns are solved more quickly. The proposed changes will maintain the substantive nature of the right. For example, on the right to refuse unsafe work, this legislation will provide some clarifications. The right to refuse remains a critical component and a critical framework for health and safety in the act. What we're doing here is streamlining the process. Workers will still have the right to refuse dangerous work without reprisals. They will have the same rights and protections related to dangerous-work refusals as they had before. This will make our rules here in Alberta similar to other jurisdictions.

Now, as I've mentioned, Bill 47 is about balancing labour laws and making them easier to understand, which is why we will incorporate the Radiation Protection Act and its regulations into the

Occupational Health and Safety Act and its regulations. This means that workplace health and safety laws will be in one place, which will make things clearer and easier for workers and job creators. It will also help reduce the confusion of having conflicting rules. Now, these changes will mainly be administrative ones such as reducing redundancies and aligning the wording. With these updated laws, we could help ensure that Albertans can come home safely from work each and every day.

Now, Mr. Speaker, another key part of this bill addresses the workers' compensation system. Our government knows that the system must be affordable, sustainable, and efficient so it's available to workers if they get ill or injured on the job, and Bill 47 will do just that. The bill will ensure that workers can stay employed and access financial support when they need it. We are restoring balance and fairness to the workers' compensation system to meet the needs of workers and job creators now and into the future.

Now, the previous government's 2018 changes added unsustainable costs to the system at a time when Alberta's economy had been struggling. Job creators have told us that some of these 2018 changes have led to rising costs, additional red tape, and have put the system's future sustainability in doubt. Mr. Speaker, we are listening to Albertans and addressing areas job creators have identified as driving up system costs and affecting the system's future sustainability. By making changes, we can ensure that key benefit programs and services will continue into the future while keeping premiums affordable for employers in order to help them employ more Albertans.

One example of these changes will be reinstating the maximal insurable earnings cap to ensure that workers continue to receive reasonable compensation while keeping costs in line. Mr. Speaker, approximately 90 per cent of injured workers will not be affected by these changes and will continue to receive wage-loss benefits at the current levels. We are simply proposing to reinstate the cap as it aligns with the recommendation the WCB panel made in 2017 to the previous government but the previous government did not follow. We have listened. We will follow those recommendations. We will reinstate the cap. This aligns Alberta with the vast majority of the other provinces in Canada.

Another proposed change we are making to the Workers' Compensation Act is having fairness reviews, appeal advisory services, and medical panel services delivered by other existing organizations to reduce duplication and reduce costs. We are making changes to ensure that key programs and services can continue in the future while keeping premiums affordable for our job creators and Albertans employed. Now, injured workers will still have access to fairness reviews, medical panels, and appeal advisory services. The employer and workers' appeal advocacy services will continue under the independent Appeals Commission. WCB will deliver the fairness review services.

Now, these changes will ensure consistency, cut red tape, and put Alberta in line with other provinces. No other provinces currently have three separate independent offices to deliver all of these services. They do it with one, and so can we. These changes will result in savings of roughly \$2.5 million and will reduce the costs for employers so again we can help reduce the costs of employing Albertans and get Albertans back to work. A fair and balanced workers' compensation system will continue to provide for ill and injured workers, ensure that workplaces remain viable, and support Alberta's recovery plan.

Mr. Speaker, the final change to the Workers' Compensation Act I would like to highlight deals with presumptive coverage for psychological injuries. Now, the 2018 changes extending presumptive coverage for psychological injuries to all workers have resulted in unsustainable costs. The previous government added not

only first responders, including peace officers and correctional officers, in the legislation, but they added everybody where there was a traumatic workplace incident. Now, the presumption means that if there was a traumatic incident in the workplace and you have a diagnosed psychological injury, the presumption would be that the injury or illness was caused by that incident and then, as a result, covered by WCB. We've heard concerns from job creators that in some cases psychological injury had nothing to do with work, but due to the presumption it was still covered. This has put significant cost pressures on the system.

To address this, we are going back to a similar format to what it was prior to the 2018 changes. Mr. Speaker, under this bill presumptive coverage will be maintained for first responders, including correctional officers and emergency dispatchers, because research has shown that these workers are more likely to experience trauma at work and develop psychological illness or injury as a result. But let me be clear, Mr. Speaker. Workers' compensation benefits and supports will continue to be accessible for all workers who suffer job-related psychological injuries, meaning that employees will still have access to compensation for work-related psychological injuries through the normal claim process. All we're removing is the presumption.

The WCB will continue to help all workers diagnosed with a work-related psychological injury to get the treatment and supports that they need. To be clear, this means that these cases will be evaluated. If there's a psychological injury and there was a workplace traumatic event or events that caused the injury or an illness, Mr. Speaker, it will be covered. If the psychological injury was not related to a work-related incident, then the treatment will still happen, but it will happen outside the workers' compensation system, through regular health care and supports. This change ensures the sustainability of the WCB system for the long term, and it will continue to protect Albertans.

Finally, Mr. Speaker, I would like to highlight one piece of this bill that our government is most proud of. Under this bill our government will follow through on our platform commitment to create the Alberta heroes fund for first responders. There is no higher form of public service than to risk one's life to maintain public safety, and first responders take tremendous risks every day to help keep Albertans safe. The heroes fund will provide a one-time tax-free payment of \$100,000 to families of first responders who die as a result of performing their duties.

While I wish a fund like this wasn't necessary and that all first responders could come home safely from their shifts, we are creating this fund to help ease the financial burden on the families of those who paid the ultimate price in protecting us. Families of firefighters, police officers, paramedics, sheriffs, and provincial correctional officers will be eligible. The Workers' Compensation Board will administer the heroes fund and will select recipients based on its fatality claim process, so families do not have to apply to the heroes fund. The heroes fund will begin once Bill 47 receives royal assent and will be retroactive to April 1 of this year.

In conclusion, Mr. Speaker, I want to thank you for the opportunity to move second reading of Bill 47. By streamlining our health and safety laws and ensuring a sustainable, affordable, and efficient workers' compensation system, we'll help Alberta's economic recovery and ensure that Albertans have safe and healthy workplaces. At the end of the day, it is our goal to ensure that every person can make it home safely to their loved ones, and in the unfortunate event that one of our first responders and their families need a little more support, we will respect, honour, and support them. We have their backs, and we will continue to support all Albertans as we move towards economic recovery.

Thank you.



**The Acting Speaker:** Thank you, hon. member.

The hon. minister has moved second reading. Are there any members wishing to join debate? I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods has risen.

**Ms Gray:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have risen to respond to second reading of Bill 47, and I have strong issues with nearly everything that the minister has said about this piece of legislation. There is nothing about this bill that will help workers return safely at the end of the day. This bill is about undermining and rolling back health and safety in the workplaces and then, if someone is injured or killed, reducing the benefits and the compensation and the supports that those workers deserve. This bill is going to hurt workers and is going to cause serious concern.

Now, how did we get here? The minister opened with his remarks about how proud he is of previous legislation. Just as a very quick reminder, Bill 2 removed your holiday pay for many workers, removed banked overtime, and made it harder for Albertans to exercise their right to collectively bargain. Bill 32 brought in wonderful averaging arrangements across a year, so that reduced overtime, instead of getting time and a half, getting straight time. Well, now you won't get overtime at all given those averaging arrangements changed final pay and introduced a number of things to take advantage of vulnerable workers. I would like to highlight that Bill 32 gave the government power to exempt themselves from key pieces of employment standards, and those exemptions I will reference later in this address because we see that same kind of blowing holes for entire sectors and for employer groups in this Bill 47 that we saw and raised objection to in Bill 32.

**10:40**

Now, that's the history of some of the labour legislation we've seen in this House. I would very, very much like to remind the minister, this government of something that they seem to have missed, that we are in the middle of a global health pandemic. We are now eight months into something that is extremely exhausting, draining, causing irreparable financial harm to many, causing emotional stress, loss of life. The number of Albertans who've died during this pandemic rises every day, 20 alone just yesterday.

This government put out a couple of surveys in the middle of the summer in a global health pandemic to try and engage with Albertans about changes to their fundamental health and safety and workers' compensation systems and calls that consultation. I am shocked, I am outraged, and I'm heartbroken by what Bill 47 is doing to health and safety and workers' compensation and the impact it will have on Alberta families and that this government considered putting out a survey in the middle of a pandemic consultation.

I would like to specifically say to the minister: you didn't even tweet about it. How can you be proud of any consultation when you didn't tell Albertans you were going to do it? How hard is it to talk . . . [interjection] Through the chair. How hard is it to share on social media that the minister of labour is engaging in a consultation that is only four weeks long, that is only a survey about some of the most fundamental legislation that impacts every worker, that literally saves lives and helps people keep their homes when they are injured?

This is a government that was listening to only one side of the equation. Now, we've seen the what-we-heard document from one piece of this but not the other, so we will continue to watch for more information about what that consultation returned. But what we did see from the side that we received notes from: 18 per cent of the responses had to do with workers; more than 60 per cent of the responses were employers, employer groups, agencies advocating

on behalf of their members to reduce red tape, as this government has called it, to weaken safety standards, to make it easier to operate day to day without any of those pesky health and safety committees, that are key and foundational for helping to keep work sites safe.

I will at this point start talking about some of the specific issues that I am incredibly concerned about in this bill and that I look forward to having more opportunities to discuss because I don't think 20 minutes is going to be sufficient to do any of these justice. At second reading I will keep my remarks fairly high level and try to introduce into the record and into this debate some of the many, many concerns that I have, because right now Bill 47 does not help keep workers safe. I challenge the minister to point to any individual item in this bill that improves health and safety for workers or improves something for workers, because it's not there.

It's greatly, greatly concerning to see this happening because in some cases – keep in mind that the changes to occupational health and safety, the changes to WCB: those systems had been neglected in many, many ways by previous Conservative governments. The major review done to the WCB in 2018, led by a panel of three experts, that involved over a year of consultation, that involved workshops and many, many, many different styles of engaging Albertans and came up with a fulsome report, was the first in-depth review of the workers' compensation system in 30 years. In this legislation we actually see them extending how often they need to update these laws. Instead of doing it every five years, they've moved it to every 10 because it just seemed too onerous to update this legislation on a regular basis. But that consultation gave me the opportunity to talk to a number of stakeholders, both employers and workers. What I heard clearly was that employers and workers value the systems that keep workers safe and make sure that they're fairly compensated. The WCB is a system that both workers and employers value and need to work well. That means that when a worker is injured, getting that fair compensation is a key part of that. In this bill we see a number of changes that will reduce that.

Let me start on the occupational health and safety side. The minister has introduced some ridiculous red tape when he's been looking at the changes that damage a worker's right to refuse. A right to refuse is incredibly important, and, Mr. Speaker, right at the outset of this I would really like to share that I believe last year there were seven right-to-refuse formal requests made through the occupational health and safety system. We're talking about a right that is incredibly important but not used very often. There were over 100 workers who died last year in work-related incidents. If more of those workers had used their right to refuse, could lives have been saved? That is what it is there for. It is a fundamental part of our system. Right now the right to refuse is being watered down and made harder to exercise through changing definitions and through changing the process.

Just as a quick example on how this is introducing barriers and red tape, I will just say that if today a worker were to refuse unsafe work, their employer could approach a colleague to do that same job but needs to tell that colleague: your co-worker refused this job for these reasons. There are many scenarios where a differently trained worker in a different scenario may still take on that task. Under the changes in the right to refuse there now needs to be a report written by the employer – and the employer would be the only one to make a determination in that system – a formal complaint to the OHS officer, and a scenario that a second worker can be brought in to do that job without ever being told that there was a safety concern there. It's bogging down the process and actually making it harder for workers to try and exercise that incredibly important right, to refuse dangerous work. I will happily get into more detail about the changes in definitions and how that weakens that right to refuse.

Another piece of the right to refuse that's been weakened. Right now in the legislation it's very clear that if someone exercises their right to refuse, they will not be docked pay. That has been eliminated from this bill. Now, when someone is trying to decide if they're going to refuse something that's unsafe, they have to do the calculation on if this impacts my paycheque for the week. That does not help improve health and safety. Making sure that those workers are not punished for using their right to refuse, making sure that they don't lose wages for using their right to refuse is incredibly important. A similar change in the legislation, Bill 47, will now not guarantee that employees will get paid when their employer, potentially running an unsafe work site, is issued a stop-use or stop-work order. Workers, through no fault of their own, may no longer get paycheques because the employer has allowed dangerous or unsafe conditions to proceed.

This bill also changes a piece called discriminatory action complaints and has changed them to be disciplinary action complaints. Essentially, what this bill is talking about: if a worker refuses dangerous work or otherwise makes trouble for the employer, it used to be that the employer could not then turn around and stop scheduling that person. It used to be that the employer could not turn around and start harassing them through various means.

10:50

Now the government has said that this was duplicative, because those workers can go to the human rights board. The human rights complaint process is upwards of two years. Essentially, by changing the definition and limiting discriminatory action complaints, this bill gives employers carte blanche to start messing around with those problem employees and points them to the Human Rights Commission when that starts to happen. This is not an avenue that is going to help worker health and safety.

Joint work site health and safety programs are foundational for keeping work sites and workers protected, healthy, and safe. They do that through the worker's right to participate, the right to participate in their own health and safety. Bill 47, through a number of measures, weakens joint work site health and safety committees. Major construction sites will no longer be required to have them. Complicated sites that can be filled with dangers no longer need to have those committees.

The requirements for how those committees run, who gets to be put on them: all of that has been removed. Instead, now the employers will have more control. This government paints it as flexibility, but what they're doing is gutting those health and safety committees. Instead of workers being trained on how to be a good chair or co-chair of a joint work site health and safety committee, making sure that they have dedicated time to operate, that they are doing regular inspections of the work site, that they are involved when there are incidents – all of that has been taken out.

Now, I know that this government has never respected joint work site health and safety committees. They've removed the need for joint work site health and safety committees at different work sites. A good example – they made this change earlier in their term, Mr. Speaker – they specifically used schools as the example for why they were removing those requirements: because, gosh darn it, every school is the same; there shouldn't be a need for there to be a committee at each school. Now that we're dealing with COVID-19, the idea that there would be a worker at each school, a committee where workers are trained on health and safety and how to protect people, would have been an asset during this pandemic. Instead, this government removed that ability.

They're removing health and safety committee and representative requirements on certain work sites, particularly those

complicated oil and gas and construction work sites. They've made another change in how people are responsible for themselves and others on work sites by changing the definition of self-employed individuals and moving them into an employer category. Now, this is a big problem because a lot of these self-employed people are contractors coming to complicated work sites. Now they have the rights and responsibilities of being an employer, which means they need to fulfill, as a self-employed person, all of the requirements within the Occupational Health and Safety Act, and they are given the responsibility to control for situations that they probably do not have control of. I would love to hear more from the minister about why that change was made to self-employed individuals.

I've touched on a few of the pieces in occupational health and safety, and I think I will at this point switch to the Workers' Compensation Act, just to touch on, again, some of the things on that other flip side of Bill 47. The workers' compensation system is incredibly important to ensure that workers are given that fair rehabilitation after an injury, that they get that help that they need when something has happened on the work site, and making sure that they are able to focus on recovery and supports.

This bill has done super fun things like eliminate the employer's requirement to pay for health benefits, so your health benefits will actually get cut off when you start getting treatment and help from the WCB. Now, your health benefits, as many of us know, often don't just cover the worker. That means that that entire family may have lost their health benefits because of changes in Bill 47. Those health benefits are part of a worker's recovery, making sure that they still have access to the care that they need, and this is an egregious change that is done purely to save employers money but will hurt the recovery of workers.

The government has reduced the time limit for appeals, and it's my understanding that the Appeals Commission has not been unduly overwhelmed since the changes went in place in 2018. Now workers will have less time – instead of two years, it's one year – to appeal any decisions. They are removing the obligation to reinstate workers.

Mr. Speaker, we know that there have been countless situations in Alberta where a worker who has made a WCB claim has then been punished for making that claim by losing their job. That was why making sure that a legal obligation to reinstate workers was so important in the changes to the Workers' Compensation Board. Having a culture where WCB claims are feared and suppressed is disastrous to health and safety and disastrous to the long-term health and well-being of Alberta's workers. The system is set up to provide that fair compensation.

Now a worker might go on a WCB claim, and as soon as they are reinstated and rehired, they're turfed out the door as a lesson to others. "Oh, but if it was unjust, well, they can go to that Human Rights Commission again." Remember that two-year wait? It's ridiculous. It's hurtful, and when the workers' compensation system does not work for an injured worker, it ruins lives. People lose their homes. People lose their families. It is so destructive. We have all heard stories of the workers' compensation system not fully serving an injured worker. Particularly during our 2018 review we worked very, very hard to try and find and address those gaps where that happened.

Let me be clear to you, Mr. Speaker. The workers' compensation system often works well and smoothly, but not all the time. That's one of the reasons why creating the Fair Practices office for both the support of workers and employers was an important recommendation that came out of that 2018 panel recommendation.

Now, the minister shouted that the panel recommended X for one piece that the government of the day, that we were a part of, differed on and gave more than what was recommended by the panel, but he

doesn't talk about the fact that almost everything he's doing in this bill goes counter to those recommendations. As we get into the debate of this bill, I look forward to talking item by item about each of those recommendations made by this panel that this legislation is now going against. The minister can't tout one item, one recommendation from that year-long process as, "We are listening to that" and ignore the rest of it. It's ridiculous. It's a fig leaf.

The government hates increasing anything for anyone, so just like our AISH recipients, just like a number of other cases, they're removing cost-of-living adjustments. We don't want, you know, people to get that little bit more as life gets more expensive. They're limiting those psychological injury presumptions. The minister did spend a good deal of time talking about this, but it is heartless to not acknowledge that by removing those presumptions, a clear distinction between different types of workers is being created.

When a police officer and a social worker go to a difficult call and a traumatic event occurs, only one of those two people will now have that presumptive coverage. Now, the minister says that the other person will for sure get covered, except we know that people often have to fight for coverage. Now the tools and the systems for them to fight for coverage are also being weakened.

I will have much more to say about this. Thank you.

**The Acting Speaker:** Thank you, hon. member.

I see the hon. Member for Livingstone-Macleod has risen.

**Mr. Reid:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my privilege to stand in this House this evening and to be able to speak in favour of Bill 47, Ensuring Safety and Cutting Red Tape Act, 2020, and establishing a heroes fund. Through you to the minister of labour, I want to say thank you to him and his team for their hard work and comprehensive work on this important bill.

I want to start off by saying that the protection of rights of workers in Alberta is integral for this government. Albertans deserve to work in a safe environment and should be compensated for injuries that happen on the job. My own riding of Livingstone-Macleod is full of hard-working Albertans who are protected by these very regulations. From the oil and gas technician near Granum to the ranch hand taking care of cattle near Fort Macleod and even the meat-packing worker near High River, the residents of Livingstone-Macleod work hard. They work demanding jobs, and injuries can happen in occupations that are hard work. Unfortunately, the fact is that injuries can happen in any line of work. Injuries can happen at the Claresholm general hospital, could happen at a small business in Pincher Creek or at the grocery store in Nanton.

**11:00**

I want my constituents to know that they are protected and that the government is looking out for them. Worker protection should be comprehensive. Worker protection should also be balanced and easy to understand so that job creators can provide these protections while efficiently running their businesses. Unfortunately, the reality is that changes made under the last government did not take any of this into consideration.

We are all aware of the issues created by the previous government's farm legislation act in regard to the WCB and safety rules. The previous legislation put additional costs and extra pressure on farms and ranches, especially if they already had private worker insurance or if they only employed a handful of workers. I was happy to see that under the direction of the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry our government changed these job-killing and harmful, inefficient regulations with the Farm Freedom and Safety Act. But there was much more work that needed to be done

to ensure a balanced and responsible approach to occupational health and safety and to workers' compensation within our province, and this approach must have safety as top of mind.

I am pleased to see that the legislation that the minister and his team have worked so hard on now fixes these problems. Bill 47 places more emphasis on personal responsibility of employers and the personal responsibility of employees. It emphasizes the concept of managing risk through streamlining processes. This bill achieves this objective by eliminating repetition and duplication within the legislation and by moving certain requirements into regulation, where they are much better suited.

Workers and job creators deserve to have rules in place that are easy to understand. Many workers don't have the luxury that we here in the government have of being able to comb through extensively worded legislation for hours on end. Workers and job creators simply don't have time for that. By simplifying and taking out redundant and duplicate language – you see what I did there; redundant and duplicate language – we can make the legislation more tangible and direct. This allows job creators to know exactly what is required of them without having to spend a lot of time and money deciphering redundancies. It also allows workers to have a greater understanding of their rights and their responsibilities that they have as they navigate the workplace, especially during a pandemic.

Another change within this bill is the revision of radiation safety laws, which we have not seen done in 35 years. The current language of the law is confusing because the terms used are not as relative or useful anymore. Bill 47 will bring radiation rules into occupational health and safety, will ensure that all health and safety laws are in one place.

Once again, Mr. Speaker, for the last few years employers throughout Livingstone-Macleod and all of Alberta have expressed their worries over the rising cost of the WCB and the future stability of our workers' compensation system. Changes made in Bill 47 will reduce costs, increase efficiency, and bring us more in line with other provinces in Canada. By reversing the changes made in 2018, we will ensure that our workers' compensation system is sustainable for years to come.

I'm glad to see that this bill will check off a few more of our 2019 election promises. One of the most important ones is the establishment of the Alberta heroes' fund. Our first responders put their lives on the line every day to keep our communities safe and secure, and as a member of this caucus I'm privileged to serve with several of my colleagues that served on the front lines to serve our communities. Their families often wonder and hope that they will come home safe at the end of a day at work. The reality is that sometimes this just does not happen. The Alberta heroes' fund will provide a one-time tax-free payment of \$100,000 to the family of a firefighter, police officer, or paramedic that dies while performing their duty. This fund will allow the grieving family to worry about one less thing while they mourn the loss of an Alberta hero. Once this bill passes, the Alberta heroes' fund will be the only program of its kind and will be funded for a full three years.

Mr. Speaker, I once again would like to thank, through you, the minister for all of the hard work he has put into this bill, and I ask all of my colleagues to join in supporting this bill, Bill 47.

Thank you.

**The Acting Speaker:** Thank you, hon. member.

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

Seeing none, are there any members looking to join debate? I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview has risen. [interjections]

**Mr. Bilous:** I appreciate the opportunity to speak despite the fact that members from the other side are calling for the question, trying to curb my democratic right to speak on behalf of my constituents and then laughing about it. [interjections] Pardon me? Say that on the record.

Bill 47, Ensuring Safety and Cutting Red Tape Act, 2020: it actually should be titled Ensuring Safety and Cutting Worker Protections. Now, I do have a great deal of respect for this minister, but from what he has said regarding this bill, he's either wilfully ignorant, doesn't actually know what's in the bill, or is trying to pull the wool over workers' eyes in this province. If members go and do their homework, Alberta was a laggard in this country when it came to legislation to protect workers. We were last. In 2018 my colleague the former minister of labour brought forward changes that brought Alberta to the middle of the pack. When the minister of labour talks about how this is benefiting workers, it's patently false. In fact, it's insulting, Mr. Speaker. It makes my blood boil that this piece of legislation is not only attacking workers, but you're also treating workers differently.

You know, I think the Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo was either a social worker . . .

**An Hon. Member:** A paramedic.

**Mr. Bilous:** He was a paramedic. He was a front-line first responder. Okay. Thank you.

I think it's absolutely critical that this member, in his former occupation, has provisions to protect him and other front-line workers. What I'd like to know is how this government differentiates responders or defines responders, actually. For a myriad of calls in this province there are social workers who will be first on scene along with our first responders, yet somehow this government feels that they should be treated differently in arriving on a scene than police, EMTs, and others. I'd love to hear the logic behind that. You're right. They'll be impacted differently because they have a different occupation. Why shouldn't they be treated the same?

Many of the changes in this current piece of legislation actually reduce the protections that workers have in this province. You know, as I sat here and I listened to the minister and I listened to other members of the government caucus, I don't know if people are just reading speaking notes blindly without ever having looked at the legislation and looked at the impacts. Mr. Speaker, I don't believe that members of the other side of the House are so callous as to not value all lives equally. I can't believe that. Otherwise, I won't be able to ever go to sleep again. But what's frustrating is that what this legislation does is not only undermine our workers and the protections that they deserve, but, you know, it's a direct attack on the very people that this government is reliant on during a global pandemic. We'll talk about the hero fund and the fact that this government in one breath says, "We thank our first responders, our front-line workers, yet we're going to claw back as many benefits" – and not even benefits, honestly. It's coverage for workers that ensures that they and their families will be cared for.

**11:10**

I don't believe that there are a multitude of employers asking for this. I know that we have really good people who are at the helm of companies here in the province that want to protect their employees. The fact that the minister talks about a balance is a joke. For decades the system was imbalanced: workers being denied WCB, workers having to fight for claims. I'm pretty sure that most MLAs in this Legislature have had workers come to them in tears trying to fight for a claim where they were injured on a job and they were denied

and fighting against this system that is supposed to be supporting them. I've had countless – countless – constituents come to my office, Mr. Speaker. Now, I appreciate the fact that I may be one of the longer serving MLAs in this Legislature, but I don't believe for a second that other MLAs haven't had workers come to them.

The system, which was originally designed to ensure that they and their families are taken care of, has been degraded for years and years. Alberta fell in as the province in Canada that had the worst labour standards in the country. Thankfully, many employers went above and beyond the minimum because they care about their workers. The problem is that there are employers, there are always people that will only do just what needs to be done, the minimum, and that's why we need to raise the bar, to ensure that workers and their families are protected. I listened to the minister, and I think you're talking about a completely different bill. What's in here is not what you're talking about. It's not.

You know, the other irony is ensuring safety and cutting red tape. Please, let's go through what red tape employers have faced. If we want to talk about how complex work sites are in this province, yeah, they are complex, and there shouldn't be a one-size-fits-all. But what this bill is doing is reducing the bare minimum for every employer across the board. That's not the solution. My colleague the Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods talked about the question around consultation and that it was a few weeks long. How many people did you talk to? Who did you talk to? Table it.

The fact of the matter is that, you know, our system of WCB has been plagued with complications for many, many years. I know the previous speaker talked about a few changes that have been made within this bill that amend legislation that hasn't been touched in a long time. Fair enough. I have no issues with that. In fact, that's something positive within this bill. But what's frustrating, Mr. Speaker, is when the good gets lumped in with a whole lot of bad. Updating legislation is important but not at the expense of protecting workers.

You know, what's interesting is that when we talk about committees and we talk about work sites, what we have seen in especially the past decade or two for some of our largest employers in the province is that they moved away from having employees to contracting out. I noticed it especially in the oil and gas sector. I mean, my whole family is in oil and gas. How many of them are an employee of a company? None. They're all contractors. So what does that mean? If they get injured, they have to have their own insurance. They're not covered. That comes from, you know, a myriad of things. I mean, this is one of the challenges, quite frankly, with the fact that when our oil and gas sector took such a significant blow, many Albertans, a significant number of Albertans, did not qualify for things like EI and other types of social safety nets because they were independent companies, right? I think that there has got to be a different way to ensure that the voices of subcontractors are able to be heard and that they're able to participate in committees that are focused on safety.

Now, again, there are lots of examples of companies where this is their number one priority, and I believe it, and I've seen it, that they have a workplace culture that rewards safety. It's quite admirable.

I can tell you, Mr. Speaker, that I've also heard from a number of workers in this province who talk about the unfortunate examples of employers that, when they are injured, will do everything in their power to convince an employee not to make a claim. Now, the way that the WCB was originally structured, where at the end of the year it would give back premiums to employers: well, this was part of the reason we changed it. If they're incentivized not to have claims, then they're going to do everything in their power to ensure that

employees don't make claims because it means dollars that get returned to them. That's a conflict of interest.

Again, I'll be really clear on the record. I'm not talking about all employers. We have some incredible employers that value their employees, and they are the most important asset. I applaud those employers. But, unfortunately, there are also employers that will do the bare minimum, that will look at ways to skirt the existing laws that we have and look for loopholes. The problem, Mr. Speaker, is that these loopholes: we're talking about peoples' lives. We're talking about them and their families. So the reason that I'm so passionate about this bill is that we're talking about people and ensuring that we are doing everything we can for them to return home safely at the end of the day and that if something happens, they are compensated.

I've sat in this House since 2010 and listened to debate after debate about farm workers and how unsafe working on farms can be. The part that blew me away: if a farm worker gets a limb caught in a machine and it gets ripped off – and this happens more often than you think. In fact, I was having a conversation the other day about how dangerous being a police officer is. Did you know, Mr. Speaker, that police officers are the 15th most dangerous profession in Alberta? Fifteenth. There are 14 other professions that are more dangerous than police officers. Do you know what number 1 is? Construction. Farming, I think, is 3. But here's the thing that killed me. You have someone working on a farm. They get their limb caught in a machine. They can now no longer work on a farm. They're not going to get employed to throw bales if they have one limb or one leg or one arm. What is their recourse? What is their compensation? Until we formed government, nothing. Zero. So the livelihood that these people have is decimated without protections.

11:20

**The Acting Speaker:** Thank you, hon. member.

I believe that the individual who caught my eye for the purposes of effective back-and-forth debate is the hon. Minister of Labour and Immigration on 29(2)(a).

**Mr. Copping:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to participate in debate just based on some initial comments. I want to appreciate the members opposite in terms of their passion for health and safety, but I do want to raise that on this side of the aisle we are just as passionate about health and safety. Really, that's what this bill is about. What we heard from health and safety professionals is that we needed more balance. There were a number of notions that were brought in by the previous government in terms of health and safety committees and health and safety programs. They weren't there before, and – guess what? – they're still there now because we recognize the importance that these programs and committees can have to improve the health and safety outcomes for Alberta workers. Myself, my background is in heavy industry and rail industry, and I personally recognize the importance of workers being involved in identifying risks and mitigating those risks.

The focus needs to be on outcomes. The issue here, Mr. Speaker, is that we need to focus on the outcomes. Unfortunately, and not through – you know, a tremendous amount of work done by the other side, but the prescriptiveness that was in the act actually impeded the ability to focus the time and energy on getting the outcomes, identifying the risks and mitigating those risks. At the end of the day we want workers not to get hurt and not have to need workers' compensation. We want them to go home to their families and be safe. This is what we heard. Again, we go back to balance. When we compare occupational health and safety in Alberta after the changes made by the previous government, it was out of balance. It was far more prescriptive than what we found in other

jurisdictions, and it restricted the ability to be able to focus on the things that matter.

That's why we're making the changes to the health and safety committees, that's why we made the changes to the requirements for health and safety programs, the details. We are going to move them into the code, provide more flexibility so they can focus on outcomes because, Mr. Speaker, what matters is outcomes, is people not getting hurt and being able to go home.

We're also making changes – and, again, this is about balance – in terms of the Workers' Compensation Act. It's about ensuring that we have a long-term, sustainable system for workers and also that we manage the costs because every time you add costs, what does that do? It makes it more expensive to hire an Albertan, and we want to keep Albertans working and have a competitive system. So some of the changes that we are making like the maximum cap on insurable earnings bring us in line with all the other provinces, right?

That cost that was introduced by the previous government benefited a very small percentage of people because the way that the WCB would set the maximum rate, they'd look at, you know, roughly the 90th percentile, right? If we went back to the old cap that was in place – it was just under \$100,000, Mr. Speaker – that would mean that there's roughly only about 8 per cent that wouldn't get all their earnings under the cap, but that was really expensive to cover and jeopardized the long-term sustainability. There are a number of changes – I won't go into all of them now – that the previous government made which added benefits and – guess what? – we kept them, but it's about balance and it's about ensuring that we get people back to work.

The last comment I'll talk about: the Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview mentioned that, you know, workers have to fight for a claim, right? In certain cases they do, but I want to state that in terms of the WC system, it is incredibly effective. Well north of 90 per cent – and I haven't got the exact figures; I'll have to go and look it up, but it's roughly 95 per cent – of people who get hurt get back to the job and start working or get accommodated, right? That happened even before the changes they made. Now, I appreciate there were issues in terms of the other 4 or 5 per cent, there were concerns and we needed to do it, but, Mr. Speaker, we are focused on reducing the costs of the system so more Albertans can be employed.

No other province has three independent organizations providing services, and we're maintaining the services so as to ease, help people get through the process and so Albertans can get an independent assessment and a fair assessment. We're just putting it under one organization, and we're going to continue to work with that one organization, making them responsible so we can streamline the process and make it go faster. What we heard from employers is that getting people back to work quickly is what the objective is here with our workers' compensation system.

Thank you.

**The Acting Speaker:** Thank you, hon. member.

I see the hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont.

**Mr. Rutherford:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I want to thank the Minister of Labour and Immigration for your comments and for being here for the debate to clear up some of the misleading comments, I think, that are coming from across the aisle and really just making sure that we fully understand what the bill does and what it's trying to accomplish.

You know, I know that the Member for Livingstone-Macleod talked in depth about some of the changes. I wanted to mainly touch on the heroes' fund. It's important that if passed, Bill 47 would

allow the government to deliver on its commitment on the heroes' fund, which was a platform commitment. The Alberta heroes' fund will honour the sacrifices of first responders who have passed away as a result of performing their duties.

I proudly served for over 10 years with the Edmonton Police Service, and I can say first-hand that no two first responders have the exact same experiences or walk away from a call in the same way. I'd like to just touch on the fact that in 10 years not once did I go to a call where a social worker showed up at the same time, as was claimed earlier, that that had happened. So after 10 years – I'm not sure what the day-to-day work of social workers is like. I'm sure it is very difficult work, and I can appreciate what they do, but I just wanted to highlight that. In the robberies that I went to, in the domestic assaults that I went to, the car chases, the stolen cars, the homicides, the standoffs, I was never met with a social worker at the same time. I'm sure they do very important work, but I just wanted to mention that.

The variety of calls, as I just mentioned, is immense in policing. No two days are ever the same, and I can imagine that that's the exact same for paramedics and firefighters as well as correctional officers. What they do have in common is that every single first responder puts the needs of others before their own mental and physical well-being, and they deserve our appreciation and respect for this.

During my time in the Edmonton Police Service I was part of high-intensity, high-stress situations, and the overarching goal was to help the citizens that were in need and to make it home. I could share many stories from a decade of policing, but I'll just say that the officers each and every day walk into unknown situations, and it's sometimes the most innocuous situations that can really turn on you quickly.

For firefighters, I have seen first-hand the work that they do. I have been to the calls, the homes that are engulfed in flames, and they're going straight in. I have seen them extract victims from vehicles and some of the other things that they do in between, and I can appreciate how intense that work can be and how dangerous it can be as well.

I also want to touch on – and I've mentioned this before in other conversations. Paramedics, in my view, are really the unsung heroes. Cops are always in the news, firefighters are always the heroes for showing up to the calls – and you could be sort of lighthearted on that – but paramedics day in and day out deal with a lot of really difficult situations, and I've always admired their ability to care for someone and to be compassionate in the services that they offer in saving lives, including, actually, their skill at putting in IVs while bouncing around in the back of an ambulance. I don't know if you've ever had the opportunity to sit in an ambulance and try to help out a paramedic or watch them try to do that work, but it is not easy, and I've always admired them for doing it. So my hat goes off to them.

All first responders go out every day knowing that they might not make it home that day, but I think that's actually probably harder on the families, really not knowing what's going on. I know what's happening at an individual call. I know what it's like to be there. You're surrounded by teammates and other colleagues. But the families really have no idea what's happening, and I think that that can be far more difficult.

Over the last decade alone, though, there have been 106 Albertan first responders who have perished on the job or from occupational illnesses, and that covers a lot of firefighters who from various forms of cancer have passed away, and that was from job-related illnesses as well.

Our government ran on a commitment to establish a heroes' fund that will honour the sacrifices of first responders who have lost their

lives. These heroes have made the ultimate sacrifice to protect our community and to keep Albertans safe, and they deserve the recognition for their contributions. Alberta's government is keeping that commitment, and the heroes' fund will provide a one-time tax repayment of \$100,000 to eligible families of first responders who pass away as a result of performing their duties. The list of first responders includes police officers, firefighters, paramedics, sheriffs, and provincial correctional officers who have lost their lives as a result of serving others. There is no higher form of public service than putting one's own life at risk in the service of your community, and Albertans who do so are heroes and deserve our support and respect.

**11:30**

Nothing can replace the life of a lost loved one, but the heroes' fund can help make dealing with the financial burdens easier during a troubling and overwhelming time for the grieving families of the first responders. Affected families will not have to apply for the hero fund payment. The WCB will identify eligible families using its claim process and administer the funds. The heroes' fund will take effect when the legislation passes, and the WCB will begin identifying eligible families and administering payments retroactively to April 1, 2020.

Currently there is a federal memorial grant program for first responders, and it provides a one-time payment of up to \$300,000 to families of first responders who have lost their lives while serving in the line of duty. Even if a family receives benefits under the federal program, you can still be eligible to receive benefits under the provincial heroes' fund as well.

I'm proud that Alberta is the first province to prioritize establishing a program like this to honour our fallen heroes. When I think back to why I became a first responder, it was because I wanted to serve my community, and I'm grateful my role as MLA for Leduc-Beaumont allows me to serve my community in new ways. Bill 47 will make a difference in the lives of families of first responders when they need it most, and I am pleased to support this.

In closing, of course, I would like to thank all the police officers, firefighters, paramedics, sheriffs, provincial correctional officers that serve their fellow Albertans with pride every day, not only in the riding of Leduc-Beaumont but across the province. My sincere hope is that all first responders will make it home safely every day, but for those that make the ultimate sacrifice, your government will be there to support your families in their time of need.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**The Acting Speaker:** Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available should anybody wish to take the option of questions and comments.

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

**Ms Sigurdson:** Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to join the debate on Bill 47, entitled the Ensuring Safety and Cutting Red Tape Act, 2020, and as my colleagues have already said on this side of the aisle, that title seems very incongruent with what the bill actually contains. You know, "ensuring safety" could be replaced with "not ensuring safety." It's certainly taking away a lot of provisions that were previously there for workers, and it's definitely something that will make them much less safe on the work site.

I guess what I've learned sitting in this Legislature since, you know, we were elected back in 2019 for this mandate is that there are some key words that this government uses to mean something that it doesn't really mean. It's like there's a new definition of the word or something. We heard it several times by the minister,

talking about that he wants to bring back balance. That isn't what he's bringing back. You know, many people involved in workers' compensation, in occupational health and safety have indicated very much that this is not creating balance but that it's taking us backward.

This is from an article in the *Edmonton Journal*, and it says that "if the UCP bill passes, it would represent a big regression for workplace safety and injury compensation." So it's not creating balance. It's taking us much further backwards. When you hear that word "balance," you must realize that that's not exactly what's being said. It's really "regression." That is what is being said.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

You know, it's not just one person saying it. It's several people. Gail Cumming, who works as an advocate for employees navigating WCB claims, said that changes in the bill include cutting the Medical Panels Office and that this could be devastating for workers. So there are many voices that know that this kind of euphemism for balance is not actually accurate. It is taking us backwards.

When the NDP was government, we modernized and, as has already been articulated by my hon. colleagues, brought Alberta sort of to the middle of the pack of the provinces, because we were the laggards. But, of course, now we're being taken back to be the laggards once again, which is very disturbing. You know, the workers in Alberta are not being served by this language that is used in this House. It's interesting how it doesn't really mean what is being said.

Another word that's often used is "sustainable." I've heard that over and over again: well, it's not sustainable; we've got to make it sustainable. Certainly, the Minister of Seniors and Housing says it repeatedly as she cuts programs, deindexes the Alberta seniors' benefit, and cuts grants to community organizations supporting elder abuse and a myriad of other things. It's just all about sustainability. Oh, please. Let's just be frank. Let's just say that it's about cuts and that it's about taking away services for Albertans. Those words: we need to understand what this UCP government means by them.

One of the major reasons that I ran politically was because Alberta has the greatest inequality of any province in Canada. I'm a proud social worker. I'm a registered social worker to this day, and I worked for 30 years and continue to work in this Assembly to ensure that all Albertans are included in the programs and services that we have here. When I see a bill like this take away supports for workers, I see that we are sliding backwards again, creating more inequality in Alberta, and I'm completely – well, I mean, my colleagues have talked about passion. I don't know. I feel a bit of, you know, outrage. I feel kind of furious that this government, in the guise of sort of this misnomer of ensuring safety, is actually taking away that safety and that workers in Alberta will not have many benefits that they rightly deserve, and I see this as quite disturbing.

Not only does the UCP, you know, obviously serve elite corporations, create great inequality with the \$4.7 billion corporate giveaway – now, this was a way that regular workers could be supported, and that's being taken away. We know – we know – that for people who have health issues and who have challenges, people who are injured, that often does impact their ability to earn an income, and oftentimes their income may go down significantly. That impacts their family, and they're living maybe below the poverty line or closer to it. It just seems completely the wrong direction for this government to be taking away some of these provisions for workers in Alberta.

You know, it's creating that income disparity. We already know that we have the largest income gap, where money is pooled in the hands of a few and less and less in the hands of many. Another reason I ran politically was because I was concerned specifically for women in our province. As we know, women in our province have a great income disparity with men. The Canadian centre for social development every year does a report about the best and worst places in Canada for women to live, and it looks at the largest cities. Out of 26 Edmonton is at 25, and Calgary is at something like 21. It's a range of factors, but, I mean, we're down in the bottom. I don't want to be in a province like that.

That's why I'm here to advocate to make sure that everyone has an opportunity, but bills like this take away those opportunities and help the same folks who've always had the supports, the leg-up, to continue to have them. There's just no mystery to it. It's clear. It's clear that this UCP government is just continuing the old-fashioned way of: certain folks get support in our society, and certain folks don't. You know, it's just not fair, and this bill only perpetuates that.

11:40

Another reason that I ran is because I do believe very strongly in democracy. Certainly, as a social worker we always talk about our dual purpose as social workers. Not only do we help individuals, but we also look at the larger society, policies and programs, and we look sometimes at the intervention to help someone who needs to be at that level. We need to create programs and policies that help people. Of course, in this Chamber that's what we get to do. We get to do larger system policies. You know, that's another reason why I wanted to run. I felt like there were some policies in Alberta that were not serving all Albertans and that we need to have a much more inclusive and fair and just society.

Of course, how do governments even determine what policies to create, how to create them? Well, one of the ways is that they actually listen. You know, they listen to people, the stakeholders, we call them, and groups that are impacted by legislation. But this government – I mean, it's sort of a mockery of the consultation process. The vast majority of submissions they got were from employers, very few from workers, in a very short timeline. Certainly, my hon. colleague from Edmonton-Mill Woods said earlier that in the middle of a pandemic, in the middle of summer, an e-mail was sent out. It was such a minimal effort to actually hear the voices of the people that this bill will impact. It's difficult to watch sort of the disregard for a proper process so that people are really heard and that there's a sort of a selection of who should be heard only. That seems to be the same old folks all the time.

Basically, we know that the changes that this bill is putting forward will make it more difficult for workers to qualify for WCB and employer benefits and easier for a worker to be cut off from them. It makes appeals harder to get. I mean, who does this benefit? It doesn't benefit the workers. This is all very difficult for the workers. But, of course, the employers will get lower premiums, and therefore the costs of the injuries themselves will be shifted more to the workers.

The workers' compensation systems all across Canada are sort of based on this, you know, 100-year-old set of principles called the Meredith principles. There are about five principles that are set up for that. One is the security of benefits, and one is collective liability, and both of these are being significantly eroded by the legislation before us.

There are just a myriad of things that will of course put more burden onto workers and their families and make it harder in Alberta for workers to get a fair shake. You know, that's certainly why I and my colleagues will absolutely oppose this bill. We know

that some of the ways workers will receive less compensation for their losses is through the implementation of a cap on benefits, the removal of the requirement for an employer to continue to pay health benefits for one year following an accident, the limiting of presumptive PTSD.

The member who was just speaking from the government, the Member for Leduc-Beaumont, said, you know: I've never gone to a crime scene anywhere with a social worker. Well, he mustn't be familiar with the teams that certainly they have in the city of Edmonton. We call them the CARRT team and family violence teams, where a social worker and a police officer attend together. This is just a standard practice. Every day they go to calls throughout the day. I just wanted to inform the House that this is a regular practice, and it's not an extraordinary thing. Perhaps he wasn't involved in those teams, which is fine, but that doesn't deny that those teams are available. Of course, the confusing piece is that now social workers will no longer be able to have presumptive coverage for PTSD even if they do attend exactly the same situation with the police officer who's their partner, and that person will get it. It sort of defies logic.

Another thing that will negatively impact workers is removing the right to compensation of wages during a stop-work order, changing the definition of what is an occupational disease to limit applicability, removal of the annual CPI adjustment on benefits. Of course, the consumer price index is just – you know, generally each year the cost of living goes up. It's just a fair thing to do so people's benefits aren't eroded. Indexing it according to the consumer price index is just the proper thing to do to make sure that those benefits continue to be enough for that family and that worker.

Making it voluntary to reinstate an injured worker. I mean, this is particularly disturbing that a worker is on-site and they've been injured and then they get treatment and recover and then they're not – it's only voluntary; it's not mandatory that the employer rehire them. I mean, this just seems so completely unfair just on the face of it. You know, someone who has through their work on-site put themselves in harm's way or something happened that did injure them, they do what they need to be free of that injury, and then the employer doesn't necessarily have to hire them. Hopefully, a lot of employers will do that, but we also know that some employers won't, and that employee will just be out of luck for that. That just seems unfair. This person was hurt during their work, and that job should be for them when they come back.

**The Deputy Speaker:** Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available. I see the hon. Minister of Labour and Immigration.

**Mr. Copping:** Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I'd like to respond to a couple of comments made by the hon. member, who cited an article from the *Edmonton Journal* which was talking about medical panels. The article would leave the reader to believe that we are eliminating medical panels, and I just wanted to set the record straight on this item that that is simply not the case. But what had happened under the previous government is that they set up three – let's count them: one, two, three – independent offices to deal with the application of WCB and to deal with complaints. We were the only province out of all the WCB systems in Canada that had three offices, and one of them was the Medical Panels Office. What we're doing is we're collapsing those three offices into one, like other provinces. There will still be an individual responsible for medical panels, a medical panel officer, who will report in to the workers' compensation Appeals Commission – and that would handle that – and appoint medical panels. We recognize that medical panels are important to be able to help address issues where

there's a debate in regard to the medical issues surrounding a particular claim, and they will continue.

I just highlight this because I want to set the record straight that we are not eliminating medical panels. They will continue. What we're doing is eliminating the administrative structure that you find in three offices for one, and the reason we're doing that is because we can do this like other provinces with a single independent body that will make decisions fairly, without bias, in a just manner, and make them faster. One of the problems that we found with three independent offices: there was no one individual that was responsible for ensuring that the process was smooth and went as quickly as possible. What we found, Madam Speaker, is that for a certain small percentage of cases it would take not months but years to resolve. Every time you have a case which takes months and years to resolve, additional issues can come up.

Really, our focus of our system should be to be able to get people back to work, so what we're doing is we are reducing red tape. We're getting rid of administration. We're saving costs so employers don't have to spend as much on WCB premiums and can hire more Albertans, and we're making one person responsible, which is the independent office of the Appeals Commission, to be able to streamline the entire process, and, Madam Speaker, we will be doing some further consultation and looking at how we actually do this next year.

11:50

One other thing I would like to address that was mentioned by the hon. member across is the Meredith principles. She spoke to the Meredith principles. She is quite correct that these were the principles which were established over a century ago to establish workers' compensation systems, and then it was replicated across the country. She's saying that this bill, the changes we're making in this bill are going against the Meredith principles, destroying the Meredith principles. I may have not gotten the exact words correct, but, Madam Speaker, that is not the case.

What are the Meredith principles? They promote no-fault insurance – we still have that – security of benefit so that when an employee gets hurt, they get the benefits right away. Part of the deal before we had workers' compensation was that if a worker got hurt, they would have to sue their employer. That was part of the deal, right? That's what they had to do before, so part of the deal is: no, no; they need security of benefits so that when they get hurt, benefits are provided. That is being maintained, and, Madam Speaker, I could say the maximum insurable earnings is the same as the maximum insurable earnings across all provinces. The previous government eliminated that, introducing higher costs for a small number of people and limited benefit. Collective liability: that is still there. Independent administration: that is definitely still there. We still have the workers' compensation Appeals Commission. Exclusive jurisdiction: we are maintaining that.

Madam Speaker, we are focused on – and she said the word – sustainability. We are focused because we recognize that if you increase costs on employers – guess what happens? – there are fewer jobs for Albertans. We are focused on getting Albertans back to work and the sustainability of the system. We are focused on reducing the cost for employers, getting Albertans back to work, and improving safety so fewer people have to depend on the system.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

**The Deputy Speaker:** Any other members wishing to join debate on Bill 47 in second reading? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadows.



**Mr. Deol:** Thank you, Madam Speaker. It's my honour to rise in the House and have the opportunity to speak to Bill 47, Ensuring Safety and Cutting Red Tape Act, 2020, on behalf of my constituents. First of all, thank you to the minister for actually taking interest to really engage in the debate, but listening to all the members and the arguments made by my colleagues and looking into the draft and the recommendations and proposals through this bill, the answers we are hearing from the minister are not satisfying. The government has made similar attempts – I wouldn't say attempts. They already took the steps. We have seen through Bill 32. It was called Restoring Balance in Alberta's Workplaces Act, restoring balance by the way of, you know, having workers not being able to collect sick pay or overtime, holiday pay. We have seen that before in the last year when the government tried to address the unemployment in youths. The same thing was told: increasing the cost to employers would not help Albertans; it will not help in creating more jobs.

Rolling back the youth wages is the obvious example, and that is not a philosophical debate. That was the notion, the philosophy of this UCP government: lowering the youth wages will create a lot more positions and jobs for the youth workers. In actuality it happened opposite to it. The unemployment among youths actually climbed, almost unprecedentedly, that our province has never seen before.

Similarly, the minister, replying to my colleague from Edmonton-Riverview, made the same comment once again. Even though he's still claiming that – and this is how the bill is worded, Ensuring Safety and Cutting Red Tape Act. When I'm going through the recommendations and drafting of this bill, the one word – I'm just trying to find it in the bill – that is just on the heading: ensuring safety. Where is the safety of the workers? Whose safety are we trying to ensure in this bill? By capping the benefits, by eliminating the ability of refusing to work at dangerous sites – I'll go through all of those. I just wanted to highlight these few points. The few recommendations in this bill tell that this bill is not addressing the issue of ensuring the safety of workers, the safety of Albertans.

Albertans deserve a government that has their backs, and that is the narrative this UCP Party also created during the last election. But one way, what they have done: they handed \$4.7 billion on the notion that it will create jobs in Alberta. They still cannot claim even a single job. They still cannot even tie a single job to their plan.

Instead of reviewing their decision honestly, I would say, they are proposing 11,000 layoffs in, you know, Alberta health care even during the pandemic. The way they're building it on, the vocabulary we're using is so saddening to hear that the people who clean the vomit – not everybody can do it. The workers who do it, the workers who are doing a commendable job need to be praised, but during this time the government chose to pick those workers to attack.

Next to my riding – we all know that the Grey Nuns hospital is one of the large facilities that's helping Albertans. That office has been diverting patients for four, five consecutive days because there was an outbreak in the hospital. I came to know the family whose patient was in the hospital. The only member that was allowed to stay close to the family member was sent home due to the outbreak. I cannot explain the pain of that family when they received a call the next morning that their family member was no more. They could not even stay close to the family member on his last day.

12:00

During that time and that situation, when those very people were working in that critical situation, our government chose to attack those workers, let those workers go home, suffer Albertans in the

name of saving some dollars on health care, when, on one hand, the government has spent billions of dollars without having proper oversights, without confirming how Albertans are going to benefit from it.

In this bill there is a whole step that obviously means a reduction in benefits. Now we are capping the maximum insurable. This means that if Albertans earn a high income, put their lives at risk, take a risk, I would say, to work on the dangerous jobs, which is uncommon – and most Albertans probably wouldn't do that – by doing that, if they're able to earn a little bit more than what everybody else would, now they will not be able to qualify, be entitled to a claim to compensation according to that. The other thing that still a minister didn't answer to, that has been raised by a number of my colleagues a few times, is the removing of presumptive coverage for psychological injuries for workers who've experienced a traumatic event. So now it's limited to a select few occupations, as the Member for Leduc-Beaumont said.

Police, actually, are among the occupations that can still claim the traumatic injuries, but social workers are not. I'm still waiting for the answer on this, why this is distinguished, why this is discriminated between two occupations.

Another concern I have in this bill is that now the minister will no longer need to prepare and maintain illness, death, and incident statistics relating to workers and self-employed persons. What is the logic behind it? How do we think this is improving the workers' safety, as this bill is saying, ensuring safety? That's what I'm saying. Like, it's very hard to find when we were talking about the safety of workers. Why are we reducing our responsibility and transparency for workers and Albertans? Are we moving this just to verbal security now, because the wording has been changed from "shall" to "may" in this bill?

One of the incidents I really wanted to share, for the purpose of the record, of *Hansard*, is that I do have a close friend, and there was a situation at work that was obviously a dangerous condition. If it would have been after 2018, he would have definitely refused to work there. It was an old building where his employment, work was situated. He was told to do some work on top of the roof of the high building. The building structure, the subfloor was very old, deteriorated, and he fell to the floor.

He didn't feel confident and comfortable, in the first place, going on the roof. That was not even part of his regular job. But he was told to do so, and he didn't have a choice. We're still not sure how he escaped, how he's still alive, the way he just fell from the very tall, maybe 20, 30 feet, building. It took him not only to recover . . .

**The Deputy Speaker:** Hon. members, Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available. I see the hon. Minister of Labour and Immigration.

**Mr. Copping:** Thank you very much, Madam Speaker, and thanks to the hon. member for the comments. I do want to just touch on a couple of items raised, one item by the hon. member and a couple of items raised by my esteemed colleague from Edmonton-Mill Woods, partly just to get the facts on the record. I understand there are some concerns that have been raised over there about a couple of items, and I want to make sure that there's a common understanding about that.

First, I want to talk once again a little bit about presumptive coverage. Madam Speaker, the presumptive coverage – well, let's back up for a bit. The purpose of workers' compensation legislation is to compensate an individual who is hurt at work because of work. In that circumstance a presumption that an injury that an individual has incurred at work should never be in place. But we have put it in place, and the reason is for certain occupations, like first responders, like firefighters, for example, who have suffered from

a psychological injury like PTSD. There's a common link based on years of research and also based on years of workers' compensation systems doing an investigation, an evaluation, seeing the type of injury, and then recognizing the type of work that's going forward and accepting the claims over a long period of time. So that's why we establish presumption.

The previous government, you know, established presumption for a number of first responders – and we're not removing that, Madam Speaker – but they also established it for all other occupations. Quite frankly, that link hasn't been established. But I would like to say and point out to the members across the aisle that there still remains regulatory authority within it so that if that link gets established over time and Workers' Compensation is approving these claims again and again and again and again, we may be able to add that.

But the starting point, just so we're all clear, is that there shouldn't be presumption that it happened at work, right? There's always an investigation, right? But because over time, when you see the type of psychological injury and the nature of work and they're always approved, then it makes sense to do that and not have to do the assessment, because that just adds more red tape. So we do have that regulatory authority.

12:10

I'd like to actually touch on a couple of other items raised by the Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods. This is in regard to COLA. We are removing the COLA provision in workers' compensation. But, Madam Speaker, I would like to point out that what we're doing is that we're going back to the way it was before 2018. Prior to 2018 the board had through policy the ability to establish COLA, and they did. COLA was provided on a regular basis to employees to be able to maintain the cost of living, but they had their own policy. They did it based on the assessment and looking at the particular experience within Alberta.

Another concern raised by the Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods was concerning the right to refuse. A question was asked: if someone refuses, do they still have an entitlement to payment? They will still have the entitlement to payment. That is in the Employment Standards Code. That is there, and we will be maintaining that. That won't change.

In addition, the Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods raised the issue of disciplinary action complaints, DACs, right? The suggestion she was making – and I just wanted to seek clarity – was that no longer, if there's a DAC, would you have to go through the human rights tribunal. What we were finding was that because they changed a word, beforehand, prior to 2018, from "disciplinary" to "discriminatory," there was confusion about: should they be going through the human rights tribunal, or can they actually process it, because there is a process within occupational health and safety to deal with it? We are going back to what the language said prior to that to reduce the confusion. But, Madam Speaker, let me be clear. You know, if there is discipline, if there is action by an employer which penalizes an employee for exercising their rights under the Occupational Health and Safety Act, then DACs are applicable, just like they were before. What we're doing is that we're changing the wording for clarity, and just to be clear, this is not so that employees go to the Human Rights Commission. No. The DACs process is in place. They used the process before to ensure that they were protected from disciplinary action, and they can use it again.

Thank you.

**The Deputy Speaker:** Any other members wishing to join debate on Bill 47 in second reading? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

**Member Loyola:** Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. It gives me great pleasure to get up in the House and actually speak to this bill because, of course, as has been pointed out by many of my colleagues, we're actually talking about a bill that doesn't really profess to do exactly what the title actually says. It actually says Ensuring Safety and Cutting Red Tape Act.

Now, before I continue specifically on this bill, I just want to preface with an understanding. So I hope you grant me a little bit of leeway here, Madam Speaker. Yeah. Don't worry. It's all connected; I'm going to bring it back. Don't worry. I'll do it just for you.

This is the way that things run under this UCP government. They try to play this false dichotomy all the time. They make you want to choose between the economy and the environment. We used to hear that all the time: it's either the economy or it's the environment. We used to hear that it was either the economy or the public-sector workers. Isn't that right, my friend?

**An Hon. Member:** Mm-hmm.

**Member Loyola:** Right?

Now we're going through this pandemic, and this government pushes Albertans into the false dichotomy that it's either the economy or it's a lockdown. Now what we see here is that it's either the economy or it's workers.

Now, Madam Speaker, I'm going to share something with this House that, you know, perhaps is no big secret. You know what? I was born working class, and I'm proud to be working class. I wear it like a badge of honour because workers all around this world go into work each and every day and they give their best, they work hard, and they take pride in their work. When they roll up their sleeves, they take pride in the work that they do, and they do it because they're providing for their families, they're putting a roof over the heads of their children, they're making sure that their children have enough to eat, and they're bringing home the bread that they can eat on their table.

There's no difference, Madam Speaker – there's no difference – between a person who is a proud working-class person and that business owner, so then why should we treat them differently? Why does this UCP government continue to push us into this false dichotomy that it's either the economy or X or it's the economy or Y or it's the economy or Z when it's not about that? It's about taking a holistic approach and making sure that all people that we are elected here to represent are treated fairly. That's what it's about at the end of the day. So I refuse to go down the rabbit hole that this here UCP government wants us to go down when they play this false dichotomy of: it's either the economy or it's workers.

The Minister of Labour and Immigration got up in this House and actually talked about restoring balance. Now, a number of my colleagues have already gotten up and talked about how prior to our NDP government we were actually way back in the 1950s when it came to labour laws here in the province of Alberta. You don't have to go that far out. You can go out and ask anybody. People knew what it was like. I remember hearing – and this was even before I was elected – the problems that people had with WCB claims here in the province of Alberta. I remember a lot of people even from my own community. A lot of Chileans came here, and they started working. Working-class people, proud people, putting food on the table, a roof over their children's heads, did their job honourably, went in to work every day, punched in, put in a good day's work,

and then they punched out because under that system that's all they have to do. All they have to do is sell their labour, but does that mean that they should be treated any more unfairly just because they don't have as much power?

I would even argue that, specifically with this here government, they put more weight on the opinion of business owners than they do on these working people. What I'm saying is: be fair. Yes, we need small business, we need medium-sized business, we need corporations – we need them all – but make sure that workers are treated fairly under this regime. That's why it's impossible that I'm going to support this here piece of legislation, because although the Minister of Labour and Immigration wants to try to convince us that he's restoring balance, what he, in fact, is doing is that he's taking us back to the 1950s. He's taking us back in time when we should be modernizing. We should have an economy that treats all people fairly, raises all people up. Now, I get it. These United Conservatives like to talk about red tape. They like to talk about too much government being involved, too many regulations. I get it. Where it makes sense, I would even agree with them. I talk to small-business owners just as much as they do. In Edmonton-Ellerslie I have a lot of small-business owners. [interjections]

12:20

The Minister of Justice over there is laughing at me as if I don't do my job. Even though I'm a proud working-class person, Minister, through you, of course, Madam Speaker, I listen to all of my constituents, and I try to represent them as fairly as I possibly can. I've said it in this House before: yes, I have my own ideology. I don't hide it, not like the members on the other side, who try to hide their ideology and pretend that, oh, for some reason they're doing everything based on science and statistics and this and that. No. They're firmly based in their conservative ideology and apply it thus and so within each and every piece of legislation that they present in this here House.

Now, all I'm asking is for them to be fair to working people in the province of Alberta. That's all I'm asking. This bill actually removes protection from workers, both in compensation and safety at work. I think it's incredibly unfair that if a worker identifies a particular task within their workplace as being unsafe, they would be forced to do it anyway because the only other option under this here piece of legislation, I would argue, is, like: okay; you can do it, or you can go home and you're not going to get paid. That's what these UCPers want, right? They don't want workers to be treated fairly. They don't want them . . .

**Mr. Schow:** Point of order, Madam Speaker.

**The Deputy Speaker:** The hon. Member for Cardston-Siksika on a point of order.

#### Point of Order Language Creating Disorder

**Mr. Schow:** Thank you, Madam Speaker. I rise on a point of order under 23(j), "uses abusive or insulting language of a nature likely to create disorder." Now, I recognize that the Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie was not directing his comments at a specific member on this side of the Chamber, but let's be honest. This has been going on now for several minutes, where he's touching on a point of order, likely to create disorder with his language. We're here to debate this bill. We're not here to debate alleged nefarious intentions of an hon. minister of the Crown. I will allow, obviously, you, Madam Speaker, to rule on this, but I do believe that this is a point of order and would ask the hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie to clean it up.

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

**Ms Gray:** Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. This is not a point of order. This is absolutely matter of debate. As the government deputy whip specifically identified, the member in his very impassioned remarks was not naming members, was speaking on very important themes between Bill 47 and other pieces of legislation, between patterns from this government. I submit to you, Madam Speaker, that this was a matter of debate and not a point of order.

**The Deputy Speaker:** Hon. members . . .

**Mr. Jeremy Nixon:** Hear, hear.

**The Deputy Speaker:** Hon. Member for Calgary-Klein, I was just about to caution some of the banter that's going back and forth, which is certainly not really allowed in this Chamber as comments are to be directed through the chair, so some of that is not helpful in the debates that we have here today.

I appreciate the comments made by the hon. Member for Cardston-Siksika. Perhaps if you cited a different standing order in which the member is not discussing the matter at hand, you might have been more successful in winning that particular point of order. So, with that said, there is no point of order. However, I will caution the member to perhaps focus his debate more on the bill at hand instead of particular members broadly in this Chamber as I know your skill level is certainly at that level of debate, and I look forward to you continuing.

**Member Loyola:** Thank you very much for the compliment, Madam Speaker. Of course, I'll stick specifically to the bill.

#### Debate Continued

**Member Loyola:** As I was stating, this bill actually removes protection from workers both in compensation and in safety at work. Now, I was actually talking about the right to refuse dangerous work, so I was talking specifically about this here bill because this is one of the factors that is actually in question based on the piece of legislation that we have before us. For me, it's really important that we be able to focus on the fact that this is an important right that workers should have, because at the end of the day, a worker should be able to go to work, do their job, and, as I said, do it with all the honour that they do it. These are the people that I know in my life, the experience that I've had, Madam Speaker: people that go do their job, do it honourably, are proud of what they do, give 110 per cent when they go and they do their job. So they shouldn't be treated unfairly.

As I was stating, they have the right to refuse dangerous work, and this is something that we need to continue to uphold here in the province of Alberta. The one thing that I wanted to focus on is the fact that it also has the implementation of a cap on the actual benefits. Now, the Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods, the previous minister of labour, spoke at length to this particular piece, but this is one piece that I just find – what's the word I should use, Madam Speaker? Of course, I do not want to create disorder within this House. But by making sure that there's a cap on benefits – I'm not naming any names; I'm not pointing any fingers – I'm saying that the process, the actual principle, is heartless. Why? Why is this something that has to be within this legislation, putting a cap on benefits? Whose interest is the minister serving? Maybe the minister can actually address my question.

We also have the removal of the requirement for an employer to continue to pay health benefits for one year following an accident. Now, again, I want to remind this House that, you know, although the minister is getting up and saying that he's restoring balance, this is not balance. This is actually taking us back. We also have the limiting of a presumptive PTSD, removing the right to compensation of wages during a stop-work order – wow – changing the definition of what is an occupational disease to limit applicability, narrowing in drafting the language, and removal of the annual CPI adjustment on benefits. So what we're seeing here is, like, essentially just rollback after rollback after rollback after rollback after rollback on the rights and benefits of working people here in the province of Alberta. The members on the other side get up and talk about how: hey, this is balance. It's not balance. This is not balance.

Also, part of this piece of legislation is making it voluntary to reinstate an injured worker. Now, safety in the workplace is compromised through the limiting of the work of joint work site health and safety committees, representatives, including the removal of their participation in the investigation of an incident or an inspection and removing the need to have either on a work site with multiple employers where there is a prime contractor. I'm hoping that this is something that the minister can address because, of course, you know, he recently got up in the House and talked about: no, no, no; workers can participate. But that's not what we're reading. As was pointed out by the Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview, I think that there must be some kind of confusion here between what the minister knows and what's actually within the bill.

**12:30**

We also have the removal of the requirement for the employer to co-operate with the JWHSC or representative; the reduction of the responsibilities and checks and balances of the employers, prime contractors, and supervisor and more onus put on the worker; the return to the practice of returning surpluses to employers. It creates the incentives to not report, which again was talked about by the Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Then, of course, there's the limiting of the scope of the right to refuse unsafe work, which I spoke to at some length, but allowing for the disclosure of a worker who does so. The insertion of "undue hazard" means that they can only refuse work if the hazard falls outside what would normally be expected in the job.

We also have the removing of the obligation of the prime contractor to ensure that no one is exposed to hazards and changing to: informing workers of existing or potential hazards. Now, correct me if I'm wrong, Minister. This is what we understand by what is contained within this here bill. Instead of making things safer for workers, we're basically saying: hey, you know, all I've got to do is tell you about the potential hazard – that's it – not ensure that these workers are not being exposed to a hazard. You know what? This is the thing about UCP legislation. It's all about making things voluntary. It's all about making things voluntary and, of course, according to the members on the other side, reducing red tape, cutting out the regulations, in this case, that would actually make it safer for workers on the work site.

This is something that I think that, you know, here in the province of Alberta we've been battling for a long time because, of course, when you make things voluntary – pointed out by the Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview perhaps a couple of times was the fact that we have incredibly great employers here in the province of Alberta, many, many that do an incredible job of making sure to take care of their employees because they understand the relationship that is between their business and the people that work

with them. The people that work with them. This is one of the things that is so incredibly hard for me to accept, the fact that these business owners, yes, put in a lot of time and effort – they put in a lot of time and effort – and for the good ones, the ones that respect their workers, make sure that their workers are safe, the ones that do go over and above what is legislated, there's actually a great relationship between employer and employee.

But that's not the case every time, Madam Speaker. Unfortunately, we have some bad apples, and not only will they do the bare minimum when it comes to taking care of the safety of workers on the work site but, again as was pointed out by the Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview, will actually look for loopholes so as not to follow specific regulations. This is the truth. There are lots of examples where there have been workers that have actually gone through this.

Now, one of the things that I also wanted to stress – and I hope that this isn't the case as we move forward here in the province of Alberta, but I suspect it will be. I remember being – oh. Remember, Madam Speaker, I was telling you that even before elected, I heard about so many cases of workers applying to WCB . . .

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

Seeing none, the hon. Member for Cardston-Siksika.

**Mr. Schow:** Well, thank you. It's an honour to rise this evening and speak on this bill, and I'm glad that we have this opportunity to debate this important topic of protecting workers and making sure Alberta is an attractive place to live and work. I'm grateful for all the members in this Chamber here tonight taking part in this debate. I'm grateful for the minister putting this bill forward. Through you, Madam Speaker, if I can get a "Hear, hear," for that minister for putting this bill forward.

**An Hon. Member:** Hear, hear.

**Mr. Schow:** There. What a time to be alive.

We have heard a lot on this bill, and I think now would be a great time to adjourn debate. With that, I move to do just that.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

### Bill 39

#### Child Care Licensing (Early Learning and Child Care) Amendment Act, 2020

[Adjourned debate November 3: Mrs. Savage]

**The Deputy Speaker:** Any members wishing to join debate on Bill 39 in second reading? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood. Sorry. I was just seeing if you'd spoken before.

**Member Irwin:** No worries. Thank you, Madam Speaker. It is a pleasure to rise at this hour to speak to Bill 39. I say that it's a pleasure because, you know, it's certainly a privilege to be here in this Legislature. While I might be tired and have had a long day, I know that my job pales in comparison to the jobs of many folks, many Albertans, especially those Albertans right now who are on the front lines, our health care workers, who are working in the hardest of situations right now. We owe them so much. It's very much the least we can do to be trying to stand up for their rights, at least those folks on my side of the House here, stand up for the rights of all workers in Alberta, which is a good segue from our debate on the last bill, Bill 47.

But I would like to shift gears now and speak to Bill 39. You know, Bill 39, for those who don't know, is the Child Care Licensing (Early Learning and Child Care) Amendment Act, 2020.

This reminds me as well that I want to give a shout-out to all those working in child care. I've spoken many times in this House about the importance of child care. As the critic for status of women we know how life-changing child care can be, not just for women; for families as well.

But at this time of COVID, at a time when we're looking at recovery and looking at what that means, we know that child care is absolutely a pillar – it needs to be a pillar, I should say – of any economic recovery plan. However, we've seen from this government that they've not been responsive to that ask. In fact, myself and the Member for Edmonton-Whitemud and our leader, the Member for Edmonton-Strathcona, have been talking about this in the Legislature for months. We've been talking about the need for child care, about the need for women's voices to be centred in an economic recovery. To date it's essentially fallen on deaf ears. This is why I'm pleased to stand and speak to child care at any opportunity.

12:40

You know, I can't claim to be as passionate as the Member for Edmonton-Whitemud because she's a fierce advocate for child care, but I've learned a lot from her. One of the things that I've had the opportunity to do with that member is bring her to a couple of child care sites in my own riding of Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood. One of those trips was to the Intercultural Child and Family Centre in the McCauley neighbourhood in Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood, and that was actually the very first site of \$25-per-day child care, brought in by this previous NDP government, of which, of course, I was not a part, but I was so proud to see the work that they were doing to address affordable child care in our province.

Now, I have to tell you that in meeting with the wonderful folks from the child care centre at McCauley school, at the Edmonton Intercultural Centre, we learned that, you know, they're very much troubled because they are, of course, like the original pilot sites, losing that funding. What's most troubling about that is that these folks, the clients that they serve, are some of the most vulnerable families – newcomers, indigenous families, families that have very little – and so, as I said, benefited so greatly from \$25-per-day child care.

I rise because what's so critical in the child care debate is affordability, and this bill doesn't address that whatsoever. This government had an opportunity to take the calls for child care to be centred in an economic recovery, to take those calls seriously, and they didn't. It's not just us in the NDP calling for that. As I've said in this House, it's countless economists across the country, it's the big banks, it's a whole heck of a lot of folks who are saying that child care is absolutely critical. At a time when this government could have shown leadership and could have said, "You know what? In this bill, Bill 39, we are not only going to address licensing; we're also going to address affordability," they chose not to. What else didn't they choose?

**Mr. Jeremy Nixon:** That's the big banks.

**Member Irwin:** I sure hope that the men across the aisle will join in this debate instead of heckling me on such an important topic, so I look forward to the Member for Calgary-Klein doing just that.

They failed to take these calls seriously. I worry greatly that, you know, we're spending our time debating a bill in the House that fails to address not only affordability; it also fails to address one of the key components that it claims to address in the title, early learning. I won't speak today on the crucial need for early childhood education and how much investing in early childhood education pays dividends. The evidence is absolutely clear.

What I want to do is that I want to focus on one other piece with Bill 39, the child care act. What I want to do is that I want to speak about safety and how this bill fails to address safety. It doesn't do enough. So what I'm going to be doing right now is that I'm going to be introducing a reasoned amendment. I will hold off talking about that.

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

Hon. member, please proceed.

**Member Irwin:** Thank you, Madam Speaker. It has been a moment since I've introduced an amendment. Do you need me to read the . . .

**The Deputy Speaker:** I do.

**Member Irwin:** Perfect.

**The Deputy Speaker:** Please note that you are still not to read your name.

**Member Irwin:** I will not read my own name. I did catch that part. Thank you. I move that the motion for second reading of Bill 39, Child Care Licensing (Early Learning and Child Care) Amendment Act, 2020, be amended by deleting all of the words after "that" and substituting the following:

Bill 39, Child Care Licensing (Early Learning and Child Care) Amendment Act, 2020, be not now read a second time because the Assembly is of the view that the proposed legislation will not adequately improve safety within the child care sector, and therefore further stakeholder consultation is required to address these deficiencies.

I'm going to just speak briefly on this, and you are going to be hearing a whole lot more from my colleagues, in particular the Member for Edmonton-Whitemud, who, as I mentioned, has been doing a great deal of work on this file. It's a very difficult thing to speak about the death of a child, but we know that the death of 22-month-old toddler Mackenzy Woolfsmith happened in 2012 at the hands of her caregiver in a day home that was unlicensed and unregulated. One of the biggest concerns that my colleagues have identified in this piece of legislation is that the inquiry that followed the death of this young child set out a whole series of specific recommendations to address safety. They focused, really, on safety and unlicensed day homes, but it was broader than that.

The report found a number of things, and for time purposes I won't go into all of them. The report outlined the fact that we know that the death of a child at the hands of a trusted caregiver is a parent's worst nightmare, and it talked about the interconnected issues and causes behind what happened in this very tragic incident and pointed out that it was because of a number of risk factors that this young person died. We're raising this, and this is obviously an incredibly serious and heartbreaking situation. We need to talk about this. We need to give that family, the Woolfsmith family, the clarity and the answers that they deserve, and we need to give all families that access child care across this province some certainty when it comes to safety in child care. We're asking by this amendment – we're pleading with this government, in fact – to take a step back, to engage in further consultation, to do right by these families today and in the future.

With that, I will conclude my remarks, noting that we will be speaking about this in more detail in coming days. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

**The Deputy Speaker:** Hon. members, Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available.

Seeing none, are there any members wishing to speak to amendment RA1 on Bill 39? The hon. Minister of Justice.

**Mr. Madu:** Thank you, Madam Speaker. I would move that we adjourn debate on this matter.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

**Bill 35  
Tax Statutes (Creating Jobs and Driving Innovation)  
Amendment Act, 2020**

Member Loyola moved that the motion for second reading of Bill 35, Tax Statutes (Creating Jobs and Driving Innovation) Amendment Act, 2020, be amended by deleting all the words after “that” and substituting the following:

Bill 35, Tax Statutes (Creating Jobs and Driving Innovation) Amendment Act, 2020, be not now read a second time because the Assembly is of the view that a reduction in the corporate income tax rate that rewards foreign shareholders is an ineffective strategy to create jobs, relative to the alternatives.

[Adjourned debate on the amendment November 16: Mr. Ellis]

**The Deputy Speaker:** Any members wishing to join debate? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

**Ms Gray:** Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I’m pleased to join the debate on Bill 35, speaking to the reasoned amendment. Because we have not had the opportunity to talk on Bill 35 yet this evening, I will just remind members that our reasoned amendment is that

Bill 35, Tax Statutes (Creating Jobs and Driving Innovation) Amendment Act, 2020, be not now read a second time because the Assembly is of the view that a reduction in the corporate income tax rate that rewards foreign shareholders is an ineffective strategy to create jobs, relative to the alternatives.

Madam Speaker, I rise to speak in support of this reasoned amendment. What we have seen since this government initially used its \$4.7 billion corporate handout to try and restart this economy: we’ve seen 50,000 job losses prepandemic, we’ve seen a doubling of the deficit prepandemic, with Alberta becoming the second weakest economy in Canada, and we’ve seen five credit downgrades in a single year and a government that seems to be struggling in fulfilling the jobs mandate that it was elected under.

**12:50**

In this piece of legislation we see an acceleration of that \$4.7 billion corporate tax giveaway. Rather than doubling down on a failed strategy, what Albertans need, what our province needs is a real solution. That’s one of the reasons why the Official Opposition, through the website [albertasfuture.ca](http://albertasfuture.ca), has been engaging with Albertans to find real alternatives that will come up with a plan that can help move things better here in the province. This Legislature can do better than doubling down on a failed trickle-down economics plan, that this government has started off with. There are so many things we could be doing to help Albertans through this, to create jobs.

We keep seeing layoffs from major employers who have benefited from this corporate giveaway. We have seen, unfortunately, things that really do harm our economy like auto insurance premiums going up 24 per cent, school fees going from zero dollars to up to \$500, sometimes more, per year per child, yet Albertans are footing this bill for the \$4.7 billion corporate handout. And when we ask for the economic analysis behind this, the FOIP returns blank, with no information, no evidence that this will work or that this will provide a solution.

The Official Opposition has been working through [albertasfuture.ca](http://albertasfuture.ca) to really start engaging Albertans in these job-creation ideas, what we can do with our economy to improve, and doing that work based on several important pieces of the values behind the discussion. I think that’s really important because the values behind the \$4.7 billion giveaway are that if we give large, profitable corporations absolutely everything they want in a giant race to the bottom, they will create jobs, which is not what we’ve seen, and the evidence has disproved that.

Our ideas at [albertasfuture.ca](http://albertasfuture.ca) are based around five principles: job security for Albertans, with a real focus on creating those jobs, and achievable job-creation targets in the short and medium terms; equity and inclusion of all Albertans, because if we are leaving behind entire sectors of our population, that is not a good solution; diversification as a priority, not a luxury, as the Finance minister said prior to losing 50,000 jobs prepandemic; a recognition of the role of the public service in growing the economy – I’m not even totally certain what the UCP government thinks of the public service, but they certainly seem hell bent on attacking them over and over and over – and finally, a rejection of that race to the bottom.

I wholeheartedly support this reasoned amendment. I think that through the debate on Bill 35 we’ve provided sufficient evidence to have all members of this House support this reasoned amendment, and I very much look forward to the continued debate this evening.

Thank you very much, Madam Speaker.

**The Deputy Speaker:** Hon. members, Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available.

Seeing none, any other members wishing to join debate on the reasoned amendment? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadows.

**Mr. Deol:** Thank you, Madam Speaker, once again. It’s my honour to rise in the House and speak to the amendment on Bill 35, Tax Statutes (Creating Jobs and Driving Innovation) Amendment Act, 2020. I just wanted to actually be clear on this: I’m speaking in favour of this amendment.

The reason I’m speaking in favour of this amendment is that what is being proposed in Bill 35 is not really backed by evidence. It’s basically the same notion, the notion the UCP government told Albertans to believe 16, 17 months ago, back in 2019. The purpose of the bill that was passed last year, that handed out \$4.7 billion: that money goes to the super rich, profitable corporations and then comes back to the economy in a way that creates jobs. Even then we argued in the House that this argument does not make sense. It does not make sense based on the information, based on the facts, based on the evidence from those very jurisdictions where these approaches with trickle-down effects have been applied in different parts of the world.

These moves did not only fail the people, they not only lost jobs, but there are obvious examples and information for the record that the jurisdictions who applied these theories actually ended up being bankrupted. That is why, when we talk about these trickle-down effect theories and the UCP government’s decision to hand out Alberta taxpayers’ money to super rich corporations, corporations that don’t even belong to Alberta – obviously, those corporations picked up the money and either laid off workers in Alberta or, you know, wrapped up the projects and moved out of the country.

So those are the facts that happened in Alberta. The government cannot deny that evidence, those facts.

What it will deliver to us: the government said, when it was first introduced in the House, that it will create 55,000 jobs within a seven-month period of time. But we saw 50,000 jobs lost in those seven months. The loss added up to, I will say, another 5,000 jobs.

The economy shrank, the deficit doubled, and Alberta is facing one of the highest unemployment rates in the country.

Those are some of the concerns I have. I wanted to support the reasoned amendment that this bill should be referred to committee, and I will conclude my comments with these remarks, Madam Speaker.

Thank you.

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

Seeing none, any other members wishing to speak to the amendment? The hon. Member for Edmonton-West Henday.

**Mr. Carson:** Thank you very much, Mr. — excuse me — Madam Speaker. I appreciate the opportunity to speak this early in the morning, and I apologize again for that mistake.

It is indeed an honour to rise to speak to Bill 35, as this government calls it, the Tax Statutes (Creating Jobs and Driving Innovation) Amendment Act, 2020.

**Mr. Jeremy Nixon:** Hear, hear.

**Mr. Carson:** Of course, I've been able to speak to this piece of legislation a couple of times now, and indeed I will be supporting the reasoned amendment that we have before us and not so much the actual legislation because it has been up to this point an absolute disaster.

1:00

I appreciate that the Member for Calgary-Klein and Cardston-Siksika continue to heckle the people on this side of the Legislature. The fact is that we are relaying to the Legislature what we hear from our own constituents, that up to this point, you know, this \$4.7 billion failed economic plan that this government has brought forward has not been working for families in our community. At the same time with the legislation that we see before the House right now, that we were speaking about earlier — the changes to WCB that will actually take money out of the pockets of injured workers in our province; looking at Bill 41, the insurance changes, taking money out of the pockets of injured drivers in our province — it's very clear the picture that is being painted by this government. They have very little regard for the workers of this province and the people that have been injured and at the end of the day the people who need support now more than ever as we continue through this global pandemic.

You know, the conversations that we've brought up as an opposition caucus were around things like paid leave, ensuring that Albertans who are out of work right now, mainly and, most unfortunately, because of the failed decisions of this government, the failure to take action, first of all, to continue moving forward with some of the very important tax credits that our government brought forward and instead axing all of those without any consultation. We heard the backlash from chambers of commerce across this province, from programs that were accessing or planning to access the interactive digital media tax credit. We saw many gaming companies and other digital media companies that were relying on some of that funding to bring in new investment.

Unfortunately, the direction that this government took was to instead, of course, lower taxes to the tune of \$4.7 billion. Unfortunately, up to this point we have seen absolutely nothing in return from these largest, most profitable corporations. We've seen them, once again, use that money to buy back stocks in their own corporations, to use that to transition out of our very own backyard instead of hiring people in the province. This failure of an ideology that we see with this \$4.7 billion handout is the very same failure that we saw from this government when they went back on our

proposals — or at least they talked against our proposals — when we raised the tax bracket on the highest, most wealthy individuals in our province. It's unfortunate that this government cannot see the fact that people who are the most well off, people who are the richest in our province — and this goes for corporations as well — are often not going to invest that money back into their workers, back into their corporations, and in turn back into our province but instead, once again, using it to either keep for themselves or transition that money into other jurisdictions.

The fact is that the interactive digital media tax credit that we brought forward, the other very important tax credits we brought forward ensured that that money was, one, accounted for, which is very important, a distinction that this government has not made in their \$4.7 billion failure of a program, and also that that money would stay in our province and actually benefit workers in our province.

We are going to have more opportunities to speak to this no doubt. Once again, I am in full support of the reasoned amendment that is before this Legislature. This piece of legislation should not go forward because, as has been stated several times through the course of this debate, there is absolutely zero proof that this program is working — absolutely zero — even in the government's own documents. So there's no reason for this to move forward, which is why I will be supporting this reasoned amendment.

Thank you.

**The Deputy Speaker:** Standing Order 29(2)(a)? The hon. Member for Cardston-Siksika.

**Mr. Schow:** Thank you, Madam Speaker. Just to clear the record, while I may have been talking loud, I was not heckling anyone from the opposition side. Just for the record.

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

Seeing none, any other members on the reasoned amendment? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

**Member Irwin:** Thank you, Madam Speaker. I, too, will keep my comments quite brief on Bill 35. There is a lot I want to say about this piece of legislation. I'm going to, obviously, focus on the need for us to urge this government to re-examine this piece of legislation, hence the amendment. You know, Bill 35 highlights — when I first saw this piece of legislation, the first words that came to mind were “priorities” and “misplaced priorities.” You know, this piece of legislation, Bill 35, says a lot about what this government values, what they care about, and it's not people. It's corporations, it's the wealthiest, and it's not the everyday Albertans who are my constituents, who are struggling every day just to make ends meet.

We're talking about priorities. We're talking about choices. This government had an opportunity. They knew very well when they drafted and introduced this piece of legislation that we were in the midst of a pandemic. When they could have chosen to introduce a piece of legislation as one of their first pieces of legislation of the session as a piece of legislation that would enhance and uplift the lives of their constituents, instead they chose to double down on their plan — say it with me — of the \$4.7 billion corporate giveaway — right? — page 144 of their budget. [interjections] Yeah. You know what? Again we hear apparently not heckling but a retort from the members opposite that it's about jobs. I'd love for him to respond with some evidence to support such an ill-informed claim. We know that the evidence absolutely shows otherwise. It shows that this government has had a horrendous record on jobs and the economy. [interjections]

**The Deputy Speaker:** Hon. members, we are in the early morning hours of this debate. [interjections] Order. Guys, let's just get through this, okay? Let's listen to the people who have the time to speak, and you will have your time to speak when the opportunity presents itself.

With that, the Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood, please continue.

**Member Irwin:** Thank you, Madam Speaker. I was just urging, through you, of course, the members opposite, who are claiming that this is just all about jobs, urging them quite reasonably, I would say, to show us the evidence and to outline for us how by, you know, believing in trickle-down economics, how these jobs are going to be created. I'd love to hear from some of those members exactly how they plan to do so.

I want to get back to the serious nature here. We're talking about tens of thousands, hundreds of thousands of Albertans, in fact, who are out of work. We're talking here in the House about our own constituents who have shared their stories of struggle – right? – of not knowing how they're going to make rent, make their mortgage payments, put food on their tables. Let me tell you that none of my constituents are saying that they're going to get there through this government giving money to the largest corporations. Absolutely not.

With that, I will conclude my remarks but again urge this government to rethink Bill 35.

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

Seeing none, any other members wishing to speak to the amendment? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

**Ms Sigurdson:** Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. It's my pleasure to join the debate on this reasoned amendment for Bill 35. I, of course, stand in support of it. Certainly, as my hon. colleagues have already indicated, the government's decision to accelerate the corporate tax giveaway, the \$4.7 billion, to already wealthy corporations is not helping Albertans.

It is definitely a choice of this government that they're doing that. This is on top of – we know that we have a \$14.4 billion tax advantage in Alberta compared to the next lowest taxed jurisdiction. Already we have that, so it is a decision that seems like, you know, throwing good money after bad. It's not needed. As my colleague framed it earlier, it's about choices. These choices that this government is making: someone is paying for those choices, and I know who they are.

**1:10**

You know, for sure it's seniors. The UCP government has deindexed the Alberta seniors' benefit. They've closed down the Seniors Advocate office that supported seniors to navigate provincial programs, help facilitate them getting support when they needed it. They've kicked 60,000 Albertans off the seniors' drug plan. They've increased costs for home care. They have plans to increase costs for continuing care, increasing charges for various costs within these facilities. They have plans to do this.

And then housing: the housing piece is completely abhorrent. They have no – zero – capital funding, no new capital funding. The last budget had no new capital funding. They had a 24 per cent reduction in rent supplements from the fall of 2019, and that's when the federal government has funds that are ready to go that the province has to match. There's supposed to be an agreement – I heard this directly from the minister's chief of staff – with the province of Alberta. It was supposed to happen in April, and for some magical reason it hasn't happened. That means hundreds of Albertans are without rent supplements, and I'm certainly getting

calls continuously in my constituency office regarding those rent supplements actually coming to an end as of March 31, 2021.

Guess who's paying. People who are already vulnerable, you know. Certainly, go ahead; give all the money to the corporations because that's going to help everyone. No, no, no, no. That is false. It's not trickling down, and it's at the cost, it's at the expense of seniors, vulnerable Albertans on low incomes.

We certainly know that the housing management bodies that do an amazing job serving low-income Albertans – these are often, you know, rent-geared-to-income facilities, so people are paying 30 per cent or so of their income to the facilities. Certainly, part of the responsibility of government is to help fund the housing management bodies, to support them so that people can live in dignity, you know. Housing is a human right. Many of these facilities are many years old, though, like 30, 40 years old, and there needs to be much more refurbishment. But remember what I said earlier. No new capital funding. That's not happening, so how are we going to keep these units open? Well, we have maintenance and renewal. Every year you put in a certain allocation of funding so that people can turn suites over, make sure that they're livable for the next family that wants to live in there.

When we first became government, we inherited a billion-dollar deficit in maintenance and renewal in these kinds of facilities, and our \$1.2 billion affordable housing plan went some way to filling that hole. Believe me, there was so much more to do. It's just abhorrent that this government isn't doing that. That's another thing they've cut: \$53 million from that investment in maintenance and renewal. These are definitely clear choices that the government is making, and we know that seniors, vulnerable Albertans are paying for that \$4.7 billion corporate tax giveaway.

Thank you.

**The Deputy Speaker:** Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available. The hon. Minister of Justice.

**Mr. Madu:** Thank you so much, Madam Speaker. It wasn't my intention to speak tonight, but listening to the Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood and the Member for Edmonton-Riverview – you know, it feels so weird hearing the words “jobs,” “economy” from these folks' commentary tonight. These are folks who have no idea what it means to build a functional economy. You know, these are folks who for four years ran Alberta's economy into the ground: 180,000 folks out of work, chased away billions of dollars – billions of dollars – away from the province, and pursued policies that undermined the largest sector of the Canadian economy, worked with all kinds of activists around the globe to undermine our access to international markets. Yet we sit down in this House every single day and night, and we hear them talk about economy, jobs. What is their solution?

Imagine if we had hit our job creators with a 50 per cent corporate income tax. That is their solution. Then, saddled with this pandemic: imagine. If we think that this pandemic has caused a lot of havoc on our corporations, those who actually created the jobs that our people rely on, imagine if we had an NDP government that then imposed a 50 per cent corporate income tax on them. Imagine the devastation. If we think what Albertans are going through right now is bad, imagine if the NDP were in charge of this province at this point in time. We would be in a complete lockdown of every sector of our economy. Absolute lockdown. Our corporations would be struggling like we've never seen before.

What we do agree on, Madam Speaker, is that our people are suffering right now. We do agree on that, all of us. Folks are suffering, but folks are suffering as a consequence of multiple factors, one that began with the NDP in 2015. You know, they



talked about debt and deficit. For the four years that they ran the province, every single year they ran a deficit in the billions of dollars. Billions of dollars. Let me remind them once again. In 2015 the entire provincial government debt was \$12.9 billion. By April of 2019 that debt was almost \$70 billion, in less than three and a half years. Those were the circumstances that we inherited: a depressed economy, policies that devastated our economy, debt, and deficit. An unhinged NDP, that worked with the federal Liberal government, undermined the largest sector of Alberta's economy. Then we started digging ourselves out of it, and then the pandemic.

In the midst of the pandemic this political party still wants us to impose a 50 per cent corporate income tax. That is their solution. That is their solution, Madam Speaker. That's all they want. The beginning and the end of their economic philosophy is in tax, tax, and tax. It doesn't matter whether or not all of the reputable economists out there have denounced their economic policies.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

**The Deputy Speaker:** Are there any other members who would like to speak? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs.

**Ms Goehring:** Thank you, Madam Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise this morning to speak to Bill 35, Tax Statutes (Creating Jobs and Driving Innovation) Amendment Act, 2020, on the reasoned amendment, which I am in full support of. I've spoken to this piece of legislation and expressed some serious concerns about what this government is trying to do to create jobs. I've referred to it as driving industry away, driving professions away. It's not driving innovation at this time. Their record shows that they've taken incredible talent from this province and forced them to leave. We've had industry refuse to invest in this province. We've had this Finance minister cut scientific research, experimental development credit, interactive digital media tax credits. The list goes on, Madam Speaker. For this government to say that this is the piece of legislation that's going to create jobs is just simply not true.

1:20

I think that I can wholeheartedly agree with my colleagues on this side of the House that this bill should not be read a second time and that the reasoned amendment is the way to go. There was very poor consultation that occurred, if they're actually talking to people in industry to hear what they need. I don't believe that this is what Albertans are asking for.

We know that there are so many other factors in place when it comes to drawing investment into our province, when it comes to asking people to consider bringing their jobs here. When you look at the state of the province – when you look at our health care, when you look at our education, when you look at the supports that have been absolutely decimated for AISH and PDD – there's no interest in bringing an organization, a profitable industry to the province of Alberta. It's more than just having a tax credit, it's more than what they're offering here; it's the whole picture of what the province is going through right now. For them to bring this piece of legislation right now, proceeding with their agenda despite the pandemic, despite evidence that shows that this is not effective – it doesn't make sense to continue with this piece of legislation.

I wholeheartedly support that we vote yes in this reasoned amendment and that we stop this piece of legislation from moving forward. We know that this doesn't make sense. It's part of their failed plan, that they were giving away \$4.7 billion to already profitable corporations that were investing outside of this province. This piece of legislation ultimately, again, is leaving Albertans behind. It's not looking at drawing investment into the province, it's not looking at all the factors that an employer makes

when considering moving their business to another jurisdiction. Families, I can tell you, would not be happy if their spouse came home and said: we're moving to Alberta. This is what we have to offer: it's complete chaos right now when you look at our health care system, how the government is ineffectively dealing with COVID, ineffectively dealing with health care and education. It's not a good time to invest in our province, and there are so many things that need to happen before we can really look at ways to create jobs.

This piece of legislation just simply doesn't do that, Madam Speaker. We're driving away incredible talent, incredible people from industries all across the board when they look at the postsecondary cuts that are happening. The list goes on. I don't think that this is the appropriate time to continue with this piece of legislation, and I support my colleagues on this side of the House with our reasoned amendment. I would encourage all members of the House to do that at this time.

Thank you.

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

Seeing none, any other members wishing to join debate on the reasoned amendment?

**Hon. Members:** Question.

[Motion on amendment RA1 lost]

**The Deputy Speaker:** We are back on the main bill. Any members wishing to join debate on Bill 35? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

**Member Irwin:** Thank you, Madam Speaker. Sorry; it's been a long day for all of us. It's certainly an honour to stand and speak in this House. Before I make a move here, I would like to just recap a couple of the comments, very briefly here, that have been made this evening in regard to Bill 35. It's clear from the comments of my colleagues this evening that this bill is wrong for Albertans. It's clear that with whatever form of consultation this government has done, it's certainly not reflecting the wishes of my constituents and of many Albertans who have written to us, called us, reached out to us in many ways to say that corporate giveaways are not going to address the very real challenges that our province is facing. Despite what this government might try to say in their justifications for giving handouts to large corporations and in their justifications of cutting a number of the programs that our government introduced while we were in office, despite all that, this is not – this is not – the direction that our province needs to be taking.

We need a government right now to show leadership. We are in the midst of a pandemic. I know I sound like a broken record because I seem to make that statement every time I rise in this House because it feels as if this government forgets the very real situation that we find ourselves in. We need a government that has our backs, that believes in people first, not corporations, and that believes in an economic recovery that uplifts Albertans, doesn't hurt them, doesn't attack those who are the most vulnerable, whether they be AISH recipients, whether they be the folks who are looking for affordable housing, as my colleague from Edmonton-Riverview so eloquently stated, whether they be front-line workers who are front-line health care workers like those who do laundry. This government has shown complete disregard and a lack of respect for so many Albertans. I don't know. My time is tight, but I could've listed countless groups of Albertans that have been attacked and disrespected by this government, and I don't know how long it's going to take before suddenly this government has alienated all Albertans.

With that, I would like to introduce an amendment that will urge this government to reconsider Bill 35. I will pause for a moment. Great, Madam Speaker. You confirm and let me know. I can do hand signals. You let me know. I'm nimble.

**Mr. Schow:** It's a fluid situation.

**The Deputy Speaker:** This will be known as amendment – order. When I stand, you don't speak.

**Mr. Schow:** Apologies.

**The Deputy Speaker:** This will be known as amendment HA1. Please proceed.

**Member Irwin:** Thank you. I'd like to introduce the following amendment. I would like to move that the motion for second reading of Bill 35, Tax Statutes (Creating Jobs and Driving Innovation) Amendment Act, 2020, be amended by deleting all of the words after "that" and substituting the following:

Bill 35, Tax Statutes (Creating Jobs and Driving Innovation) Amendment Act, 2020, be not now read a second time but that it be read a second time this day six months hence.

I think this is an extremely fitting hoist amendment that we'd be introducing because, again, we're in the midst of a pandemic. Six months from now this world will look a whole lot different, this province will look a whole lot different, and this is an opportunity for this government to do the right thing, to re-examine this piece of legislation in a timely manner. Let us hope – let us hope – that we are in a better situation in six months in this province.

With that, I would like to adjourn debate. Thank you.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

**The Deputy Speaker:** The hon. Minister of Justice.

**Mr. Madu:** Thank you, Madam Speaker. Through you to all members of this Assembly I do want to thank them for a spirited debate tonight. It has been a very fruitful evening, having gone through five pieces of different legislation tonight. With that, I do move that the Assembly be adjourned until 1:30 p.m. on Wednesday, November 18, 2020.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 1:30 a.m. on Wednesday]

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