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The 30th Legislature
Second Session

Alberta Hansard

Tuesday evening, November 24, 2020

Day 70

The Honourable Nathan M. Cooper, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta The 30th Legislature

Second Session

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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

7:30 p.m.

Tuesday, November 24, 2020

[Mrs. Pitt in the chair]

The Deputy Speaker: Hon members, please be seated.

Government Bills and Orders Committee of the Whole

Bill 39 Child Care Licensing (Early Learning and Child Care) Amendment Act, 2020

[Mrs. Pitt in the chair]

The Chair: Any members wishing to join debate? The hon. Member for St. Albert.

Ms Renaud: Thank you, Madam Chair. It's my pleasure to rise and speak in Committee of the Whole to Bill 39, Child Care Licensing (Early Learning and Child Care) Amendment Act, 2020. I think, just to review, I know that my colleagues have spoken at length about this piece of legislation. I'd like to add my thoughts and support some of the things that they've already said in this place that I think we can all agree on: affordable, accessible, and quality child care and early learning is a key pillar to our economic recovery.

The Minister of Children's Services will tell you that the bill improves the early learning and child care sector, when in reality it does very little of what it claims to do. It doesn't recognize that child care is about early learning by ignoring the quality standards this government has already removed, and will, in fact, decrease the quality of child care. The minister refuses to divulge the members of her working group that consulted on this legislation, which is not all that surprising but nonetheless concerning, and changes alluded to by the minister will only be through regulation, a process that does not allow for debate or deliberation in this place.

I think, Madam Chair, that has been an alarming trend of this government, to remove decision-making or debate opportunities from this place and move decision-making behind closed doors so that really significant changes are made in regulation and very often Albertans are finding out too late or after the fact. Of course, I have a few questions and then I will move an amendment, but, you know, I've not heard the answers to some of these questions, so I'm just going to add them to what is, I'm sure, a growing list of questions.

Why does early learning only appear in the bill in reference to the title of the act itself? I know that when not on duty, I have watched some of my colleagues, in particular the Member for Edmonton-Whitemud, debate and speak passionately about the need to include early learning within the body of the bill. It is that important. Just to have it in the title really seems a little bit ridiculous when if that is indeed the focus of the legislation, why isn't there sort of a detailed plan as to how early learning will, in fact, be encouraged or supported through this legislation? When there is no requirement for a focus on early learning in the legislation, how, then, do you ensure that early learning is incorporated in all early learning and child care situations?

Following the cancellation of accreditation, there were no quality standards for this sector, only health and safety requirements, and one of the top issues for educators and providers was that quality standards be moved to legislation. We still don't see this in the legislation, yet the minister insists that it is there. So it would be most helpful if somebody on the government side would, at some

point, walk us through this. Maybe we have looked through it and not seen it. Perhaps they could shed some light on where this is.

One of the things I did want to touch on really quickly is that there are different standards and requirements around child care, whether that's a site or provided in a home, and I think in the government's race to reduce red tape, I have – well, I think anyone will admit that there are certainly regulations or red tape that is old, that doesn't do maybe what it set out to do, that should have been eliminated a while ago, or maybe there's just a new way of doing things. I get that, that there is some regulation and some red tape that is perhaps no longer necessary, and I would add that there is likely regulation and red tape and rules that we need to put into play because they're missing. I think, around child care and early learning, that standards and accreditation and all of those things that go along with it are so incredibly important because those are the things that providers actually do rely on, the providers that want to be the best providers that they can. It's actually quite a helpful framework.

I was involved years ago, actually, helping set up a bit of a co-operative for child care for workers. I was initially a little bit stunned by the amount of work that was involved in meeting all of the health and safety standards. Those were pretty straightforward in terms of, you know, health and fire and all of those things. But the other pieces were really around the quality of care. So it didn't just look at nutrition and breaks and activity and how the day was scheduled and all of those things, but it touched on some real sort of development goals and ways that operators or providers could be delivering services.

You know, again, I am skeptical that such a big piece of the goals, such a big focus of this piece of legislation is actually to roll back some standards that are important. I don't think the UCP actually has demonstrated that there is a large desire for that to be rolled back and what the benefit is to Alberta families and ultimately to Alberta children. I have not seen that.

I'm going to stop there, and I'm going to switch gears a little bit. I'm going to introduce an amendment on behalf of my colleague the Member for Edmonton-Whitemud.

The Chair: Hon. members, this will be known as amendment A2. Hon. member, please proceed.

Ms Renaud: Okay. The Member for Edmonton-Whitemud moves that Bill 39, Child Care Licensing (Early Learning and Child Care) Amendment Act, 2020, be amended in section 4(a) by striking out the proposed clause (b) and substituting the following:

- (b) "child care," of a child, means the temporary care and supervision of the child, or an early learning program focused on the child's learning, development, safety and well-being that is provided to the child, by an individual other than their parent or guardian but does not include . . .

I think it sort of stopped there.

Section 4 of Bill 39 defines child care as: the temporary care and supervision of a child by an individual other than the child's parent or guardian but does not include. This amendment adds that child care includes "an early learning program focused on the child's learning, development, safety and well-being that is provided to the child."

This amendment recognizes that child care is not glorified babysitting. It's about early learning. It recognizes that the early years of a child's life are critical to learning and development. Bill 39 adds early learning to the title of the act, but does not mention it anywhere else in the act. This is a superficial change with really no substance behind it. It's clear that this government is not committed to supporting quality early learning.

Why would I say that? They cancelled accreditation standards for quality and broke their promise to child care educators, providers, and parents that these standards would be incorporated into legislation. That did not happen. They ended the \$25-a-day early learning and child care pilot project which, along with affordability, implemented the Flight early childhood education curriculum, provided wage top-ups and professional development to educators. They are refusing to improve the minimum qualifications of early childhood educators and provide support for training and professional development even though the minister has said that she knows the qualifications of early childhood educators are the primary indicator of quality early learning.

Just based on that last piece alone, it doesn't really make sense. I mean, we say this all the time, that what you say is relevant, but it's what you do that is important. I find this again and again with the government. They will pop up and say all kinds of things that they claim they're doing or that they're leaning towards or they're working towards, and they'll say these things in this place or online or in press conferences or wherever, but when it comes right down to it, show the work, show your work. Are you actually doing what you say you're doing? Again and again this government has demonstrated that they say all kinds of things, but their actions do not support the things that they say.

7:40

I think that this amendment is important, to add learning to child care, to the definition. I think it is important. I think it is probably the very least we can do. There are a number of issues and problems with this piece of legislation, but I think this particular amendment would address at least a couple of concerns.

With that, I will take my seat and allow my colleagues to add their thoughts.

The Chair: Any members wishing to speak to amendment A2 on Bill 39? The hon. Member for Edmonton-West Henday.

Mr. Carson: Well, thank you, Madam Chair. It's an honour to rise to speak to A2, an amendment for Bill 39, once again reflecting on the amendment that's before us on behalf of the Member for Edmonton-Whitemud, requesting that we add early learning to the child care definition. I think back to the beginning of this conversation and, first of all, obviously, the Minister of Children's Services making what I would say is the wrong decision to get rid of the accreditation process in our province. It had been in place for 16 years. At the time the minister said that was to cut red tape. Just looking at the dollar figure that that represented, about \$3 million is what the minister said it would save for the ministry. With the removal of the accreditation process, unfortunately not only are there concerns about standards being upheld in the first place to the same level as they have been for so many years in our province, but the bigger concern is that while the minister says that they're saving \$3 million, when we look at the budget of that minister for, as far as I can tell, this year there was, up to the last opportunity that I had to see, much more than that missing from the minister's portfolio in terms of money that was reallocated within the government's budget.

At the same time as we have a minister saying, "Ah, we're doing this so that we can provide better services within our ministry," unfortunately money has actually disappeared from that ministry to be reallocated to other things that are not supporting child care and early learning in our province. I most definitely appreciate that we see here this amendment that is including the concept of early learning in the definition of child care. There is no doubt that through the discussions that I've seen, and even back to the original

change that the minister made to remove the accreditation process, we've seen a lot of organizations come forward and say that this was the completely wrong direction to move. Unfortunately, as we see this piece of legislation, the Child Care Licensing (Early Learning and Child Care) Amendment Act, 2020, come before us, there is no real commitment other than the title that there is such an importance put on early learning.

You know, I think of some of the opportunities that I had to go visit these centres that were accredited through the past government process, when we had implemented our \$25-a-day child care program, and they took the opportunity to reflect on how important such accreditation processes were, not only to the centre itself and their ability to educate themselves and, in turn, educate the children that they were caring for but also ensuring that there was a level of quality that was in place for parents when they ask: "Well, what is my child learning? How is my child developing?" Those are important questions that unfortunately it seems like this government is just saying are needless paperwork as they eliminate the accreditation process, which is deeply frustrating and unfortunate.

When we look at the comments, when the accreditation process was dismantled, of the Alberta Association for the Accreditation of Early Learning and Care Services, an organization obviously working hard to ensure that these standards of early learning and education are in place, they were very frustrated and saddened to see this accreditation process disappear. Unfortunately, once again, instead of this minister coming back to us with a process that has potentially strengthened the early learning and child care process, the only time that we see that is in the actual title. When we look at this amendment, talking about that we need to add that child care includes "an early learning program focused on the child's learning, development, safety and well-being that is provided to the child," it is incredibly important that this is included in the legislation.

Albertans deserve a government that invests in the people and that is willing to ensure that when we talk about important ministries like Children's Services, we are doing all that we can to ensure, in this instance, that children are getting the early learning opportunities that they deserve. Once again, while this Minister of Children's Services stands up day after day and says that, you know, what they are doing is the right decision, unfortunately, when we read the legislation and the lack of detail in it specifically around early learning education, it seems that we just simply can't take the minister's word for it. There are too many details missing in terms of what should be expected of these early learning centres and child care centres, and it's very unfortunate that up to this point we haven't been able to get any real answers. I heard some of the debate this afternoon, and unfortunately, once again, I just left with more questions than answers in terms of how this legislation is actually going to benefit Albertans.

You know, I remember back to the previous election, in 2019. There were a couple of parties, one, of course, being ours, talking about the expansion of \$25-a-day child care, and unfortunately we saw that the UCP did not have a credible plan for reducing fees for Albertans. Once again, to this day, as this legislation comes forward, we see that not only do they not have a credible plan to expand affordable child care across this province; instead, we see money being scaled back from that minister's portfolio, and even further we are seeing the accreditation process disappear. What's being brought back in its place is lacklustre at best.

Once again, the minister will tell us that this bill improves the early learning and child care sector, but in reality it doesn't accomplish anything that she claimed earlier today. She talked about, you know, that these are guiding principles, but unfortunately guiding principles are simply not enough to ensure

that the children across our province are getting the supports and the early learning opportunities that they need.

I'm happy to, you know, reflect on the idea that every child care facility may be different and might potentially offer different levels of support. While, you know, I would hope that we do have benchmarks in place, which was the important reason for having accreditation in the first place, I recognize that different facilities will offer different opportunities, so you might receive different things, depending on where you go. For a variety of reasons, that could be a good thing in most cases, but we need to do our best, once again, to ensure that there is a basic level of accreditation and standards for ensuring that early learning opportunities are in place.

When we look at Bill 39 and the idea that it's adding "Early Learning" to the title of the act but does not mention it anywhere else, not even once, in the act, it is a completely superficial change from this minister, with no substance behind it. When we talk about the changes that we are asking for through this amendment, I think it is very straightforward that we should be doing our best to at least strengthen the definition of child care as requested in this amendment.

Just, you know, reflecting back to I believe it was March of this year and the wrong decision of this minister to go back on the accreditation process and then moving forward to, I believe between June and July, a one-month process for consultation, a very short period of time that was presented by the minister, even after that fact we heard from many people within the industry and within early learning development and child care facilities that they did not feel that they were adequately consulted or that what has come forward since then reflects the consultation that they had expected to see or the changes that they had expected to see.

7:50

Once again, we heard from YW Calgary – I'm just looking at a past *Edmonton Journal* article – a registered charity that also offers accredited, licensed child care. They were quoted as saying, "This is time now that we can dedicate to working with our children versus working in the back room getting ready for an audit."

You know, obviously, we need to do our best, as this government likes to say, to get rid of red tape anywhere we can, and there are opportunities for that. The minister earlier today talked about the idea of moving things to more digital processes. I can agree with that completely, that we need to do our best to reduce the burden on these child care facilities and on the child care system to ensure that the money is getting to the front lines, to ensure that the time is spent on things like early learning programs. I appreciate when we talk about digitizing processes and simplifying processes, but the fact is that, at the end of the day, if we start removing the idea of accreditation processes or we start removing or weakening the auditing process, we have to be careful that we aren't losing other important aspects of what we require of our child care facilities in the process. We need to ensure that through that process of, once again, as the government likes to call it, reducing red tape, we aren't hurting the early learning opportunities for these Albertans.

When we look at the very substantive accreditation process that was in place, when we talk about the idea of protecting outcomes for children and being able to have a clear process in place that is auditable and is held accountable across the system, you know, the outcomes for children were an important aspect of the accreditation process that was in place, and the outcomes for families and the outcomes for staff were important pieces of that. Unfortunately, with the removal of this accreditation process, these are all important pieces that, well, will no longer necessarily need to be

held to the same level of account as they were in the past. The other piece, of course, is the outcome for community.

These are all important pieces to reflect on when we look at the child care system and the programs that they are building, whether they're responsive to the diverse needs of Albertans and the children and the families and the communities across our province. Unfortunately, none of that is reflected in the legislation that is before us from the Children's Services ministry. That's very unfortunate. I hope that, as the minister has discussed, through moving forward with the regulatory process and the consultation process for the regulations, we might see some of these things included in the legislation, but I truly don't understand why it wasn't put in there in the first place.

Once again, I do want to show my support for the member who has brought this amendment forward, ensuring that we at least, at the very minimum, properly define what child care is in this legislation to strengthen it just a little bit better than it is already.

With that, Madam Chair, I appreciate the opportunity to speak to this, and I will take my seat. Thank you.

The Chair: I see the hon. minister of status of women and multiculturalism.

Mrs. Aheer: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. It's a mouthful, I know. Thank you for the opportunity to speak and the opportunity to debate this. This is such an important discussion, especially given the situations we're finding ourselves in.

I just wanted to clarify a few things for our friends opposite. When we talk about red tape, we're talking about some redundancies. When we look at the 95 per cent of spaces that are in this province, when we're looking at licensing in particular, one thing that I think my friend across the way here doesn't realize – and he had actually mentioned it; I wasn't sure exactly where he was going with this – is that when we look at the number of hours, when we think about what we want our child care workers to be able to do with our precious kids, that we leave with them, is to be able to actually spend time with those kids and to be able to help them. If you look at the guiding principles throughout accreditation and with respect to licensing, it's about inclusiveness and making sure that kids have loving people around them and all of that. The hours that are spent on paperwork behind the scenes that could be spent with the children are truly important.

I think this is a very, very good discussion, but I'd just like to clarify a few points. Obviously, child care is essential to our economic recovery, making sure that those spaces are available. The problem with accreditation is that it stopped a lot of other spaces from being able to get the top-ups that were necessary to make sure that we have enough spaces available. Especially as women are going back to work and especially because our schools are open, we want to make sure that that is available. It's really, really important that those spaces are available.

I just would like to talk about how the licensing versus the accreditation were parallel programs. That was a lot of red tape. There was a lot of paperwork with respect to accreditation. The other thing, too, is that if spaces can't open as a result of accreditation, that allows the government to pick winners and losers when it comes to the opportunities for families to have choice as to where they'd like to have their children go. We want to make sure that families here in Alberta have as many choices as possible because it's not the same for everybody. We all live in different regions. We have rural families. We have families that are travelling and commuting for their jobs, especially right now, with our incredible health care workers. You know, especially right now, it's never been more important. I'm very, very proud of the minister for

the work that she did, especially at the onset of COVID, in getting those child care centres and, actually, of the sector itself, who did some incredible work advocating on behalf of the sector to make sure that they had safe spaces for our little ones to go back to.

I think that for the members opposite, if we're addressing the outcomes, which I think is what we should actually be looking at, versus the semantics around the language of what it is that we're doing, if we're actually looking at the outcomes of what is in the best interest of our munchkins that are in these spaces, the licensing of these spaces is, in principle, going to outline the outcomes that would run in this parallel piece. If that means that our workers are able to spend more time with the kids – and, again, I bring up our crisis that we're in right now. You know, there's a lot of fear out there. There's a lot of confusion. It's never been more important for our kids to feel safe in these spaces. So, again, a huge thank you.

I wanted to say, too, one of the interesting things on this that I learned from the minister upon this discussion – because I can honestly say that, like, in my lifetime I actually never used child care, so it was beyond my capacity to even really have this discussion. It was very, very far from the way that I had raised my kids. I'm so happy that these things and these choices are available to families nowadays, but I honestly needed to understand how it all worked. What was interesting was that when it comes to the work that was done behind this, did you know, Madam Chair, that there hadn't been a really long and robust consultation on this for almost 10 years? So as much as I very much appreciate what the former government was looking to do and the opportunities that they tried to create and the spaces, the problem is that when you look at the way that it was working out, there were a lot of folks who couldn't have access, or the spaces weren't in the right areas. I think that with any situation you're looking at where it is, and you tweak it, and you fix it, and you move forward. So I'm very proud of our minister, who was able to do this.

To answer the questions around this amendment, the questions that they have are actually answered in the principles of the document, so I do believe that any concerns that they have will be managed in there. I wanted to say also that licensing teams have more time to focus on the programs. I have a girlfriend, actually, who has her little ones in a really, really great I guess it would be a day home. Pardon me if my language isn't a hundred per cent correct around this. The lady who runs the day home also speaks Spanish. She's teaching the kids Spanish. She has some other special classes that she does in there, and it's just phenomenal.

8:00

I think the member was talking about early childhood education. It's amazing. Given the creativity and the ability to create a viable business, women are going to come to the table, and this lady is doing an absolutely phenomenal job. She's teaching Spanish to these little ones. They are learning it so fast because, as you can imagine, their little minds are just opening up and learning languages lickety-split. It's been really amazing seeing her four-year-old pick up on Spanish as quickly as she has. Very, very impressive. I would hate to see that the burden of accreditation would stop this incredible lady from being able to do the phenomenal work that she's doing with our little ones and especially now.

The other thing, too, is the licensing. I believe the principle of accreditation is dealt with in the aspect of the way that the licensing is done. It's a risk-based licensing. Again, it allows these wonderful child care workers to really focus on the programs that they're doing, especially if we're talking about early childhood education.

The guiding principles in the legislation include quality, safety, well-being, inclusion, and child development, which is already –

that's what was listed, Madam Chair, in the principles around accreditation. You can see that it's really, really important, and I'd like to point out again that red tape reduction isn't always around just – I mean, this is actually helping businesses, and if we're talking about women-driven businesses, this is where it's at. If we can reduce the burden on these incredible women who are taking care of our babes and give them the space to create an amazing business, why wouldn't we want to do that? Having that doubled-up implementation of accreditation really, really stops some from being able to do that.

I would like to personally thank the minister for her work on this, and I would ask that all my colleagues please vote against the amendment. Thank you.

The Chair: Any other members wishing to speak to amendment A2 on Bill 39? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. I was very interested in speaking to this bill prior to the minister getting up, and now I have even more to say, so I guess for that, thank you. I appreciate commenting on the fact that somehow the minister is equating licensing with accreditation, and also I think there's a little bit of confusion there as to the fact that child care spaces weren't obligated to become accredited. But I can tell you that those that did want to went through a separate process. Now, what I find fascinating is that once again this UCP government calls any kind of regulation or process to elevate something to a higher standard: it's red tape; we've got to get rid of it. Where's the creativity? Where's the innovation?

If the process is bulky or time consuming, then streamline it. Do the work. Do your job. But just to throw it out because it was painful – and what's interesting is that a colleague of mine pointed out the fact that a child care licensee or an operator of an accredited child care space indicated that, once upon a time, being accredited meant that they would receive a top-up in order to get that designation. Again, to be really clear for Albertans and for everyone watching, that designation of being accredited was optional. It was voluntary. It was up to the child care provider if they decided to go after that.

To talk about how this was burdensome and overwhelming – these poor child care providers, right? I think that this bill – and I'll speak to the amendment, Madam Chair – does reduce some of the paperwork for administrators. Okay. Absolutely. Again, I think there was an option for providers or for the government to look at ways to streamline that paperwork. But just to throw the accreditation out and to say that that's the reason that there aren't enough spaces in this province is absurd. That's ridiculous. It's optional. It's not stopping people from starting businesses and opening up child care spaces. If you believe that, then you really don't understand that accreditation wasn't mandatory. I find this extremely frustrating.

The other thing is – and I will applaud my colleague who brought forward this amendment – that outside of the title of a bill, which we know is not worth the paper it was written on, for most bills anyway that I've seen thus far in this sitting, the early learning concept of child care: there's nothing in this bill that enhances early learning. I know I have some colleagues of mine that are also teachers that can attest to the fact that the first five years of a child's life are the most critical, the most critical in the development of that child. I can't stress that enough. I've met with a number of different early learning practitioners and experts and advocates who have said that if you want to give kids the best start, invest heavily on the front end, on that early learning. Now, I wish that this bill did something to augment that, to enhance it. I appreciate that this isn't a money bill, so this isn't going to increase funding, but let's look

at ways to strengthen the quality of early childhood learning. So far in this bill I see no evidence of any attempt to seize this opportunity.

If you're bringing forward a bill that could potentially make a significant difference and impact in the lives of children, again, our most precious resource – I get that the government doesn't get that. I mean, you see that in their K to 12 attack on education, cuts all over the place. You see that in our postsecondary, the fact that they cut, cut, cut. They throw back a couple million dollars and say: hey, maybe you should make a statue of us or a plaque or a trophy or something because we are so wonderful. The reality is: add up all of the cuts made and add up what you've put back and until you replace the funds that you have cut, and you're not making investments in postsecondaries. You're not making investments in education. As an educator there is nothing more frustrating than to see a government pay lip service to something with zero actions that follow it. At least have the courage or the conviction for the dollars to follow it.

What I find hypocritical is when members on the other side stand up and say: we don't have the money; we're broke. The reason that that wall in the Federal Building is being torn down: \$70,000. Table it. Show me that it's the cost of a full-time staff for the wall plus all the expenses. I'm not buying it, and neither are Albertans. What's naive about that is that you hand \$4.7 billion to corporations, and then you say: we don't have money for education; we have to fire 30,000 educational assistants; we don't have money for postsecondaries; we're downloading costs to municipalities who are struggling, who provide the majority of services. Then you say: yeah, and we have no money. It's disingenuous at best. I'm trying to keep my language as parliamentary as possible, but it's frustrating. In this bill there was an opportunity that the government had to enhance our child care. If there is a need for more child care spaces, then let's address that, but throwing out accreditation doesn't do that, especially because it was optional. It was voluntary. You can't stand here and say that that was a barrier to people opening up child care spaces because it wasn't.

8:10

Now, if the accreditation process was cumbersome and onerous and challenging, especially for the small operators, okay. Then let's address that. Let's look at ways to streamline it. But the purpose of the accreditation – again, you know, I want to thank my colleagues that have spoken to a number of operators and really dug in on this bill. If you go back to the history of accredited child care spaces in Alberta, do you know where it came from? Do the members opposite know why there are accredited child care spaces in the province? It wasn't because there was a New Democrat government that wanted to bureaucratize everything, and it wasn't because some bureaucrat somewhere thought: hey, let's make people go through heaps of paperwork. It's because industry asked for it. Industry said: we'd like a differentiator between the spaces and operators that go above and beyond and provide a certain standard of child care and others that don't, that are just doing the bare minimum. It was industry that said: we're willing to do the work; we're willing to take on this red tape and become accredited.

The incentive was twofold back then. First of all, again, it meant that it differentiated them from other child care spaces. It meant that they had to do more. They have to work harder. It kind of makes me think of academia and the difference between graduating with a degree and graduating with distinction. It requires more work. But the reward is that you have a designation that not everybody else has, and for families that feel that that's a priority, they have choice. What you are effectively doing is taking away that choice by eliminating accreditation. It makes me laugh – actually, it doesn't

because it's so frustrating – that you think that that's providing more choice. It's actually doing the opposite.

Second of all, it provided those operators who achieved accreditation the ability to increase a top-up or a higher amount of funding because they put in that work. That's the government not picking winners and losers, Minister. You missed that concept. It's about providing them with a top-up for putting in that extra work to provide Alberta families with a choice. By eliminating accreditation, you've now eliminated that choice. You've eliminated that option for parents and families. I mean, this is an example of taking a sledgehammer to put in, you know, a tack. Again, there are many families who sent their kids to accredited spaces and wanted that designation. Again, there are operators who asked for that accreditation.

You know, again I want to emphasize the fact that if that process was onerous, then fix it. There are more than two options here. It's not: have accredited spaces or don't. That's lazy. That's actually not providing choice. Choice is looking at creative ways to give families choices.

For these reasons, I support this amendment. But I'm extremely disappointed in this bill as it's currently written and the opportunities that this government could have taken to really enhance early childhood learning, which is critical. I don't have the numbers in front of me, but I know for a fact that the NDP government invested in early childhood learning. I know we also invested in the K to 12 system. Now, you can stand up, members of the government, because I'm sure they will: oh, we haven't cut education. I don't know who you think you're fooling, because it's there in black and white. In fact, it was – what? – 30,000 educational assistants that got the axe.

We'll see now, with the new measures that the government brought in, if school boards are squeezed further because now all students are going online: "You know what? Why don't we just pile 75 or 100 students in a room?" Well, they won't be in a room; they'll be online, but I'm sure an individual teacher can handle that, right? I know I shouldn't use sarcasm because *Hansard* doesn't capture it well. I am being sarcastic.

But, you know, education is an investment. I've said this over and over since I was first elected, that the people of this province are our greatest resource. We need to invest in people. We need to set them up for success, and one of the best ways to do that is to invest in our education system. Honestly, that starts right from the get-go, when a baby is born, to ensure that families have the support that they need to ensure that those babies are well looked after and well nourished. Then we move into our early learning and kindergarten, our K to 12 system, and beyond.

For these reasons, I support this amendment. I urge members of this Chamber to accept this amendment, and we will attempt to fix a bill which I think – you know, the bill in its current form doesn't deliver what the government claims it does. I think there's an opportunity to improve it, and I urge members to consider the amendments coming forward from the opposition.

Thank you.

The Chair: The hon. Minister of Culture, Multiculturalism and Status of Women.

Mrs. Aheer: Thank you very much. Thank you again to my colleague for this opportunity to debate this. I just wanted to – one of the things that is interesting that happens in here is some of the dripping sarcasm. I'm not quite sure. I think the member was saying something about unparliamentary language. What I think will be particularly fun will be clipping the beginning of his speech, when he went after the poor – and he stopped himself. Good for you. But

it just is another confirmation of the lack of respect for the private sector and for people, especially women. The dripping sarcasm that came off that comment initially: thank goodness he stopped. I can't wait to look at it because he literally attacked women, literally attacked the fact that after consultations they said . . .

Ms Gray: Point of order.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods. A point of order.

Point of Order

Allegations against a Member

Ms Gray: Thank you, Madam Chair. Under 23(h), (i), and (j) the minister opposite is accusing a specific member of literally attacking women. I find that to be not parliamentary, not appropriate in this place, not what took place, and that is why I raise this point of order for you to rule on.

Thank you.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-West.

Mr. Ellis: Well, thank you very much, Madam Chair. I certainly appreciate the passion of both members going back and forth, but I do believe that this can be perceived as a matter of debate. I know that the minister is certainly passionate about this, and I know that her language, of course, might have been very strong. But I certainly would encourage, you know, just if she's able to gather her emotions, a strong bit of caution. But I do believe it to be a matter of debate, and it's not a point of order.

Thank you.

The Chair: I would tend to agree with the hon. Member for Calgary-West. This is a matter of debate. However, I will say that both members are playing fairly close to the edge when it comes to inflammatory language against each other, members of this House.

I will ask that the hon. minister continue with her remarks.

8:20

Debate Continued

Mrs. Aheer: Thank you so much and thank you for the opportunity to continue. It's interesting, Madam Chair, that when we look at what it is that's actually being accomplished here and what the opposition is asking for, those are the things that are being accomplished. There are always so many articles and interesting opinions and sides on all this, and the opposition is right. There were people who had come up with ideas that were contrary to the legislation that came forward.

But one of the most interesting, like, I guess, validations of the legislation that the minister brought forward was about this type of care being more accessible to who needs it. Did you know, Madam Chair, that 18,000 workers now will receive top-ups versus 16,000 under the previous methodology? This is just about looking at it from – and I tried to say this the last time I spoke about this, where I thought I was fairly fair in my understanding of what was going on, that this is about taking a situation and making it better for the people who are using it.

I think that when the member was mentioning that it wasn't mandatory, if I'm getting this straight – let me just understand. The previous government, our opposition, is saying that it wasn't mandatory, but there were top-ups for those who did it. We're offering top-ups in principle for the exact same method that is happening now without creating a burden of paperwork for these incredible humans that take care of our children to be able to

actually run their programs. Yet they want accreditation that wasn't mandatory. Isn't that, by its very nature, red tape? Is that not, by its very nature, creating a burden for a system that needs to have as many spots available and make sure that it's accessible?

We can debate that piece of it as much as we want, but if it wasn't mandatory in the first place – and then, on top of that, when the principles are the same as what the expectations are of any organization that is taking care of our munchkins, my thought would be that those dollars, the \$3 million that the member opposite was having plus the other \$10 million, \$13 million in total, went to top-ups to make sure that not only is that child care accessible, but it's especially accessible to those who are struggling, low socioeconomic especially. It actually forces the government to have more transparency about how those dollars are moving and make sure that the programs that are needing that support actually receive that support.

I actually think those are fantastic opportunities and amazing changes to a system that – you know, the member was mentioning that that system was there before, and then they changed the system. This is another tweak to that system to make sure that as many kids as possible can be in the system so that we can leverage the dollars that we have, stretch them as far as possible, to make sure that as many kids are able to benefit from that. I remember the minister talking about this in the opening of her debate, speaking very eloquently about making sure that those who need this can get it, and this is really important. When we choose an option that – there are options to have winners and losers in a system that is really differentiated. Like, I could kind of understand if the member was sort of comparing apples to apples, but we actually have a lot of different differentiation in the system. We have daycare operators. We have licensed, like, larger operators. We have organizations and corporations that run opportunities. There are so many choices, which is wonderful.

As far as the early learning piece of it goes, I would question – the member was talking about how it's in the name but there's nothing within the legislation. Well, that's because we're not dictating how to educate these little ones that are in daycare. It's not about dictating education at that point in time. Isn't that the choice of the parents? Like, for example, my friend that I mentioned, who takes her little ones to this wonderful lady who speaks Spanish: are there going to be criteria that all have to learn Spanish or there has to be a second language or there are certain things that have to be required? Accreditation didn't do that either. To the member's point, accreditation didn't make anything – there was nothing in the legislation to push early childhood learning. Again, I find it interesting.

I think that what will happen as a result of this, as a result of choices: competition kicks in, you know, the word of mouth of an excellent provider, and then on top of that to have the top-ups to be able to attract talent into that pool of workers, and then on top of that to be able to make sure that the parents' wishes are of utmost importance, especially right now. Like school – you know, our teachers are with our kids more than we are a lot of the time, especially through their school years. Those impacts are absolutely – it's hard to put it into words. It's hard to put it onto paper.

So I would like to take this moment again to thank the minister but also to thank our child care workers, that are doing a phenomenal job under the circumstances and in the work that they're going to do with that early piece of our kids while we trust our munchkins with these folks while we're heading off to work, especially our front-line workers and all of those that are keeping our population safe right now. I'd like to send an extra shout-out to them as well and again to the minister for being able to get those

child care spaces opened really quickly at the beginning of this crisis.

Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

The Chair: Any other members wishing to speak on amendment A2 to Bill 39?

Seeing none, I will ask the question.

[Motion on amendment A2 lost]

The Chair: We are back on Bill 39 in Committee of the Whole. I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

Ms Sigurdson: Yes. Thank you very much, Madam Chair. I'm pleased to rise, and I also have an amendment that I would like to put forward.

The Chair: It's a two-pager. Hon. members, this will be known as amendment A3. Please note the two pages.

Hon. member, please note the moving on behalf of another member and no names.

Ms Sigurdson: Sorry. Did you say that I should go ahead and read it?

The Chair: Please.

Ms Sigurdson: Okay. Sorry. This is brought forward by my hon. colleague from Edmonton-Whitemud. It's to move that Bill 39, Child Care Licensing (Early Learning and Child Care) Amendment Act, 2020, be amended in section 5 by striking out the proposed section 1.1 and substituting the following:

Principles

1.1 This Act is to be interpreted and applied in accordance with the following principles:

- (a) the best interests, safety, security, well-being and development of a child are paramount to all other interests;
- (b) all children have a right to access high-quality early learning and child care from their birth until age 5, being a critical period for developing foundations for a child's thinking, behaving, and emotional and social well-being;
- (c) flexibility, affordability and inclusiveness in high-quality early learning and child care supports choice and accessibility for families;
- (d) properly qualified and supported early childhood educators play a critical role in the provision of high-quality early learning and child care;
- (e) Indigenous families and Indigenous early childhood educators must be treated as partners in developing early learning and child care programs that include Indigenous traditions, languages and ways of knowing;
- (f) engagement of parents, guardians and community members in the provision of high-quality early learning and child care supports a child's optimal development;
- (g) high-quality early learning and child care requires the systematic collection, analysis and sharing of information and data by the Government of Alberta and providers of child care to enable comprehensive planning, management and continuous improvement of the early learning and child care system.

Okay. That is the complete amendment. I think I want to highlight, Madam Chair, just one of the very most important parts of that, and that is that we know that the primary indicator of quality

early childhood education is the qualifications and ongoing professional development of early childhood educators.

8:30

This amendment certainly supports this legislation, these principles, to see that and know that that's one of the very fundamental things to child care. I feel that, you know, I've been a social worker for 30 years, and in that time my profession has sort of grown. At first a lot of people called themselves social workers who had no educational background, no training in social work, didn't have registration, and it was, like, anyone can be a social worker. I feel like this legislation is important, too, because it's not anybody who can be a child care provider. We need people who have, actually, the education and the background to do this. It's just not some nice lady down the street. Actually, you want someone to be educated, understand child development, be able to respond to that child's needs, stimulate them in all sorts of ways beyond my understanding, because I'm not an early childhood educator.

I feel like that's still a mistake. Even though social work now – it's mandatory; you can't call yourself a social worker unless you are registered with the Alberta College of Social Workers, and, you know, you can't use that title – is all protected, this area is still very weak. People can still say: oh, yeah, I put out a shingle; I'm going to do this.

But – guess what? – we may be putting our children in harm's way because of that. We need to actually have strong principles, like this amendment puts forward, where we do ensure that educators have the proper training and background and experience and supervision. If not, children aren't supported to increase their development appropriately, and I certainly – you know, it's still so prevalent in our province that children are sometimes put in situations where they're vulnerable and they're not cared for well. Certainly, I know that government wants to keep children safe, wants to make sure that they have the support and the development that they should, and that is accomplished by people with early childhood education background. This principle makes that very important.

As my hon. colleague from Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview talked about, it's just, like, the research is phenomenal. There's just study after study that has shown us without question that zero to five, that age group – it's so fundamental that a child have good development and supports at that age. It can reverse even, you know, a situation that they may have been in that wasn't very optimal for their development. Those zero to five years are so crucial, and that is so important, for governments to be investing in early childhood education and making sure that those educators have the right credentials to do that kind of work. So, I mean, this amendment certainly addresses that.

It is troubling, I must say, that this government is sort of again opening up the view like it's the gal down the street; it doesn't really matter who it is that provides this kind of care for kids. It does matter. It does fundamentally matter, as I think is very clear from the research. I mean, many of you may have known – it's like ancient history now – that the Head Start program made a phenomenal difference for kids who were in low-income, maybe sometimes very ghettoized neighbourhoods, things like that. It helped them be able to enter the school system, like in grade one, and be at the same level with someone with a more sort of nourishing family life, more stable, maybe higher income with, you know, more stimulation, more books, more creative activities and toys around them. The Head Start program has shown what a huge difference that made.

I mean, I really ask the government members to see the value of this and the significant importance in making sure that people who

are caring for our very small children have the right educational background. As I said before, that's one of the primary indicators of quality early childhood education, the qualifications and the ongoing professional development of early childhood educators. That would strengthen, you know, this legislation, so I really ask members to be in support of this.

We certainly know, as my hon. colleagues have talked about before, that taking away the accreditation program and putting in some sort of – I don't know. Sometimes people have said sort of good-feel principles that don't have any teeth because you can't monitor them. I'd go further and say, like, that this is milquetoast. Like, this is not doing anything to make sure that our children are safe. We know that legislation is about creating some teeth so people have to fulfill things. It's very sad that the government doesn't understand this and that instead of strengthening an accreditation process, they're actually weakening it very much. Certainly, I mean, you know, we hear nice words – “of course, we care, and we want kids taken care of” – yet any kind of investment has sort of evaporated out of this ministry. They took \$135 million out of this ministry. So, please, I have a little bit of trouble believing the authenticity of those kinds of happy words that say they care when that kind of funding decision is made.

We certainly know that the Association of Early Childhood Educators, who was consulted regarding this amendment that's been put forward just now, has talked about the importance of education. They put forward three priorities. One is raising education and education-related standards – so this amendment, of course, you know, goes forward in that area – legislating mandatory ongoing professional learning, which is another area that this amendment speaks of, and adopting early learning curriculum framework. All three of those priorities of the Association of Early Childhood Educators of Alberta – these are the people who work in the field, and it's their umbrella association that is very much in charge of understanding what's going on in that field, and these are their recommendations. Sadly, you know, the legislation does not address any of these priorities.

I just really commend the government members to actually vote in favour of this amendment because this amendment does actually bring this stakeholder's, which speaks for thousands of child care workers, concerns forward. You know, the legislation could be much more powerful and have some deeper meaning. As I said, it could make sure that people who are caring for zero-to-five-year-old children, Alberta's next generation, have the qualifications and the training to do what is needed and that they even know. It isn't, unfortunately, as some people think, just some nice gal down the street. No. That's insufficient, and that is not what is needed here.

With that, I will end my debate. Thank you.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Red Deer-North.

Mr. Stephan: South.

The Chair: South.

Mr. Stephan: That's okay. Thanks, Madam Chair. I just want to stand briefly and just comment on the amendment and the comments that were just made. The member opposite referred to a gal down the street or a nice lady not being qualified to provide care for a child. You know, I don't think the member intends this at all. I truly don't.

But I know, looking at my own family and from life experience, that character, serving with a heart full of love and with kindness, is far more important than education. I would love to have even the great mothers in Alberta, who may not have formal education or

training in being a mother – and they're full-time caring for their children. Because their hearts are full of love and they work hard and serve in kindness, that is far more important than training or education. I would much rather have my child cared for by someone who loved my child and who was kind and conscientious and hard-working than someone necessarily that had education but didn't have those characteristics.

8:40

I'm not going to spend a lot of time, but I think, you know, that sort of disparaging someone just because they lack formal education or training in a matter does not disqualify them from providing this important service.

With that, Madam Chair, I'd just like to make that comment.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore.

Mr. Nielsen: Well, thank you, Madam Chair. I appreciate the opportunity to rise this evening to speak to, you know, more or less, Bill 39, the Child Care Licensing (Early Learning and Child Care) Amendment Act, 2020, and, of course, specifically the amendment that's just been brought forward here, A3.

I think it's most important to say that if Alberta is going to be able to come through in its economic recovery, affordable and accessible quality child care and early learning must be a key pillar. We cannot compromise on that. Without that, we are going to find ourselves where parents are not able to get the child care that they need to be able to go to work, make a paycheque, pay the bills. I certainly always think about that single mom that I remember meeting when the \$25-a-day child care program came out. She was planning to go back to school because she wanted a better life for her and her kids. When that program came in, you know, I was there the day it was announced. She was in tears. She came up to me and she said: “You know, you don't understand. You just put me through school. I was going to go back. I was hoping I would be able to make it. I was pretty sure I probably wasn't, but now I am.” So when you have those types of stories, to think that child care is not a key pillar is incredibly short sighted.

Now, the challenge we face here with Bill 39 and, of course, the reason why we've now brought forward a couple of amendments, a third one now here – and I'm sure some of the members who served in the 29th Legislature will remember this – is that we, unfortunately, have a bad piece of legislation, but I think this amendment will probably make it less bad.

I know some debate had swirled a little bit around accreditation, and I find I must speak up on this component. I have a child care provider in Edmonton-Decore that's been a pillar of the community for over 50 years, and the executive director there, who's been around for a very, very long time, remembers when accreditation came in. That's significant, you know, because with my background being in labour, whenever you have the ability to access someone who knows the history, who was there – I've said it in this House before. When we're crafting legislation, it's not necessarily for us here at this moment, because we all know what's going on. It's for when we're gone and people don't necessarily have access to us. They should be able to read this language and interpret what it's supposed to mean.

But in those situations where you do have access to those individuals, they were there. They remembered why it happened. I know the Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview spoke to this a little bit. The entire program of accreditation was driven by the industry itself. They said: “We want a program that's voluntary. You don't have to do this. You have to absolutely maintain the minimum standards for your licence, but we want a

program that will allow us the ability to go over and above and be able to stand out in the crowd.” Those were his exact words to me. It was their ability to stand out in the crowd. You know, this gave parents an opportunity that, should they choose that particular child care provider that decided to go after accreditation, they were sort of getting that little bit extra. By removing the accreditation, we’re simply saying, “Well, this is sort of the minimum standard,” and I find that to be a bit of a pattern now with the government, Madam Chair, where we seem to be just going for the bare minimum. “We have higher standards? No. Let’s bring them down.” “Can we chase after better?” “No, no. We don’t want to do that.” It’s this pattern of this race to the bottom, which concerns me a lot.

I also hear the words “red tape” thrown out here a lot. Obviously, as the critic for red tape the hairs on the back of my neck stand up sometimes when I hear this. You know, we’ve seen language in the bill regarding removal of renewal terms, time limits for when licences have been revoked. This is concerning language because the reason they were brought in to begin with was because there were concerns about the implications of that. Now we have amendment A3, which looks at the wording of this section – and I won’t go through it because the member previous spoke to the amendment in full, on what it does – but it fails to address what the stakeholders were calling for in their submissions around the preamble.

The other concern I have is that I see a pattern within the government. They’re saying one thing, but they’re doing something else. They’re doing one thing, saying something else. Or they’re bringing in legislation that says one thing, but then they say something else, and we constantly seem to have these things colliding all the time. I mean, right in the title of the bill itself: “Early Learning and Child Care.” Yet the bill does not address it at all. Are you trying to do something about early learning and child care or not?

It always seems to come down to the language being presented, and I think our ability to take A3 and incorporate that into the bill will start to clarify these things. I mean, I know one section here that I think is incredibly important.

- (c) Indigenous families and Indigenous early childhood educators must be treated as partners in developing early learning and child care programs that include Indigenous traditions, languages and ways of knowing.

But the problem is some of the actions that we’ve seen from the government. Some of the things that they’ve said, some of the things that they haven’t said start to conflict in terms of our relationship with the indigenous peoples of this province. I mean, one of the earliest examples is the failure of the government to recognize that the past was a genocide for indigenous peoples. We have to come to grips with that. That’s what happened.

By incorporating amendment A3, at least we have the opportunity to move that forward. There is an incredible amount of work that needs to be done, and our indigenous partners must be included in that. But there’s a lack of language within the bill. It always seems to come down to the language. My hope is that the government members will take a hard look at this amendment, not just simply dismiss it because, well, it was the NDP that brought it in.

8:50

I have to say, Madam Chair, that it’s getting a little tired. Come up with a better excuse. If it’s so bad, tell me why. Explain it. Go through it. Walk through it. I think the Member for St. Albert said it best: show your work. If it really is that bad, then I’m willing to accept that, but then can we possibly change it rather than just

simply shooting it down because it happened to come from this side of the floor?

Our children are our greatest resource. We have the chance to make things better. We want them to have every opportunity to be given the tools so that they can then go ahead later on in life and lead on the world stage, like I know they can. But it can’t be just backed up by legislation. It also has to be backed up with the money to provide it. You know, my colleague from Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview went into that a lot.

So I urge all members to support this amendment. I think it will make this bill a little less bad, to use the term that I used to hear in the 29th Legislature when referring to some of our legislation. But, at the end of the day, let’s do what’s right for our kids.

The Chair: The hon. minister of the status of women.

Mrs. Aheer: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. Thank you again for the opportunity to debate. I guess I have a question that potentially can be spoken about later in other debates. I’m just curious. If the desire for accreditation is there and was brought forward by the sector and they wanted it to be voluntary, then why wasn’t it made mandatory? How is it better? You could do the accreditation, but it’s similar to licensing. The licensing is asking for the exact same things that the accreditation is asking for. In fact, more top-ups are going as a result of that in order to attract that talent. For example, around 16,000 child care workers were able to get top-ups before. Those top-ups are continuing, and in fact there are 18,000 now that will have those top-ups.

The other thing, too, is that I want to make sure that the opposition is not implying that licensing will somehow harm our children. I’m assuming that that’s not what was intended, but I just want to clarify, if we’re going to talk about language – important, very important – that the language we’re using isn’t in any way intending that a licensed daycare worker or a person who is certified, even if it’s the lovely lady down the street, is not in any way going to harm our children.

I would like to speak about my colleague across who talked about the love of a person who is taking care of one of our children. I was really, really lucky in my lifetime that we had grandparents and family. I mean, we always say that our children are raised by a village, right? I certainly can’t take credit for raising my kids completely by myself. They were raised by a lot of different people, a lot of different ideas and everything. I’m so grateful for that. But I don’t ever want any of us in here to make a conflation between licensing and harm to our children. Just to be clear, I just wanted to make that clarification.

I wanted to say, too, that dollars have also been directed, Madam Chair, to provide updated resources for parents and operators in order to make sure that they have all of the tools that they need to be the best caregivers that they possibly could. So they are licensed, certified. There are still conferences that are available – of course, I’m not sure what they’re doing under the COVID protocols – on child development. There’s still grant funding available for all of that. And, of course, the enhanced subsidy that went out to 28,000 families actually created a place where some families were only paying \$13 a day to make sure that their kids get fantastic – fantastic – child care.

I’d also like to thank again the minister for her safe restart program. That really was – we were amongst the first in Canada to be able to get that going to make sure that our workers that were on the front lines had safe places for their babes to go.

With that, Madam Chair, I’d like to adjourn debate. Thank you.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

**Bill 38
Justice Statutes Amendment Act, 2020**

The Chair: Any members wishing to join debate? The hon. Member for Edmonton-West Henday.

Mr. Carson: Well, thank you, Madam Chair. It's an honour to rise to speak to Bill 38. I have had a couple of opportunities to speak to this legislation up to this point and always appreciate another opportunity. You know, I continue to have the same concerns that I've had in my previous discussions, particularly around the fact that this is amending so many pieces of legislation that in many instances are completely unrelated. I'm talking about the six acts that are in here relating to the justice system, of course: the Jury Act, the Police Act, the Provincial Offences Procedure Act, the Queen's Counsel Act, the Victims Restitution and Compensation Payment Act, and, of course, my favourite, the Referendum Act.

You know, we've seen a pattern from this UCP government where they bring forward legislation with many pieces involved, and in some instances I find myself wanting to support some of the things that we're seeing in here, potentially around creating more opportunities for jury summons to be done through electronic means and, potentially, other modernizations of the justice system. I think that there's room for me to be able to support those pieces within this legislation. The concern for me that continues is that at the same time as they make common-sense changes, we also see bigger changes in terms of the Victims Restitution and Compensation Payment Act legislation in here. We've raised many questions around that as well as the changes to the Queen's Counsel Act. I mean, once again, these are very different pieces of legislation that deserve to see the light of day and not necessarily being debated at 9 p.m. I think that all Albertans should have an opportunity for input in this legislation.

Once again, while I have concerns with pieces here and on the other hand I can support certain pieces within here, my biggest concern, I would say, is the piece around the Referendum Act changes. I've spoken to these changes, even in the past with Bill 26, Bill 27, and Bill 29. You might recall that at the time those were introduced, they raised many concerns, as did the alarm bells going off across the province with municipalities and Albertans, all Albertans alike, from different stripes. This government, of course, cannot be trusted.

Madam Chair, we have seen this government and ministers literally attacking democracy in the past, in the decisions that they've made to put forward legislation literally attacking democracy in our province. When we look back even to the leadership contest of this UCP government, many, many things took place. You know, there were conversations about voter fraud that led to an RCMP investigation. I've raised this before, members sitting in this very Legislature being interviewed by the RCMP. We had the Member for Calgary-East, who was investigated by the Election Commissioner for fraud . . .

Mr. Ellis: Point of order.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-West.

**Point of Order
Imputing Motives**

Mr. Ellis: Thank you. Under 23(h), (i), and (j) I would say: imputing false motives. Look, as a former police officer I can tell you, having interviewed many, many people within my life, it doesn't mean that everybody I interviewed is guilty in some way. And the insinuation that any member on this side of the House is in

any way a suspect or guilty of anything by being interviewed by a police officer: I suggest that the members opposite pick up the Criminal Code, read it, and then they can have an understanding of what the law is and how police actually conduct investigations.

Thank you.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. This is not a point of order. Much more obviously than our previous point of order, where we had a member specifically accusing another member, here we have someone who's just talking about the history and used the word – our member was talking about facts, talking about things that are part of the public record as part of a larger debate relating to this very important justice bill, Bill 38. I would suggest that this was not a point of order intended to incite debate; rather, it's talking about related issues that are important to the discussion that is happening here. Certainly, the member did not mischaracterize anything, rather just spoke facts that are in the newspapers about what investigations are and are not taking place. So, Madam Chair, I submit to you that this was not a point of order.

9:00

Mrs. Aheer: I believe I'd like to bring up the point of language here. It's not about investigations or anything like that. The fact that the newspapers are being used as a relevant source in order to be able to say that, especially when language that came from that came from disparaging comments that came from across the way, not necessarily factual information: I do believe this is not a matter of debate, and some of those pieces of information in there are factually incorrect.

The Chair: Hon. members, I'm concerned that we're going down a path that doesn't lead to good, productive debate in this Assembly so early in this evening's session. I will not find a point of order. However, I will express some caution in the language that's being used in this debate just for the sake of a healthy debate here this evening.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-West Henday to continue.

Debate Continued

Mr. Carson: Well, thank you, Madam Chair. I appreciate the comments being raised, so I will do my best to carry on without any further concern. You know, the point I was trying to make is that while these circumstances took place, I am very concerned to have a UCP government who has had these accusations made against them. Whether they were true or false can be left to the public record, as it has been already, as we see the investigation continue to roll out.

My concern is that while that investigation continues on to this day, I do not personally believe that I can fully trust that everyone should . . .

Mr. Ellis: Point of order.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-West.

**Point of Order
Imputing Motives**

Mr. Ellis: Thank you very much. Again under 23(h), (i), and (j). I certainly encourage the member – if he is fully aware that there is an investigation ongoing and he has been in contact with the police service that may or may not be conducting this investigation, then certainly he has more knowledge than anybody on this side of the

bench. I certainly would like to ask him if he would like to continue down this path where he is again insinuating false motives on other members by saying that there is some sort of ongoing investigation when the police have been very, very clear that they are not saying one way or the other whether they are conducting or not conducting an investigation. I have some serious concerns that this line which he is going down is indeed a point of order and is indeed inferring false motives on members of this House.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. Again I would argue that this is not a point of order. The member is simply recounting things that are public knowledge. Although I did reference newspapers earlier, I would submit that it is not fake news. We are talking about the public record, that reporters have gotten information from members of the police services. The member is engaging in what I think is a very important debate in this House, so I would submit to you that this is not a point of order.

The Chair: Hon. members, I would suggest that if we were having a debate on the bill, we wouldn't be in this territory. In the interest of moving forward, there will be one more chance given to the hon. member to discuss the bill which is at hand, which I know is going to be a rather exciting, interesting debate, particularly on this topic and on this topic only. I will not find a point of order, but I will express some very serious caution in the rest of the hon. member's remarks.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-West Henday.

Debate Continued

Mr. Carson: Thank you, Madam Chair. I once again appreciate the ongoing conversation here. Just to get to the point, the amendments that we're seeing to referendums, of course, were within the platform of the UCP, but the platform failed to mention the ideas, that we saw in the previous legislation before the House, that created the opportunities for referendums on a provincial level. Of course, now we're seeing it stretched through Bill 38 to the municipal level, that these referendums could be had in conjunction with municipal elections. Now, the UCP failed to mention in their platform that, you know, they called it – grassroots referendums would be opportunities for that to take place.

Unfortunately, in past legislation that we've seen from this government, indeed it is the Premier who would have the final say on what referendum would actually be presented to Albertans or what it would say and what the details of that would entail. While this government once again claims to be, you know, grassroots and that they'll bring the ideas of grassroots Albertans forward, it appears, through this legislation and the other election changes that they brought forward through past legislation, that indeed it is quite the opposite, whether we're talking about the opportunity for PACs to be prevalent in our province and spend money across our province. In conjunction with the changes made to Senate elections and past referendum changes, there is a lot of money that is going to influence elections moving forward, and that is before we even had an opportunity to see what a municipal election looks like under past changes that this UCP government has made.

I know that other members would like to speak. I will leave it at that, but once again, while I see pieces within Bill 38 that I could potentially support, unfortunately this government has made a very bad habit of creating omnibus bills that make it very hard for us to support it in whole.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Chair: Thank you.

Any other members wishing to join debate on Bill 38? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs.

Ms Goehring: Thank you, Madam Chair. It's my privilege to rise this evening to speak to Bill 38, the Justice Statutes Amendment Act, 2020. I think this piece of legislation, like the previous member was talking about, is quite extensive in some of the pieces of this legislation that they would like to change. I mean, when we look at the steps that they're making to support indigenous communities with First Nations police services, this is absolutely something that we can support, but that alone could have been a stand-alone piece of legislation. It's something that I think deserves a lot of attention, and I'm happy to see that it's in here.

I do have some questions about how this came to be. Were all of the First Nations communities consulted with? What does that look like? A question that I think is a safe question is: who's going to fund this? Is this something that the federal government is going to be expected to fund? We've seen some significant cuts to police services from this government such as \$13 million to the Calgary Police Service. I think that when we're looking at creating this piece of legislation that allows a creation of First Nations police services, it's a fair question to say: who's funding this? What is the motivation behind this? Is it something that they're going to put onto the feds? We've heard over and over in this House, in news releases when it comes to COVID, et cetera, that it's something that they're relying on the federal government to fund. I'm curious about what that looks like.

The unfortunate thing, aside from the success of the creation of the First Nations police services, is that there are many other pieces in this legislation that do not seem to be in the best interests of Albertans. There are some serious implications for Albertans, and I'm curious who they consulted with to implement these changes. I know that some of the things that we're hearing, that I'm sure this government is hearing as well, are some really concerning things that Albertans have regarding the safety of their communities, the safety of their municipalities, and the capacity for those communities and municipalities to fund services like the police.

9:10

In Edmonton-Castle Downs policing has been a tricky area when it comes to some of the racism that occurs in the community. There are triggers that happen whenever there's an attack on the Muslim community. There's fear that runs through our community, and there are people in the community that are legitimately torn whether to trust the police, because they've perhaps had some negative experiences, or reach out to them, because they're there to protect them. I know that with the recent election in the United States there was extreme fear from the Muslim community wanting to know what the police would be able to do to support them. I know that that's what Albertans are talking about. When we're introducing a piece of legislation that directly impacts policing, it's a little disheartening to see that that is completely left out. They're not talking about what I know Albertans are talking about.

The wonderful thing about Edmonton is that we have a group of very dedicated police officers in the hate crimes unit, who do great work with engaging within the Arab community, the Muslim community. I know that they have a great presence at the Al Rashid mosque. There's someone that the mosque believes in. The police are there often in celebration and in protection. When we look at some of these amazing services that our police departments offer such as the hate crimes unit, it worries me: with cuts, are those the type of services that are going to be cut?

Some of the great progress that some communities are making to address the current circumstances, the current feel in the province – there are a lot of things that happen in the United States that have had direct impact in Alberta, across the country, to be quite frank, Madam Chair, and I think that people's fear is legitimate. When people are afraid to leave the house in a hijab because they are seen as a target, we need strong support within the police services to continue to engage communities, to help educate communities so that people feel safe and feel protected. I know that there's great work going on.

My fear is that when we're looking at Bill 38, the Justice Statutes Amendment Act, 2020, it doesn't come up. It isn't talked about, what sort of services can be counted on by Albertans. They're worried about the cuts that are happening. I can tell you that many members of the police are coming forward, and they're concerned about what their ability to actually police and do community engagement means. There are programs that used to run. The NET team, which was the neighbourhood enhancement team that was thriving in Edmonton-Castle Downs: it was a social worker and a police officer. Their job was to engage in the community, to help build trust and safety, and it provided a safe place where, if people were feeling that things were going wrong in their community, they could trust the police to do those things. That program is gone.

With the cuts that are happening, I'm fearful that more amazing programs like that are going to be cut, programs where the communities rely on the bonding and relationships with their police officers. I know that in Edmonton-Castle Downs we have some incredible officers that are dedicated to our community, and they're engaged. They attend community events. They attend community organization meetings. They're tuned in to what's happening. One of the things that I think is pretty exciting is when you see police officers and youth engage in floor hockey or basketball, and it's relationship building. But when you're cutting the police service, those are the types of programs that get cut, and I just worry that this is where this government is continuing to head. They deserve a government that has their backs and a real plan to ensure that there's a safety within the province, and unfortunately I don't see that.

Another piece of this legislation that I have some questions about is related to the Jury Act. It allows jury summons to be sent electronically. I think that with the way that society is moving, it seems like a reasonable change, especially with how progressive – many organizations and individuals have become used to this form of communication because of COVID. I think that this makes sense. But I'm curious about what happens when someone receives an e-mail that was clearly sent; however, it might end up in their junk folder, or perhaps individuals aren't in the regular routine of checking e-mails. If you do not appear to a jury summons, that's an offence, so what is the criteria that's being put in place to kind of catch some of those things? How is it going to be proven that this e-mail wasn't received? Is there kind of a balance in place when it comes to people's accessibility to e-mail? I know that in Edmonton-Castle Downs one of the main features that is run out of our public library is access to the computers, where individuals will go and sign in to their computers, because they don't have access to that technology at home. I'm just curious what the oversight is to this.

I'm excited that we're in the Chamber talking about this, and I look forward to more debate on this. Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Chair: Any other members wishing to join debate on Bill 38? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore.

Mr. Nielsen: Thank you, Madam Chair. I appreciate the opportunity to add some more comments to Bill 38, Justice Statutes

Amendment Act, 2020. I just want to thank the Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs for her insight. Certainly, her background always provides some very great insight into the communities, how people perceive things. You know, I, very luckily, get to share a border with her riding, and when she's able to talk in depth about her communities, I feel like she talks about mine as well because we're so close and we share that.

Like her, I am concerned about some of the direction the government has taken around policing, specifically, as she had mentioned, cuts within the system itself and possibly maybe a reliance on, you know, raiding the victims of crime fund in order to pay, potentially, for some things, which leads me to my point around changes to the Police Act and specifically how that is going to look for indigenous peoples, First Nations, that want to be able to have police services within their communities.

You know, the first question that I have – luckily, now that we are in Committee of the Whole, I do hope that we will see the minister or someone from the front bench get up to address some of these concerns around funding for these. We know that currently, right now, three communities do have police services. Will those communities that do want to come onboard with their own local police have access to the same level of services that the ones that are established already have? It's funny how it will always come down to dollars. When we see that the government is clawing back some of those needed dollars within municipalities, I worry that we might see ourselves with a bit of a shortfall in that department, so I'm hoping that we will get some clarity on that. We want to ensure that those communities just simply have the same level of services that any other municipality would have, including even the big cities.

I'm also curious, again – I've asked this before – around alternative dispute resolution or traditional, culturally relevant means of justice. Will that be available to them, or are we simply going to say, "Here's a whole bunch of rules, and you have to follow them even though you know your communities better"? I'm hoping we will see some clarity around that. I think that the minister needs to be able to clearly articulate to indigenous communities what is going to be available to them, how it will be available to them, and, again, who's responsible for the cost.

9:20

I certainly hope that the province is prepared to step up rather than simply pushing it off to the federal government to try to deal with, because we have seen a bit of a pattern where it seems the province is waiting on everybody else to do something, whether that be the federal government, whether that be the municipal government, whether that be Albertans in general. It's time for some leadership here. Just take the reins. You know, if it should be the case where the federal government should be stepping up with dollars, let's provide those services to begin with, and we can always chase after the federal government later for it should it go there.

I, too, have some concerns around the Jury Act, thinking about some of the communities that call Edmonton-Decore home. I know there are lower income communities, which, the reality is, might not have access to Internet. I see it all the time going into some of my local stores, you know, people buying time for their phone because they need the phone but they don't necessarily have the data services, which means notifying people by electronic means could start to pose a challenge. Should they get a notification and they don't respond, as the Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs had mentioned, now we're starting to talk about penalties. Well, when people can't afford Internet access or data plans on their phone, they're certainly not going to be able to afford penalties. Are

you now considering throwing these people in jail simply because of their financial situation? We really, really need to see some clarity around that and what kind of options are available to people by going down this route here.

Some of the other things that I would like to address here, of course, are around the Referendum Act. I clearly remember, of course, in the 29th Legislature, we always used to see the opposition wanting to see economic impact studies done about proposed legislation that the government brought forward almost ad nauseam, and, you know, here I am wondering: when you're looking at this Referendum Act and the changes that are being proposed, where we could see decisions about provincial affairs occurring at the municipal level – it's funny; it still comes down to dollars, Madam Chair – what's the province going to do? Is the province going to foot the bill for those kinds of things, or are they going to download it onto the municipality, like we've seen as of late? I hate to say it. It kind of feels a little bit like interfering in a municipality's ability to make decisions for itself. I mean, they are the ones that tend to deal directly with Albertans in their local communities, and it seems the government wants to constantly play around in their pool.

As we see this moving forward, you know, what kind of burdens are going to be placed on them for that? I think the government needs to be clear about this before we pass this legislation, because if they are on the hook for the bill – and municipalities are struggling with their funding – you can't simply point a finger at them and say: well, you don't have your fiscal house in order; you need to control your spending. No, you've downloaded those costs onto the municipality, and I think the province should be on the hook for them if that is indeed what you want to do and start, I guess, forcing these types of things onto municipalities.

I'm sure, as the debate proceeds through Committee of the Whole, hopefully we'll see some answers around that. I'll probably have more to say on that, but at this time I will be happy to take my seat and see what we hear.

The Chair: Any other members wishing to join debate on Bill 38? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

Member Irwin: Thank you, Madam Chair. It is an honour to rise in this House, as it always is. This is, in fact, my first time debating this week, and I just, of course, as always, want to just give a shout-out to all those front-line workers right now who are doing amazing work and many of whom feel quite discouraged right now and quite disheartened. We just want them to know that we stand with them and we support them, and we will continue to have their backs.

I'd love to speak a little bit about Bill 38. Actually, what I am going to focus on is an amendment that I have to introduce, but before I get to that, I just want to echo some of the comments of my colleagues who've spoken so eloquently tonight. You know, this is a fairly large piece of legislation that amends a number of acts. Certainly, just as with any piece of omnibus legislation, there are a few elements that we support, but there are a number of concerns. I won't repeat the same ones in the interest of time although I do want to just highlight particular concerns around some of the pieces with indigenous supports, how indigenous folks are being consulted. It's a common theme. I feel like a broken record standing in this House asking about consultation. In this case Albertans deserve to know who, in fact, was consulted. What role did the various First Nations play?

With that, I would like to speak more at length about my specific amendment. My specific amendment speaks to the Jury Act.

The Chair: Hon. members, this will be known as amendment A1.

Hon. member, just note that you're moving on behalf of another member, and no names, please.

Member Irwin: Yes. Thank you, Madam Chair. I'm certainly learning that. I can no longer play the new card here.

On behalf of the Member for Calgary-McCall I will move that Bill 38, the Justice Statutes Amendment Act, 2020, be amended in section 1 by striking out subsection (2) and substituting the following:

- (2) Section 8 is amended
 - (a) in subsection (3) by striking out "or" at the end of clause (a) and by adding the following after clause (a):
 - (a.1) by sending it by electronic means, using information obtained under the authority of an enactment or with the person's consent, or
 - (b) in subsection (5) by striking out "on payment of the fee prescribed by the regulations and".

Again, I'll just speak to this briefly. I'm moving on behalf of the Member for Calgary-McCall, who is one of the members of our lawyer caucus. I hope I do him proud if he's watching at home tonight. Certainly, you know, I've learned a lot from our lawyer caucus, and one of the things that they've made quite clear to us is that we know that access to justice and a functioning justice system is key to a healthy democracy.

What this amendment specifically does, like I said, is address the Jury Act, and one of the things it does is that it provides a jury summons by electronic means. We support that. I mean, absolutely, on our side of the House we recognize very much that innovating and matching the practices of the justice system to our modern society absolutely make sense to ensure fair access to justice. If anything, the pandemic has – well, it should have – taught us many things. Unfortunately, we aren't seeing, necessarily, lessons learned by this government, but we have learned that technology and adapting are certainly critical. I don't know about the rest of you in this House today, but I was on multiple Zooms, and some days I'm on Zoom all day long. So we know the importance of technology.

However, we want to maintain a prescribed form for a jury summons, especially when introducing the ability to give a summons via electronic means. For those who don't know, a jury summons is a legal document which, of course, carries with it responsibilities and repercussions. We are saying absolutely that that should be a prescribed form. The bill outlines that if you remove the requirements of a prescribed form – the bill does outline that – that would make anything, really, official, so we're saying: could a note on a napkin be considered official? Could an Instagram post be considered official? Where would you draw the line?

9:30

I mean, I don't mean to joke about it, but we need to underscore the fact that there needs to be clarity and certainty in the justice system for it to be healthy and for it to be functioning. In the context of a jury summons, that means most certainly a prescribed form. Obviously, this means that because the bill includes the use of an electronic form, we know that the prescribed form will have to change. We understand that. We believe and we hope that the minister will very much consider this amendment, because we know that the minister is capable of making this change through regulations and does not need to remove the prescribed form.

The other piece we are pointing out here is that our amendment will remove the prescribed fee. We've made it very clear, and I remember talking about other bills in the Legislature over the last year and a bit where we've really encouraged this government to consider affordability and consider access to the justice system for all folks from an array of socioeconomic backgrounds. By creating financial barriers, which this fee does, that only serves to create a

stratification of class within the justice system. We know that by this one small change our system will be fairer, and it will be, in turn, more accessible.

We're urging the government. These are common-sense changes, like I said. I know that our Member for Calgary-McCall and the rest of our lawyers in our caucus have analyzed this bill thoroughly, and these are not, you know, partisan amendments or anything. These are amendments that will truly make this bill stronger and will make the justice system more accessible and more fair for everyday Albertans.

So we hope that the members opposite can see that and will support our amendment. Thank you.

The Chair: Any members wishing to speak to amendment A1?
Seeing none, I will call the question.

[Motion on amendment A1 lost]

The Chair: We are back on the bill, Bill 38, Justice Statutes Amendment Act, 2020. Any members wishing to join debate? The hon. minister of economic development.

Mr. Schweitzer: I move to adjourn debate.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Bill 40 Forests (Growing Alberta's Forest Sector) Amendment Act, 2020

The Chair: Are there any members wishing to join debate? I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung.

Mr. Dach: Thank you, Madam Chair. Before I begin my remarks on Bill 40, I'd like, first, to indulge the House by mentioning the reason for my wearing the vyshyvanka today. Of course, it is to commemorate the Holodomor, which took tens of millions of Ukrainian lives in 1932-1933 in a famine perpetrated by the Soviet regime against the Ukrainian population. Of course, my father's mother, my Baba Tekla, was part of the immigration wave of Ukrainian settlers who populated western Canada, having arrived in Canada in 1913 with three young children, and four more came later, including my father. I remember her very well, and I wish to honour her and my father's family by commemorating the remembrance of the millions who died at the hands of the Soviet regime. With that said, thank you for that and for the opportunity to commemorate that heritage that I share with many others in this House.

I'd like to continue by speaking in her name about Bill 40 and bring forward some concerns I have about the legislation. Certainly, an act to modernize an industry that's so integral to the province is one that we look forward to. I'm not certain whether it achieves an awful lot. In fact, I would say that it doesn't achieve a whole lot.

After stating in the preamble and talking about it in the House, the Minister of Agriculture and Forestry seems to be quite proud that this is a culmination of an act that took 50 years to arrive and that there was a real amount of consultation that went into this and that this will fill the gaps that haven't been addressed since 1971, when the act was most recently changed and updated. So one would have expected a much more comprehensive piece of legislation, Madam Chair, if one was to address all of the changes that have taken place technologically, culturally, geographically, climatologically, geologically, and hydrologically throughout the province in the forestry sector, just numerous things.

It's a totally different landscape that we're in tradewise. International trade supply routes have been affected. We've gone

through a number, at least five, if I'm correct, of softwood lumber disputes with the United States, which the minister believes he has addressed partly by this legislation but, really, has been ineffectual. The part where the minister talks about addressing the softwood lumber dispute to perhaps make it easier to win our cases if and when, and probably when is more likely, the United States decides to rumble forward and bring forward another softwood lumber claim – they've now made the timber dues transparent, and they're a matter of public record. Therefore, the powers that be in the United States will have less of an argument to suggest that we were kind of masking the dues that we were charging.

In fact, Madam Chair, if you listen to any of our Canadian trade representatives talk about the negotiations that take place over softwood lumber disputes over the years, believe me, they're not dealing with ill-equipped or underinformed individuals on the other side, the United States. They know full well what these numbers are, and simply publishing these numbers, making them publicly available and so-called transparent, does nothing to forward the trade dispute resolution mechanisms that we have with the United States. They are totally a child of the lumber lobby in the United States, which is very, very effective and almost on a cyclical basis. Like a pine beetle in the spring, they come forward when the lobby decides that it's time to make noise again and then put the hammer down on the Canadian lumber industry. That's one element of the piece of legislation that I think the minister trumpets about, which really has no effect.

There are a number of things that I haven't had any proper explanation for yet from the government either, and one of them really concerns me. In the technical briefing that I received, I had the officials suggest to me that it was something that was complicated, and they weren't really able to address it when asked about it; that is, the repeal of section 23 of the act, which reads, "No timber licence or timber permit, except for non-commercial use, may be issued until the applicant has satisfied the director that the applicant has complied with the Workers' Compensation Act." That, on the face of it, raises the hair on the back of my neck, wondering what in the world that exactly means with respect to a timber permit being issued when the applicant is not compliant with the Workers' Compensation Act. What, in fact, does that mean? We haven't got a satisfactory answer for that yet.

9:40

I know I've looked back at *Hansard* and read other members from the House, the government side, suggesting that it was an outdated clause, that it was just a matter of housekeeping, getting rid of an outdated clause. But I think the public and the forestry sector unions would be very, very concerned on the part of the workers to determine exactly what the outcome of this exclusion of section 23 would mean. What's the impact? Certainly, I think it's incumbent upon the government members to very clearly explain what the impact of this repeal of section 23 actually means. Does it mean that forestry workers would no longer be protected by workers' compensation? Is that sort of a slippery slope towards that end?

It's not clear exactly what the repeal of section 23 has embedded in it, and certainly I'm not in a position to really want to support this legislation until I get a satisfactory answer that allays any concerns and fears that I have about workers' compensation being perhaps taken out from under the feet of the workers who are in the forestry sector as a result of the repeal of section 23. So let's hear a little bit more about that from the government side, because I'm certainly not satisfied with the lack of information about the repeal of section 23 right now – and neither are any workers and unions in the forestry sector – until the government supplies a satisfactory explanation.

Now, we hear that the preamble in the legislation has received the approval of industry members, yet it seems to be an imbalanced attempt to suggest that security of sustainable timber supply is the basis for the ability of the forestry industry to contribute to Alberta's economic prosperity. That's a part paraphrase of the preamble.

[Mr. Milliken in the chair]

Now, I have in my hands a copy of the Alberta Wilderness Association's comments about this particular piece of legislation. Their concerns, I think, are valid in terms of how the preamble should be a little more balanced by adding such terms as "environmentally" sustainable timber supply, so the "security of access to an environmentally sustainable timber supply is the basis of the forest industry's social license and ability to contribute to Alberta's economic prosperity."

Certainly, timber supply is important, but it should also be in principle recognized in the preamble to the legislation, that the minister thought was so profoundly important and welcomed by the industry members, that timber supply should be an environmentally sustainable timber supply. I don't think members opposite, on the government side, should argue with that. We should always maintain a balance, and that timber supply has to match the environmentally sustainable paradigm that any renewable industry should want to meet. That's another element of it.

There are some other parts of the legislation that the Alberta Wilderness Association does have some concerns with, and they basically want to seek to recognize climate change in the preamble. They wish to add wording to say, "whereas Alberta seeks to manage climate change threats to forests" as a threat, on top of wildfires and pests. The overarching cause of these wildfires and pests is arguably, and I think quite defensibly, climate change. So more correctly stated in the preamble, we should see the words: whereas Alberta seeks to manage climate change threats to forests to find opportunities to reduce risks from wildfires to human life and communities and to promote healthy ecosystems.

There should be some more balance in that preamble so that it's not only industry members who are happy with it but also those who wish to see that the forests are preserved for those 200-year forestry programs that the industry members like to herald, and rightfully so, so that they are sustainable, because they do recognize and implement environmentally sound timber practices and acknowledge that climate change is also affecting the timber supply.

Now, finally, another thing that is very, very important – I've touched on it before in debate – is the lack of consultation with indigenous people. I did mention previously that the critic for Indigenous Relations and myself were able to meet with members of Treaty 8 at their invitation to a meeting that they were having. We asked them very clearly: had they been consulted with? The answer was very clearly no. This is in direct contrast to what the minister has suggested was done, suggesting wide consultation. If I read the Blues correctly, the *Hansard* record of this House, I can see that the consultations that were done, as described and diarized by the minister, consisted of talks with industry leaders and industry members, not with indigenous people. That is a direct contradiction, Mr. Chair, with the policy of consultation that is required by the provincial government in their own rules and regulations.

I hold in my hands Indigenous consultations in Alberta from alberta.ca. It's an overview, and it talks about Alberta consultation policies and First Nations policy and specifically states, and I quote:

When the Crown contemplates a decision on land/natural resource management that has the potential to adversely impact First Nations' Treaty rights or traditional uses, the Government of Alberta's Policy on Consultation with First Nations on Land and Natural Resource Management, 2013 is applied.

To clarify expectations (including roles and responsibilities) of all parties involved in a consultation process, the Government of Alberta's Guidelines on Consultation with First Nations on Land and Natural Resource Management 2014 is available.

Mr. Chair, the consultation guidelines are very explicit, very detailed, quite lengthy, and none of it happened for this piece of legislation. They disregarded a manual that set out for consultation with indigenous people with respect to Crown lands and natural resources. That is directly the focus of this piece of legislation, and they completely ignored it.

Now, to this untrained legal mind, Mr. Chair, it suggests an exposure, a legal exposure, over the course of these new 10-year forestry management agreements, which may be a well and good policy change, to increase that time frame for the forestry management agreements. I know that the industry is receptive and positive about it, but that is, of course, something that may cause the indigenous populations, who have treaty rights to the land that's been harvested, to be shackled to a longer period of time than they otherwise would be right now with the five-year agreements in place of a forestry package that may be damaging to their rights, their treaty rights, that they have currently in place. Given the lack of consultation with indigenous people regarding the changes that Bill 40 would make, including the extension from five years to 10 years for the forestry management agreements, I would suggest that this government has exposed itself to significant litigation that they could have avoided quite easily by simply following their own policy that's been in place for decades and actually consulting with indigenous people.

There's no reason that I can think of why this was ignored. It's a blatant disregard for the responsibility of the provincial government to follow its own policy with respect to consultation. There's a blueprint for it. It's by the admission of the minister when he diarizes who he consulted with that First Nations people were omitted, and when we talked ourselves with members of Treaty 8 during a meeting that we were invited to, the critic for Indigenous Relations and myself were told quite plainly: no, there was not a peep; there was no consultation effort made at all with them.

9:50

Should there be future impacts on the First Nations' lands which are affected by treaty rights that are being harvested or adjacent lands that are under treaty acts and legislation that grants rights to indigenous populations, should there be changes that result from this legislation allowing different practices by forestry companies, there may be grounds that are opened up to indigenous populations, unnecessarily opened up by this government because it totally ignored its obligations under its own policy practices to consult with indigenous people. That is pretty disappointing.

In this day and age, when we are under, you know, very clear knowledge of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission and its 96 recommendations, we shouldn't be ignoring indigenous people. It's an egregious error, and I think, unfortunately, that should this legislation pass without those consultations taking place, prior to amends being made and indigenous people being properly consulted, this government has exposed the people of Alberta to very expensive litigation and possibly punishing lawsuits.

With that, I think I may end my comments for the moment and allow others to speak to the legislation.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview has risen.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you, Mr. Chair. It's my pleasure to rise and speak to Bill 40. "Excited" might not be the right word, but I am honoured to rise and speak to this bill. I mean, excited on the one hand to talk about our forestry sector. There are elements of this bill that I do support, and then there are some questions and concerns that I have that I'm hoping that the minister will be able to address as we are in committee.

I want to start off, first of all, Mr. Chair, by acknowledging the incredible role that the forestry sector plays in the province of Alberta. I can tell you that in my time as minister of economic development and trade I worked very closely not only with the Minister of Forestry and Agriculture but also with the Alberta Forest Products Association. In fact, their former executive director participated on a number of trade missions that I led to look at opportunities to enhance and expand Alberta's trade. Now, I can go into quite a few details, in fact, about the different markets and the different quality of lumber that they demand, but there's a recognition within industry that, you know, we as a country need to do much more to increase our market share elsewhere.

The sad reality, Mr. Chair, is that when I was in elementary school, I remember studying and learning about the softwood lumber disputes between Canada and the U.S. That was many, many years ago. I believe we are now in our seventh round of disputes. This is a revolving door. I will say that Canada has won every single one of those disputes. In fact, the WTO has ruled in favour of Canada.

The problem, Mr. Chair, is that every time there's a softwood lumber dispute, it means that there are tariffs imposed on our Canadian exporters. It is much more expensive. Our smaller mills and smaller companies really struggle. Our larger companies are able to weather the storm just because they have more, you know, funds in the bank and reserves that they can draw from. I mean, they are under the impression that and know that Canada will eventually win, but the problem is that it's a battle that is dragged out over years, which, of course, wears down many, many companies.

You know, in our time as government, Mr. Chair, we brought on Gary Doer, the former Premier of Manitoba, to be Alberta's trade envoy and lead in the U.S. on the softwood lumber dispute. He worked diligently, obviously, with our Alberta trade office and the Canadian embassy down in the U.S. to look at ways to further resolution. I mean, we could spend hours and hours talking about why there are softwood lumber disputes. I mean, first and foremost, the largest reason is that in the U.S. the majority of timber is on private property. The issue that – and it's a select few companies down in the U.S. Most of the U.S. companies are quite good to work with. They know that Canada is not illegally subsidizing our forestry sector, but the challenge is that the majority of timber harvested in Canada is on Crown land. They will argue that governments give unfair advantages or incentives to our Canadian forestry sector.

Now, we don't. As the Member for Edmonton-McClung pointed out, it's a very, very transparent process. I mean, interestingly, the Minister of Agriculture and Forestry has stated that one of the reasons that this bill is necessary or one of the things that this bill will do is provide more transparency. To reiterate the point that my colleague made, these companies know exactly what, you know, our forestry companies are paying as far as timber, exactly how much they're harvesting, at what price. Keep in mind, too, Mr. Chair, that every province has different rules across the country. Alberta has some rules that are very similar to British Columbia and

quite different from the province of Quebec. Our biggest frustration within the Canadian sector is that Alberta has been the only province to use its full allocation of timber and could actually go above and beyond that. Our Canadian timber allocations: that's one of the challenges that we need to resolve internally. Most other provinces are not harvesting what they're allotted, and the frustration for Alberta companies is that we could harvest more, but we can't under the current system without being penalized.

I realize I'm digressing, but it's important that, you know, we are looking at ways to support our forestry sector. As you know, Mr. Chair, forestry is our third-largest sector in the province of Alberta. It creates thousands of good-paying jobs for men and women around the province. I've had the opportunity to get to know several companies throughout the province that are incredible, that do an amazing job looking after their workers. I'll jump right to the one section of the bill that I know the forestry sector has been asking for, and that's increasing, when we're dealing with the timber leases or the – currently the legislation is such that they're five-year agreements. The current legislation will increase them to 10 years. I know that that's something that the industry has been asking for as far as their timber licensing. Licensing is probably not the right word, but it's expanding it.

Now, my colleague from Edmonton-McClung did raise the point that there are some indigenous communities that are frustrated that this government did not consult with them on this bill. Keep in mind that much of the land that belongs to the Crown falls under treaties, so our indigenous peoples should have been consulted on this. Now, I haven't spoken to them directly, but my colleague has told me that some of them are not in favour of extending the term from five years to 10 years. I appreciate that there's a balancing act as far as trying to work with our indigenous communities but also recognizing that extending these agreements to 10 years provides longer term certainty for these communities and for the companies.

10:00

One of the areas of this act, Mr. Chair, that I find curious is the fact that up until this piece of legislation was introduced, the timber quota, I believe, was established by Executive Council. Now that authority is being placed with the minister directly. That does raise some flags. Part of the reason why legislation often does go to Executive Council for regulations or for decisions is to provide oversight as well as to ensure that different cabinet members bring their ministry's lens to the discussion, to ensure that all the different angles, all the different repercussions, the different perspectives are represented. Again, any time authority is taken away from Executive Council and placed solely on the shoulders of the minister, there is – I mean, it's increasing the opportunity for a decision to be made that has implications that the individual minister maybe didn't think of. So that's one of the challenges.

Another area of this bill that I want to touch on is, as my colleague from Edmonton-McClung pointed out, that section 23 is being repealed. Now, I think it's important to read this into the record. I believe this does require some clarification, so I'm hoping that the minister will share with the Assembly and with Albertans why section 23 is being removed completely. It presently reads:

No timber licence or timber permit, except for non-commercial use, may be issued until the applicant has satisfied the director that the applicant has complied with the Workers' Compensation Act.

This I find to be very, very curious. I will try not to jump to conclusions on this, Mr. Chair, but I'm curious why that section needs to be repealed. Now, you know, we heard the minister talk about the fact that this was put in a long, long time ago. Okay. Maybe so, but ensuring that our workers in the forestry sector have

access to WCB I think is critical. We know that there are some jobs within the forestry sector that are actually quite dangerous. I mean, obviously, our companies, our workers will take every precaution, but we know that accidents do happen. I'd like to know why this section is repealed and what assurances the minister can give that workers will be taken care of if there is an on-site accident.

The last point that I'll make is on, again, questions that I have, actually, around section 4(e)(n). It's substituting a clause on timber quota. Again, I'm curious to know how not only that section, Mr. Chair, but how these changes will impact the existing dispute that is going on right now between Canada and the U.S. and how this bill, which I've read through a couple of times, will actually help our companies in their efforts to, you know, look at ways to try to mitigate against future softwood lumber challenges. As I pointed out earlier in my remarks, this seems to be a revolving door. Every time it gets resolved, within a couple of years a new softwood lumber dispute gets launched.

Now, I know that, again, our companies have managed – many of them, not all – to weather this current softwood lumber dispute quite well, but there are a number of reasons for that. Of course, there's always concern within industry, as there should be, that these types of disputes, if they get dragged on for extended periods of time, will have harmful effects on our companies even though we know that, again, the track record is such that the WTO has consistently ruled in favour. Then companies do get remunerated for the costs, but in the meantime, Mr. Chair, it's onerous on our companies.

You know, I wished or would have hoped that this bill would look at opportunities to expand Alberta's ability to fulfill the needs, especially in Asia, Mr. Chair. We know that Japan requires J-grade lumber, which is the highest quality lumber that can be produced, but we know that there are many other uses for lumber, sawdust, et cetera, that doesn't meet the J-grade. We know that we have existing partnerships with many different companies in China who, again, are very interested in our lumber. Of course, Alberta and Canada are competing on the global stage, so this will take a concerted effort.

I would love to hear how the Minister of Agriculture and Forestry is furthering Alberta's relationship with the province of British Columbia. Again, we have similar legislation and rules when it comes to harvesting. We know that many companies in Alberta actually also operate in British Columbia, and there's a nice overlap in consistency, but what are the other ways that the government is looking at, you know, supporting the sector but enhancing opportunities to further trade with other jurisdictions? My sense, Mr. Chair, if the last 40 years are any indication of the next 40, is that unless something significant changes, we are going to be in this ongoing dispute regarding softwood lumber for the future.

With that, I will take my seat. Again, I appreciate that the legislation is being modernized, because it's been some time, but again some questions for the minister, which I hope that he will respond to and also to engage in a discussion on how we can increase supports for our forestry sector.

Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any members wishing to join debate on Bill 40?

If not, I am prepared to ask the question.

[The clauses of Bill 40 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

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

Hon. Members: Aye.

The Deputy Chair: Any opposed, please say no. That is carried.

I see the hon. Deputy Government House Leader has risen.

Mr. Schweitzer: Thank you. I move that the committee rise and report Bill 37 and Bill 40 and report progress on Bill 39 and Bill 38.

[Motion carried]

[Mr. Milliken in the chair]

The Acting Speaker: I see the hon. Member for Livingstone-Macleod has risen.

10:10

Mr. Reid: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Committee of the Whole has had under consideration certain bills. The committee reports the following bill: Bill 40. The committee reports the following bill with some amendments: Bill 37. The committee reports progress on the following bills: Bill 39 and Bill 38. I wish to table copies of all amendments considered by the Committee of the Whole on this date for the official records of the Assembly.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

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

Hon. Members: Aye.

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

Government Bills and Orders Second Reading

Bill 47

Ensuring Safety and Cutting Red Tape Act, 2020

[Adjourned debate November 24: Mr. Dach]

The Acting Speaker: Are there any hon. members looking to join debate on this? I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood has risen.

Member Irwin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm always happy when I can stand in the House and speak about workers and workers' rights. This is actually my first time speaking to this bill, and I just have to start my comments by reflecting on how proud I was of the work that the NDP government did to support workers. I should mention that I'm standing up right now on Bill 47, for anybody watching at home – I'm sure there are a few – the Ensuring Safety and Cutting Red Tape Act, 2020. I'll talk a little bit about the irony of that name in a moment.

I was starting to say that I did not have the honour of being a part of the NDP government, but I followed the work that they did and the legislation that they brought in quite closely. I was incredibly proud of the work of our labour minister, the Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods. You couldn't find a more dedicated and knowledgeable person to have taken on that role, and the care and the time that she put into legislation that affected workers were unsurpassed, second to none.

I look at Bill 47 and I see how much of that good work is just being destroyed, being rolled back, and that's not me being hyperbolic. That's not me being partisan. It's about safety of

workers. I'll talk about some of those specific pieces that I'm so, so concerned that this government is putting forward. I mean, right now we're in second reading. I'm hopeful that this government will consider some of the amendments that I know we're going to be putting forward, that I know my colleague the Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods has been already working on. She's consulted a whole heck of a lot of people already and is seeing major – major – concerns.

Listen, we're – I've said it so many times in *Hansard*; I'll have to look it up – in the midst of a pandemic. We don't know when things will be done, but we do know a few things. We know that more than ever – I mean, again, I'm only speaking for this side of the House – we should be supporting workers. We should be strengthening workers' rights, not attacking them. The pandemic has laid bare how critical it is that we support those who are doing so much for all of us and, you know, in some cases risking their lives on a daily basis.

So all that is to say that I wanted to really frame my comments before I get into some of the meat that I want to address. I really, really am urging this government to listen on this piece of legislation. You know, I heard a little bit of heckling earlier when I was speaking. I'm very hopeful, too, that we'll hear from some members opposite. To date we've not heard from a lot of members opposite. I'd love to hear their perspective, and maybe they can answer some of the questions that we're going to have tonight as well.

Let me get into a little bit more of the nitty-gritty here. One of the biggest concerns – I'm really trying to narrow my focus a little bit here because there's just so much. The biggest piece that concerns me is around the removal of protections for workers, both in compensation and safety at work. Workers are going to lose compensation. They're going to receive less compensation for losses 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, 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, making it voluntary to reinstate an injured worker. The list goes on. This is a huge piece of legislation that is impacting so many areas of compensation when it comes to workers.

The piece around the cap: I wanted to actually quote our leader, the Member for Edmonton-Strathcona, because she said it better than I. For those of you who don't know, our leader was a labour lawyer, and she's spoken – I've had the honour of hearing her speak – many times in this House about workers and workers' rights. In fact, I remember probably sitting in this exact same spot during the Bill 32 debate and how eloquently she talked about the stories of workers that she worked with.

In particular, she has a lot of stories of injured workers, and she knows first-hand the toll that that takes on workers. She said the following: the Workers' Compensation Board was not set up to be a cheap insurance scheme for employers; it was set up to be a balance between workers and employers, and in Alberta it doesn't achieve that objective, and people suffer as a result. Right? She brought up the same point that I did as I started my remarks, just the pride that she had in having been a Premier that oversaw such important changes that would ensure protections for workers. She said: you know what; quite frankly, now I'm so angry on behalf of those families and their kids, families who are all being impacted by these changes.

I want to talk a little bit about some of the other pieces that are most alarming to me. The exemption from safety rules: I've been actually doing a little bit of analysis of a few documents that I found

online. Honestly, there's been a whole lot of analysis done on this bill because it impacts so many areas. I don't have the bill in front of me, but it is a large piece of legislation. I'm going to quote two folks who work in the area of labour, Jason Foster and Bob Barnetson, who've done a very thorough analysis of this bill.

One of the pieces that I wanted to touch on that they bring up is the piece around exemption from safety rules. They point out:

A new provision allows an OHS director to waive requirements of the OHS Code for specific employers or industries.

This means that

they can do so only if the waiver does not materially affect a person's health or safety.

What does this mean? This means that safety is compromised.

The creation of allowances raises the possibility of loosening protections for some employers, thereby reducing the overall level of protection for their workers.

Now, an interesting analysis from them points out that

a provision of this nature requires us to believe that government officials will not cave to pressure from employers or employer-friendly politicians. There is no requirement that the government publish who has received what exemptions from the OHS Code.

I have to ask – this is just one example; again, I know I can only speak for a certain period of time – who specifically was consulted on this piece of legislation?

10:20

As I said earlier, I know that our Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods has done and can refer back to – she's done a lot of consultation lately, of course. She's on the phone all the time talking to workers, not just unions but workers as well, to hear their feedback, and she also can refer back to the many, many hours of consultation that she led when she was minister. Again, I'm hoping that we can hear more from the minister on exactly who was consulted. How many workers did you consult?

Ms Renaud: Not many.

Member Irwin: Not many, I'm hearing. Not many.

Correct me if I'm wrong, but I think that, in fact, they even said that it was a one-month consultation, and that happened in the summer in the midst of a pandemic. Again, I am a broken record; I'm saying that again tonight. How much consultation could have actually been done in such a short period of time? It certainly makes me wonder how fulsome that could truly be. It appears they received a total of 95 submissions. Now, the last time I checked, the population of Alberta was, gosh, at least 4 million, so I do wonder: who is being represented when there were only 95 submissions?

Okay. I want to get into a couple more points. Again, I'm looking forward to speaking to this more because there is just so, so much to dig into. The other piece that I wanted to touch on was the joint health and safety committees. Again, she's going to be blushing a little bit, but I can't say enough about the work of our previous minister of labour, the Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods, because it was under her leadership that mandatory joint health and safety committees for employers with more than 20 workers were established in 2018. Workplaces with five to 19 workers, as we know, are required to have a health and safety representative.

One of my biggest concerns with this piece of legislation, Bill 47, is that it guts that entire system, the JHSC, the joint health and safety committee system. That leaves basically the employer, the boss, to have control. Employers determine who sit on the committees instead of the workers – right? – or the unions actually appointing the worker representatives. What else? The duties of the JHSCs have been reduced to receiving worker concerns, making nonbinding recommendations, reviewing inspection results. The

importance of these committees has been absolutely rendered ineffective. What does this mean in simple terms? By these joint health and safety committees being ineffective, this means that workplaces are less safe for workers, and they don't have a voice in the very operations of their work setting.

Again, I've spoken quickly, and I've not touched on nearly enough of the things that I'd like to speak to, but I would like to introduce an amendment.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

I believe that this will be amendment REF1.

Once I get a copy of it, I'll just take a quick peek. If you could please just read it into the record, because it looks like that should be pretty easy. Just so everybody knows, if you put your hand up, then of course we will deliver a copy, but there will be copies available for everybody at the tables as well.

If the hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood could please continue.

Member Irwin: Yes. I move that the motion for second reading of Bill 47, Ensuring Safety and Cutting Red Tape Act, 2020, be amended by deleting all of the words after "that" and substituting the following:

Bill 47, Ensuring Safety and Cutting Red Tape Act, 2020, be not now read a second time but that the subject matter of the bill be referred to the Standing Committee on Alberta's Economic Future in accordance with Standing Order 74.2.

I know I do not have a lot of time left, but we've made it quite clear. All of my colleagues that have spoken to this bill, of which there are many, have made it quite clear that Bill 47 is dangerous. It attacks the fundamental rights of workers. It gives employers in some cases unnecessary powers. It attacks what fundamentally many of us as Albertans believe, the importance of a safe and fair workplace, and that alone should be enough for this government to consider referring this bill to committee. We owe that to Albertans. We owe that to Albertan workers.

I can tell you that the amount of correspondence that I'm getting on this bill is quite significant, and I'm hearing from workers across the province who are concerned. They're asking: how is it that a government that has already attacked our rights through previous pieces of legislation, Bill 32 as an example, is again going after fundamental rights of Albertans, of working Albertans?

So we ask you to go back, to think about the lack of consultation that's been done on this bill. Again, I'm happy to hear if the minister can share with us that perhaps our numbers are wrong, that great consultation was done. I'm happy to hear that, but until then we're urging this government to not support this bill.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

We are on REF1, but there is a 29(2)(a) to the hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood. Under 29(2)(a) for questions and comments, I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and I want to say thank you to the Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood for raising such important concerns and introducing what I think is an excellent amendment to refer this bill to Alberta's Economic Future.

Now, I heard a number of things from the Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood, including concern around joint work-site health and safety committees, them being rendered less effective, then limiting a worker's right to participate. Those joint work-site health and safety committees really get to that right to participate, one of those three fundamental rights for occupational health and safety. Those committees are a foundational part of health and

safety for many employers. Here in Alberta our major oil and gas employers, particularly, had joint work-site health and safety committees for a long time, but they weren't required in legislation until changes were brought in in 2018.

Now, the member also spoke about the number of workers who are corresponding to her about Bill 47, so I really just wanted to provide the member with an opportunity to tell me more about what you're hearing from workers and your thoughts on those joint work-site health and safety committees, making sure that workers, the ones who are doing the job day in and day out, are involved in identifying hazards and managing them, learning about health and safety through the work of those committees.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood has risen to respond, with about three and a half minutes remaining.

Member Irwin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods for those comments and questions. To start, I just want to talk about her question around correspondence. You know, I can tell you that I won't say that this is the bill I've received the most amount of feedback on. That's certainly not true. However, we've received definitely some concerns from workers. I think part of what is interesting is that there have been so many pieces of legislation put forward by this government that many people aren't able to follow everything that's being pushed through. You get messages from people like: "Wait. What just happened? What just happened to WCB? What just happened to OHS?" Like, people are starting to learn what is contained within this piece of legislation, and it's absolutely worrisome to them, and rightly so.

Again, you know, workers in Alberta very much have reason for their fear and their concern, because they've seen actions from this government time and time again that are so antiworker, that are antiunion, right? You don't need to look much further than some of the incredible health care workers who are, you know, members of HSAA, AUPE who've been demonized by this government, who've been laid off in large numbers. I think it's quite reasonable that folks are concerned, and I'm certain, as kind of happened with Bill 32 last session, that as people start to learn more about it, they're going to be even more vocal. But, of course, as I pointed out earlier, this is all happening – the consultation happened in the middle of the summer in the midst of a pandemic. This is being pushed through as well in the midst of a pandemic. I worry that folks won't have the opportunity to know enough about this piece of legislation until it's too late.

10:30

That's why we're here. That's why we're in this House. This is why I've introduced this referral amendment. We're urging this government to do the right thing and to go back to committee on this one, do further consultation, talk to workers, listen to workers, and put forth a bill that actually supports workers' rights.

The other piece that the member asked me about was joint health and safety committees and how important those are. I know I've got some colleagues in this House who've worked in unionized workplaces who know the importance of joint health and safety committees.

You know, as I said earlier, I think one of the biggest slaps in the face to workers is that they're being told that – you know what? – your voice doesn't matter anymore, right? Your voice doesn't matter. Your employers' voice certainly matters, but yours doesn't. We know. I mean, any of you who've worked in a workplace: you know that you look out for your colleagues.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any members wishing to join debate on REF1? I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods has risen.

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm very pleased to be able to rise tonight to continue debate on Bill 47, particularly on this referral amendment, which I absolutely support, which would see this bill not now read a second time but instead send it to a committee. I think that that is eminently reasonable, and I will speak to some of the reasons for that as I address the referral amendment this evening, starting off with concerns around the amount of consultation that was able to take place on this bill. The reality is that that consultation took place during the summer, August-ish, during a pandemic, at a time of great personal and professional stress and family stress for so many Albertans.

I can tell you that a number of workers have reached out, surprised that this bill was coming forward. They did not know that there had been a consultation. I've also heard from stakeholders who have said quite clearly that the consultation that did take place was very quick for their ability to respond, to be able to pull together the resources and respond to the questions that the government was asking around the issues contained in Bill 47.

Now, Bill 47 touches on the Workers' Compensation Board as well as occupational health and safety. On the Workers' Compensation Board side it reduces compensation for workers in significant ways. On the occupational health and safety side there are three fundamental rights that workers have: the right to know about workplace hazards; the right to participate in their workplace health and safety, which the Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood was just referencing through her remarks; and right to refuse, and that is the right to refuse dangerous or unsafe work.

To begin in putting forward what I think are important reasons why this needs to be sent to committee, I'd really like to start by focusing in on the right to refuse unsafe work. The reason that that's getting my focus today is because we've heard through question period puffball questions – that is the friendly term for when a member of the government caucus asks questions of their own minister – in this case saying: right to refuse is still there; it's great. The minister replying: yeah, it's still there; it's great. During those question period interchanges there isn't an opportunity to get into debate. I'd like to now say that it's not great. The right to refuse work has been significantly undermined in this piece of legislation in ways that will hurt workers, make it a right that is harder to use, and make it easier for bad employers to punish workers who exercise this important right.

I'd like to do that by very specifically talking about the contents of this piece because it seems that there are certainly a number of MLAs in this Chamber who are not aware of the damage that is being done to the right to refuse. Given its importance in keeping workers safe, given that this is essentially the last step to keeping workers safe, starting with the right to know about hazards, continuing with the right to participate, it is the right to refuse that is the line in the sand for making sure that a worker is able to come home at the end of the day, that they have a clear, protected right to say, "Wait; this doesn't feel safe; some hazard isn't being managed" and to have that addressed appropriately, which keeps people alive.

I would like to repeat something that I mentioned in earlier remarks, Mr. Speaker. This is not a right that is overused in this province. As I understand it, it was exercised seven times last year. Now, it has been exercised more during the COVID-19 pandemic, and in fact members of the UFCW local 401 credit the right to refuse work for the Cargill outbreak not being worse, so it is an important right, particularly during a pandemic.

There are some very serious ways in which the changes in Bill 47 actually undermine the right to refuse in a COVID situation, so let's talk about that. The right to refuse dangerous work is found on page 61 of Bill 47, part 3. Right from the very, very beginning I have serious concerns with how the definition of what dangerous work is has been changed. I will be referencing the original version, because, of course, this is essentially an entirely new bill. Bill 47 is an omnibus, so lots of changes. We're very used to seeing that, particularly with labour legislation.

What's made it even more challenging as we go through and review the changes to occupational health and safety is that this is an entirely new act, so the bill doesn't show you what it used to say and what it does say. For that, I will reference the previous version of the act. The previous version of the act actually had it very straightforward. When would somebody refuse dangerous work? If you are a worker and somebody says: if you believe on reasonable grounds that there are dangerous conditions on the work site or that the work constitutes a danger to the worker's health or safety or somebody else's health or safety, do you have reasonable grounds? That is language that a worker can understand. It is clear, and in occupational health and safety, in so many ways, "reasonable" is important because we expect employers to do what is reasonably practical. That language is used throughout the Occupational Health and Safety Act, and I think it's entirely appropriate to give that same language to a worker and say: if you reasonably believe that this is going to be very dangerous.

Instead, we now have a new definition. "A worker may refuse to work or to do particular work . . . if the worker believes on reasonable grounds that there is an undue hazard." Undue hazard, which means, of course, there must be many due hazards which are acceptable in the workplace environment, and that undue hazard has to pose a "serious," and that word is not defined in this legislation, and "immediate" – that word is also not defined although I think "immediate" doesn't necessarily need to be defined in that same way. I am not a member of the lawyer caucus, as has been referenced tonight, but that word "immediate" brings to mind COVID-19. Is it an immediate danger if somebody is worried that they might contract COVID-19 at their workplace, which hundreds of thousands of workers are worried about right now?

Right off the get-go we have a problem because, as a worker, an undue hazard that is serious and immediate is absolutely less clear than: do you think you have reasonable grounds that something might hurt someone, yourself or another? The addition of "immediate threat" brings into question: okay; so when there are undue hazards that might contribute to asbestosis in the future – that's not an immediate threat – does that mean you don't have the right to refuse that work? These are really important questions that this bill introduces.

10:40

Now, reading further down into parts (3), (4), (5), what happens when someone thinks that there is an undue hazard with that definition? Well, the worker has the right to exercise to refuse to do the work. They need to make sure that it doesn't endanger the health or safety of any other person. Great. They need to report that to their employer or supervisor or another person designated by the employer or supervisor. Great. The employer who receives that report will as soon as possible inform the joint health and safety committee if there is one or representative if there is one. That's good, involving the health and safety committee.

Now, in part (6) we have a really big problem. "The employer may require a worker who has made a report under subsection (4) to remain at the work site and may assign the worker temporarily to other work assignments that the worker is reasonably capable of

performing.” Combine that with part (7): “A temporary assignment under subsection (6), if there is no loss in pay, is not disciplinary action for the purposes of section 18.”

Now, why am I saying that this is a big problem? This is a big problem because this section replaces one that very clearly said that a worker cannot be docked pay because they have refused unsafe work. Instead of that, we now have: if your employer gives you something else to do, it is not disciplinary as long as you’re not losing pay. But notice all of those ifs. Under this revised act the employer no longer needs to continue to pay the person who has refused to do something unsafe, and if there is no other work, they get to send them home for the day. In the current version that is being replaced with this, there is some very clear language that a worker cannot be financially penalized because they’re worried about health and safety.

I really want to emphasize how big of a barrier this is, particularly to vulnerable workers, young workers, new workers, newcomers, lower wage workers, workers who maybe don’t speak English as their first language, workers who just graduated high school. If you know that if you refuse to do something, your employer may just send you home for the day, maybe you’ll just do it, and maybe another worker will be injured or killed. This change is incredibly harmful, and it damages the right to refuse unsafe work, which is unacceptable, particularly during a pandemic. Again, I support the referral to the Alberta’s Economic Future Committee so we can further discuss this.

Now it gets bonkers. I just don’t understand what the government is trying to do here. Essentially, the process now comes in; the worker no longer gets any support from anyone else. It used to be that the employer would go and inspect to see what was going on, and a member of the joint work site health and safety committee would come with that or another worker. This is really important because we do not want a worker who has reported unsafe work to feel isolated, to have to go up against the employer on their own to talk about this health and safety issue. This might not be a worker who is trained in health and safety, and having a joint work site health and safety committee member or chair there makes sense. It protects that worker’s right. It protects that worker from feeling like they can’t report.

That’s been stripped, so now the employer can go and take a look at what’s going on, and if the employer does not remedy the undue hazard, then that worker has a choice to make. The worker may want to report to occupational health and safety, but guess what? They can’t. Before that worker can go report to occupational health and safety and an officer, they need to get a copy of a report completed by the employer. So now the worker reports unsafe work, it doesn’t get resolved, they need to sit and wait for the employer to write a report, and there are no timelines in the legislation for when that will happen. Once they have that report in their hands, now they can contact an officer.

Well, what happens to the work in the meantime? Well, in the old version, if a worker refused something and the employer says, “No, I’ve looked at this; we think that this is safe to do,” another worker can be brought in to do that job, but that worker needs to be fully informed – “Another worker refused to do it on these grounds; this is why I as the employer think it’s safe” – and gets to have that information before deciding whether they will do the task or not. This is important. Right now, under this, the way I’m reading it: the worker refuses unsafe work; the employer now has to write a report and maybe doesn’t do that right away; the employer asks a different person to come in and do the job.

Let’s imagine this. A senior worker recognizes that there’s a hazard: “This is too hot. If I go into this space to do this work for

too long, heat exhaustion, possible death, bad times.” The senior worker refuses. The employer comes along and disagrees. The employer can now get a junior worker to do that job and has no obligation to tell the junior worker that there’s a hazard there, that somebody else refused that work. This is unacceptable. That was very clear in the old version, and it has been completely removed. Instead, honestly, you could only call it red tape. This whole red tape maze of reports now needs to be entered into in order for this situation to be escalated.

The right to refuse unsafe and dangerous work is being limited and harmed in Bill 47 in the middle of a pandemic, going against the government’s stated desires to make sure that all workers come home safe at the end of the day. None of these changes simplify the process or keep workers more safe. This is being damaged, this right to refuse, which is critical, which is the last line of defence. This doesn’t even make sense.

I will look forward to, hopefully, everyone supporting the amendment to refer this to Alberta’s Economic Future Committee. If that is not successful, though, I will be working to try to amend these sections through Committee of the Whole, and I will be happy to work with the minister of labour to try and address some of these deficiencies, because this is not okay. Having that clear right to refuse unsafe work is critical.

When the employer becomes aware that a notification has been made to the officer, the employer should advise any other worker that the employer assigns the work to in writing of the details. But here’s the thing. Before that other worker can come in to do the work, the employer has had to write a report, the employee has had to receive a report, and the employee has had to make a complaint to an officer. This does not make sense. Now, maybe these are drafting errors. Perhaps the government did not intend to make this such a barrier.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available. I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

Member Irwin: Yeah. I’m going to be quite brief. I would love for the Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods to continue her comments. As I said in my comments earlier, she is incredibly knowledgeable. She’s clearly done her homework, and she’s also talked to and listened to hundreds if not thousands of stakeholders, so I’d ask her to continue her analysis.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods has risen.

Ms Gray: Thank you very much. Well, let me summarize my concerns with the right to refuse dangerous work. The definition has been changed, making it less accessible, less understandable by workers. It’s added in new barriers, the barrier of something having to be serious and something having to be immediate. It has added confusion around the process. It has isolated the worker by no longer involving joint health and safety committee members or possibly another worker. Much, much more likely for a scenario where now a bad employer could potentially bully a worker, make that person get back in there: don’t worry about the heat; you’ll be fine; drink some water.

The employer-only investigations, I think, are a big concern, because exactly how was it a huge barrier to make sure that another knowledgeable worker came to inspect this hazard? I think that’s a reasonable, precautionary thing to do, and it makes sense. This change does not make sense. Making it unclear and, in fact, removing that guarantee that a worker will not be docked pay because they refused unsafe work means that fewer people will do

it, and we didn't have very many people doing it in the first place. We do not want to put barriers to this right.

You do not want a 17-year-old – and who even knows about the right to refuse unsafe work? Of course, we need to do a better job of educating young workers and incorporating this information into our curriculum. These are basic rights that new workers need to know about. Even if someone knew about that right to refuse, looking at this: ah, I might not get paid if I do this. We don't want to have those barriers in place.

Then having the worker wait for an indefinite amount of time, because there are no time limits for the employer to write a report about the situation, before they can talk to an officer? Now the employer controls if and when that worker can actually talk to occupational health and safety because there's a step there that the employer has to do. The employer, also, in the immediate situation: the senior guy won't do it; I'll get the junior guy to do it. That seems to be allowed.

10:50

The subsequent section, after this, has to do with discipline and disciplinary action versus the previous version, which was discriminatory. Incredibly concerning changes here particularly because, as this government has said: discrimination and that type of action, discriminatory action, is protected by the Human Rights Commission. So we're just going to move that over there so we'll eliminate the duplication, completely ignoring that going to the Human Rights Commission for discriminatory action is a two-year wait. It's a huge barrier that forces that worker to get a lawyer, to go through a bunch of processes and wait two years to find out the results. It is unreasonable to say that this is a system duplication, to have the definition for discriminatory action in the act and to make sure that somebody isn't punished in a discriminatory way because they exercised their right to refuse unsafe work or other rights found in this act.

We need to make sure it's clear that workers have this right. We need to make sure that workers know that they will get paid even if they report unsafe work. There needs to be a clear process that isn't full of loops and jumps. Who knows who's going to do the report and when? And why does the worker have to wait for the employer to fill out a report before they contact an occupational health and safety officer? That's not reasonable.

These are barriers to workers being able to exercise a right, and I will repeat again: workers were not exercising this right too much. They were not abusing this right. It has kept people safe. It can keep people safe in the future if it remains a right that is clear and understandable in legislation, that is protected, and that's not what is happening in Bill 47. None of these changes help workers.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

I see that the hon. Member for Lethbridge-East has risen to join debate.

Mr. Neudorf: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. While I appreciate the passion and the consultation that the members opposite have done, there is a big difference between consultation and lived experience. I was a worker in this trade, the trade of carpentry, construction for 26 years. I just did a little bit of quick math to stack up against the hours of consultation: 50 hours a week is kind of what I worked – a lot of summers I worked a lot more than that – 50 weeks a year, pretty typical. Over 26 years that's 65,000 hours. I'm proud to bring that to the debate, proud to be part of a Skilled Trades Caucus with members from Lac Ste. Anne-Parkland, Highwood, Sherwood Park, Spruce Grove-Stony Plain, the Associate Minister of Red Tape Reduction from Taber-Warner. We talked with the Minister

of Labour and Immigration, so I would like to think that there are probably several hundred thousand hours of experience that went into that conversation.

The unfortunate part of what we're talking about here is that there is inherent risk in nearly everything we do. What this bill aims to do – and I believe that it fully does accomplish it – is that it's about training young people. It's about growth, their growth. It's about learning. It's about getting better. It's about getting more competent at jobs, and it's making them more valuable, which leads to them being more safe. You do not become more safe by knowing your rights; you become more safe by learning how to do the job.

I would love to be able to touch on every single thing within this bill, but I don't have time for that. I would like to talk about the joint health and safety committees as they were one of the biggest concerns that construction companies had because they did not accomplish what they set out to do. There are already hazard assessments. For every job, every task you do, you do a hazard assessment, a young worker with an older worker. Every day you do one of those. You already do daily tool box meetings, where your whole crew gets together and talks. You do weekly meetings with the larger crews, with all the crews together, to talk about safety and the job and everything else. Adding a fourth committee meeting per week did not accomplish anything more safe because it was about bureaucracy and it was about double-checking the double check of the double check.

The NDP may not understand this, but workers generally want to work, not go to another meeting where they don't pay attention, where they don't contribute, where they literally sometimes don't care. Unfortunately, where they learn is not at a meeting. Where they learn is watching an experienced worker, doing it with an experienced worker. That is why we've put so much emphasis on our skilled trades, on apprenticeship. That's where they learn to be safe.

The other thing that I feel is obviously often overlooked by the opposition is that employers are humans, and they want their employees safe. A hurt employee doesn't help them in any way. They become family, quite literally. The heartache, the headache, the pain, the cost of an injury is not worth the reward of not training a young person. They get better at a task by doing it, not talking about it, not reading about it, not watching somebody else do it, though those are all important incremental steps. They get better by doing it themselves over and over for 65,000 hours. They can do it in their sleep.

There's one other part with the inherent risk of job sites that we have to keep in mind. Every worker should have the right amount of fear and respect for the powerful tools that they are using in order to use them properly. If they do not fear and respect that tool that can put a nail in in a split second, yes, there is a risk. But they can go back to hammer and nail. I did that, too. It just takes a lot longer, and there is just as much risk there, I can tell you, having put a hammer on my thumbnail. The leverage of a 26-ounce hammer can really do a lot of damage. Ask any of my colleagues that have also done it.

Mr. Getson: Wayne Gretzky hurt his thumb.

Mr. Neudorf: Exactly. There would have been some unparliamentary language at that point in time.

It is very much like driving a car, where we let a 16-year-old get behind the wheel of a several-thousand-pound piece of deadly equipment. They do not do a hazard assessment every single day. They do not go to a tool box meeting every single day. They do not go to a job site safety meeting every week, yet they operate one of

the most dangerous pieces of equipment known to man, and they do it all the time.

There is an inherent risk in everything we do, including working at this lovely Legislature. I love this building, Mr. Speaker. I really do. As someone who loves architecture, construction, I love it, but every time I go up the stairwells in this beautiful building, I should be filling out a hazards assessment. I should be documenting that it is not to code. There are at least two code infractions, very serious code infractions, on every stairwell in this building. Double winders between every flight: that is completely against code. You cannot do that. It is a serious risk hazard for tripping. The handrails are not to height. These handrails, as beautiful as they are, are not to code: a serious risk, a serious hazard. In fact, this building should have a multimillion-dollar renovation if we were to bring it up to code. I hope we don't. There's an inherent risk in that, and I think we need to understand that, and we keep coming and doing our job every day.

This bill does exactly what it says. Its name is Ensuring Safety And Cutting Red Tape Act. I love this bill. I love what its intent is, and though it may not be perfect because we as humans are not perfect, there needs to be an understanding that the understanding of training, the understanding of learning needs to be part of a job.

So I will not support this amendment, and I would ask that all of my colleagues do the same. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you.

Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available, and I see the hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake-St. Paul has risen.

Mr. Hanson: Yeah. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I would just like to – you know, the passion in our member's speaking points – point out to the members opposite that there's a little thing here in Canada called Bill C-45, that came out in 2004. So the idea that an employer or a foreman or a general foreman of that employer is going to bypass regulations and send a young employee in to do a dangerous job when he knows that there's inherent risk is absolutely ludicrous.

11:00

Bill C-45, which came out in 2004, is a decade-old law that established for the first time in Canada's history a crime of occupational health and safety criminal negligence. Upon conviction, an individual may receive life imprisonment, and a corporate defendant may receive an unlimited fine. The idea that as a general foreman, when I have a senior journeyman that comes to me and says, "You know what? There's inherent risk here, and I'm not going to do this job," I say, "Okay; well, you go home; I'm going to send the first-year apprentice in there to do it" and risk something happening to them and losing the company or being thrown in prison: it's absolutely ludicrous that the opposition thinks that that's an actual reality here. I would just like the member to speak to Bill C-45, if you would, and how it implicates this legislation. [interjections] Because it's relevant, and you guys should actually read it.

The Acting Speaker: Through the chair, first, and if the hon. member would like to continue, the hon. Member for Lethbridge-East to respond, with three minutes left.

Mr. Neudorf: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to my colleague. Again, he's right. There are lots of laws that hold employers and companies to account. This bill is about allowing the incentive on the employees to make sure they learn how to do the job better. Obviously, all the laughter from the opposition just proves that they have never worked on a job site like that. They

have never had to learn what it means to use a power nailer, what it means to use a chop saw, where your blade is spinning at several thousand RPMs. I would invite you to come to my garage, where I have one of these. I can show you how to use it, and if you're not afraid the first time you use it, I would ask you not to touch it because you don't understand what needs to take place. That little bit of fear and little bit of understanding is what keeps people safe. That is what inherent risk and understanding do, and if you can't handle that and if you can't do that, maybe that isn't the occupation for you.

Again, I thank the member for his comments and his expertise and his experience with Bill C-45 and how that implies that every employer has those risks and understands that. There is no financial benefit, there is no incentive to having an unsafe workplace. There just isn't. There is no benefit. Every employer I have ever worked for, having been an employer myself, wants every employee to go home safe. So we're in agreement on that.

I believe that the Minister of Labour and Immigration has done a tremendous amount of work on this. I believe the Associate Minister of Red Tape Reduction has done a tremendous amount of work. Maybe the language will be changed at some point in time. I believe that the way it is put forward is helpful, is thoughtful, and still allows for all those things to take place. They do. I see the member shaking her head, unfortunately. I didn't look at bills like this when I went to work. I worked in construction for 26 years. I never saw one of these before in my life. But I can tell you what: I taught many, many young people, including my daughters and my son, how to do that work safely.

I'm very proud that at the last company I worked for, a general contracting company, I had my 17-year-old daughter come and work one summer. She was taught how to do work safely. She worked with all the men. It was her goal every day to outwork those men, and that site became one of the most productive sites because no young man wants to be outworked by a young woman. It was fantastic. My boss asked me if he could hire the rest of my kids to come to work; I have four daughters and a son. But I'm very proud that no accidents happened there. I'm very proud that I had a part in the safety training. Again, I did it without one of these in my back pocket.

Again, I would just urge all of my colleagues to not support this amendment but to support this bill. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Looking to join debate, I see the hon. Member for St. Albert has risen.

Ms Renaud: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise and speak to the referral amendment for Bill 47, Ensuring Safety and Cutting Red Tape Act, 2020. Honestly, you know, I think it is a great idea that we pause, send it to committee. The government likes to send bills to committee, especially if they're private members' bills that come from this side. Why not send this so that we get it right?

[Mr. Reid in the chair]

You know, I never imagined, when we are faced with the challenges we are right now because of COVID-19, this government would use this cover to push through a piece of legislation that goes so far to reduce, literally reduce, the safety of Alberta workers. Never in my wildest dreams did I think that that was something they would do. The other members, the members opposite, seem to think that this is a good thing. Well, let's just do a high-level sort of overview of some of the things that it does to take the rights, to roll back the rights of Alberta workers.

I would also like to remind the members, you know, that when they're talking about sectors – I certainly appreciate that all members come to this Chamber with different experiences with different sectors, different employers. Some of them were employers, some were employees, and that's great. We all bring our different experiences to this Chamber to have a full debate. But what I would say, you know, is that I think that when you look at this legislation and some of the changes that are going to be ushered in, you have to use a broader lens. You have to think about all of the other sectors that are really impacted by this.

Earlier today, this morning, I did have an opportunity to speak to Bill 47, and I focused some of my comments on a sector that we don't tend to talk a lot about – we don't tend to think a lot about the workplace risks, workplace injuries that occur – and that is the disability sector. There are tens of thousands of disability workers in Alberta. I can tell you that some of the changes that were brought in in 2018 were so far overdue, were so essential. These are potentially very risky workplaces sometimes. Sometimes they're not, but sometimes they are. You are dealing with medication, you are dealing with protocols, and you are dealing with equipment. I don't know. I've been run over by an electric wheelchair that weighs a ton. You know what? If you don't know what you're doing, it is not good. Taking care of batteries, battery maintenance, maintenance on the chairs, maintenance on the Hoyer lifts: all of these things are risky.

I'm just encouraging. I'm just giving a sample. I may not have my own pneumatic nailer at home in my garage – I don't have a garage – but I do know how to use one. I'm just saying that when you think about the changes that are being made to legislation like this, think about all of the sectors – it is not just the one sector that we are each familiar with – to have that broader lens.

There are a number of changes. I just want to go over some of the things that I find particularly alarming. Cutting benefits to workers: one of the things that the UCP is doing is bringing in caps on benefits. Basically, caps will give the WCB board level the ability to introduce caps. The WC Board will literally – that sounds weird: the WC Board – decide on the overall caps for benefits. The question is: why would they do this unless there were reductions planned? Why on earth would this change be put in this piece of legislation? Does this sound like it's supporting workers and making workplaces safer? I don't think so.

An obligation to reinstate workers: here's another lovely change in this piece of legislation. The UCP proposes now to eliminate requirements for employers to reinstate injured workers once they are ready to return to work. Now, strangely enough, I think that from UCP documents, their own statistics and documents, prior to this new legislation being introduced, only 10 per cent of employers were not reinstating workers, so I honestly don't know where this came from. Did it come from your lengthy, one-month consultation during the summer, that only had about 18 per cent participation of Alberta workers? It could be. It doesn't even make sense. Why would the government want to encourage employers not to take back their employees when they're ready to go?

Now, think about worst case scenarios. Some of the members talked about some of the horrific injuries that do occur in workplaces, and I agree that there are too many injuries. I'm not saying that that's because workplaces are unsafe; it's just that sometimes accidents happen. That is a reality of life. When somebody is disabled because of an accident, it is a really long road back. It can be a really long road back from something like a brain injury. Perhaps it's a physical injury of some kind that just changes life from that moment on. That is a brutal fight back, and the ultimate goal seems to be: I want to go back to work, I want to go

back to my job, and I want to go back to where I felt like I had meaning.

11:10

Why on earth would the UCP bring in legislation that makes that even more difficult and then pass on the costs to Albertans by saying, "Well, we're not going to, you know, keep this job, so let's add to the unemployment of people, of Albertans with disabilities"? Their unemployment rate is twice as high as nondisabled peers. Why on earth you would want to contribute to that dismal, dismal statistic is absolutely beyond me.

In this piece of legislation the UCP also attacks the obligation to continue benefits. Now the employer is no longer required to continue health, dental, and other benefits. Now, keep in mind that the purpose of WCB – and I'm talking about the WCB changes – is to compensate injured workers. It seems to me that an injured worker would need this kind of coverage for themselves, to be able to support their families. I don't understand in normal times why on earth a government would think it's a good idea to reduce coverage for injured workers, to reduce the ability for them to return to their work, and think that that's a good idea. Layer on top of that that we are in a pandemic, where we know that all of the risks are going up. We know this. We know this to be true. Still, it seems like a good idea to this government.

Let's talk about presumptive coverage. The UCP is literally proposing to eliminate this for psychological injuries for the vast majority of workers. Now, there will still be, thankfully, some workers that are covered, and those are first responders, so firefighters, paramedics, peace officers, police officers, corrections officers, emergency dispatch. Thank goodness that this group is covered. Absolutely, thank goodness. But what about all of the other workers? If you honestly think that these are the only workers, that these are the only Albertans that are subjected to this kind of injury, you are so incredibly, sadly mistaken.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

I think that if you speak to anyone that works in child protective services or talk to anybody that works in Children's Services, who works with people with disabilities, anything like that, there is an incredible amount of risk. Earlier today I talked about just in my career some of the things that I've had to witness or had to support different staff through, whether that was just being part of debriefing or making sure that they had access to the supports they needed. This is just a – not just; I don't mean it that way – disability worker supporting Albertans with disabilities, some of which are very, very complex. They can present with sometimes very aggressive behaviour, extreme self-injury, all kinds of challenges. All kinds of challenges.

I have seen workers have to respond to sudden death at home, whether it was related to their disability, or maybe it was age, or maybe it was something else, all of these things. They have had to deal with incredibly traumatic instances in their work life. For some people, you know, they manage with support from staff or perhaps some counselling or debriefing, a little bit of time off, whatever it is that they need, but some people don't. Some people are left with an injury that you can't see, but it is very much there, and it changes their life from that point on. That doesn't mean they don't ever recover and that they don't ever have quality of life, but life changes, and often it is a long path back to be able to do the work that they did before or just to recover from the injury.

I always remember in this House – and this was years ago now, actually – when the Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs brought forward a private member's bill about PTSD Awareness Day. I always remember the day, which is June 27. That's my birthday, so

it's really easy for me to remember. But I was incredibly grateful that she did bring forward that piece of legislation because I think it's one day of the year where we can all stop and recognize that injuries and disabilities – you can't always see them, and it doesn't mean that they don't change your life in ways that are hard to even describe. I remember that debate, actually, on that Monday. At the time I think it was the Wildrose and the Progressive Conservatives, before they had a mind meld.

I can remember people sharing lots of different stories and support for this and recognizing the importance of understanding how severe this kind of injury can be. Suddenly, not so much. Suddenly this is a government now that is introducing this piece of legislation during a pandemic, when workers are stressed beyond I think what most of us can understand on a day-to-day basis, particularly those in health care, people working in long-term care, people supporting even disability services, where people that they're supporting no longer have access to their routines and their normal way of life – they've lost their jobs if they had them, many of them – so the stress is enormous, not to mention the risk of getting sick, not to mention the risk of getting sick, recovering, and then being left with all kinds of issues that we are starting to see as different reports come out talking about the long-term implications of COVID survivors.

I read a report a couple of weeks ago, I think it was, so forgive me if I don't remember a lot of the details. It came out of Italy, one of the cities that was hardest hit in the first wave. They talked about – they were able to sort of follow a lot of survivors a little bit longer than, you know, obviously, in North America, and noted, like, really significant issues six months later. Again, think about the workers, think about all of the workers that this impacts.

To think that, well, we're not even sure of the extent of the damage or the challenges that will be faced when this is finally over and when we finally have a vaccine and we can start to move in a different direction – we don't even know what the end result will be, yet this government is ramming through this giant piece of legislation that is a full-out attack on Alberta workers in so many ways, yet they just want to focus on: oh, no, no; we're just reducing red tape. You are not. You're reducing support for Alberta workers in all kinds of ways. At least be honest about what you're doing.

The presumptive coverage alone . . .

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. member, just to caution you to direct your comments through the chair. Using words like “you” is more direct than “Madam Speaker.” Please proceed.

Ms Renaud: Absolutely, Madam Speaker. Happy to speak through you.

Going back to presumptive coverage, again, the proposition to eliminate support for this type of injury, you know, I think that we can all, I hope that we can all sort of land on a place where we understand that both physical and psychological injuries can be equally debilitating, much like – I know I've said it before in this place – with disabilities. I've heard so many times people with invisible disabilities, perhaps a brain injury or fetal alcohol spectrum disorder or schizophrenia, something like that – I've often heard people say things like: it would be so much easier if I just had a visible disability because people just look at me and they think that I'm fine. They actually see that as more difficult because people look at them and don't see the disability. Same deal here: people, Alberta workers who sustain this kind of injury really need to be supported the same way that other workers are.

Finally, I wanted to talk about the Fair Practices office. I don't know about my colleagues on this side or the other side, for that

matter, but I know that after being re-elected in 2019, it was really interesting that WCB sent out people – it was my understanding that they were going to all constituency offices – from the Fair Practices office to make sure that every constituency office understood their role, how they could help, what they could do, and what they could offer workers, not to mention how they could support the casework that we were doing. You know, I imagine that if other constituency offices are like mine, you get a lot of casework that is focused on WCB. That is just a reality. This Fair Practices office was brought in to assist, and it actually was assisting. I know that I've referred people there and heard back that it was quite useful.

But now we have Bill 47, that is removing this office. I mean, we can be thankful that it's not being moved to the seniors and health advocate/mental health advocate/ex-UCP ED, but, you know, this Fair Practices office now, Madam Speaker, is being replaced by one person.

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

11:20

Mr. Copping: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I rise to respond to some of the comments made by colleagues across the aisle and also to speak to the proposed referral amendment. My colleagues across the aisle, while I do appreciate their tremendous enthusiasm and desire for health and safety – we share that on this side as well. They've suggested a referral amendment for two reasons, both on procedural grounds and on substantive grounds, it appears. On the procedural side, they seem to suggest that we need to refer this because there hasn't been sufficient consultation. On the substantive, they suggest that this needs to be referred because it's an attack on Alberta's workers and an actual decrease in health and safety.

Madam Speaker, I rise to share that on both these points they're incorrect. In regard to the procedural concerns and consultation, we did engage in consultations with workers, with health and safety professionals, with employers, with labour unions. Even prior to us doing the consultation, we had heard concerns about the previous government's bills, changes they made to workers' compensation, occupational health and safety, that the changes made were too prescriptive, difficult to understand, difficult to implement, increasing costs for employers and making it difficult to get Albertans back to work. Based on this – and there were a number of submissions made through red tape – we conducted our own consultations. We went out. We received over 350 responses to a survey. We developed two discussion guides. We received 95 written responses to those discussion guides, and we also held four virtual sessions to talk about these issues with the parties to be able to get it right.

Madam Speaker, I believe that in this bill we did get it right, so the concerns raised, you know, that this needs to go to a referral to committee for more consultation: that is not the case. We've done sufficient consultation, and the fact is that it is important that we make these changes now. A number of these changes are about ensuring the sustainability of our workers' compensation system. It's about reducing the red tape. It's about reducing costs for employers while improving health and safety outcomes, and that's all about getting Albertans back to work, which is important now more than ever.

On the health and safety side, Madam Speaker, I'd also like to comment that this is about improving health and safety outcomes. You know, while I respect a number of the changes made by the members opposite, particularly the Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods, who's passionate about health and safety, they put in rules

that actually made our health and safety experts box checkers, not focused on identifying risks, worried about process, and not focused on not only identifying the risks but mitigating those risks in the workplaces.

The changes we're making in the health and safety act in Bill 47 address a number of them. I would like to point out, because some substantive issues and questions were raised by the Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods in regard to two issues, time permitting – I'll deal with the first one, the shortest one first. In regard to disciplinary action complaints the concern raised by the Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods – the word prior to the change we're making, "disciplinary action complaint," was "discriminatory action complaint." The concern she's raised is that now, because we changed the wording, these items – the concern is that if, where disciplinary action is prohibited, they violate the section, they would now have to go to the human rights committee to be able to seek redress. Madam Speaker, I just want to confirm for the other side that that is simply not the case. If you look at the bill, disciplinary action complaints: that remains. The process is within this bill.

I would point out that in the definitions, we have made disciplinary actions – we've defined that very broadly. Disciplinary action, in the definition section, means "any action or threat of action by a person that does or would adversely affect a worker with respect to any terms or conditions of employment." What we were finding, Madam Speaker, was that because of the name change made by the previous side to call it discriminatory action complaint, there was confusion about: what is the appropriate venue to resolve these complaints? We want to make sure there is no confusion. If a person takes any disciplinary action, which we've defined very broadly, against a worker by reason that they're actually in compliance with the act, they can file a disciplinary action complaint with occupational health and safety. Officers can investigate and then address this under the act. We've provided a greater clarity.

The Deputy Speaker: Any other members wishing to speak to the referral motion? The hon. Member for Edmonton-West Henday.

Mr. Carson: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It's an honour to rise this evening to speak to the referral amendment that is before us, of course, asking that the members of the Assembly support us in our motion to move this to committee, recognizing that this legislation is by no means ready to go and be shared with the general public and, you know, what this government likes to say, protect workers. Unfortunately, what we're seeing here is a complete rollback of very important amendments to the legislation that we had done over the past four years.

I've had the opportunity to speak to this a couple of times, and it's unfortunate, in my opinion, that once again we hear members like the Member for Lethbridge-East say that they absolutely love this legislation, that it's wonderful, and that he is in love with it. It's frustrating because, once again, when we look at what's in here, specifically around the implementation of caps on benefits, which the minister is doing his best to steer clear of – happy to talk about what he calls continuing safety in the workplace. You know, it is what it is.

But when we talk about, once again, the implementation of caps on benefits, whether we're talking about income that should be provided to an injured worker if they are injured through no fault of their own on a workplace or whether we're talking about the clawback of benefits to injured workers and their families – once again, if they're injured, traditionally they would potentially get up to a year of benefits. They may have dental coverage. They may

have medical coverage for themselves and potentially their beneficiaries or people that they are the guardian of. It's very unfortunate that once – you know, we have members that are so happy to stand up and say that they love these kinds of changes, that they love taking money out of the pockets of injured Albertans, that they love clawing back benefits to injured Albertans.

You know, I have to point out that this is very similar to the conversations that have been happening under Bill 41, the changes to insurance in our province. This government is saying, "We are expanding the medical coverage for injured Albertans," but when you look in the legislation of Bill 41 and you look at the details within it, it's actually this government capping the benefits that are going to Albertans that are injured, once again, through no fault of their own in a motor vehicle collision. While I appreciate that private members of this government have to stand up and have to show support for the bills that their government is bringing forward, I really – it's hard for me to grasp why members are willing to go as far as saying that they absolutely love this legislation, that is going to take money away from injured families and their own communities.

You know, we hear many anecdotes, and I've shared my own. Last time I stood up and talked about the fact that at a workplace that I was at – and there have been many. Every workplace does their best to stay safe, but instances arise where, whether it's the employer or the employee that is not living up to the safety that they should to protect themselves and their colleagues, things happen. In this instance, I spoke about a colleague that was working on compressed air, using open flames, and it exploded and injured themselves and another worker. While in this instance that worker was provided benefits to cover the fact and they were reinstated on light duty, the fact is that this government is making it so that if that were to happen on a workplace, this legislation would change the fact that it's now voluntary that those workers would have to be reinstated if they're injured.

You know, while the government goes on about, "Oh, there are protections in place so that if an employer goes against the legislation that we put forward, then an employee can take action to hold them accountable," this government is changing the legislation so that a worker could potentially not be reinstated now that it's voluntary for an employer to reinstate that worker. They no longer have to provide the same amount of benefits supplementing their income, that they can no longer get because they're injured and no longer able to work. Once again, on top of not being able to work anymore, this government is saying that they don't have to be reinstated. It's very frustrating to hear the government so proud to stand up against injured workers, stand up for legislation that is literally attacking and taking money out of the pockets of injured workers.

11:30

You know, the last time I had the opportunity to stand – and I imagine that after I finish speaking here, the Member for Lac Ste. Anne-Parkland will rise with a smile and talk about how wrong I am – I talked about the fact that I have been on many work sites as an electrician and before that as a finishing carpenter/labourer, and I've seen all sorts of things, good and bad, as I said, Madam Speaker. That member actually stood up and attacked my ability and also my place in this very Legislature, saying that: oh, he's just a young man; maybe once he gets older, he'll understand how this legislation works. But it's the exact same language that employers use against employees when they're trying to tell them that they don't deserve these kinds of benefits. It's incredibly unfortunate.

You know, there's an opportunity here to listen to the opposition, to where we're coming from: social workers, people working within the disability community, people working in construction. Despite what the Member for Lethbridge-East thinks, some of us have worked in construction, but that is by no means the only industry where these kinds of workplace injuries happen. I think that the Member for St. Albert raised good points about workers in the disability community and the risks that are there. When we look at other front-line workers – nurses, social workers, health care aides in long-term care facilities, teachers, janitors, retail workers – there is the opportunity for injury in any workplace.

Once again, it is deeply frustrating that this government thinks, "Oh, these kinds of things can only happen in the construction industry or, you know, on front lines if you're a police officer or a firefighter," because the fact is that injuries are common in all lines of work, and we should be doing everything we can to protect everyone, no matter what industry they work in.

I go back to the point that the Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods was making, that legislation and changes like we're seeing through Bill 47 are primarily done on the backs of injured workers but also have the most negative effect on people who aren't able to understand the legislation or aren't in a position to argue legislation with their employer or aren't in a position to refuse work because of the precarious situation that they're in. I have seen this at many work sites, the workers being afraid to say: no; I will not do this work because I believe it's unsafe. Often the employer will recognize that it's unsafe, and they will go to the next worker and say: "How about you? Would you like to do this horribly unsafe job?" If that's not the case, then it goes on and on and on until he finds somebody that is willing to do it. Of course, there are, as far as I know unless, you know, this government has already changed that legislation, processes in place where if enough employees say no to work, an investigation of some sort is had to ensure that the employer should be asking workers to do this at all. But the fact is that employers will ask things of their employees that, in some instances, they wouldn't potentially do themselves.

We heard the Member for Lethbridge-East say – I don't want to paraphrase wrong here – that fear is the best way for safety. I don't even understand how that's a thing. The best way for safety is to learn how to do the job properly. With that member talking about having their own family on a work site with them and, you know, how having their family there drove the other workers to do better than ever before, that's wonderful, but what about instances where a worker is injured? Wouldn't you want these protections to be in place if you are working with your family member and, God forbid, something were to happen? All of a sudden the employer is saying: "Oh, no. We're not going to reinstate you. You injured yourself. It was your own fault. We aren't going to cover the benefits. You have children? That's too bad. You had a health spending account when you worked for us, but you don't work for us anymore, so you have to figure it out now." It's unbelievable that that member is willing to stand up and say that they absolutely love this bill, that it's perfect.

Once again, the idea the minister has gone on at length about, that this legislation will be easier to understand compared to what was in place before: injured workers don't need legislation they can understand. They need legislation that is going to protect their benefits after they've been injured. They don't need to figure out how the legislation works. They need legislation to be in place that works in the first place.

It's absolutely frustrating, Madam Speaker, that this is where we're at now, that we can't get clear answers from the government, that they're unwilling to talk about the changes that they're making

to benefits because they know that people in their communities who are injured on the job are going to face the real consequences that the changes in Bill 47 bring onto them and their families and their communities.

You know, I would have to reflect one more time that this minister through the rollout of Bill 47 took to social media and talked about how wonderful the heroes compensation act was going to be. He scripted up a nice video with some employer groups that stood with him and talked about how wonderful this is. You know, other than some of the questions that we have about how the heroes compensation act and the compensation that comes from that will affect workers, particularly those who access programs like AISH and how that will affect their benefits, I don't think that it's necessarily a bad idea. It might be a great idea.

Unfortunately, we haven't had a proper amount of time to consult on that. I think that many members on this side of the House have been very clear that the process that took place around consultations around this legislation was very short. Quite clearly, this government does not want to have open consultations on changes to labour legislation. Very clearly. Once again, through the social media campaign that that minister took, he disabled the comments on his social media feeds in some instances, which made workers of Alberta very suspicious of why that would take place in the first place. Very suspicious, Madam Speaker. If you're so proud of your legislation, why are you trying to hide the comments of Alberta workers, who simply want to comment on the changes that you're making?

I think that quite a bit of time has been spent on the changes that are being proposed through this legislation to the joint worker safety committees that we put in place when we were in government. I think that it's very disappointing that this government doesn't believe that representatives should be there to protect workers who are injured, once again, as we talk about workers who are in precarious situations, workers that are potentially new to the job, are young. You know, based on changes that this government has made, maybe they're 13- or 14-year-olds working their first job. While the Member for Lac Ste. Anne-Parkland thinks it's funny to say: ah, maybe when he gets older, he'll figure it out. Unfortunately, these protections need to be in place now for if they are injured.

So, once again, I would reflect on other changes that this labour minister has made to lower the wage for youth workers, to change averaging agreements for workers who often work overtime across our province in many different industries, and I would just simply have to ask: what do you have against people that, one, want to make overtime; that, two, care about their safety; that, three, want to be fairly compensated if they are working overtime, if they are working their day to day, but also if they are injured? What do you have against these people that simply want fair compensation and, more than that, want the opportunity to return to their job, even if they are injured, in a limited capacity until, hopefully, they're able to get back to work? Why is it all of a sudden okay for that to be a voluntary measure for employers to reinstate workers?

It's so frustrating, Madam Speaker, and that is why, once again, this should be sent to committee, why I will be supporting this referral amendment. The minister talked about how great of a consultation process that they did, but we have seen consultations on things like daylight saving time that have received tens of thousands of submissions. The consultation process that went into this was very little compared to that, not substantial at all. It's so frustrating that in the midst of a global pandemic, a health pandemic, when we should be reflecting on how this legislation is written right now and strengthening the ability of employees to hold their employers accountable, strengthening the ability of employees

to be fairly compensated, when we look at the idea of new risks for front-line workers in grocery stores, retail workers, workers in our health care system and the idea that COVID does create many new concerns for the ability to do our jobs safely and that employers should be doing even more – I know, the majority of them are. There's no doubt about it, but we need to ensure that that continues.

11:40

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

Mr. Copping: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I rise to respond again to some of the comments made by the opposition in regard to the referral amendment. Again, as indicated earlier, we have done substantial consultation on this. We've heard from parties, experts, health and safety experts on this. Really, our focus and our government's focus is improving health and safety outcomes and reducing red tape. It's about ensuring that there is a fiscal sustainability to our workers' compensation system while maintaining key benefits and restoring balance in our labour laws. It's really, you know, something that we understand on this side of the House. I think that they don't quite understand on the other side of the House that by reducing costs for job creators, you help keep Albertans working and help get Albertans back to work, and that's our focus while at the same time improving health and safety outcomes.

I would like to further comment that not only did we do significant consultation but in regard to changes we are making, particularly in regard to occupational health and safety, we're taking a number of the provisions out of the act for health and safety committees and putting them where they belong because we heard far too often that these were very prescriptive, these need to go into the code. Madam Speaker, I will commit to the House and I will commit to the other side that we will do further consultation as we evaluate the code and what needs to go in there. I didn't bring my copy of the code with me, but it's about three inches thick, and we need to put the items in the right locations, provide flexibilities for employers so they're not box checkers, they're not focused on process; they're focused on outcomes.

I would also like to take a moment to talk a little bit about the right to refuse dangerous work because I appreciate the thoughtful questions being raised by the Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods in terms of what changes we're making and why we're making them. I'll touch on three of them. The first is in regard to the change in the definition. We made a change in the definition to speak to the right to refuse dangerous work where there is an undue hazard. We are adopting language very similar to B.C., and the reason why we are doing this, Madam Speaker, is because what we want health and safety committees and workers and employers to focus on is: identify the known hazards of the workplace and put in place the mitigation, right? The hon. member is quite correct across the way that the right to refuse is the third step. It's the last step, right? We want them to identify up front these hazards. There could be an undue hazard that comes up, and an undue hazard, you know, in a very broad sense could be something that hasn't been identified so you don't have mitigation or it has been identified but mitigation is not in place, so now that's an undue hazard and there's a right to refuse.

I will point out, Madam Speaker, that this right to refuse can be exercised at any time. It needs to be exercised in a reasonable manner, where the person believes and we maintain on reasonable grounds that there is a serious and immediate threat to the health and safety of the person. They can exercise that when they believe that and then raise the issue with their employer, and then the employer can address that.

Now, I do want to speak in terms of assigning additional work: we did streamline the process, and the intent behind the process, if you actually go through it – I won't have time to read through it all at this point in time – is that once an issue is raised, then the employer will investigate, and until they finish their investigation, no one else can work on it. But once they investigate and say, "Hey, this is fair," and then they give the report to the employee – right? – to say, "This is fair," and advise the health and safety officer, then they can let someone else know to do the work, but they are still going to have to inform them that there's an issue outstanding because what this gives the employee is that they can take a look at it and say: "You know what? I still don't think it's safe or it's fair. I'm going to call an occupational health and safety officer and have them investigate."

What we're trying to do and the reason we made the change: because the way that the wording was beforehand, even if the issue was resolved, the employer looked at it, they wrote the report, they gave it to the employee, they gave it to the health and safety committee, the health and the safety committee agreed that it was resolved, and you still had to inform every employee that there was an issue back then or someone raised something. It's resolved to everyone's satisfaction, but they still had to, which makes no sense, Madam Speaker, and we heard that when we actually did the assessment. We needed to change it to reduce the red tape.

But, from our perspective, what's really important here is that the right to refuse remains, that, you know, the hazards be identified and mitigation be in place. There's still ability to do this. And then there still is a requirement to inform other employees where issues are outstanding.

The Deputy Speaker: Any members wishing to speak to the referral amendment? The hon. Member for Lac Ste. Anne-Parkland.

Mr. Getson: Yes. Thank you, Madam Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise to talk on the referral amendment. I really do appreciate – I'm going to have to take these glasses off. I'm trying to wear this mask at the same time and fogging up the glasses. Quite frankly, I think it's going to be a safety incident right here if we don't take care of some of these protocols. On a normal job site that's something we would have. We would sit in committee, talk about it in the JHSC, and go through those types of things. You know, coincidentally, with this bill that's being brought forward, none of that changes.

The Member for Edmonton-West Henday: I'm not sure if he was trying to bait me or not, Madam Speaker, but he mentioned me lots, and that's okay. I think it's okay that he mentions me lots because, obviously, he's listening to what I'm saying. He might not understand what I'm saying, but at least he's listening. So maybe we'll try this one again.

The job site that he had referred to where he worked before, with all these atrocious safety incidents – if the Blues are available to him, maybe he can go look it up and read the context of what I said – that type of job site sounded like something out of a *Happy Gilmore* movie, where they're shooting nail guns off and doing all these types of things. What I had said is that if that was happening at one of my sites, he would have probably ran all of them off. That business has no business being in business.

Now, the members opposite, our side had brought up here Bill C-45, and coincidentally I had mentioned about that as well. The Westray mine disaster brought about Bill C-45. So that takes it to federal law, and it makes people accountable. As the Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake-St. Paul had mentioned and the Member for Lethbridge-East had mentioned as well, that makes management all the way up punishable and guilty by law for not taking care of safety

items. Literally, if you put someone in harm's way, if you don't take care of business, you go to jail. Like, it's pretty definitive. For a lot of us, we understand that. We've grown up in that.

Now, I've had the chance in my career to mentor some young project managers as well. On one particular project, they didn't understand the significance of having a safety officer out on-site, not just someone roaming around the province and popping in once in a while. I would not send my guys out to the field nor the contractor nor anybody else till this young project manager put a safety officer on-site. He didn't understand the significance of Bill C-45.

Again, I'm not faulting the folks, the members opposite, the Member for Edmonton-West Henday specifically, for heckling on that, the significance. The rest of us understand that the OH and S manual was paid for in blood, and that Westray mine disaster is nothing to joke about ever. We understand the gravity of it. We really do.

Now, Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods, honestly, I appreciate what you're saying. I'm starting to go through some of the bills, and I'm looking at the language, and I can see where potentially it was there. But I'm not with you yet to say that we should just, you know, gas it so far and put it back to committee.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. member, I'd just remind you to direct your comments through the chair, please.

Mr. Getson: Oh. I'm sorry, Madam Speaker. I have a bad habit of looking at people when I talk to them. You're right, and I apologize. I'll try to make sure I'm focused there. Thank you. Hopefully, the member opposite appreciates that that was a look of sincerity. It wasn't meant for anything else.

That's where I'm thinking that we should not go with the amendment that she's putting forward, that we shouldn't have to put it back to another committee, that we allow it to continue forward, and that if in Committee of the Whole there's some latitude or potential opportunity to do it, then that would be the place to bring those motions forward.

Now, one thing I do want to talk about is also the culture, the culture of OH and S. Coming back to the context and the professionals that I've dealt with over my career that are OH and S officers or safety officers or being on these joint committees, et cetera, again I talked about kind of growing up through the tools and the bush and then going out and becoming management in some of these major capital programs.

Now, the Member for Edmonton-Rutherford and I both had a conversation, a little bit in the House here as well, and we have that respect, that mutual respect. That OH and S manual is pretty important. As a nomination contestant it was rather odd for me to have OH and S officers reaching out to me before the election and saying: "There's something wrong here. Like, the culture of going out there and making sure these jobs, these sites are safe has changed. We're being told that we should go out there and start punishing employers." The whole idea now: the mandate is to go out and have however many enforcements we can put in place. That's how we're being measured. It's not about making sure that labour and the companies work together to have proper sites. It's about changing that culture, and it's about offering all these punitive measures.

They were also talking, from the zone officers themselves – and I don't have a way to verify it, just based on what the officer told me – of being bloated at the top end. They had a ton of directors floating around.

11:50

When we're talking about red tape, we're also talking about safety culture, and we're talking about how those OH and S manuals should be enforced. When the Member for Lethbridge-East – and obviously the Member for Edmonton-West Henday took it out of context – was talking about being scared of tools, it's having that respect for the tools. It's about training so that people understand what equipment can do, even something as simple as a circular saw. That's part of the process, part of the process of training and making sure it's in place. None of that changes, that I can see, substantively from here.

The red tape bill. You know, the Associate Minister of Red Tape Reduction has been criticized. It's been interesting. He's been criticized for having nothing. He's been criticized for taking money and spending it and doing it even though he works under Treasury, so it's already there. He's been criticized for having too much. He's been criticized for not going enough. This poor fellow: he's on the hunt for red tape, and he's getting it, and he's getting targeted himself all the time for actually doing his job. I find that, with tongue in cheek, a bit interesting.

The fact that we have multiple items in three different jurisdictions or three different ministries taking place: it's no surprise to us. It's not meant to ram through legislation. They're simply efficiencies, and for those, on a quarterly basis, I understand that when he's going through those departments, they're taking care of business.

Again, it's with the utmost respect for the Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods, the Member for Edmonton-Rutherford, and some of the other comments I've heard in understanding – to the Member for St. Albert: I was trying to picture getting run over by a wheelchair. I've never run into that, but I'm trying to picture how that happens, and I can appreciate the gravity of that taking place. Again, there are some pretty big wheelchairs out there. I've seen some senior citizens with some buggy whips going down the road that I was clocking at doing at least 10 kilometres an hour. Those types of things happen in different workplaces. You know, the simple fact of scalding yourself with a coffee pot: those things happen.

Again, I don't accept some of the dialogue saying that safety accidents just happen and that nothing is preventable. One of the mantras we always had in our job was: zero safety incidents; everything is preventable. When you have these mechanisms, controls, and when the culture is correct, that's what everyone is striving for. I think that's what our side is trying to articulate, and I believe that none of that intent has been taken away from this bill that's put forward.

With respect, I would urge the members to vote against the amendment, and let's get back on the bill. Committee of the Whole, I think, would be the best time to bring forward some amendments if required.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

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

Ms Gray: Thank you very much. I just wanted to join in the debate once more and recognize and appreciate that there has been some very good going back and forth in talking about this bill. I have listened with interest to the government members, to their arguments. Under 29(2)(a), in response, I rise just to encourage members to really consider supporting this amendment and sending this back to committee.

Some of the very specific concerns that I've raised about the right to refuse unsafe work have not been fully addressed in this place, and I do continue to have those very genuine concerns about the consultation. I can tell you that prior to making major changes to workers' compensation, we appointed a panel of three experts, and they embarked on an over a year long process that was massive in its breadth and depth in reaching out to people.

It is hard to speak with front-line workers in those consultations. It is hard for people to know it's happening, to get engaged, to be connected to a consultation. What I saw from the consultation this government conducted over the summer, during a pandemic, was completely inadequate for reaching workers. Most didn't know it was happening. Even those who had professionals to help deal with the responses did not have enough time to really put together those fulsome responses. I've talked to several stakeholders who said that it was super rushed and that they had to quickly pull everything together and respond in the way that the government wanted.

I have heard the minister talk about how he feels that the consultation was adequate. I disagree. I feel very strongly that we did not hear from so many key stakeholders in this area. I would just like to continue to encourage the members in this House to consider supporting this important amendment to refer this bill to committee because of the impacts to WCB, because of the impacts to occupational health and safety and the real lack of being able to see how this will continue to keep workers safe.

I want to say thank you to everyone who has risen to speak to the bill in debate this evening, tonight, because this is an incredibly important piece of legislation. It's fundamental. Unfortunately, I think most Albertans aren't aware that we're even having this debate right now because there is so much else going on in the world right now.

That impact on the right to refuse combined with COVID-19: I really hope to hear more conversation about that. The use of that word "immediate" in identifying those undue hazards has had many stakeholders reaching out to me, saying: well, how does this apply in a COVID-19 world, when there isn't an immediate "I'm going to break my arm" risk, that, more, there's just that risk in this case? The good news is that employers are responsible for mitigating hazards in their workplaces. They should be doing this. But when that right to refuse isn't clear, when someone can't tell just by reading it and understanding it that they have that right, then it makes it way less likely that they will exercise it. I think that's particularly concerning.

I wanted to simply rise, thank those who joined in, reinforce that I will be supporting, I think, this referral amendment, which is quite important. I continue to have very serious concerns throughout this bill, and I look forward to having more opportunities to address those as we go forward.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

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

Seeing none, any other members on the referral amendment? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs.

Ms Goehring: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise this evening to speak to Bill 47, specifically the referral amendment that this bill not be read a second time and that it be referred to the Standing Committee on Alberta's Economic Future. I can speak directly to the great work that can come out of a committee meeting and a committee consultation when looking at legislation that impacts so many. I am the deputy chair of Alberta's Economic Future, and I can say that during the pandemic we've met with stakeholders who've reached out to our committee chair requesting

an audience with us to discuss their concerns specifically related to COVID.

I think that committee work is so important to the way this House functions. I think it has a definite role when looking at legislation, especially big legislation, omnibus legislation like Bill 47, especially during a pandemic. I think that having the opportunity to bring in more stakeholders, to have that robust information gathering, like the Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods had talked about, being able to really reach those front-line workers is something that we really are missing in this legislation, that consultation piece with those that are directly doing the work.

I can speak to some of the work that's been done in the past in committee, looking at different pieces of legislation that have been brought forward. Often, when you're in the committee, because you have that time to really go through things, you have the ability to reach out to many more Albertans that are being impacted. You might find areas that are identifiable as things that perhaps were unintended consequences, things that were perhaps overlooked.

Unfortunately, with the introduction of this bill at this time, during a pandemic, I think that there are some glaring things that are standing out that are going to directly impact workers during COVID. That might not be the intention of the government, but I think that when we're looking at workers during a pandemic, when we're looking at things like the right to refuse work, there are many who, if they know that if they refuse work, they could be sent home – that paycheck is important. There is a huge impact on employment right now with COVID. People are desperate for work, and I think that when people are considering their options and their safety, unfortunately I fear that some employees that are struggling to make ends meet might consider not reporting. They might consider working in that unsafe environment because they need the employment.

12:00

To me, this is never okay to do to a worker, but I think the risk is higher right now because of what people are facing, and this is something that's happening world-wide, Madam Speaker. I think that when we're looking at ways to keep workers safe – I think that during a pandemic we should be looking at ways to enhance safety. We should be looking at ways of making sure that more people qualify for coverage, not doing what this government is doing and reducing eligibility for coverage, giving employers the right to stop paying benefits if there's an injury at work. It's just baffling to me that while so many people are coming together – we're seeing communities come together to embrace each other, to support each other in times of need – this government is directly changing legislation that impacts workers, specifically their safety, and saying that it's ensuring safety and cutting red tape.

I just don't understand why they wouldn't take this opportunity to put it on pause, refer it to committee, have a more robust conversation about what employment looks like right now during COVID. I can tell you that it's probably a lot different than what it looked like a year ago. Simply not wearing a mask, not wearing a mask properly, which, unfortunately, I see all the time – I see people with, I hope, good intentions putting some form of face covering on, yet their nose is exposed. Maybe it bugs them. They take it off, they put it back on, and they take it off: well, that's not proper procedure. If we have people that are in leadership positions, whether it's an employer or someone else in leadership, not doing it properly, not role modelling it properly, how many others out there in the workplace are experiencing this? I can walk through this building, I can walk on the street, and I can walk in the grocery store and see many people not doing something as simple as putting

a mask over their face, covering their nose, covering their mouth. People aren't doing it properly.

If I'm an employee and I see that this is happening in my workspace, am I courageous enough to stop it? Do I have the confidence to say that this is not a safe workplace? What if it's your employer that's doing it? What if your employer is saying, "I don't believe in masks" and not taking it seriously? That is an unsafe workplace, and as an employee do you feel confident going to your employer and saying, "I'm refusing to work because you're not compliant with the CMO and what's happening"?"

This is very, very scary, and I think that a lot of consideration needs to be considered with what's happening right now. Right now we are in a pandemic. Right now Albertans are calling for action. They're calling for leadership. When we're looking to this government for leadership and guidance and we're getting legislation in the middle of a pandemic that is going after workers' rights, going after what they deserve as workers, it's very, very concerning, Madam Speaker.

When I look at the piece of legislation here that talks about removing presumptive coverage for psychological injuries where workers experience a traumatic event, limiting it to only a few select occupations – well, I can tell you and I've heard many of my colleagues in this House talk about the impacts of psychological trauma in the workplace. Through my consultations doing PTSD Awareness Day there were occupations that I hadn't even considered that experience trauma in the workplace. Journalists covering traumatic events over and over and over: something that I hadn't really considered being a traumatic exposure to a job. When you have journalists that are covering crime and you have this horrific, heartbreaking story unfolding, the impact on that journalist is traumatic. I hadn't even considered that as an occupation that would experience trauma, but I spoke to those journalists, and I heard their stories.

When we look at trauma in the workplace, I think about the Fort McMurray fires, and I think about how many workers experienced trauma because of that, not only the workers but those that were part of it. There were studies done on youth that were impacted by the Fort McMurray fires, and one-third of the youth that were surveyed showed symptoms of PTSD. The remarkable thing in that study was that 46 per cent of the students that were surveyed had some sort of psychological impact, whether it was depression, whether it was anxiety, whether it was sleep disturbances, and those 46 per cent had a blend of students that experienced it first-hand and students that did not experience it first-hand. The simple act of being involved in the situation created a traumatic experience psychologically.

When I think about COVID, I think what your day might have been as a worker pre-COVID and what it is now – they are experiencing trauma – how your brain processes that, how your previous experiences have an impact on that. To see that they're limiting occupations and removing presumptive coverage in a time when people are experiencing trauma sometimes every day through their job: it baffles me. Having this referred to committee, I think, gives us an opportunity to talk to some of those front-line workers, to talk to some of those employees that are experiencing trauma simply by going to work during a pandemic. You look at people that work in the grocery store. They were deemed an essential service early on in the pandemic. I remember being at Save-On-Foods and thanking the worker for coming to work, and she started crying. She burst into tears and said: I have to work, but thank you for acknowledging that.

Showing appreciation only goes so far. There are workers that absolutely need to go to work despite the safety risks that they take in their hands every single day. When I think of some of those

vulnerable populations that are working, youth that don't yet have that life experience to stand up to an employer or to identify that there's a concern in the workplace – some of it, I think, is employers maybe just not understanding. I don't believe that all employers absolutely are intentionally putting their employees at risk. I think a lot of it is good intentions but an inability to perhaps adequately support. There could be some sort of barrier that's causing that. It could be something as simple as not being able to afford enough masks, so the employees are wearing the same disposable masks, taking them on without understanding the proper procedure, but their employer can't afford it, so they're doing that.

I heard of a story on the weekend where a business owner was offering a service, and someone had called in and asked if a mask was mandatory. Now, this was in Edmonton, and it was a place that has been clearly identified as having to have mandatory masking. The employer said: yes, masks are required. The customer said: then I'm not going to come, and I'm not going to access your services. And the employer, the business owner, said: "You know what? I'll make an exception. Come to my shop. We'll figure it out." At first I was outraged that she would allow someone to come into her business not wearing a mask for the safety of not only her but of anybody else who was in her store. Again: tears. She's struggling. She had to make a decision: put food on my table, take a risk that this person is telling me the truth with COVID, that they don't have symptoms.

These are serious matters, Madam Speaker, and I think that supporting this referral amendment is essential. We need to talk to people about what it's like right now. With that, I would like to encourage all members of the House to support this important amendment, and I would like to adjourn debate.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

12:10

Bill 48

Red Tape Reduction Implementation Act, 2020 (No. 2)

[Adjourned debate November 24: Mrs. Savage]

The Deputy Speaker: Are any members wishing to join debate on Bill 48 in second reading? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore.

Mr. Nielsen: Well, thank you, Madam Speaker. I appreciate the opportunity this evening to add some initial comments here around Bill 48, the Red Tape Reduction Implementation Act, 2020 (No. 2), a very large piece of legislation, of course, 145 pages, affecting 12 different pieces of legislation, possibly more, across I believe it was eight ministries. I guess I have to begin my remarks with: I'm going to have a lot of questions, and I realize that possibly 29(2)(a) after I'm done is probably not going to be a sufficient amount of time, so my hope is that the minister will take these questions away and provide us with some insight more fully when we reach Committee of the Whole.

The first thing I have to quickly ask about is around the bill and the way it's presented itself. I clearly remember that the associate minister, back when he served honourably, of course, in the Official Opposition, was quite against omnibus legislation. I specifically remember the debate around the labour bill that the former minister of labour brought forward. They wanted to cut it up into different pieces. They wanted to take this out. This wasn't fair. This was a disservice to Albertans, and on and on. So I have to ask, you know. Here we have your second piece of omnibus legislation. Did you actually believe what you said back then about omnibus legislation? Are you against it, or is it a good idea? I don't know. I am kind of curious about that, because I was made to believe that omnibus legislation was not in the best interest of Albertans.

Either way, here we are with Bill 48, with a bunch of changes around this. It kind of seems like there's a bunch of fluff all boxed up real prettylike, trying to cover up some very significant changes that are of great concern. I know my colleague the critic for Municipal Affairs, the Member for Calgary-Buffalo, will probably have a lot more to say on this, but I will certainly add my comments around that.

As I'm looking at this, you know, one of the first things I'm seeing, of course, is changes around the Alberta Centennial Medal Act. I can't help but wonder. The ministry, of course, was designed to reduce red tape. It was supposed to help job creators create jobs and speed up our economy. I'm just wondering why this piece of legislation would be included in red tape. How does that create jobs? How does that speed up our economy? It kind of seems a little bit like a loss of focus about what we should be looking at right now. We are in the midst of a pandemic that is of great threat to Alberta, not only to its citizens but to its economy as well, yet here we are considering something like this along with things like handing out plaques to fellow members. I find that rather odd.

[Mr. Milliken in the chair]

I guess that when, you know, I talk to Albertans about the red tape ministry, there are not a lot of positive comments about it, Mr. Speaker. They're rather dismayed that an entire ministry was created to do something that I think not only myself but other members of the opposition have demonstrated can be handled within each and every ministry. I mean, we were just debating Bill 47, around ensuring safety and cutting red tape. Why should Albertans be on the hook for \$13 million for this ministry when apparently the Minister of Labour and Immigration can clearly handle red tape all by his own ministry?

You know, we have some changes to the Animal Health Act. I guess one of the quick questions I have in here is around the definition for a qualification certificate as "a certificate authorizing an individual to provide advice on the use of authorized medicine in accordance with labelled instructions." I'm just kind of wondering: what kinds of implications does that mean? Do we potentially have situations where we could have individuals dispensing medications for animals that maybe they shouldn't be doing? My hope is that maybe we'll see a little bit of clarification around this. It kind of feels almost a little bit like the changes we've seen around child care and getting rid of the accreditation program in favour of just simply licensing. You know, perhaps we need to have these distinctions. They were probably put in there for a reason. My hope is that we see maybe some clarity about that.

There are changes around the Child, Youth and Family Enhancement Act. These changes do not place the recommendations of the child intervention panel in place. I'm just wondering: why should the minister be making changes to this but then ignore the recommendations of that panel? Again, you know, is this red tape reduction, or should this be handled within another ministry?

We also see some changes around the Post-secondary Learning Act. This deals with things around cadavers that are no longer requested by universities. You know, the whole justification around this is that people are donating, which I believe they are, which is great. You know, science always can be moved forward when they have the ability to study folks that have passed, to find out how maybe in the future we might be able to solve these things. But I have to ask: is this creating jobs? Is this speeding up the economy? That was what your ministry was tasked to do.

Again, I'm seeing things bundled up, being able to go out and celebrate all this to try to justify this ministry, again, costing Albertans \$13 million. It's amazing the reaction I get every time I tell people that. It's always the same: "It's costing what? How much? Can't the

ministries do that by themselves?" almost every single time. Yet we're supposed to accept as the public a letter grade from an organization as justification for that. I think we need a little bit more than just a letter grade.

12:20

We see changes around the Historical Resources Act. I'm wondering: are municipalities now going to have to be the gatekeepers of this, and what kinds of consultations took place around indigenous historical? If that is indeed the fact, where this kind of thing will be downloaded to the municipalities, do you plan to fund that download in order for them to effectively look after these kinds of things? It would be interesting to know what the results of that consultation would be.

We also see changes around the land and property rights tribunal act. I have to admit, of course, sitting on the private members' committee, we have seen a bill dealing with property rights. I'm wondering. It's unfortunate we weren't able to get any kind of technical briefing with regard to that bill, but I'm wondering how that interacts with what we're seeing here, including the Land Titles Act. Is there anything that's butting up against each other and that is going to create any kinds of problems with some of the changes that are being shown here in Bill 48?

Also, changes around maintenance enforcement. I believe the comments were additional amendments to improve service delivery, including clarifying the Maintenance Enforcement Act to prevent confusion over registration in the maintenance enforcement program. I guess some of the questions that are there are around, you know: were these changes necessary? Could they maybe have been done in a statutes amendment act? Why did they need to be identified as red tape reduction? Perhaps that could have been handled within the ministry.

Now, the big one here that I do want to spend just a little bit of time on here is around the MGA, Municipal Government Act. We are seeing some very significant changes within this, so I have to ask: why are changes this significant not being handled within Municipal Affairs? Why is that being, I guess, delegated to the red tape reduction? When we're looking at the changes being proposed here, it very clearly is showing that the ability for municipalities to make decisions that they make for their neighbourhoods seems to be getting eroded.

Of course, this goes to a little bit of a pattern that we are seeing with this government in terms of downloading things onto municipalities, interfering with their business, essentially. I mean, this is the level of government that deals very, very directly with Albertans each and every single day. Why is it that we are taking away those rights, all under the auspices of "Well, we want to make it easier for developers and to move faster"? But if it's not in the best interest of the neighbourhood at the time, when we're looking at specifically reserve land, which potentially could house a school, a fire hall, and things of that nature, if you're going to override those decisions, later on, as the community grows, the municipality is going to go there and go: "Well, we would have liked to have put a fire hall there. Now we can't because that decision got overridden for us."

What kinds of consultations took place with municipalities around that, and what was the feedback that you received with regard to that? I have to admit that it would seem rather odd that a municipality would say, "Well, yeah. No. Absolutely. I don't want to be able to make those decisions at all. I'm so glad that you're willing to take those on for us if things get kind of sticky," especially, I guess, given the circumstances that we find ourselves in with this pandemic, that that was top of mind for changes that have been brought forward.

We also see some changes around the New Home Buyer Protection Act, changes around professional occupation association registrations. I guess I have to ask with the latter there, the Professional and Occupational Associations Registration Act. I'm wondering why the red tape ministry was tasked with these changes. It seems like the minister that is in charge of these things should be making these changes. I mean, it's all great that you come in and make the changes, but then it's still going to be the ministry that deals with that. Here again we seem to see – I don't know if it's a case of the ministry saying: yeah, I don't really want to handle that, so why don't you do that? That'll make your bill look bigger and more impressive, I guess, to Albertans.

We see changes in the Wills and Succession Act. I know that that act was amended – so much.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you very much, hon. member.

As you know, 29(2)(a) is available.

However, prior to that, I did receive a very urgent note from our security, our Sergeant-at-Arms, which requires some important attention. Approximately 27 minutes ago one of our pages, Claire West-Hall, began celebrating her birthday. We will not be singing, but I think it would be appropriate to give her a warm welcome and, obviously, a celebratory – let's give her a round of applause. [applause]

On that happy note, 29(2)(a) is available, and the member who did catch my eye on that prior to that announcement was the hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

Ms Gray: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Under 29(2)(a) I rise to say: happy birthday, Claire.

The member who was speaking was in the middle of a thought, and as I know this has been his first opportunity to respond at second reading to this piece of legislation, I wondered if he wouldn't mind just finishing the thoughts that he was going on. There's a lot to get through in 15 minutes, and the time goes very quickly.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore.

Mr. Nielsen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yeah. It's funny how that 15-minute clock seems to shrink down to almost, like, five minutes sometimes. I could have sworn there was more time.

Yeah. I was making a comment around the Wills and Succession Act, that was amended with the red tape reduction bill. Why did these changes not happen then? I know many of the changes in Bill 48 are related to Service Alberta. Why didn't the Minister of Service Alberta appear and introduce some of these changes? I mean, like I said, Mr. Speaker, it seems we're constantly seeing – unfortunately, it does; it sounds a little bit harsh – this fluff that keeps getting added to these bills which really aren't red tape reduction. They're things that could be handled in a miscellaneous statutes act, they're little things that maybe could be handled in statutes amendment acts, but as I said, when there doesn't seem to be a lot of congratulations floating around, I guess that sometimes

you might have to pad things a little bit here in terms of making it more impressive.

Again, I'm still hung up on the fact that it is an omnibus piece of legislation, that the minister in the past has been very, very clearly against seeing others bring forward, as in the previous NDP government, so I can't help but wonder what changed. Why was it not okay then, but now it's okay to bring in omnibus pieces of legislation, especially when we're taking very significant changes, as I mentioned, around the Municipal Government Act? Like I said, my colleague from Calgary-Buffalo will probably have more to say to that as the debate progresses and as we get into Committee of the Whole, I'm sure – well, I guess I should say that I hope, to be sure – that we'll get some of the questions answered around this bill.

I think Albertans deserve to know why, when they're facing one of the greatest challenges that they will probably face in their lives in regard to this pandemic, we're looking at these kinds of little changes when they want to be safe, they want their kids safe in the schools, they want to be able to work safely, not have to, I guess, fight each and every day just to make sure that they come home safely to their families and that they don't potentially put their families at risk.

12:30

It's disappointing, quite frankly, that we're seeing some of the decisions that are made by the ministry here moving pieces of legislation forward when we really should be looking at ways to keep the population safe, to keep them healthy, and stop waiting for, it seems, everybody else in terms of either the federal government or the municipalities or Albertans themselves to step up to do something versus the province trying to help them through. You know, maybe we should be reducing the red tape around getting supports for small businesses should we be facing stiffer restrictions at the time.

I appreciate the time to be able to make some comments, and I hope to hear more as we move forward in Committee of the Whole.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any members wishing to join debate on this bill?

Seeing none, I am prepared to ask the question. Should the hon. associate minister choose to take it, there is always one last opportunity.

[Motion carried; Bill 48 read a second time]

The Acting Speaker: I see the hon. Deputy Government House Leader and Minister of Jobs, Economy and Innovation has risen.

Mr. Schweitzer: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I don't know if tonight's level of debate is going to make any top 10 lists, but I will say that we did make progress and debate was done here tonight. I would move that the Assembly be adjourned until 9 a.m. on Wednesday, November 25, 2020.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 12:33 a.m. on Wednesday]

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