



Province of Alberta

The 30th Legislature
Second Session

Alberta Hansard

Tuesday afternoon, December 1, 2020

Day 74

The Honourable Nathan M. Cooper, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta The 30th Legislature

Second Session

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New Democrat: 24

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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Tuesday, December 1, 2020

[The Speaker in the chair]

The Speaker: Hon. members, please be seated.

Members' Statements

COVID-19 Statistics and Health System Capacity

Mr. Dang: Front-line health care workers have been warning this Premier for months that the second wave of COVID-19 could overwhelm our health care system, but the Premier did nothing. Hundreds upon hundreds of doctors wrote letter after letter to this Premier; he did nothing. In fact, he did less than nothing. He went into hiding for 12 days while Alberta tipped into crisis. He found time to Zoom into UCP AGMs, but Albertans without a membership in his party heard nothing.

Everyone from schoolchildren to office workers to Dr. Hinshaw herself has continued to show up for work, even during their isolation through video conferencing. Every single Premier in Canada addressed their province that week, and the Prime Minister addressed the nation.

This UCP Premier was silent and invisible and idle. He was too preoccupied with the extremist fringe of his own party, and that's why he failed to take action to prevent community spread. He was too preoccupied with the antimask conspiracy theories within his own caucus, and that's why Albertans still don't have the same most basic protections that other Canadians have like a provincial mask policy.

Now, Mr. Speaker, the full weight of the Premier's failure falls onto our hospital system, and the strain is showing. During those 12 days of solitude the Premier failed to learn that you can't simply scale up intensive care without putting people in danger or taking beds away from other Albertans or pulling health care workers away from patients with other serious medical problems, and we don't even have the infrastructure to deliver enough oxygen to all the COVID-19 patients in the coming weeks.

If the Premier had spent those 12 days learning about how our public health care system works instead of scheming to tear it down, maybe he would have realized that we needed to stop COVID-19 in the community, not in the hospitals. Maybe if he'd had a real conversation with a real front-line health care worker instead of fabricating a story about a constituent, he would have taken real action last week and not the grab bag of half measures we got.

Mr. Speaker, I'm immensely grateful to the health care workers in Alberta hospitals today. They are heroes. They're in the fight of their lives, trying to hold back a pandemic, without any meaningful help from this Premier.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Falconridge.

Guru Nanak Gurburab Farmer Protests in India

Mr. Toor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday was the 551st birth anniversary of Sri Guru Nanak Dev Ji. Happy Gurburab to all. Guru Nanak is also known as [Remarks in Punjabi].

Nanak was an original spiritual writer, as his teachings were expressed in the form of beautiful Sikh hymns, hymns that formed the basis of Sikh scripture. In his teachings were [Remarks in

Punjabi]. Work hard with honest labour, remember almighty God, and share your bounties.

While there are various accounts of Nanak's early life, it's widely accepted that the first guru was born in a small village called Talwandi, now known as Sri Nankana Sahib, in Pakistan. His life mission was not self-serving but to work hard to elevate humanity, spirituality, and create a path of virtue and morality for society.

This anniversary is important to Sikhs across Canada and across the world but particularly this year as farmers in India peacefully protest new farming legislation. Hundreds of thousands of farmers from Punjab, Haryana, Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan, and other parts of India have made their way to Delhi to voice their opposition to a new controversial law. Sadly, these peaceful protesters have been met with violent government reaction in the form of blockades, water cannons, police beatings, and tear gas. This aggression has not stopped farmers from continuing their peaceful opposition.

Any attempt to deny the most basic democratic right to peaceful protest is shameful and must be universally condemned. I stand with farmers who provide the basic necessities of life.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Peigan.

Theatre Calgary's A Christmas Carol

Ms Fir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, Christmas looks a little different this year due to COVID-19. The traditions we enjoy year after year have been affected by this pandemic, and we all have had to make adjustments. A favourite tradition many Calgarians share is going to Theatre Calgary to enjoy their annual production of *A Christmas Carol*. I remember attending this production many, many years ago with my junior high drama class, and I became fixated with the world and escapism of theatre. *A Christmas Carol* has become a favourite holiday tradition for Calgarians to look forward to, and this year will be no exception.

Theatre Calgary is known for the last 33 years to delight their audience with a different rendition of *A Christmas Carol* each year, and this year they are bringing the magic of this classic Christmas story to you in your home under the lights of your own Christmas tree. The familiarity of this story will bring a joyous at-home experience, transporting you to the timeless tale of the ghosts of Christmases past, present, and future. Stephen Hair will also be returning for his 27th year as Scrooge. This year the digital production of this timeless tale will be available to everyone from December 11 to December 31 for \$25 a household.

It is wonderful to see community traditions finding new ways to adapt to our reality during COVID-19. It is important to enjoy the little things in our lives that we can and keep our traditions alive and stay safe and healthy. After all, even Mr. Scrooge has found a way to enjoy Christmas at home in a safe and exciting way. I encourage everyone to take an evening during the holidays and enjoy this special digital production, and when it's safe to do so, please head out to our local theatres to support the live experience sector and Alberta's performing arts.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The Opposition House Leader has a statement to make.

Essential Service Provider Wage Supplements

Ms Sweet: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday in this House we saw a whole new low, a low in accountability, personal responsibility, and adherence to the facts, and who was reaching for those new lows at a time when they should be rising and leading the

province through a pandemic? The government members. When asked about why the UCP government has been leaving hundreds of millions of dollars on the table from the federal government for wage top-ups for front-line workers, the response was shocking, to say the least. First, they bragged about the tens of millions of dollars they secured in the spring. Now, I know math is hard, but 10 is less than 100.

Further, the federal government offered up money in August, which the UCP has left sitting there. While every other province in the country has stepped up to get support for their workers and the economy, this government is proud of the fact that they are dragging their feet because to do otherwise would be counter to their anti-Liberal and ideological agenda. Alberta workers suffer so the Premier can save face.

But it got even more bizarre from there. Next the Premier actually had the gall to admit and to blame the NDP for the lack of action by the UCP. The Premier claimed that the delay in money for front-line workers was due to our NDP caucus filibustering a motion that hasn't even been called by his government for debate in this House. To be clear, no one in this House has debated it ever. Why? Because it is the government that decides when that is called.

So may I suggest to stop misrepresenting the facts, stop trying to create an alternative reality to smokescreen for the lack of action, figure out how to lead, figure out how to govern, and take responsibility for the mess that this government has caused.

The Speaker: Calgary-North has a statement.

COVID-19 Protective Measures and Economic Recovery

Mr. Yaseen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Our government has accomplished many things since our election in 2019, and we are committed to accomplishing many more despite facing unprecedented challenges. The Alberta government, in consultation with Dr. Deena Hinshaw, is working to determine the best course of action to limit the spread of COVID-19. We are managing COVID-19 in a way that will protect the lives and livelihoods of Albertans. We introduced additional mandatory health measures that will help prevent our health care system from being overwhelmed. Our goal is to minimize the disruption these measures will have on the lives and livelihoods of Albertans. We are taking a balanced and evidence-based approach because we must focus on both the economy and the health care system.

We know that this time is especially challenging for many Albertans. The Alberta government allocated over \$15 billion in our pandemic response and recovery plan, which includes \$500 million to the health crisis, \$53 million to support mental health and addiction treatment, and \$170 million to community and social services.

Alberta's recovery plan was built on creating jobs, building infrastructure, and diversifying the economy. We are building roads, bridges, and schools, which will employ thousands of workers. Our liquid natural gas strategy, geothermal energy, petrochemicals, and the plastic circular economy are projected to create thousands of jobs.

1:40

In addition to our job creation and energy diversification, the government contributed nearly \$12 million to support innovation at the University of Calgary, which helps establish Alberta as a leader in quantum technologies, antibacterial resistance, and space radiation and technology. Today Alberta also set a record for venture capital investment, with new investment totalling \$286 million just in Calgary alone.

Mr. Speaker, when the pandemic hit, it caused a wide range of difficulties for many hard-working Albertans. It is important to look to the future while protecting both lives and livelihoods.

COVID-19 and Seniors

Ms Sigurdson: This week the Minister of Seniors and Housing is co-chairing a meeting with her federal counterpart to host all provincial and territorial seniors ministers. This regular meeting is significant. Being able to chair this conversation is a particular honour and is typically an opportunity to highlight the work of the hosting province, but with restrictions due to COVID-19 people will not physically come to Alberta. However, the situation of seniors in this province still must be highlighted.

The crisis of COVID-19 in continuing care hit other provinces first, but it has now charged into Alberta and is getting worse. Just last month 150 Albertans died in continuing care. These are not numbers; these are human beings who were parents, grandparents, siblings, friends, wives, and husbands. They were loved. Sadly, with the increase of cases of COVID-19, it is going to get worse.

That is why Alberta needs to fundamentally shift how it supports seniors. The UCP's record is poor. They have fired the Seniors Advocate, cut the seniors' benefit, and kicked 60,000 Albertans off the seniors' drug program. Now the UCP are considering adding more costs to continuing care, and worst of all the UCP has done little to protect seniors during the pandemic, a clear illustration of prioritizing private corporations over Albertans.

One example is the exception list for single-site staffing. There are so many exceptions to this public health order that it's rendered ineffective. The spread of the virus by staff working at multiple sites has caused significant transmission, yet the UCP caved to the interests of corporations who say that they can't manage this. Shameful, Mr. Speaker.

After 343 deaths of seniors in continuing care my hope is that every member of this Assembly sees the need to do better. The current trajectory is simply unacceptable. The Premier promised that seniors would be protected by a wall of supports and defence. That protection layer has not been built.

Calgary Police Service Budget

Mr. Ellis: Well, Mr. Speaker, we did it. Last week the city of Calgary voted not to defund the police, but not everyone on city council was happy about this decision. One councillor even said that this was not over and that the work was not nearly done. He made it obvious that he is preparing to keep fighting. Well, as a 10-year veteran of the street I am more than happy to take on that fight.

Let's take a trip down memory lane – shall we? – of the four-day-long budget debate that Calgary city council had last week, where this same councillor entered the ring for one final push of his radical defund-the-police motion. For those who did not have the privilege to tune in to this deliberation, let me bring to light the riveting remarks this councillor said for this House. During his discussion on alternative funding options for the police the councillor reflected on his family history from Ukraine when he said that, quote, the Communist regime in that part of the world completely decimated their culture. Do you know what they did? They invested in secret police and more police. End quote.

That's right, Mr. Speaker. He compared the funding or any future funding of the city police for Calgary to the historical funding of the secret Communist police in eastern Europe. This statement further proves how out of touch this councillor is with the city he represents, first fighting for the police to be defunded and now making these outrageous remarks.

Also, Mr. Speaker, I find it ironic that the mayor of Calgary self-proclaimed himself as a fiscal conservative to justify him voting yes on the initial motion to defund the police. Yes, he himself claimed that he was, quote, a fiscal conservative. End quote. Apparently, doubling property taxes over his tenure and attempting to defund the police means being fiscally responsible. Who knew? I certainly didn't know that.

To those members on city council who still want to fight for the defunding-the-police movement, I have one thing to say: bring it on.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie.

COVID-19 Protective Measure Compliance

Mr. Milliken: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is an honour to represent the great people of Calgary-Currie, and it's an even greater honour to do so during challenging times. I want to take a moment and thank everyone in Calgary-Currie for the sacrifices that you are making under the public health orders, whether it's not seeing your family or friends, working from home in a makeshift office, especially if your kids are at home with you. To everyone in Calgary-Currie: thank you. Your actions directly help keep my family healthy and safe.

Now, as you know, Calgary-Currie is in the heart of Calgary, so that means Calgary is all around us. Like many others, I have family and friends throughout other Calgary ridings, so I also want to thank every Calgarian for doing your part in limiting the spread of COVID. Calgary is definitely all in this together.

Now, Mr. Speaker, as you know, I am a fourth-generation Albertan. My great-grandfather often spoke in this Legislature, and I've had family here since before Alberta was even Alberta. To name just a few: if you live in Edmonton, St. Albert, or Sherwood Park and if you've put limits on your social gatherings, thank you. If you're social distancing in Innisfail, Delburne, or Olds, thank you. Your actions matter to me. And if you're using a bunch of hand sanitizer in Wainwright, Bashaw, or Botha, thank you. You are directly helping to keep my family safe and healthy. To everyone following the health measures across Alberta: your actions are greatly appreciated. It's a sacrifice.

I know I've talked to many constituents about the current level of restrictions in place. For some it will always be too much, and for others it will never be enough. For a moment, regardless of your political stripe, the way you vote, or if you even vote at all, take a breath and just put all that aside. Alberta has gotten through challenging times before, and if we all work together, we will get through them again. For everyone following the current health measures: thank you. You are helping keep my family, across all of Alberta, safe and healthy.

Thank you very much.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Brooks-Medicine Hat.

COVID-19 Protective Measures and Mental Health

Ms Glasgo: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last Tuesday Alberta's government announced province-wide public health measures and stronger restrictions for regions under enhanced status. This was not done lightly, nor was it done without considering the real-life impact on everyday Albertans. The reality is that we've seen a sharp increase in COVID cases, and these measures were necessary to preserve our health care system and slow down the spread. Alberta's government continues to take a targeted and balanced approach to the issue to protect Albertans' lives and their livelihoods.

Mr. Speaker, most Albertans have been supportive and understanding of this approach, but we can always count on the NDP to politicize and criticize actions that were taken in the best interest of all Albertans. The opposition continues to twist issues of public health into a game of political ideologies, not once considering the very real implications that a blanket shutdown would have on Albertans.

Mr. Speaker, mental health is something near and dear to my heart, which is why I've never supported a total lockdown. Not everyone has a secure paycheque. Countless individuals and families have their entire life savings tied up in their businesses, and they literally cannot afford to be locked down. The NDP claim to be champions of mental health, yet they still don't understand the facts. Income insecurity and loss of income have a severe negative impact on mental health and are linked to severe anxiety and depression.

In fact, Mr. Speaker, research shows that in Alberta every 1 per cent increase in unemployment correlates to a 2.8 per cent increase of death by suicide. That is roughly 16 Albertans who won't be around for the next birthday, Christmas, big life event, you name it. While the opposition continues to use the COVID-19 pandemic as a political opportunity to attack, divide, and deceive, Alberta's government will continue to make decisions based on facts and evidence.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

1:50

Oral Question Period

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-City Centre has the call.

COVID-19 Statistics and Hospital Oxygen Supply

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Now, yesterday I asked the Premier how on earth we got in such a deep crisis in Alberta that we're rationing oxygen in Calgary hospitals. The Minister of Health tried to deny it's happening at all. He said that none of that is true, that it's continued fearmongering on behalf of the NDP, but AHS officials sent a memo to all Calgary hospitals on Friday instructing them to "engage in oxygen conservation measures immediately." The minister can accuse me of lying, but this memo proves that he's the one who's a stranger to the truth. To the Premier: are you ready to admit how badly you've failed to prepare our hospitals for the second wave?

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, this is fearmongering based on information taken completely out of context. AHS's Calgary zone has an adequate supply of oxygen to meet patient needs now and in the weeks ahead. They continue to provide safe and appropriate care for all patients, including those in need of oxygen therapy. The limitation is not the supply of oxygen itself but the capacity of the pipes delivering oxygen. That's been an infrastructure limitation identified for several years, and we have plans to improve that. It's unfortunate that it wasn't done during the NDP.

Mr. Shepherd: Whether it's the tanks or the pipes, the pressure is because of this Premier's failure to act. In the same breath this Premier denied that oxygen rationing is happening in Calgary. He claimed it's routine. That's nonsense. Multiple Calgary doctors have told me and national media that they've never seen this before. Indeed, the AHS memo specifically states that the rationing is due to "expected increase in demand due to the COVID-19 pandemic." If the minister is struggling to get the story straight, perhaps the Premier can just tell us the truth. Premier, will you admit that there's

nothing even remotely normal about hospitals being unable to provide their patients with a proper oxygen supply?

Mr. Shandro: I will not do so, Mr. Speaker, because that's not the case. This is, as the Premier said, fearmongering. This is fearmongering, plain and simple, from the NDP, as we've continued to see throughout the pandemic. It's unfortunate they continue to behave this way, and every time they want to stand up in this Chamber and try to scare patients, they keep on being proved wrong. This is not what's happening right now. There's enough oxygen for the critical patient needs that are going to be needed at this time as well as throughout the rest of the pandemic.

Mr. Shepherd: I will continue, Mr. Speaker, to bring forward the concerns of front-line health care personnel, because oxygen rationing in Alberta is national news, but it's only one of the cracks that are starting to show in our hospitals. AHS is setting up intensive care units in nontraditional spaces with nontraditional staff. Their modelling has shown for weeks that a tsunami of Albertans infected with COVID-19 was headed towards our hospitals, but this Premier was too busy listening to the extremist fringe of his own party, ignoring their violation of public health orders, and thumbing his nose at clear data about the incoming crisis. To the Premier. We're deep into the crisis now. Are you really going to stand here and claim that you couldn't have acted sooner to stop this spread?

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, where the NDP from day one of this crisis has sought to politicize the pandemic and to campaign off this tragedy, Alberta has been one of the best prepared jurisdictions in the western world. The spike that we are currently experiencing is being experienced across the western world, with much higher levels of transmission in much of Europe and the United States under political parties, governments, and policy responses that are very different. We have taken strong but balanced measures to bend down the curve. We ask Albertans to co-operate with those new rules and guidelines.

The Speaker: The hon. the Leader of the Official Opposition has the call.

COVID-19 Statistics and Health System Capacity

Ms Notley: We have the highest number of cases in Canada. That's what the Premier fails to acknowledge. He does say, quote: we don't have it. That's been the Premier's excuse for not releasing modelling for months, and it was untrue. Today we released some of the modelling that the Premier refused to show Albertans, and it's alarming. Two weeks from now health officials project we could have as many as 775 Albertans hospitalized, 161 one of them in the ICU, and that's taking into account the Premier's half measures. Premier, if you truly believe it's up to each Albertan to act, why are you continuing to hide this important information from them?

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, the data to which the hon. the leader of the NDP refers is not modelling. I repeat: it is not modelling. I don't know whether she is saying that out of ignorance or dishonesty, but it is the early warning system, about which we have spoken many times. These are two-week projections that AHS always maintains for surges in any kind of an illness, particularly a communicable one of this nature. The important thing is that AHS is constantly adding additional capacity to meet the growing demand and will be providing more information on hospital capacity in terms of details in the days to come.

Ms Notley: These two-week projections are information this Premier refused to share with Albertans. They also are from yesterday, after the new half measures were put in place. We have hospitals with oxygen shortages, we have ICU patients sharing rooms, we have doctors saying that they are close to triage, and we have hospitalizations skyrocketing. Premier, you've had numbers like this for weeks. Explain. When did you see them spike, and why did you wait before doing anything about it? Most of all, why are you still waiting right now?

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, we're not waiting. We're acting. In fact, just a few days ago we announced the most dramatic measures that affect the exercise of basic personal liberties in the history of the province of Alberta, and the NDP refers to that as libertarian extremism. What kind of an Alice-in-Wonderland world do they inhabit?

In terms of the numbers, we release comprehensive data on COVID hospitalizations, fatalities, new cases, total case count, recoveries every single day, so Albertans have seen this very worrisome increase in cases evident for the past several weeks.

Ms Notley: But you refuse to release projections going forward, even the ones that show your half measures are going to fail.

Our province is reporting the highest rate of COVID in the country. Internal projections show it's not working. The Premier has spoken about opening new ICU beds, but Albertans need to understand this, that having ventilators and heart rate monitors isn't enough if we don't have enough staff. As we open new ICU beds, the quality of care is compromised, so relying on new beds is the wrong way to manage this. What we need are stronger measures. Why won't you act now?

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, of course opening up new beds is an essential part of the response. Is the Leader of the Opposition supposing that we shouldn't do that, that we should deny care to people? That's bizarre.

You know, Mr. Speaker, the very strong, balanced measures introduced last week were fully implemented this Monday with the return to at-home learning for high school students, on Sunday with the maximum capacity at churches. It will take 10 to 14 days to see the impact of that. Ultimately, that is in the hands of Albertans. We call on them to respect these new rules and guidelines.

The Speaker: The hon. the Leader of the Opposition for her second set of questions.

COVID-19 Contact Tracing

Ms Notley: Well, the AHS models suggest that it's not going to work. They also detail the moment where Alberta's contact tracing collapsed. The percentage of cases marked missing on November 1: less than 10 per cent. One week later, on November 8, AHS didn't know the source of 60 per cent of cases. Today we can't trace 80 per cent. The Premier just started hiring more contact tracers. They might be trained and working by the holidays if we're lucky. Premier, the model showed you that a second wave was coming. Why did you fail to prepare?

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, Alberta did not just start hiring additional contact tracers. We went from 50 contact tracers in March to 800 last month. We're on track for 1,100, moving more of the part-time contact tracers into full-time positions. Through the entire pandemic Alberta has had the strongest and largest contact tracing system. It's true that it's been overwhelmed in the last few weeks, like it has in every single jurisdiction in the western world.

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, that is absolutely untrue. B.C. has 26 contact tracers per 100,000; Saskatchewan and Manitoba, 30; Ontario, 27; Alberta, 18. Far short. Contact tracing is strained across the country – that is true – but only in this province is it broken. Why is this Premier taking so long to act, and why does he continually say things that are not factually correct about our contact tracing relative to the rest of the country? It's just not true.

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, the reality is that Alberta has had the most robust contact tracing system from the beginning of the COVID pandemic. It's also equally true that with the huge spike in cases being experienced all across the western world, the system is unable to keep up. I can assure the member that Alberta Health Services is pulling out the stops and has been for weeks to add capacity. We've made it clear to them from day one that budget is not an issue. We are giving them maximum resources to surge in hiring and training and bringing people onboard. We continue to make progress, but we've got to lower the spread.

Ms Notley: Lower contact tracing than Ontario, Manitoba, Saskatchewan, B.C.

This Premier has no right, by the way, to lecture ethnic communities about their households when they are more likely to be essential front-line workers who contracted COVID-19 on the job and then never got a phone call. That's his fault, not theirs. The Harvard model says that we need 1,300 full-time contact tracers. He's promising 1,100, meaning we'll still be behind Ontario, Saskatchewan, and B.C. Will the Premier commit to having 1,300 full-time contact tracers actually working before he dares to blame any more front-line health care workers?

2:00

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, neither I nor this government have blamed anyone. It is only the NDP that is obsessed with lecturing, dividing, blaming, politicizing, and being peddlers of fear and hysteria. With respect to contact tracing, we're well on the way to hitting our interim target of 1,100, many more of whom will be full-time, and we are hiring as many people as we can. Budget is not a consideration. Maximizing the contact tracing system is.

Premier's Remarks on COVID-19 Case Increase

Mr. Sabir: The Premier blamed my constituents in the South Asian community for spreading COVID-19 with zero evidence and threatened to fine them. The Premier then went on the radio and said that part of the problem is that residents have, and I quote, limited literacy in their own maternal tongues. Premier, it is your responsibility to proactively communicate with them about the dangers of COVID-19. Instead you have chosen to insult and mock them on multiple occasions. My first question is pretty simple. What will it take for you to apologize?

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, that member should apologize for that grossly dishonest and inflammatory question. When I was speaking about literacy, I was specifically referring to members of the East African refugee communities who had conveyed to me that many of their members are not clear on what the guidelines and rules are. These individuals indicated to me that translated materials sometimes are not sufficient for people who did not have high degrees of literacy in their own language. My point was that we must and will do a better job of communicating orally with some people, for example, in refugee communities who have limited literacy.

Mr. Sabir: Yesterday the Premier went to Red FM for a follow-up, and many of my constituents expected to hear an apology. Instead the Premier said, and I quote, obviously, I was intending to be helpful, end quote. Let me tell you on behalf of my constituents that you were not helpful, Premier. You were insulting. In the *Calgary Herald* today activist Saima Jamal called your remarks "an example of systemic racism." Premier, you are using my constituents as scapegoats for your failure to manage this pandemic.

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, only the NDP is obsessed with assigning blame and dividing people, in this instance on racial grounds. There is a reality that the highest areas of spread include neighbourhoods with many new Canadians who do work in front-line jobs and who do have to cope with high levels of housing density. We are reaching out to those individuals to offer self-isolation support, to ensure that they are aware of the sick pay benefits that are available, to ensure that people are aware of the guidelines in a way that is linguistically relevant to some households.

Mr. Sabir: The Justice minister implied yesterday that the cap on outdoor gatherings of 10 people is only for social gatherings. That was his excuse for staying silent as hundreds gathered over the weekend in Calgary for a maskless protest in downtown. Premier, COVID-19 doesn't care if it's a social or political gathering. Are you really going to stand there and tell me that your public health orders don't apply to hundreds of unmasked protestors, or is it simply that COVID-19 deniers and antimaskers are your base and you don't want to offend them?

Mr. Jason Nixon: Point of order.

The Speaker: A point of order is noted at 2:03.

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, I was not implying it; I was quoting from the chief medical officer's order that applies to, quote, private social gatherings. With respect to protests, I disagree vehemently with the messages conveyed at that protest. I will point out that members of the NDP attended protests throughout the spring and summer in violation of the 100-person gathering limit. I'm only aware of one charge against people attending a protest. That was in the spring. The charges were dropped by the Crown because they felt that under the Charter of Rights and Freedoms they had no reasonable success of a successful prosecution.

Impaired Driving Penalties

Mr. Loewen: Mr. Speaker, as the Christmas season approaches, we know that many Albertans will be hoping that public health orders regarding private social gatherings will relax so that they can attend family events. We also know that some may choose to consume alcohol during this holiday season. Albertans have plenty of options to ensure that they arrive home safe, and we trust that they will use them as there is no excuse for impaired driving. We know that making decisions on how to get home are better made while you are sober, before you head out, as opposed to decisions made after consuming alcohol. However, given yesterday's SafeRoads announcement, Minister, what can those who decide to drink and drive expect?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Justice and Solicitor General.

Mr. Madu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for that question. Effective December 1 impaired drivers can expect

immediate and significant consequences when they are caught. First off, consequences for impaired driving means more offenders would be detected, sanctioned, and deterred. Studies show that immediate consequences impact behaviour far greater than the same consequences delayed. In fact, the experiences of British Columbia and Manitoba prove this. For that reason, Mothers Against Drunk Driving has endorsed this approach to fighting impaired driving.

Mr. Loewen: Given that we know impaired driving is a major cause of death and injury for Albertans and given we also know that provinces like British Columbia and Manitoba have significantly deterred first-time impaired driving charges and given that we know Albertans have a zero tolerance for impaired driving and that drunk drivers must be held to account for their actions, as do those who drive high, Minister, what will SafeRoads do to enhance the safety of all drivers, passengers, and yes, even pedestrians in the province?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Justice.

Mr. Madu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Let me be clear. Those who choose to drink and drive are endangering the lives of every other Albertan in their community. The SafeRoads program enhances the safety of all Albertans by reducing driving offences. This is because immediate roadside sanctions provide serious, immediate, and escalating consequences that deter impaired driving. In British Columbia impaired driving offences dropped by a third from 2011 to 2018 and impaired driving fatalities by over a half over the same period due to the SafeRoads program.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Loewen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that nearly every aspect of our lives has been altered by the effects of COVID and given that this global pandemic has placed additional pressures on our court system because of social distancing, not being able to do in-person court, and other changes to the court system to accommodate COVID guidelines and given these changes have caused delays in timely court processing of impaired drivers, who we can all agree need to be dealt with quickly and effectively, Minister, how will the SafeRoads changes ease the burden on our court system?

The Speaker: The Minister of Justice.

Mr. Madu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for that very thoughtful question. Using these simple and fast administrative consequences will save lives and restore court capacity. Shifting impaired driving to this program will divert nearly one-tenth of all criminal files. That means fewer dropped charges and more court capacity for other criminal trials. This system ensures first-time offenders continue to be treated fairly, and it will be cheaper for drivers and more efficient for taxpayers than using the court system while taking impaired drivers off the road immediately.

Tax Policies and Commercial Rent Assistance

Ms Phillips: Well, Mr. Speaker, the worst Finance minister in Canada took to the airwaves last night, and many Albertans called in hoping to hear a plan to reverse the Finance minister's dismal management of jobs, economy, pandemic. Albertans didn't hear any plan to help them. Incredibly, they did hear that the Finance minister is A-okay with a sales tax, downloading more costs onto families and small business. But given that this government is the

least trusted in Canada, there's no way Albertans are okay with this, so here's a simple question for the minister. Will the minister just roll out a sales tax? It's an easy one.

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Finance and President of Treasury Board.

Mr. Toews: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. The answer is yes; right now would not be the time to introduce a new tax. That's the long and short of the answer. But I'm not sure where the member opposite was at last night. Last night was a budget consultation. I was there to listen to Albertans, to hear their views and perspectives around Budget 2021. It was a very constructive conversation, and I appreciate every Albertan who took part.

Ms Phillips: Well, Mr. Speaker, given that the worst Finance minister in Canada also last night refused to rule out health care tax – to the folks at home, the Finance minister is toying with the idea of folks paying several hundred dollars a year – and given that the Finance minister also supports toll roads and higher income tax, to the minister: will he rule out a health care tax?

Mr. Toews: Mr. Speaker, it's interesting that the member opposite would raise every topic that Albertans raised last night to share their perspectives and immediately attribute those views to this government. The purpose of the consultation last night was to hear from Albertans, to understand their perspectives, their priorities, and take advice from regular everyday Albertans. Again, I thank every Albertan who participated.

2:10

Ms Phillips: Well, given that the Finance minister was just given a chance to rule out a health care tax and he declined to do so and given that the Finance minister we know has heard from small business not asking for a health care tax – we know that they have asked for commercial rent support – but given that the actual policy record of the minister is to end small-business rent support programs, will the minister actually respond to those small businesses he's heard from, at least to extend commercial rent support, the number one thing people are actually asking for, not a health care tax?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Finance and President of Treasury Board.

Mr. Toews: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. We know that small businesses are experiencing great challenge in this province due to the pandemic and the energy price collapse. That's why we rolled out a whole series of measures to assist small business, from WCB premium relief to utilities deferrals to corporate tax deferrals to the small-business relaunch grant, which the Minister of Jobs, Economy and Innovation has just expanded and made simpler for businesses to receive. We recognize the great challenge with small businesses. We continue to listen. We continue to deliver.

Renter Assistance and Affordable Housing

Ms Sigurdson: Seven out of 10 provinces have signed up for the provincial-federal rent assistance program. Four provinces have already announced agreements, and I sincerely hope Alberta is one of the remaining three, but I'm doubtful given the inaction of the UCP government, which has refused to work with the federal government and continually leaves available funding untouched. To the Minister of Seniors and Housing: will you commit to working with the federal government to increase rental supports?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Children's Services has risen.

Ms Schulz: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I do want to thank the member opposite for that question. We absolutely know that access to affordable housing is critical, and it's a critical issue for Albertans. Demand continues to grow, and we are absolutely committed to creating a rental supplement program which is efficient and sustainable for Albertans. The minister has been in discussions with the federal government about this, as all provinces across the country have been.

Ms Sigurdson: Given that the opposite has happened from what that member said and given that in 2019 the UCP cut the rental supplement program by 24 per cent and that all signs are leading to further cuts but the UCP refuses to admit it, as we just saw, and given that Albertans are coming forward with notice of their rent supplements ending and given that homelessness is growing in Alberta due to this government's mismanagement of the economy, refusal to support Albertans, and their continued cruel cuts to social supports, to the minister. Albertans deserve to live in dignity and should not be pushed onto the streets now or ever. Will you commit to restoring funding . . .

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Children's Services.

Ms Schulz: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. We are focusing our redesign of this program on building capacity to serve more Albertans who need rental assistance. Alberta's government is committed to being open about the state of our province's finances. We simply can't continue to spend money we don't have. As part of the redesign we are absolutely working with the federal government to integrate our rental assistance program with the Canada housing benefit. We'll continue working with housing providers and other partners to identify innovative solutions for Albertans.

Ms Sigurdson: Given that Alberta now has the highest per capita case count of COVID-19 and the UCP appear to be completely ignorant of their failure to manage the pandemic and given that the UCP has still not released their report on housing but given that business advocates, including the Edmonton Chamber of Commerce, have openly stated that affordable housing must be part of an economic recovery, to the minister. Both the evidence of public health and economics show that a stronger investment in affordable housing is needed. Will you end the cruel cuts and invest in affordable housing?

Ms Schulz: Mr. Speaker, the member opposite is absolutely correct. Alberta is facing one of the most challenging times in our province's history. More than ever low-income Albertans need a rental assistance program that is sustainable and has the capacity to support those most in need. We will be looking at the rental assistance program and also including feedback and recommendations from the panel on affordable housing review as we make those decisions.

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

Home Education and Teachers' Work from Home

Mr. Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The COVID-19 pandemic has created challenging times for everyone, especially for young children and students. Recently Alberta's government cancelled in-person classes for students in grades 7 through 12, and this decision

was made in consultation with public health officials and Alberta's chief medical officer. Switching back to online schooling presents new challenges for students and families, and students are being asked to adjust their learning styles once again. To the Minister of Education: how can the government ensure that students don't fall behind and stay on track to graduate?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Children's Services.

Ms Schulz: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. First of all, I do want to thank administrators, teachers, staff, and students for continuing to be flexible and dedicated to student learning through this very challenging time.

Mr. Speaker, these new measures are part of a province-wide effort to slow community spread of COVID-19. The upcoming Christmas break presents an opportunity to briefly transition to at-home learning without impacting the quality of learning for students. Students will continue to receive a high-quality education, and we'll continue to ensure that staff and students are safe at school. We continue to rely on the advice of our chief medical officer of health as we make these decisions.

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

Mr. Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you, Minister. Given that when Alberta's government cancelled in-person classes during the first wave of COVID-19 we saw numerous challenges come forward for students and parents and given that some students in grades 7 through 12 have special needs when it comes to learning and require additional supports, to the minister: what additional services are available for students with disabilities during this COVID pandemic?

The Speaker: The Minister of Children's Services.

Ms Schulz: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I do want to say that the re-entry plan that was introduced by the Minister of Education gave the education system time to plan for unique circumstances. We do recognize and support the need for special education programs to continue. There is a very clear exemption that allows all students with disabilities to continue to get their education needs met in school, no matter what grade they're enrolled in. All superintendents and boards have been made aware of these exemptions. I do on behalf of the Minister of Education encourage parents to work with their child's teacher and school principals on appropriate arrangements for their individual circumstances.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you, Minister. Given that yesterday the Member for Edmonton-Glenora erroneously claimed that the Minister of Education is compelling grades 7 through 12 teachers to continue to go into schools to teach their classes virtually and given that it is the responsibility of local school authorities as the employer, not the minister, to make decisions on working-from-home arrangements, can the Minister of Education please set the record straight?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Children's Services.

Ms Schulz: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for the question because I was also very confused and, quite frankly, disappointed to see the Member for Edmonton-Glenora falsely claim that the government of Alberta is making it mandatory for teachers to continue to go into schools to teach their classes virtually. As a former board chair the Member for Edmonton-

Glenora knows full well that local school authorities have the decisions to make around staffing arrangements. They are the employer. That includes work-from-home arrangements. All school authorities' decisions must continue to follow occupational health and safety as well as provincial health measures, but those are local decisions.

The Speaker: The Opposition House Leader has a question.

Health System Capacity and Mental Health Services

Ms Sweet: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. This UCP government failed to prepare for the second wave of COVID-19. Now provincial hospitals are being forced to divert resources away from Albertans with serious medical problems. I have heard several reports from front-line workers that actively suicidal youth are being turned away from the Stollery children's hospital because the staff they need to receive them and keep them safe have been redeployed. To the Associate Minister of Mental Health and Addictions: why are youth in crisis being forced to pay for your failure to prepare for the second wave?

Mr. Shandro: Mr. Speaker, as the hon. member knows, none of that is true. Of course, we had begun to respond to the pandemic as early as January and February. Anybody who attends a hospital is going to get the treatment that they need. Of course, especially those who have critical illness are going to get that treatment. I'm happy to, if there is some kind of a concern that AHS had done – well, I'm happy to get more information from the hon. member about that specific situation.

Mr. Speaker, our hospitals remain open. Throughout our 15 largest hospitals right now their bed occupancy is at 91 per cent. We're going to continue to work with AHS, make sure they have all the resources . . .

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

Ms Sweet: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that Alberta Health Services' internal modelling shows that hospitalizations and intensive-care admissions will continue to soar for weeks to come and given that Alberta Health Services is recalling former intensive-care workers, training other health care professionals to work in ICU, and expanding into unconventional spaces to treat Albertans with severe cases of COVID-19, again to the minister. We know the government's failure to prepare is affecting all aspects of the health care system. What will the specific delays and loss of service be for Albertans with mental health and substance use impacts?

2:20

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Health.

Mr. Shandro: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again, as I've said before in this House and as the Premier said just moments ago, that is not correct at all. What the NDP continue to refer to as modelling is not modelling; it is the early warning system of AHS. This is operational planning, as they're going to continue to do to be able to make sure that they have the resources that they need to respond to the pandemic. Of course, the case numbers: because of the additional measures that were announced last week, we are going to continue to see cases rise over the next couple of weeks, and we will see even for another two weeks after that our cases of hospitalizations and ICUs continue to increase. It will take weeks for these measures to be able to show their effects, but we're going to continue to work with AHS to make sure that they have the resources . . .

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Sweet: Well, thanks, Mr. Speaker. Given that the associate minister himself told his constituency association that the second wave is, quote, happening at a much faster pace than we dreamed of and given that we know that they are triaging patients in our emergency centres right now and given that there were months of warnings from the front-line health care workers and public health experts that a second wave would happen, again to the minister: why did you fail to act when the warning signs were so obvious and fail to provide resilient mental health and substance-use emergency services just when Albertans need them the most?

Mr. Shandro: Again, that is false. We have not failed. We began to respond to the pandemic starting in January and February, and in April we provided additional funding for mental health and addiction in the amount of \$53 million. Now, if you were to take, Mr. Speaker, all the additional funding that every other province provided for mental health and addiction in response to the pandemic and multiply it by two, that's the amount that we added for mental health and addiction. The majority of that actually went towards children, in particular to the Kids Help Phone and other programs, to be able to help children in need.

Ms Sweet: If they're suicidal, they're not going to pick up the phone.

The Speaker: Order. Order.

Disability Caseload Growth Review

Ms Renaud: This government has already cut funding for Albertans on AISH and changed the payment date. Now – surprise, surprise – they appear to be planning to ram through further cuts without proper consultation. This government has issued a request for proposal for review of the numbers of people receiving AISH, PDD, and FSCD. This review, which will impact tens of thousands of people, will be done in just three weeks. Why is the minister of social services in such a rush to cut supports for the most vulnerable Albertans?

Ms Schulz: Mr. Speaker, as I have said on behalf of my colleague the Minister of Community and Social Services a number of times in this House, the AISH benefits have not changed. This RFP was also not secret, as I know the members opposite would like the public to believe. This was very public. It was on the government website. It is very important to have data when we're looking at all programs and services that we offer. As I've said before, we continue as a government to support those who are most vulnerable, and also we want to review every program and service to ensure that every single dollar is going to those who need it most.

Ms Renaud: Given that the Premier showed that he doesn't have an ounce of compassion for disabled Albertans when he bragged to a newspaper columnist about how easy it would be to cut AISH funding and given that this minister has repeatedly told Albertans with disabilities to trust her but that didn't work out and now trust in this government is at an all-time low and given that now we see plans to make further cuts without real consultation, Minister, I'm going to offer you some help. I'll set up a series of meetings with AISH, PDD, and FSCD recipients so that they can tell you exactly how these further cuts would impact them. Will you take me up on my offer?

Ms Schulz: Mr. Speaker, I do appreciate this line of questioning from the members opposite because I think it is important that I

have the ability to stand in this place and unequivocally share that, once again, we continue to support those most vulnerable across our province, not only now, during these uncertain times in this pandemic, but over the last year and a half. The Minister of Community and Social Services has spent countless hours and continues to do so with disability advocates, stakeholders as well as people in the disability community to make sure that we are making sure that every dollar goes to those . . .

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Renaud: Given that I know that you don't support disabled Albertans by doing a one-month consultation only looking at caseload growth, only using ministry officials without actually talking to the people whose lives are impacted by this and given that I want to believe that this minister is better than her cruel and heartless leader, to the minister: here now will you commit to resigning if a single person is kicked off because of this RFP?

Ms Schulz: Mr. Speaker, once again – I have said it before, and I will say it again – we continue to direct supports to those who are most vulnerable. A responsible government is one that looks at every single program and service to ensure that every single dollar is going to support those in need. I know my colleague the Minister of Community and Social Services is a hundred per cent committed to that.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Falconridge.

Support for Small Businesses Affected by COVID-19

Mr. Toor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Many of my constituents in Calgary-Falconridge are small-business owners. They own restaurants, retail shops, printing stores, driving training outlets, and many other small businesses that provide valuable goods and services for the community. Unfortunately, many of these small businesses are struggling to remain operational as COVID-19 has devastating effects on their bottom lines. To the Minister of Jobs, Economy, and Innovation: how will our repurpose grant for small and medium-sized businesses help Alberta businesses who are struggling to keep their doors open?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Jobs, Economy, and Innovation.

Mr. Schweitzer: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to that member for the question. I want to thank all of the small-business owners across Alberta that have gone above and beyond during this pandemic to keep their businesses open, to keep people hired. [interjections] People in the NDP are now heckling small-business owners. That's shameful. We have provided supports of over \$200 million to small businesses to help them relaunch. Over 17,000 small businesses have participated in the first program. Now we're doing a second tranche as well. Small businesses have been impacted by the recent health orders. It's an additional \$5,000 of support for them.

Mr. Toor: Thank you, Minister. Given that COVID-19 has proven to be unpredictable in this province, this country, and across the globe and given that there's no real timeline when normalcy will be restored, despite the encouraging news of a vaccine being developed for distribution in the near future, to the same minister: is our government prepared to provide additional support to struggling businesses if the virus persists?

Mr. Schweitzer: Thank you to that member for the question. One of the things that we've done as well with this new repurposed second tranche of the relaunch grant is that we've lowered the eligibility criteria. Initially you had to have 50 per cent of your revenues impacted. We've lowered that down to 40 per cent to participate. That should open it up to an additional 6,000 companies. In the first round we're going to make it retroactive to capture them. We also have that lower threshold now for businesses impacted by new health orders. Again, we want to thank all of the small-business owners out there that are employing thousands of Albertans during these tough times. We're going to continue to be there to support them.

Mr. Toor: Thank you, Minister. Given that small businesses need the support of Albertans more than ever before and given that small businesses are the places which establish a sense of community as that is where people come to interact and enjoy the pleasurable things of life, to the same minister: what can we as Albertans do to support local businesses in our communities, and how will lowering the revenue threshold impact the amount of businesses that are eligible for this grant so Albertans can continue enjoying small businesses?

Mr. Schweitzer: I think, Mr. Speaker, all of us in Alberta can continue to support our local businesses. We can do the takeouts. We can make sure that we go there and support them. When we're looking at Christmas shopping, we can make sure we support those local businesses so that they have that ability to have that revenue to keep people employed during these tough times. The new threshold should have over 6,000 businesses from the first round impacted that will be now eligible. That's a good thing. We're going to continue to have that lower threshold going forward as well, make sure we can continue to support those small businesses that keep so many Albertans, you know, employed. Also, they're the beating heart of so many of our communities. We want to make sure that we're supportive of them, and we thank them for everything that they do.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-West.

Lethbridge Highway 3 Bridge Replacement Project

Ms Phillips: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Before the UCP was elected, there was a new bridge over highway 3 planned for Lethbridge. It was in the capital plan, supported by the region. There was a UCP election promise from the leader to build it. But the project is now delayed indefinitely. The 60-year-old bridge needs replacing. Now the government says that if we want that bridge to be made safer, we need to pay for that with tolls. The Minister of Transportation can just clear this up right now. A simple question to the government: will the UCP replace the bridge over the Oldman River in Lethbridge and do so without any tolls on new lands?

2:30

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Finance and President of Treasury Board.

Mr. Toews: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I take from the member's question a note of advocacy for the bridge effort. We will be considering our capital plan in Budget 2021. I know that the Minister of Transportation takes great interest in the priorities across the province, and I know that he will give his full attention to this priority.

Ms Phillips: Given that I did not hear a commitment to not toll the highway 3 bridge and given that that bridge is a key transportation corridor, an essential economic link for southern Alberta – it needs additional lanes and other improvements to bring it up to standard for better safety and capacity – will the government confirm to the people of Lethbridge that a new or expanded highway 3 bridge will not come with a toll for an extra lane in each direction? Super simple. Just say no to tolls for the people of Lethbridge.

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Finance.

Mr. Toews: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Minister of Transportation has been clear that there will be no tolls on existing infrastructure. The member opposite can rest in that assurance. What I can also assure this House is that the minister will consider the needs of Lethbridge residents with respect to capital infrastructure. Stay tuned for Budget 2021.

Ms Phillips: Well, Mr. Speaker, given that the project entails a new lane each way and is in addition to existing infrastructure and given that I have now given the government two opportunities to assure the people of Lethbridge that they won't be paying a toll on new lanes through the city, will the Minister of Transportation take this one final opportunity to commit to replacing the bridge and adding the lanes but not with tolls, and will he put this commitment in writing to city council?

Mr. Toews: Well, again, Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Transportation has been crystal clear that there will not be tolls on existing infrastructure, full stop. But what were the members opposite doing with respect to their capital plan? They had four years to replace critical infrastructure in this province. They failed. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order.

COVID-19 Outbreak at the Edmonton Chinatown Care Centre

Member Irwin: Eleven Albertans have died as a result of the COVID-19 outbreak at the Edmonton Chinatown Care Centre in my riding. My heart goes out to the families who have lost loved ones; 46 residents and 44 workers have also been infected. The staffing situation is so bad that they're appealing to residents' families to help run the facility. This UCP government has had months to prepare a provincial staffing strategy. To the Minister of Health. People are dying. It's absurd that already stressed families have to take on the role of health care workers. What is your plan?

Mr. Shandro: Mr. Speaker, that's why we worked with our continuing care operators in the spring to be able to develop that strategy. That strategy has been in operation since the spring. We're going to continue to work with those continuing care operators. My heart goes out to all those who have suffered from COVID or lost someone to COVID. We're going to do the right thing, which is to continue to work with AHS to make sure that they're providing our continuing care operators with resources that they need when it comes to PPE or the outbreak teams to be able to respond very quickly to an outbreak. We're going to continue to make sure that all these folks have all the resources they need for the pandemic.

Member Irwin: We've seen staffing collapses at McKenzie Towne, Manoir du Lac, extended care in Millrise and South Terrace, and many other facilities owned by large, profitable operators, but Chinatown Care Centre does not have a large

corporate operator that can redeploy staff from other buildings or other provinces. To the minister again. Chinatown Care Centre needs help. The Member for Edmonton-South and I: we have reached out. My constituents need health care workers to keep them safe. How many can you send, and when will they arrive?

Mr. Shandro: What we see from that question is that the real worry that the member has isn't about patients, unfortunately. It seems to be an attack on continuing care operators. It's unfortunate, Mr. Speaker. Look, we have provided \$170 million in additional funding to our continuing care operators to be able to deal with workforce capacity so that they could add more folks to be able to comply with infection prevention and control measures that have been added by the chief medical officer of health, to be able to make sure they have all the resources they need to be able to continue to care for the staff and their residents.

Member Irwin: Given that I'm simply standing up for my constituents and given that we never should have gotten to this point, with more than 1,700 new COVID cases every day, the highest per capita rate of anywhere in Canada, and given that this government still refuses to take the most obvious steps like implementing a provincial mask policy, hiring more contact tracers, or even just enforcing Dr. Hinshaw's public health orders, does the Minister of Health understand that deadly outbreaks like this one at the Edmonton Chinatown Care Centre in my riding are all the direct result of his failure to prepare for a second wave?

Mr. Shandro: Mr. Speaker, again, none of that is true. We began to plan for both the first wave in the spring as well as this wave. In the spring we started to be able to do that work very early in response to the pandemic. What the member said is completely untrue, and it's unfortunate that the NDP want to continue to politicize COVID and politicize the response to the pandemic. We are working with our continuing care operators. We're making sure that they and AHS have all the resources they need to be able to care for the staff and the residents in those facilities. That's the right thing to do, what we're going to continue to do throughout the remainder of the pandemic.

The Speaker: Calgary-South East has a question to ask.

Technology Industry Investment in Alberta

Mr. Jones: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. COVID-19 has had a drastic effect on many industries. The economic impact of this pandemic will be felt for many years to come, and full recovery will take time. Our energy industry has seen extraordinary challenges while our agriculture industry has in many areas had a record year. Looking to our future, Alberta's technology sector has seen both challenges and opportunities during COVID. Can the Minister of Jobs, Economy and Innovation tell the House how Alberta's technology sector is faring compared to last year?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Jobs, Economy and Innovation.

Mr. Schweitzer: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to that member for their question. In the first three quarters Alberta has already broken its record for venture capital investment into the technology sector. The city of Calgary alone has attracted \$286 million of venture capital into the tech sector. That is double the previous record, from the previous year. We're seeing fast-growing companies now. Alberta is on the map, particularly in the city of Calgary. We're excited about these different opportunities:

Attabotics, Neo Financial, Kidoodle. We've got so many different opportunities here. We're making sure that we have the right policies in place for them.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-South East.

Mr. Jones: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the minister for the response. It's encouraging to see that our province has surpassed last year's strong levels of investment and that we are currently on track for another record year. We know that there is tremendous competition between jurisdictions for this investment given that it bolsters economic growth, creates jobs, and results in innovations that benefit our entire economy. Can the Minister of Jobs, Economy and Innovation tell this House how Alberta is faring compared to other provinces?

Mr. Schweitzer: Mr. Speaker, we've seen across the country, actually, a drop of about 60 per cent in investment in venture capital, yet in Alberta we've seen a marked increase, breaking records for our province. The city of Calgary is in the number 4 place in the entire country now for venture capital deals. This is a big year for us. Alberta is on the map when it comes to technology and the investments in this area. That's why we made sure we had the innovation employment grant. We have the Alberta Enterprise Corporation investment of \$175 million, the job-creation tax cut. We had the right policies in place to make sure we have a fast-growing economy of the future.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Jones: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and again thank you to the minister for his response. It is great to hear that Alberta is the only province that is seeing an uptick in venture capital this year. With so many businesses struggling, we need to ensure that we are providing the proper supports to build an economy that will withstand the pressures of tomorrow. Can the Minister of Jobs, Economy and Innovation tell this House what work he is doing to ensure that Alberta's technology sector can continue to flourish in the years to come?

The Speaker: The hon. the minister.

Mr. Schweitzer: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We're making sure we have the right policies and making sure that we have red tape reduction, making sure that we have the right environment, making sure that we have the job-creation tax cut, the lowest taxes in the entire country, the Alberta Enterprise Corporation investment to make sure that we have venture capital investment. The technology sector is here to grow. We're behind them one hundred per cent.

COVID-19 Testing and Isolation Spaces in Banff

Ms Rosin: Mr. Speaker, COVID-19 has been challenging to manage for all of us, and sometimes the smaller communities surrounding the major urban centres get overlooked. The Bow Valley is an example. Despite welcoming millions of visitors even this year, towns like Banff have only 8,000 residents, but the media reported last week that they had the third-highest rate of per capita infection in the entire province. After many phone calls and e-mails between myself and the Health ministry, I am happy to report that additional testing is on the way. Can the Minister of Health please provide an update on the details of this announcement?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Health.

Mr. Shandro: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to inform the member that AHS is opening a testing and assessment centre at the Banff health centre this Friday, the 4th. Testing will be from Monday to Friday. Appointments are available through the AHS website. Residents can also schedule appointments at local clinics. There are two in Banff. One is in Lake Louise. Additional referrals, by appointment only, are going to be tomorrow, December 2, at the Banff rec centre for folks associated with outbreaks who have been referred by the medical officer of health or AHS public health.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Banff-Kananaskis.

2:40

Ms Rosin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you, Minister. Well, given that AHS is opening up this assessment centre in the Banff community health centre on Friday and that we know that this testing is part of an effective outbreak control and given that this access to testing is critical to the economic success of our hospitality industry and the safety of our workers and our guests, which is why temporary testing teams were also in the area last week, to the same minister: what will be the testing capacity of these new measures, and how accessible will these facilities be to both Banff and Canmore residents?

The Speaker: The Minister of Health.

Mr. Shandro: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Partnering with the town of Banff and several businesses, as I said, AHS is holding an assessment and testing clinic at the Banff rec centre tomorrow. This is for those who are referred by AHS public health as being possibly exposed to a positive case. The regular scheduled assessment centre has capacity for between 100 and 150 tests per day. This can be adjusted if there is more demand. This is in addition to the capacity that already exists within the Bow Valley PCN. Approximately 700 folks were tested by referral in the Banff area last week. Thank you to the AHS staff, who have been working extremely hard for . . .

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Banff-Kananaskis.

Ms Rosin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Thank you again, Minister. Well, given that the spread of this virus happened rapidly in Banff and because many hospitality workers live in communal staff accommodations, isolation space is also needed for those workers who do test positive for COVID-19 so that they don't need to go home and infect their housemates and further spread the virus and given that the Banff centre has offered to repurpose their unused hotel rooms into isolation accommodations, can the same minister please inform my constituents and this House if this partnership between the Banff centre, the town of Banff, and AHS will go forward?

The Speaker: The Minister of Health.

Mr. Shandro: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. The town of Banff is working with the Banff centre to create some local commercial isolation space to support those with living arrangements not conducive to self-isolation. Now, this space is on top of existing space available through the YMCA. AHS will support these local efforts through inspections, advice, and referrals through contact.

The Speaker: Hon. members, this concludes the time allotted for Oral Question Period. In 30 seconds or less we will continue with the daily Routine.

Notices of Motions

The Speaker: The Government House Leader.

Mr. Jason Nixon: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to give oral notice of three government motions. The first is Government Motion 50, to be put on the Order Paper in my name.

Be it resolved that pursuant to Standing Order 3(9) the 2020 fall sitting of the Assembly be extended beyond the first Thursday in December until such time as or when the Government House Leader advises the Assembly that the business for the sitting is concluded, and at such time the Assembly stands adjourned.

I also rise to give oral notice of Government Motion 51, also in my name.

Be it resolved that:

- (1) The 2019-2020 annual report of the office of the Child and Youth Advocate be referred to the Standing Committee on Legislative Offices for review;
- (2) The committee may, without leave of the Assembly, sit during a period when the Assembly is adjourned or prorogued;
- (3) In accordance with section 21(4) of the Child and Youth Advocate Act the committee shall report back to the Assembly within 90 days of the report being referred to it if the Assembly is then sitting or, if it is not then sitting, within 15 days after the commencement of the next sitting.

Finally, I give oral notice of Government Motion 52, also in my name.

Be it resolved that pursuant to section 3 of the Statutes Repeal Act, SA 2013, cS-19.3, the following statutes appearing on the list of statutes to be repealed, which was tabled in the Assembly by the Clerk of the Assembly on behalf of the Minister of Justice and Solicitor General on March 31, 2020, Sessional Paper 95/2020, not be repealed:

- (1) Black Creek Heritage Rangeland Trails Act (2004 cB-2.5);
- (2) Condominium Property Amendment Act, 2014 (2014 c10) ss2(a)(xiv) and (b), 46, 47, and 58;
- (3) Forest Reserves Amendment Act, 2004, (2004 c9) s8;
- (4) Securities Amendment Act, 2014 (2014 c17) ss2(c), (e), 22 to 24, and 55(b); and
- (5) Wilderness Areas, Ecological Reserves and Natural Areas Amendment Act (RSA 2000, c34 (Supp.)) s8, 8.1(3).

Tabling Returns and Reports

The Speaker: Are there tablings? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have an e-mail here from Kate that was sent both to myself as well as to the Member for Calgary-West, where she is a constituent. She is a teacher. She outlines the taxing hours that are included in her job as well as her unwavering opposition to Bill 22 and that teachers won't forget.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Hon. members, we're at points of order; however, the point of order from earlier today has been withdrawn. That means we're at Ordres du jour.

Orders of the Day

Government Bills and Orders Committee of the Whole

[Mr. Milliken in the chair]

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, everyone. I would like to call the committee to order.

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

The Deputy Chair: Are there any comments or questions to be offered with respect to this bill? We are back on the bill, Bill 45. I see the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo has risen.

Member Ceci: Mr. Chair, is it Committee of the Whole on Bill 45, then?

The Deputy Chair: Committee of the Whole on Bill 45.

Member Ceci: And there are no amendments?

The Deputy Chair: Yes.

Member Ceci: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair, for that reminder of where we are with regard to the Local Authorities Election Amendment Act, 2020 (No. 2). It's regrettable that we're here and that the amendments we have put forward haven't been supported, because we put forward common-sense amendments that would, if you recall, lower the donation limits, index those donations, and change donation time frame to annual rather than the campaign period.

If you recall, Mr. Chair, the donation limit in this bill for third parties is that "no individual, corporation, trade union or employee organization shall make advertising contributions to any third party during an election advertising period that exceed" – and this is the kicker – "in the aggregate, \$30,000." That amount, \$30,000, was said repeatedly by people on the other side as taking big money out of politics in this province. You know, they must have deeper wallets than almost every other Albertan because \$30,000 is big money. Our common-sense amendment, which would have lowered that to \$5,000 aggregate on an annual basis, was rejected wholesale by the UCP members on that side. It's regrettable, of course, because big money, then, still is in politics in this province.

The mayor of Calgary, AUMA, other organizations weighed in on this exact point, and they repeatedly said that the proposed – and here's a quote.

I was deeply disappointed by the proposed "restriction" of a \$30,000 contribution limit per donor per third party advertiser . . .

The \$30,000 limit is arbitrary

as we know, Mr. Chair,

and doesn't restrict anything.

The writer goes on to say:

It does the opposite, opening local democracy to unlimited dark money. Based on past experience, a \$30,000 limit will create expectation among contributors to donate the maximum amount.

I think this writer, being the Mayor of Calgary, knows what he's talking about with regard to that. That was a letter submitted to the new Minister of Municipal Affairs on November 6.

2:50

I say "new minister" because the old minister was the person who oversaw these bill changes that are brought forward in Bill 45 and also received a letter from the mayor of Calgary, finishing off perhaps that minister's time in his portfolio, and it was all about trying to ensure that local elections and the rules and regulations that get put into place should be fair, inclusive, transparent, clear, and enforceable. I would contend that a \$30,000 contribution limit is not what the average Albertan would contribute to a third party. It, of course, leaves things open for elections to be influenced by

people, organizations with very deep pockets who want to change the course of local democracies, who are elected all across our province, and bring forward issues and initiatives all across our province that will change what the local democracy in the local context of that municipality is all about.

We brought forward that amendment, and, as I said, it was not supported, though there were parts of it that would grow over time if you indexed donations. Just like the contribution limit for MLAs on an annual basis is now \$4,243, where they started out at \$4,000, a \$5,000 contribution limit for third parties would grow over time.

We also heard from other people, Mr. Chair. I point members to the Select Special Democratic Accountability Committee. There were some excellent, excellent speakers that came forward there, and one was Dr. Thomas. Dr. Thomas, of course, at the U of C agreed with Dr. Lisa Young, also at the U of C, that elections have to be fair, principled. This writer goes on to say that the \$5,000 amendment that I put in that was rejected should even be lower. Instead of \$30,000 – it shouldn't be \$5,000; it shouldn't be \$30,000 – it should be \$1,000, this writer suggested.

I'll give you the rationale for that, Mr. Chair. A \$1,000 contribution limit to PACs would be more appropriate. I would support it as a cumulative threshold across all PACs, meaning that, as it is in the bill, you can give \$30,000 to a PAC and then find another PAC and another \$30,000. Hold it; it's in aggregate, so that's not correct. You can spread your \$30,000 out amongst several PACs. What this writer is suggesting is that a \$1,000 contribution limit would be more appropriate as a cumulative threshold across all PACs while also supporting the idea that comparable separate thresholds for contributions could be set for political parties and electoral district associations.

The prewrit disclosure of this information is also something that various people involved in local democracies across this province have said is necessary, and, of course, we know that not to be the case with Bill 45. Again, the criticism is that big, dark money will remain in politics, and it's hard to see where that criticism isn't upheld with what's before us today.

I heard this bill described as a rather thin, light bill with only two things in it. I haven't touched on the second aspect of it yet, but I do want to now, and that's the harmonization for this electoral period of all municipal elections to take place on the third Monday of October in 2021. What it does is that it takes away the option of municipalities to hold their elections on the Saturday before the third Monday in October. That just shows you the respect, I think, that previous governments had for local democracies in this province, where they enabled them to have the opportunity to, you know, check the pulse of what would best suit their citizenry. Would it be a Saturday election? Perhaps there is a reason the people in their community would be otherwise occupied on the third Monday. Could they do it on the weekend before? That's shown some good results in the B.C. provincial election that just occurred. It was well run. People had the opportunity. There was a lot of mail-in voting, as we know, because of COVID. Many people took that opportunity to cast their ballots at their own private residence and send it in, but they also had the ability to have it on a Saturday and to distance from each other. They could do that on a Saturday and take their time to do that.

This bill takes that option away from municipalities. It's just another example of how this government has seen fit to take away responsibilities, as it were, from local governments to really set the course of their own destiny. We see that also in the issues that are brought forward for referenda and for a Senate election. That's the reason the UCP want to line up all elections on the Monday.

The last time I stood up, I argued that local elections should be for local issues. I was chided a little bit by one of the people here.

They said, you know: Senate elections are local, and referendums about equalization are local, and fluoride referendums are local. I just want to take a minute to say that the fluoride elections that I'm aware of in Calgary only happened in Calgary. They were probably lined up with local elections dating back for probably 40 years in that city, and they didn't involve other municipalities. They were local because the citizens and the city's elected wanted to find out if fluoride would be something the citizens supported or not. It wasn't a provincial election. It was a local election. There have been about four fluoride referenda in Calgary over the years. The most recent one was probably 15 years ago, and the citizens upheld fluoride in their community. It's not there anymore. It wasn't by referendum taken out. It was a decision of council to remove it.

Nonetheless, that was a local issue, and the referendum was local. The ones that are coming forward before us, Senate, happened at least one other time in the province, and referendum vote on – obviously, equalization has not occurred in the history of this province. What this bill does is that it changes the format and the nature of why people will be going to the polls, and we know why. This kind of stacks up things that the UCP government has wanted to stack up for a while to not only find out what people think on these issues but to draw out many people to the polls. Those coming to the polls will be having several ballots on all of these issues: school board, obviously; Senate election; a referendum on equalization; for your mayor; and local council members. That's five ballots, I think. I think it's somewhat regrettable that all of this is taking place without the tacit support of municipalities in this province. If the UCP government certainly wants to hold these things, they have an opportunity either on their own or in 2023 to put them on at the same time as MLA elections, but that's not what's happening.

3:00

I think the work of the select special committee, though it was for other reasons, has given us information on these very topics. For the most part, those people writing and appearing before us were of the view that local elections should stay local. I certainly agree with them. I also know that the opportunity to hold elections on a Saturday is an enabling feature that was granted to municipalities, and the removal of that for this cycle is, again, the government saying that it knows better about what should go on. I don't think that's kind of a respectful way to treat an important level or order of government in this province, an order of government that in Calgary's case and probably Edmonton's, too, has been around longer, for city status, than the province of Alberta.

With that being said, I just want to underline that the issues before us are ones that I'll continue to oppose in this bill. I'm opposing because I'm standing up for the views of municipalities, their associations who have weighed in on all of these things and have taken the view that they would rather their local elections stay local.

The last thing, perhaps, that I want to underline is that not only the select special committee on democratic accountability but organizations in the community have weighed in beyond the elected, and those are Parity YEG and Ask Her YYC. They believe in all cases that there need to be lower thresholds for contributions to not only candidates but also for third parties. They believe that the current rules and the rules identified in Bill 45 relative to the contribution limits for third parties create a barrier for people wanting to get into politics. They specifically talk about contribution limits for candidates, but you could extrapolate that to know that big money would essentially keep the status quo with regard to issues and try and change the status quo and that women in politics wouldn't be the beneficiaries of those changes.

I want to say those things and continue to express my opposition to Bill 45, with the outpouring of views that have come in both from

mayors, associations, and other individuals who have been involved in political science and organizations that are out there to promote the democratic opportunities for women in this province.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, Member.

Are there any other members looking to join debate? I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-City Centre has risen.

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I appreciate the opportunity to rise and speak to Bill 45, the second bill at least – well, some might say potentially even the third bill, depending on how you want to carve this up or define some of these things – that this government has brought forward this year dealing with municipal elections in the province of Alberta. Of course, we know we are entering into municipal elections next year.

Municipal elections have a huge influence on the lives of Albertans. Indeed, Mr. Chair, we recognize that municipal elections can have a lot of impact on issues that are mutually held between provincial and municipal governments. It has been very clear from the beginning of its term that this provincial government is very interested in the workings of municipal government in the province of Alberta, that much like so many other areas of our provincial politics, whether those are the areas over which it has direct purview in the agencies, boards, and commissions or the regulatory colleges or the other pieces or whether it's our municipal governments, this government is unprecedented in the level of control it wants to have over those functions.

We saw that, certainly, in the conduct and behaviour of the previous Minister of Municipal Affairs, now the new Minister of Justice. The incredible condescension and paternalism that he brought to the table in his dealings with municipalities across the province of Alberta I think was symbolic of the attitude that this government has on so many levels, whether it's dealing with a local school board, whether it's dealing with a regulatory college.

When we are looking at Bill 45, which we are today, which is making further changes to how this government is deciding that things should be conducted in terms of a municipal election, I'd say, Mr. Chair, very clearly, with an eye to, as we saw earlier this year, Bill 29, I think this government wanted to firmly plant a thumb on the scale of the municipal elections next year, this being a government that brooks no dissent and will make use of every lever, every opportunity at its disposal to try to impose its will and its ideology on the people of Alberta. Now, I think it's important as we look at this particular bill, which is looking to make further changes to some of the funding around elections, that we recall the bill that went before it, that being Bill 29, which met with much resistance.

Now, again, Mr. Chair, over the last couple of days I have heard this government and ministers pat themselves on the back about how wonderfully they listened to Albertans and how they never take any actions that have not been supported by the committee. Let me be clear that on Bill 29 they did not listen to municipalities and their concerns around the steps that this government was taking around the funding on municipal elections.

Now, they promised that they would listen, Mr. Chair. Indeed, initially we saw that the rural municipalities association was happy to stand beside them, and it was indeed quoted in the initial release, because they were given the word of this government, the minister at the time, that they would be listened to and that the amendments that they hoped to see in this legislation would indeed be brought forward. They were not. We heard very clearly and very loudly from them afterwards their great disappointment and frustration with this government for failing to listen to them on those particular amendments, amendments such as suggesting setting contribution

limits that are achievable and realistic for grassroots supporters, the average individual Albertan.

What we went to, Mr. Chair, under Bill 29, which I think really does tie into Bill 45, which we're talking about today – I think it's important context. What we went from was a total of \$4,000 aggregate, period. For anything in the election, however many candidates, whoever, you can slice that \$4,000 up however you like, but that was the total amount any individual Albertan could give. For many Albertans, \$4,000 to spend on a single election: that's still a lot of money. There aren't many Albertans that put that out. But what we saw this government do rather than listening to the RMA, who called for achievable and realistic contribution limits for grassroots supporters, everyday Albertans, was, instead, ramp that up to \$5,000 per candidate.

3:10

Not many Albertans – as I said at the time, during that debate, despite the protestations of government members that this was opening this to make it easier for more people to participate in our democracy – have multiple chunks of \$5,000 to fling around on multiple candidates in multiple races. There are some that do, and they get to enjoy far more power than the average Albertan. This government did not listen to the RMA despite having promised that they would. Indeed, what we see now with Bill 45 is that they are making sure they are keeping some nice, big, wide margins for those who have more money than the average Albertan to have more influence and exert more power in that upcoming election next year, of which this government clearly wants so badly to plant a thumb on that scale.

Well, we just heard a record member's statement today from the Member for Calgary-West. I'm not sure we've ever heard a member in this Assembly take quite a run at their local municipal councillor on the floor of this Legislature, of all the things that we can take time to talk about in here from our constituencies, Mr. Chair. Again, it's clear that this government badly wants to take out certain members of certain councils and replace them with folks that will perhaps be more amenable to this government and will question them less.

Now, one of the other changes that the RMA was hoping that this government would introduce in Bill 29, which we did not see in Bill 29 and we do not see in Bill 45, was allowing the municipalities to set bylaws for candidates to disclose their full donor lists and the amounts contributed before a municipal elections date in 2021. Municipalities had that power, Mr. Chair.

Now, this government likes to talk a big game about how they support local decision-making, but they took that decision away from local municipalities because they do not want them to have transparency in that election next year, they do not want the types of third parties and others, that they are empowering through Bill 45 here, to spend these large amounts of money, and they do not want average Albertans to know where that money is being spent or how or for municipal governments to be able to compel that to be transparent before the election takes place. That's why they chose not to listen to the RMA despite having promised that they would and that they would consider the amendments, and those amendments did not come from this government.

Lastly, the RMA had hoped that this government – and, again, this was something that they had asked for in Bill 29. The government did not listen. We hoped that maybe we would see this government change their course and put it in Bill 45; they have not: making third-party advertising accountable by outlining clear declarations of contributors by limiting the contribution amounts. Now, we do have some limits here – fair enough – so perhaps they listened to part of this request, but again what we see is that this

government is imposing contribution amounts that are far above what the average Albertan can afford to contribute or bring forward, because this is not a government, Mr. Chair, that is about the average Albertan.

As much as they like to claim that they are, it is very clear from what they are putting forward in these bills that they are not about the average Albertan. They're not about providing the average Albertan with transparent information about donations and contributions before they go to cast their vote. They are not about ensuring that the average Albertan has as much influence on their local election as corporations or anyone else that is able to form a PAC and throw in huge amounts of money. But, of course, we know what the record of this Premier and so many others in this government has been when it comes to PACs. Certainly, it has not been a record of transparency or disclosure or particularly reputable conduct.

What we see instead, again, is this government approaching the municipalities in that incredibly dictatorial and paternalistic and condescending manner that we have seen is the approach of this government with local elected leaders and making changes to hopefully install folks that would be more amenable to what this government wants to do and provide less opportunity for Albertans to have elected representatives that would actually listen to them and would actually work on local interests and would indeed stand up to and question the provincial government when it is appropriate for them to do so.

Now, as one of my colleagues has also noted, when it comes to this government's claim that it's making these changes to try to open these things up for larger and broader participation, the very groups that are dedicated to those goals are coming out and saying that this government is impeding that work. Now, I've been very pleased to see so far in the Edmonton municipal election coming up that we have had a fairly wide diversity of candidates stepping up: many more candidates of colour, many women, members of the LGBTQ2S-plus community. This is good to see.

But what we are hearing from organizations that are specifically dedicated to making more room for those individuals, who recognize that many of those individuals from those communities or backgrounds have larger challenges to overcome in participating in municipal elections, groups like Parity YEG or Ask Her YYC, which members of this government are proud to stand beside but apparently are not willing to listen to, their comments: well, this higher ceiling benefits the wealthy and the incumbents, that are often male; it's tougher for women because it minimizes the grassroots, valuable, community experience that many women bring. They note that women are already financially disadvantaged, being in a position where they're usually responsible for unpaid labour and earn less than men across the country, and they have been hit hard with lost jobs during the pandemic. They note that municipal politics was at least the most accessible entry point into politics for women. Indeed, I would say that that's true for many communities who have been traditionally marginalized and underrepresented in our politics.

Municipal government has been the most accessible level, and that has been in good part, Mr. Chair, because often it does not require the kind of hefty financial investment that, at least in the past, was certainly required at the provincial level, before we had the opportunity as government to drastically cut and cap campaign spending, donations, actually level the playing field in the province of Alberta. But as the organizations Parity YEG and Ask Her YYC are noting, this government seems intent on shoving that money back in. Even at the level of municipal governments, the most accessible, what has traditionally been the closest to the ground, in many ways, then, the most democratic, they are insisting on forcing

in more of the brand of provincial electoral politics for which Conservative parties in this province were long known and seem intent on trying to bring back.

According to these organizations, whose entire goal, entire *raison d'être* is to make more room specifically for women but also for recognizing the challenges that are there for other marginalized groups that are underrepresented in our politics, changing these current rules creates a barrier for women. They're making it more difficult, Mr. Chair. They say that the bill reduces transparency, particularly around third-party advertising. Of course, I've talked at some length over the last few days in many bills, at many points of debate about the lack of transparency from this government, voted the most secretive in Canada, wanting to extend that lack of transparency further into our elections in hopes perhaps of seeing more of their friends and allies elected so that they can further reduce transparency and accountability and indeed democracy across the province of Alberta.

3:20

The representative from these organizations notes in particular these concerns around transparency because it has the potential to open the doors to special-interest groups. Now, this government likes to talk a big game about some interest groups which it dislikes but is more than happy to throw the doors wide open for organizations which it does like or the ones which supported them in the last provincial election because, again, Mr. Chair, this bill is not about furthering democracy; this is about furthering their own influence.

That is why we have not heard support from municipalities across the province of Alberta or from municipal leaders. Instead, we have heard them repeatedly raise concern about the changes that this government is trying to force through, the influence this government is seeking to wield on local, municipal elections.

Indeed, we have seen municipal leaders from across the province – I spoke of the RMA. Of course, Mayor Barry Morishita, the mayor of Brooks, spoke out quite clearly on his thoughts on this government's changes so far. He said: you know, while we know that when most people follow rules, we're very considerate in our approach in running for elected office, but we know that's not the case with everybody. We know that from time to time people break rules to their own advantage – or perhaps, Mr. Chair, in this case, make rules to their own advantage – but that shouldn't be because you're wealthy or have access to that money, so we think a reasonable contribution limit should have prevailed. And speaking of transparency, he said: if I'm running for mayor and I donate money to certain people that are running for council because my intention is to help them get elected, would people want to know that? I should be, first of all, held accountable to the decisions I make as a donor, and more so it speaks to my ability to make decisions, how I like to run things.

I think that's a very astute reflection on the path of Mayor Morishita, that the manner in which one behaves when it comes to issues of democracy or to donating or supporting and having influence in the democratic process speaks greatly to the character and the quality of one's decision-making on other matters of import, and through this bill and through the other changes that this government has chosen to make this year in municipal elections, I think they have demonstrated their character quite clearly, and it's one that Albertans are increasingly finding incredibly wanting.

Now, of course, the thoughts of Mayor Morishita were echoed by Mayor Bill Given of Grande Prairie, who described the government's changes as a very disappointing change that people should be very, very concerned about: everyone of us that runs for city council, county council, village council, school boards has a

responsibility to let people know who's backing our campaign. But with Bill 29 and now with Bill 45, with the wide-open door which this government is continuing to leave for various third-party actors and third-party advertising and the other folks to act without disclosure, without transparency while wielding some very large amounts of dollars, or through other influence, through things like referendums or other things that come forward, again allowing large amounts of advertising with very little disclosure, that utterly undermines what Albertans, I think, have been calling for, at least those outside the direct sphere of this government.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

I see the hon. Minister of Transportation has risen to debate.

Mr. McIver: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I just want to rise and speak a little bit on Bill 45, the Local Authorities Election Amendment Act, 2020 (No. 2). Now, if someone at home was to listen to the last 10 minutes or so, they would think that the NDP in government was the paragon of virtue, that they would never have done anything wrong. The previous speaker talked about how decisions are being taken away from municipalities. He's talking about the terribleness of third-party advertising. He's talking about all these things. But you know what? That hon. member was part of a caucus that sat in this place for four years and didn't make any of those things happen. They didn't require disclosure before the election.

In fact, here's where I'll give them credit. They invented third-party support because, of course, they're not – their close relationship with the public-sector unions, in fact, who are actually part of the NDP and on their board, was probably the biggest and most effective third-party participant in elections for as long as anybody can remember, and the only ones to benefit were the folks across. Now that other people have caught on – I give them credit for catching on first. If there's one thing I've got to give them credit for, they were the champions, and they're probably still the champions, but they're just not the only ones now that have third-party groups supporting them.

So to the fact that now they don't have an unfair advantage – they are just offended. They are troubled. They are trying to whip up as much moral power as they can about how terrible – all these things that should be done, that they didn't do during the four years that they were in government: it was fine when they were in government. They didn't ignore it; they looked the other way. It's so terrible, yet now they, I mean, talk about giving the municipality – and here's the other thing, too.

Listen, the municipalities are entitled to their opinions, and I respect that. But with all due respect, too, those municipalities had the ability to pass a rule requiring disclosure, and they haven't done it. That doesn't make them bad people; it just means that to complain now that it isn't done, when, I guess, for the last 40 elections in a row it didn't get done, seems a little inconsistent.

The folks across the aisle are just unbelievable, how they want to get on their moral high horse about all the stuff that they didn't do. I loved, really loved the complaint from the Member for Calgary-Buffalo that there will be too many people voting if there's a referendum because, Lord knows, we all want fewer people to vote. Oh, no; wait a minute. We don't all want fewer people; only those people on the NDP side want fewer people to vote. They're so offended – they're so offended – that a referendum is going to bring more people out . . .

Member Ceci: Stack the deck.

Mr. McIver: See how offended they are? They're heckling because I pointed out an obvious, obvious inconsistency and obvious place where they are so inconsistent in between their words and their

actions. They are so offended that they actually – the member actually had the courage to stand up here and say, "More people are going to come out to vote," and he made it sound like a crime. Well, guilty. I guess that on this side we're guilty. We're guilty of bringing more people out to vote by having a referendum.

On the other side, on the NDP side, they actually stood up here. In *Hansard* – the hon. member can't remember what he said; he should review *Hansard* later on because his words are right there – he talked about how more people are going to come out to vote. He made it sound like a crime. Okay. If that's the biggest crime we've committed, then I guess we'll probably plead guilty to that. [interjections] See? He still can't stop heckling, Mr. Chair, because I've pointed out the incredible, incredible attitude that's over there. They don't want everybody coming out to vote and deciding who they want on a city council or as a school board member. They only want, I suppose – I don't know who they want. I don't know. We want everybody to come out. I mean, it's our job to . . .

Member Ceci: Come out in local elections.

3:30

Mr. McIver: I can hardly hear myself talk because the Member for Calgary-Buffalo is so upset because I pointed out the incredible inconsistency of what he's done. Incredible. [interjection] He still can't stop now.

Mr. Chair, with their complaining about us bringing out too many people to vote, I think we can get past that insult. I think most Albertans will forgive us for maybe reminding them to vote by putting more things on the election that they're interested in, and then when they make the effort to come out and vote, they can affect more of their world.

I also think it's tremendous when members over there talk about how people want to vote on local things. Well, Mr. Chair, the Senators deal with federal legislation, which includes the environment. I hope one thing we can agree with on all sides of the House here is that the environment is local. I think that the federal government deals with the military, which provides us all with freedom – oh, wait a minute, freedom to vote; I know that the other side doesn't want people to come out to vote, but we do – so that makes that local, too. The federal government has an environment minister. They have a Health minister. It seems to me the health of Albertans and Canadians is pretty local. Certainly, if it's somebody in your family that needs the care of the health care system, it's even more than local; it's right within your own home. It doesn't get any more local than that, than around your own kitchen table. Yet they want to deny that over there.

In fact, Mr. Chair, they talk about local. What's really neat is that – we agree it doesn't change the authority, what we're doing, of the Prime Minister of the day, from whatever party. It's the same. For us it's not a partisan thing to appoint who they want. In fact, here in Alberta, when we've had elections in the past – it seems to me the last senatorial election was 2012. In fact, we've actually had success in having Senators appointed to the upper Chamber that actually were the winners in the Alberta senatorial election, though the Prime Minister of the day didn't have to do that. Well, that seems pretty local to me when you actually get a say. In fact, the Prime Minister of the day didn't have to give Albertans the say because the Prime Minister under our Constitution has the authority to unilaterally make that decision. Well, that's pretty local. We get Albertans being able to give a hint to whoever the Prime Minister of the day is who they'd like for her or him to appoint as a Senator.

You know, I guess what you're down to are things that the NDP didn't settle when they were in government. I guess they didn't think it was that important then, but by golly, when somebody else

does it, boy, oh boy, they just lose their minds, and they are offended when people are encouraged to vote. Mr. Chair, I would just say to that that perhaps on reflection the folks on the other side might want to reconsider and they might want to support Bill 45, especially after they made the statement that Bill 45 is going to encourage more people to vote. Maybe they should get on that bandwagon and support this bill.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. minister.

Next I believe I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora has risen.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair and to my colleagues who have had an opportunity to speak to this so far, for leading us to this point in debate. I wasn't planning on responding to comments from prior speakers, but I think it's more than appropriate given the tone of the last speech at this point. The last speaker is somebody that I have something in common with in that we both ran in local elections. He certainly ran municipally, and I ran in school board elections, and I am very proud of the work that happened on those elections.

I am proud of Sheila MacKay, who was a retired person. She volunteered at an elementary school, and she spent at least three hours a day for the six months of our campaign calling through, getting donors, getting sign locations, and getting support in general. It was something that I was very proud of. She certainly wasn't bankrolled by the kind of large donors that the member is enabling through this type of legislation and in his remarks that he's pushing with regard to it. She was a woman who cared deeply about her community school, that was under threat of closure, and she wanted to make sure that she fought to keep that school open.

I still miss Sheila. She has passed away, but her son John is very active as a custodian and a labour leader here in the city of Edmonton and also fighting for good local community schools and for working people, and I'm proud to be able to continue working with him, although members of the government continue to disrespect the role of local elected labour leaders in working on behalf of their colleagues, their coworkers and fighting for a more just and fair Alberta.

I'm going to touch on a few of the comments that the last speaker made because I think that he completely tried to torque and misconstrue the comments of the Member for Calgary-Buffalo, with whom he also has in common the past of running in and representing folks locally through local elections, as they both served on the Calgary city council. What my colleague from Calgary-Buffalo was speaking to specifically was about the provincial government trying to interfere and driving a stacked engagement when it comes to this election around specific issues that they think will motivate specific populations that they want to have push for things that they believe in. That's what the member was talking about.

Certainly, we all believe, on this side anyway and I hope all members, that we want to see increased democratic engagement. That's why when we were in government, we extended the number of days for voting in pre-election periods. That's why we made sure that you could vote anywhere in the province, not just in your own local riding and your own polling station, that you could vote across the province. That's why in my riding, for example, at the Telus World of Science there were three days of advance voting. That's why mail-in was something that was expanded.

There are a lot of tangible ways that the government can actually make it easier for people to engage in democracy, including giving more autonomy to municipalities around how they do advance voting, how they engage people over a prolonged period of time,

what day, potentially, the election is on. For example, we've seen a big trend globally in accommodating weekend voting because we know that a lot of people work Monday to Friday. Many work Saturday and Sunday as well, but if both options exist – and many do have Saturdays available to spend more time engaging in things like voting. I can tell you that Telus World of Science, West Edmonton Mall, and, I'm sure, their counterparts in Calgary as well as many other places throughout the province saw really big numbers on the weekends in the advance voting in the last provincial election.

Those are the kinds of things that if the government truly cared about ensuring that everyone had an opportunity to engage in local decision-making, they would be enabling. Instead, they're really focused on this third-party, two-tiered advertising. If they wanted to truly focus on fair and just and high-turnout elections, they wouldn't have fired the Election Commissioner. They wouldn't have made one of their first very vocal bills around democracy around the eliminating of the role and the person in that role, who was investigating their own leadership campaign. They wouldn't have had somebody proudly defending being a kamikaze candidate in their leadership campaign. They would be making sure that they are bringing means and mechanisms in place so that local decision-makers can engage locally and that it's easier for them to vote instead of making it easier for big money to work its way back into local elections and to really dominate it.

There have been some graphs lately. The Member for Edmonton-City Centre was talking about the number of folks who are stepping up, expressing their interest in running in the next municipal election here, and there has also been some analysis on the current councillors and where their donations primarily came from. It ranges from zero per cent to I believe it's 99 – it might be 95 – near 100 per cent of money coming from corporate and union donations for some councillors. It really highlights the fact that we have significant work, I would say, in terms of local elections to make sure that we create a more level playing field.

I, too, am excited to see many people stepping up and putting their hand up, wanting to run for the first time ever, and instead of this government finding ways to make it easier for people to vote in the election, they're trying to find ways to ensure that third parties can ram through their big referendum questions and really push people to one specific political bent.

3:40

I also want to say that RMA and AUMA represent local officials, and I think that they've done a good job highlighting some of their specific concerns as it relates to the erosion of local decision-making and these specific initiatives through this bill.

I'm going to take a few more minutes. I did mention Sheila, but I also want to say that the other people who helped considerably on my first school board campaign, one that, I would say, was rather successful – we won with a significant margin. We were running against an incumbent, and we weren't sure that that was likely to be the outcome. There was Claire, who door-knocked with me at least two days a week during that period of time. She's somebody who actually had been a page in this place. Because there were rules around not being involved in partisan campaigns, but there weren't rules about being involved in local campaigns, she was able to – and she cleared it with her supervisor – be involved in a local school board campaign. My friend Doug came out with me at least one day a week. He rolled up his sleeves, and we went out, and we knocked. We got through a huge number of houses together. Then, of course, there was my mom, who probably has been one of the biggest supporters for me politically over the last decade, and I'm very grateful.

I also want to touch on somebody else in our family who was a locally elected official, who passed away this past weekend. He was my great-uncle Steve. He was my grandmother's youngest brother, and he died of COVID. He was 89, and he was living in a congregated facility. He moved into assisted living – well, it might have had a long-term care wing in it as well, actually. But he moved into continuing care rather recently. I want to touch a little bit on Steve's legacy. He was a councillor in Westlock. He cared deeply about affordable housing, including seniors' housing – he helped to make that come to fruition there – and specifically about the museum. If anyone has had an opportunity to visit the museum in Westlock, it's a great resource and a great asset, I think, for folks in that region. It's also on a major highway, so when you're travelling north through Westlock, I encourage you to take a few minutes to consider stopping there.

That's the type of legacy that I'd like us to see live out for local elections, that they're about the issues that matter to your local municipalities, things like making sure you're building affordable, supportive housing for your aging population, making sure that folks who want to learn more about the history of their region, have an opportunity to engage in a local museum and contribute their family heirlooms to that legacy, making sure that there are opportunities for us to reflect the local values of local decision-makers. Again, with this bill and with the spending thresholds that are being pushed in it, they are significant, and they are definitely intended to change the types of conversations that happen at the local level and the types of discussions that are happening during local elections.

Again, being able to engage on the decisions around school board elections: that was probably the first election that I can recall where people came out – it wasn't just in my ward – to enthusiastically vote for school boards. Often what happens when you vote for mayor: you might vote for your councillor, and then maybe you'll fill out the school board portion of your ballot as well. But in that 2010 election I'd say that Edmontonians rightfully knew that there was a big choice at hand, a choice around following Conservative direction and closing – at that time they were reviewing, I believe, 70 schools out of the 200 schools in Edmonton public alone for closure. There was a big push from the Conservative provincial government at the time to close many schools in established neighbourhoods because they weren't efficient enough. I have to say how grateful I am that the city of Edmonton and its voters came out in large numbers to give us a mandate to fight back against that, and I'm so glad that we did.

Here we are today, and I know how quickly the rates of COVID in our community and inner schools has risen, especially over the last month. One of the things that I think has been a big sigh of relief for a lot of families is that there aren't only large schools, that there are a variety of different types of schools and class configurations, and that we do have a number of schools still open in the core of our city that have smaller numbers. Most of them are getting quite full because a lot of families, when they had the certainty that there would be a neighbourhood school for many years to come, were in a position where they were able to make a decision to commit to that neighbourhood and raise their family there rather than fear that the local school in a mature neighbourhood would be closed and that they'd have to, if they wanted their child to be able to walk to school, move to another neighbourhood. So we have been able to see the enrolment in many mature neighbourhood schools grow in a sustainable way over the last decade, but it isn't at the extreme numbers that we see in some other parts of our city, where many, many, many students have to isolate as soon as there is a case because, of course, there are many students in a class and therefore many close contacts.

That doesn't mean that all classrooms in older parts of our cities have small class sizes. That's not always the case. There are a number of class sizes that are far beyond 15 in mature neighbourhoods. There are very few that are less than 15, which is, of course, what we recommended through our Safe Schools, Successful Students alternate relaunch plan for schools back in the summer. These are the kinds of issues that I would really love to see our local candidates engage in at a variety of levels.

Actually, during the last election I think that schools became one of the questions people were asking the mayor about here in Edmonton for sure and, I think, a bit in Calgary as well. They were talking about the ongoing sustainability of communities and the importance of those two local orders of government, the school district authorities and the boards that are elected to govern them and the municipal administration as well as the councillors and mayor who are elected to govern them, the ways that they were going to work together to ensure sustainability for our cities and for our communities within those cities.

Those are the issues that galvanized Sheila and Claire and Doug and my mom and many, many other volunteers – I'm sorry; I can't name everyone here right now – to be engaged in our campaign in 2010 and to help shift the conversation. Those are the types of conversations that I sincerely hope continue.

Again, it would be much easier to take the Minister of Transportation's comments with a greater degree of credence if his government didn't have such a track record of attacking folks who are appointed to protect our democracy. The termination of Lorne Gibson, I think, is something that is a dark mark on the democratic record of this government. I think that that's something that they will have to carry with them for quite some time. I know that they keep trying to change the topic and talk about other issues, but the fact that the person who had issued I believe it was tens of thousands of dollars in fines in relation to the UCP-PC leadership campaigns . . .

Member Ceci: Two hundred and six.

Ms Hoffman: Two hundred and six. Thank you very much to my colleague from Calgary-Buffalo for that correction; \$206,000 in fines.

The government was very quick to end his relationship as the person accountable to the public for our democratic elections, something that – I knew that there was not admiration for the work that he was doing, but I didn't think the government would be so brazen as to, in the midst of the investigation, terminate the person who was there to enforce it. This is from a government that talks about being focused on law enforcement, yet the person that was in place to protect the law was one of the first people that they went after.

There, of course, are other issues that will likely be front and centre in this upcoming election, and I would like the candidates and the electorate to be the ones that determine what those issues are, not folks with \$30,000 times many of them, trying to get dark money back into politics and pushing for corporate and union voices to be the dominant voices in elections. It should absolutely be the citizens of our fine province. That's why I'm very frustrated that the government is proposing this bill in its current form, and I hope that they seriously consider ways that they can amend it to make this legislation reflect the values of local elections, not the drive that they are bringing forward through their desire to – I believe the Member for Calgary-Buffalo talked about stacking the deck. This really should be about local decision-makers, local electors, and the candidates who are willing to run in local elections.

This shouldn't be about the UCP cabinet trying to drive their specific agenda through other orders of government.

3:50

They absolutely have an opportunity in this place to drive their agenda. They are demonstrating that every day through the rollback and very regressive decisions they're making when it comes to labour law, through the very regressive decisions they're making when it comes to health care and education, through the cuts that they are executing and in terms of cuts to individual supports for students with disabilities, whether it be in the early years or whether it be in the later years. This is the opportunity for the government to drive its agenda as it relates to provincial legislation, and the public will have their opportunity to weigh in on how the government is doing in that regard as well when they are up for re-election, when we are all up for re-election.

Municipal elections should be driven by municipal electors and municipal candidates in terms of what the questions are that they're engaging with, and for this government to disrespect those local electors and decision-makers in terms of many of the points that have been raised by the RMA, AUMA, and their subsequent membership through either individual advocacy or group advocacy I think shows that this government is not interested in listening to those partners.

The one time that they like to say "partners" is when they're downloading responsibility without autonomy or resources to many of these local decision-makers. Let's go full circle in this speech. That is exactly what led to the decisions that were being made by the local Edmonton public school board in 2009 and 2010 that inspired me to run for office. It wasn't that I dreamt of being here. When I was in grade 6, I definitely didn't think that I was going to be an elected official; it was that I wanted to be able to stay living in the core of my city and I wanted to have a good school in the surrounding areas, and our local elected official had voted to close every single school that would come across his desk – every single one – including schools in the riding that he was elected to represent, in the ward he was elected to represent. It was also at the urgency of the provincial government that was pushing so hard for increased utilization rates, as they so nicely referred to it, which means higher density, more kids in fewer schools, than what had been in play. The local decision-makers didn't have the resources at their means, in their opinion, to be able to push back, but a group of us decided that if they weren't willing to, then we would step up, and then it was the city of Edmonton, the people of Edmonton who voted to give us that mandate.

We don't decide when we become elected. We decide we're willing to run, we're willing to take a risk, and we're willing to stand up for something, and it's the people who decide whether or not we have the honour of filling that role.

So instead of continuing to try and exercise through legislation, whether it's the firing of the Election Commissioner or the bolstering of third-party advertising and PACs and third-party campaigns, this government could be well served and the people of Alberta could be well served if they respected the will of the public, if they respected the role of law enforcers when it comes to elections, and if they stopped with the type of intimidation and arrogance that we continue to see day in and day out.

It's not every day that you see a UCP press secretary address the atrocities of the government through social media, but I believe she's a former press secretary. If she wasn't yesterday, she probably is today. That very clearly became part of the discussion on the Internet.

So I think that when it comes to listening to the will of the people, there have been many examples of how this government has failed

to do so. I believe that this bill is yet another attempt to erode local decision-making and the electorate and what the electorate is, the role of the electorate in driving local decision-making as well because the government continues to funnel new ways to get big money into politics and to push third-party advertising in campaigns.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

I see the hon. Member for Fort McMurray-Lac La Biche.

Ms Goodridge: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I really appreciate the opportunity to speak to Bill 45. A fun fact: actually, one of the things that got me most interested in politics as a child – and, really, it was as a child – was the Senate. I had done some research in grade 6, and I found out that Alberta was severely underrepresented in Canada's Senate. I did an ample amount of research on this and really, really had some problems with it, so I started digging in and doing more and more research and when I got to university decided that I would further study this issue and got really involved with the concept behind a triple-E Senate, the equal, effective, and elected Senate. This is something that guided a lot of my thought processes. It was something that I wrote lots of papers on in university, and it was something that was really important to me.

I remember the first time I met the late Senator Bert Brown and chatting with him about some of the early drives he did towards working on the Senate election with former Prime Minister Brian Mulroney. I remember being really, really taken aback by how much work he had put into it and explaining how difficult it was and how proud he was that the province of Alberta and the government of Alberta at the time helped by having the Senate elections coincide with the municipal elections to really help drive the issue and give them a forum.

Fast-forward a little bit. There was a Senate election when I was in university. I remember getting really, really excited, and I actually campaigned for a couple of the Senators that were running, one of them being Betty Unger, a former Senator. It was pretty exciting to get involved and really be able to geek out but to prove and to show and to talk to Albertans and connect with Albertans about this important role.

I've had the opportunity to have conversations with Alberta's current elected Senator, the hon. Doug Black, and he's really an effective communicator. He is such an amazing representative of this province. It's not to say that the other Senators that represent this province aren't good representatives of this province – I believe that Senator Simons is definitely a great advocate for our province – but there is something about having that tied to the people, being chosen by the people, and being accountable to those people that, I believe, makes those Senators that much more effective at their role. They have a mandate from the people.

It is that mandate that clearly drives Senator Black to do the amazing work he does. He recently did a virtual tour throughout Alberta, and one of his stops on his virtual tour was in my hometown of Fort McMurray. It was something that was really amazing to me, to see a Senator engaging in this way, because I had very rarely seen this. It's directly related to the fact that Prime Minister Stephen Harper saw a piece there and saw the importance of the elected Senate. I know we're not alone here in Alberta about this.

This piece of legislation: part of the reason why I was so excited about it is that it gave the opportunity to not only have the Senate elections happen here in Alberta, but it cemented the fact that they were going to coexist with the municipal election and the school board elections, which increases voter turnout. I am a big fan of anything we can do to increase voter turnout. I do not see this as a negative in any capacity.

In studying political science through university, I saw any manner of increasing democracy as a good thing for democracy. Democracy is messy, democracy is imperfect, but democracy is the best system we have. Increasing the number of the people that have their say is critically important. This is simply removing a loophole to prevent something that has never actually been used from actually happening and costing the taxpayers more money. I think this is an exceptionally good thing.

I'm really confused, but I guess I shouldn't be totally confused. The members opposite completely object to the idea of a Senate, so I can respect that some of their concerns around this might come from that concept, that as a party, whether it be federal or provincial, the NDP does not support having a Senate in the federal government. Therefore, they are not supportive of the idea of having an elected Senate. From a very geeky perspective I can understand some of those arguments, but as someone that fundamentally believes that if we are going to have a Senate, it must be an elected Senate, and therefore we must do what we can to give a better venue and give the best footing we can to these elected Senators – I can tell you that I've had numerous amazing conversations with Senator Doug Black. He really cares about this province, and he is really pushing forward. I believe that our province is so much better because of his advocacy, his leadership, his strength in representing us. I believe that a large part of that comes from the fact that he actually has a mandate from the people of Alberta, and he takes that to heart. I don't see that with other Senators, not to say that they don't work exceptionally hard. A lot of Senators do, and I've had the opportunity to chat with many Senators in my time.

4:00

This is something that is critically important. We must do this, and I just would really urge everyone in this Chamber to vote in favour of this bill. It is a good bill. It is a great step to close a loophole for something that has never actually been used. We have never actually held a municipal election on a Saturday, so by closing this loophole to prevent this from happening, it is also making things a little bit more clear and potentially saving taxpayers a lot of money.

With that, thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other members looking to join debate? I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-South.

Mr. Dang: Thank you, Mr. Chair. It's my pleasure to rise and speak to the Local Authorities Election Amendment Act, 2020 (No. 2). I think that we've had quite a bit of fulsome debate here in Committee of the Whole, at this stage, and we've had quite a bit of discussion around, I suppose, the merits or, rather, the lack thereof around this bill and the implementation of this bill.

Mr. Chair, I'm particularly concerned with some of the comments that have been made by members opposite, by government members and government backbenchers here, because, like my colleague the hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View ...

Member Ceci: Buffalo.

Mr. Dang: Calgary-Buffalo. I'm getting close. One of these days I'll get it right the first time, Mr. Chair.

With my hon. colleagues from Calgary here, I think that certainly we were sitting on committees together, and we sat with many of the government members that spoke on committees together and heard from actual experts on elections and actual experts on democracy and actual experts like Dr. Melanie Thomas, who spoke

about how, if these changes were implemented, if these actual policies that are in this bill were implemented, it would degrade our democracy and it would actually reduce the effectiveness of democratic institutions.

We heard significant concerns around issues such as the usage of the amalgamated donation caps. We heard significant concerns around the usage of third-party advertising. We heard significant concerns from experts and even the public as well. We heard from the public as well. Basically, across the board, unless it was people who were very closely associated with the government party and the UCP Party, it was very clear that there was a nonpartisan agreement that we should have stricter limits, that are not going to be in place in this bill.

Mr. Chair, when we look at the limits that are being put in place and we look at the implications of the pieces being put in place, we don't only have to look at the consultations that this Legislature did and that committees of this Legislature did. We can also look at organizations such as Parity YEG and Ask Her YYC, two equity-seeking organizations that seek to help women engage in politics and, particularly, municipal politics, which are, of course, local authorities elections, what we're discussing here. We see that both of these organizations actually spoke out against the changes around higher ceilings that are going to be brought in under this legislation. They actually spoke out against how the changes are only going to benefit wealthy incumbents, that are often male, and how it's going to make it tougher for women and other marginalized communities to engage in the democratic process and the elections process.

Mr. Chair, when we talk about trying to get marginalized groups involved in politics, whether that's racialized minorities, women or otherwise, or sexually diverse candidates, when we look at these types of concerns, when we look at the actual policy we need to be making to encourage broader use of our democratic institutions or broader involvement in our democratic institutions, the experts all agree that this bill is taking us in the wrong direction. The experts agree that this government is on the wrong track. The experts agree that this government is reducing the means by which people will actually be able to engage in democracy meaningfully.

It's going to reduce things like transparency around third-party advertising. It's going to reduce things like the ability to control how corporate interests are being played out in municipal elections, Mr. Chair. So I think it is particularly concerning. It's particularly concerning for every underrepresented group in municipal politics and indeed even in this Legislature. We know that many groups are underrepresented in this Legislature as well, and we know that municipal elections have impacts that affect elections across the board.

Mr. Chair, when we look at this bill, when we look at members opposite talking about this bill and how they're so excited that they're going to increase voter turnout and that they're so excited about how they're going to bring in these policies and open the floodgates for higher voter turnout, the experts agree that instead of doing that, what they're actually accomplishing is opening floodgates to dark money, that's going to influence democracy in nefarious ways. It's going to muddle the issues. It's going to confuse voters. It's going to hurt marginalized communities. It's going to discourage marginalized communities like racialized people, like women, like sexually diverse candidates from actually participating in the democratic process, and that's what organizations like Parity YEG, like Ask Her YYC, like the experts we heard on the panels when this Legislature had a committee looking at these processes said.

It's very clear that across the board, if you're talking to anybody other than the Canadian Taxpayers Federation, if you're talking to

anybody other than lobbyists that are closely associated with the UCP, the experts don't agree with this legislation. The experts think this legislation degrades our democratic institutions. The experts think it makes it harder for marginalized communities and underrepresented groups to engage in democracy, in meaningful democracy.

Mr. Chair, when we look at this legislation, when we look at the changes being pushed forward, when we look at the dark money that's going to be brought in, when we look at the ability of third-party advertisers to adversely affect our democratic institutions, at the ability of third-party advertisers to work in ways that are going to be less transparent, that are going to be less accountable and significantly influence our voters and constituents, I think that we need to be very concerned. Albertans need to be very concerned, and the experts are concerned. That's why experts that were asked to present to the Select Special Democratic Accountability Committee spoke to that effect. That's why people who weren't asked, who weren't approved by the UCP majority on that committee to present, then wrote in publicly and wrote in under the public submissions or made comments publicly through means such as social media and otherwise and in releases.

That's why we saw across-the-board condemnation of the policy that is being implemented under this legislation, that this legislation is wrong-headed, that it's moving in the wrong direction. It is something that absolutely makes democracy worse off, and it's going to make our local elections and our municipal governments less effective. When we have this consensus that we should not have this dark money and lack of accountability, lack of transparency in third-party advertising, it simply does not make sense that when every single group writes in about how this is going to degrade our institutions, why then suddenly the government thinks: well, it's so great that we're going to be able to have third parties spend so much money driving up voter turnout for special-interest groups.

Mr. Chair, that is not what the experts or this opposition or Albertans believe is an effective use of democracy, right? It's not effective that special-interest groups with no accountability, special-interest groups that have worked on behalf of this government and are closely associated with this government, that are closely associated with very troubling people and very troubling groups, are now going to be able to, without accountability, without disclosure, without any mechanism of checks and balances, massively influence local elections.

Mr. Chair, it simply is shocking, the audacity that this government would get up in this place and that private members of this government would get up in this place and talk about how great it is that special-interest groups are going to be able to affect local elections, that special-interest groups are going to have additional influence on driving people to local elections, that special-interest groups are going to have additional means to do this without accountability, without transparency, without the things we take often for granted in our democratic institutions. I think it's very concerning, what this Premier and this government are implementing here. I think it's very concerning that what we're seeing is a government leaving Albertans behind when we talk about elections here.

4:10

Democracy, particularly in local government and local democracy, is so important because in many cases constituents and residents of areas, of municipalities see their municipal councillors and interact with their municipal councillors in much broader and deeper ways than they will with almost any other level of government, right? In terms of some of the biggest concerns, that I'm sure most of us get in this place, they are often municipal issues,

issues that MLAs are unable to help with, that MPs are unable to help with, that Senators are unable to help with because oftentimes people are concerned about municipal issues. That could be anything from garbage collection to potholes to traffic light timing to the playground in their community. Mr. Chair, the reality is that municipal issues touch Albertans in a very deep and meaningful way.

When we have a Premier passing legislation that's going to degrade the ability of our municipal politicians to do their work, that's going to degrade the ability of our democratic institutions at the municipal level, that's going to allow third-party advertisers and foreign and special-interest groups to have undue influence on our democratic process in municipal elections, I think Albertans are very concerned. I think that this opposition is very concerned. I think that government members should be very concerned. I think it's very concerning when we see these policies being brought in. I think it's very concerning that we see time and time again this government folding to the pressure of special-interest groups.

Right now in local elections, of course, we see that special-interest groups have an undue influence over municipal elections. Special-interest groups now are able to act without reproach, are now able to act without transparency, without disclosure. Mr. Chair, on top of that, we also see the government giving \$4.7 billion away to those same lobbyists, giving \$4.7 billion away to wealthy and profitable corporations that are now able to donate and fund special-interest groups without any disclosure, right? The \$4.7 billion this government is giving away to wealthy and profitable corporations can now be used to unduly influence municipal elections. It really is shocking. It's really shocking.

Mr. Chair, it shows that this government is not fighting on behalf of Albertans. It is not fighting to make sure Albertans have the strongest institutions, the strongest policies, and the strongest systems. Instead, it seems like the Premier's and the government's friends and donors, the special-interest groups that are associated with this government, are leading the cause here, and that is something that is very concerning when we talk about accountability, it's very concerning when we talk about democratic institutions, and it's very concerning when we talk about local elections and how local elections need to operate.

[Ms Glasgo in the chair]

When we talk to the actual civil society groups that are affected by this, when we talk to the actual organizations that have studied and analyzed the data and have actually worked in municipal elections to try and increase representation, to try and increase participation, to try and increase things like voter turnout, Madam Chair – welcome – when we talk about the organizations that have actually done the work such as Parity YEG, such as Ask Her YYC, such as the experts like Dr. Thomas, who presented to the committee, when we talk about all this amalgamation of data, when we talk about all this consensus of data, the consensus is that it doesn't make any sense to move forward with this attack on our democratic institutions. It doesn't make any sense to give \$4.7 billion away to profitable and wealthy corporations who can then turn around and use that as a special-interest group to unduly influence Alberta elections, municipal elections without disclosure, without actually having the accountability mechanisms.

Madam Chair, when we look at this process, when we look at this bill, when we look at the systems that are being introduced, it's very clear that the consensus of Albertans is that this is the wrong path. This is the wrong path for local elections. This is the wrong path when we talk about third-party advertisers. This is the wrong path when we talk about marginalized communities, whether it's

racialized communities or sexually diverse or gender-diverse communities. When we talk about marginalized groups, this is going to be the wrong direction. This is going to make it harder. This is going to decrease participation for marginalized groups.

Madam Chair, members of the government caucus, including multiple ministers and private members, have risen in this place and spoken about how they believe they want to be increasing those things, that they want to be increasing turnout, that they want to be increasing representation and democracy. When every single person consulted about this disagrees, then it simply does not make sense. Why would we be moving forward with this bill? It simply does not make sense why we would have these massive donations without accountability. It simply does not make sense because we know that time and time again these types of mechanisms, these types of systems benefit, to a significant degree, the wealthy incumbents, that are often male and often Caucasian males. When we look at the policies, when we look at the actual implementation – and this is evidence not compiled by myself. It's not compiled by the Official Opposition caucus. It's evidence that's been compiled by Parity YEG and Ask Her YYC. The evidence is compiled by the experts who have presented on panels to the Select Special Democratic Accountability Committee. When we talk about the evidence here, it's not the opinion of the opposition. It's the research that's been done by the civil society groups and the experts who have actually worked in terms of trying to improve democracy across this province. Those groups do not believe we are moving in the right direction. They do not believe that this legislation will help. In fact, they actually believe that this legislation will impede the ability of marginalized groups to become more involved in politics. They actually believe that this legislation will impede the ability of marginalized groups to be represented democratically. They actually believe it will decrease democracy at our municipal level.

Madam Chair, when we look at these policies, when we look at the way the rules are being created, what we're talking about is creating additional barriers. We're talking about creating additional ceilings. We're talking about creating additional barriers that actually limit the ability of marginalized groups to participate in democracy, that actually limit the ability of marginalized groups to have their say and to be represented. I don't think I can understate how important it is that if you come from a marginalized community, that if you come from a racial minority or otherwise, how important it is to be able to see somebody in your government that looks like you, that speaks like you, that understands the issues around your community. Having representation, a diverse representation, in government is so important, particularly at the municipal level, where it touches so many aspects of Albertans' lives because at the municipal level – again, I've said it before, but I believe the majority of MLAs here probably hear more about municipal issues than almost any other issue. Whether it's from potholes to playgrounds to traffic light timing to highways to roadway maintenance, time and time again you're going to hear about municipal issues because Albertans are affected the most municipally. Having that representation, having a diverse representation is so important at those levels to be able to make effective policy change and to be able to have effective policy change that represents those views and that represents the needs.

I think it's very concerning. I think it's very concerning that this government is basically ignoring the evidence, is basically ignoring the research, is basically ignoring the presentations that were given at committee, is basically ignoring the presentations that were sent to us by Parity YEG and Ask Her YYC and is basically ignoring the consensus opinion that this legislation hurts marginalized

communities. It hurts marginalized groups, it hurts our democratic institutions, and it damages the ability for us to do democracy in Alberta. It actually makes democracy worse. It actually makes local elections worse. It actually makes the governance of our municipalities worse off, Madam Chair.

I think it's pretty concerning that the government hides behind fallacies when they look at this, Madam Chair, because time and time again we hear this consensus that this is not the right way forward. This is not the right path. This is the wrong piece of legislation. This is the wrong policy. When we look at the package of policy being brought forward, we look at how it's being bundled and how it's being suggested to move forward, we see again that this government does not seem to be fighting for everyday Albertans. This government is not fighting to ensure that Albertans have a fighting shot. Instead, what this government is doing is giving \$4.7 billion away to wealthy and profitable corporations who can then turn around and use that to unduly influence municipal elections, who can then do it without accountability, without transparency, without the safeguards that we expect in western liberal democracies and without the systems that we expect in western liberal democracies that ensure fair and democratic elections. This government is actually bringing in legislation here that would reduce those safeguards and would make it less transparent and increase the amount of dark money being spent in Alberta politics, which, again, overwhelmingly hurts marginalized communities.

We see on both ends and indeed from multiple angles – because, of course, we see this government also cutting funding to municipalities. We see this government continue to attack municipalities, continue to attack the electoral process, continue to give \$4.7 billion to wealthy and profitable corporations and then allow special-interest groups to act without reproach, without disclosure, without transparency, to spend significant sums of money in affecting municipal elections. We see municipalities being attacked on basically every front by this government. We see where Albertans see the majority of their services delivered being attacked at every single front by this government. This government is not standing up for Albertans. This government is not standing up for families. This government is not standing up for Calgarians, for Edmontonians, or any other municipality, Madam Chair.

4:20

Instead, what this government is doing is giving \$4.7 billion away to their special-interest groups, to their friends and donors, to wealthy and profitable foreign corporations. Madam Chair, when we look at the policy, when we look at the holistic package, when we look at what is actually being presented here, it becomes very clear that the intentions of this government – or, in my opinion, it becomes very clear that it does not seem like this government is standing up for Albertans. Instead, it looks like this government is standing up for their friends and donors. Instead, it looks like this government is standing up for their friends and donors and ensuring that they get better off while Albertans and marginalized communities have a worse and lesser democratic institution. Their democratic institutions are degraded. They're worse off.

When we look at these systems, when we look at these policies, when we look at how it's being implemented here – and I know that many of my hon. colleagues here in the opposition have spoken at length today and otherwise, at previous debate points, for this bill as well, about why, in particular, this bill fails to accommodate any of the legislation that we need.

The Acting Chair: Any other hon. members wishing to speak? I'll recognize the hon. Member for Calgary . . .

Member Ceci: I just want to make a short point with regard to these extra referenda and elections for Senate. We haven't talked about who pays for those things. I assume that the lack of clarification from the other side will mean that municipalities will be picking up the tab for counting those ballots. In the case of the large cities there are hundreds of thousands of paper ballots, and they'll need people, they'll need time to do that count successfully and complete it, and it will cost money to keep those people around. So the UCP is again downloading costs onto municipalities because I haven't heard anybody say: no; we're going to pay for that. It would be great if a member from the other side actually clarified who's going to be picking up the tab, and the tab will be substantive in total for municipalities to do that work. That, again, is a concern of mine. It's local issues that aren't being addressed, and they're having to pay for it as well.

Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

The Acting Chair: Thank you to the hon. member. Just for clarity, I think the hon. member knows – he's been in this Assembly long enough – that we should wait to be called upon by the chair before we begin speaking. I know that we get excited, but it is important to maintain decorum and order within the Chamber.

Are there any other hon. members wishing to speak?

I'll ask the question?

Hon. Members: Question.

[The remaining clauses of Bill 45 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

The Acting Chair: Shall the bill be reported? Are you agreed?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Acting Chair: Opposed? Carried.

Bill 48

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

The Acting Chair: Are there any comments, questions, or amendments to be offered with respect to the bill? I see the hon. minister for red tape reduction.

Mr. Hunter: Thank you, Madam Chair. I want to start by saying that I trust Albertans. Albertans are worthy of our trust. Growing up in this province, I have experienced first-hand how resilient, strong, and trustworthy Albertans are. This has been especially true during the current COVID-19 pandemic. Albertans went above and beyond to support their friends and neighbours through acts of kindness. Regardless of what side of the House you are on, I think we can all agree that the real heroes this year are our fellow Albertans.

Madam Chair, during this time of uncertainty we must address the hidden tax that robs our job creators and our families of precious time and money. I speak of red tape. The great strides we accomplished this past year started with a solid working formula built by our cousins to the west. When B.C. took the very same red tape reduction steps, starting in 2001, their GDP grew faster than ever. Disposable income went from being well below the national average to being well above it. Small-business creation skyrocketed, and new jobs were created. It's no secret why we do what we do. In fact, I'm happy to lay it out here for the members opposite, who continuously try to undermine the work of our red tape reduction efforts.

Number one, B.C. put someone in charge with an explicit mandate to cut red tape and provide guidance, support, and feedback to every minister's office and the departments. They're still doing it today under an NDP government. We're doing that as well. B.C. tasked the department with providing guidance and feedback to assist in identifying and eliminating broken regulations. We've done that. There is a point I want to make on this as well. We appointed Treasury Board and Finance with this task because of the economic value that cutting red tape adds to our province. No new funds were used to create Alberta's Associate Ministry of Red Tape Reduction. It was all funded within the existing Finance minister's budget.

Number three, B.C. made a rule to prevent new regulations from creeping in. Currently we are at a 5 to 1 ratio, and once we have reduced regulatory burden by one-third, we will implement a one in, one out rule so that regulatory burden won't creep back in. B.C. also measures their progress. We've just completed this by establishing our baseline count of over 670,000 regulatory hoops that Albertans have to jump through.

B.C. invited the public to comment and offer ideas. We've also done the same. We've received over 7,000 submissions to date at our cutredtape.alberta.ca website. B.C. looked for best practices. We've left no stone unturned as we've scoured the Earth for best practices. Finally, for large initiatives they did a cost-benefit analysis using streamlined criteria. Our concierge services are being designed by many ministries throughout the government. These are just common-sense ideas.

Madam Chair, Albertans would prefer the members opposite took this more seriously. To date the NDP have submitted only one red tape reduction idea. One. The Member for Edmonton-Decore stated during debate that "I think we need a little bit more than . . . a letter grade." Well, let me remind that member that not only did they get a grade of F from the Canadian Federation of Independent Business, an organization that represents thousands of small businesses in Alberta, but they also received an F from Albertans in the last election. It's clear that the members opposite are out of touch with our job creators and Albertans, for that matter. I mean, the Leader of the Opposition wanted us to shut down 40 per cent of small businesses just this last week, a move that would have crippled our job creators.

When they were in office, the NDP watched businesses leave, unemployment go up, and investment flee. This is exactly what happens when government gets in the way of our job creators. This is exactly what happens when you're so out of touch with how businesses operate that you blindly create red tape and you raise taxes by 50 per cent. In fact, Madam Chair, I would have to say that the NDP government seemed to be more interested in engaging in nefarious concatenations of diabolical rascality than actually governing.

Now the good news, Madam Chair. Our government is committed to taking a common-sense approach that puts Albertans first. When we cut taxes and red tape, when we restore the balance between labour and management, investment will surge, Albertans will find good jobs, and skilled workers will want to live here, not leave here. This isn't rocket science. It's called rewarding success, not penalizing it.

I want to spend some time to address some of the issues that were raised during Bill 48 second reading. I appreciate the comments that have been made so far and will do my best to answer and address any outstanding questions. The first and most impactful change we made in this legislation was to the Municipal Government Act. First of all, there were some questions as to what consultation took place. The proposed changes were developed through consultation with representatives from the city of Calgary, the city of Edmonton,

elected officials in the administrative municipal associations, the Alberta Professional Planners Institute, and the Building Industry Land Development Association. Engagement took place in summer 2020 and included written feedback and virtual-facilitated sessions.

4:30

Our focus here is to eliminate the red tape that is holding back development. For instance, giving the Minister of Municipal Affairs the authority to set firm timelines for subdivision development in large municipalities will speed up approvals and ensure residential construction projects are completed on time and on budget. Who would be against that?

I want to reassure all members that these changes do not grant the minister any additional authority to intervene in the municipal land-use process. Municipalities retain the authority to approve development in the lands around the Edmonton and Calgary international airports, that are restricted under the airport vicinity protection area regulations. However, rather than having to wait for cabinet approval for the regulation to be changed, the Minister of Municipal Affairs can now approve changes, allowing the municipalities to approve specific developments on lands near airports much faster.

Repealing additional reserve land requirements will reduce uncertainty for developers. Allowing the board to hear appeals of off-site levies and development permits will reduce costs the developers spend on disputing decisions of local appeal boards in court. In the end, this will be a win for everyone, including municipalities, as it will bring more investment and more jobs into our communities. Another point on the proposed change to additional reserve land is that during engagement with stakeholders, including the big cities of Edmonton and Calgary, they acknowledged that this provision is rarely utilized. As a result, there is no negative impact on our municipalities, and therefore it doesn't detract or take land away from the building of fire halls, schools, parks, et cetera.

Continuing with changes that the Minister of Municipal Affairs contributed to this legislation is the removal of building assessment reports, otherwise known as BARs. These reports are redundant and simply duplicate checks already available to condominium buyers and boards through other requirements illustrated in the Condominium Property Act and the Safety Codes Act. Other sources of information about the condition of the building, including common areas, can be found in permits and certificates, reserve fund studies, technical audits, and professional schedules which engineers sign off on.

The proposed changes to the Child, Youth and Family Enhancement Act would work to bring us into alignment with other provinces by making our adoption records more accessible and transparent while reducing wait times for this information. The act will continue to have protections that ensure a careful review of each application to ensure that private information is only shared with the appropriate people.

Another question came up regarding the proposed changes to the Animal Health Act that I want to clear up. The reason for this change is because the federal government now requires a prescription from a vet or pharmacist to sell medically important antimicrobials. As a result, farmers can no longer purchase them at these outlets, removing the need to have qualification certificate holders at these outlets. This change will save outlets around \$14,000 per year.

I want to thank the Minister of Culture, Multiculturalism and Status of Women for her comments on her portion of the bill during second reading. She made a good point, that even some of the smallest changes we make to cut red tape are important to someone

in Alberta. Isn't that one of the messages of Christmas, lessening the burden on our neighbours?

By finding efficiencies, by simplifying the legislation, we're saving people from unnecessary confusion and saving taxpayers' dollars by reducing the amount of government legislation. Bill 48 is about creating efficiencies and making it easier to navigate government processes and procedures. It's not a miscellaneous statutes amendment act, as some have said. We're not addressing typos and/or aligning with new federal regulations. We're reducing the actual regulatory burden Albertans face every single day. We're cutting down paperwork, headaches, and confusion for Albertans. We have a lot of red tape to cut through, and I'm proud of the work we've done so far.

We've saved Albertans over \$476 million in compliance costs. Would the members opposite call that a waste of time? When they were in power, they couldn't find one piece of red tape. In fact, if they looked, they would have found lots of opportunities, lots of ways to give back to Albertans, lots of ways to get out of the way of Albertans and our job creators, but they didn't look. They refused to look. Mr. Chair, they mocked every word I had to say on the subject of red tape when I was in opposition. In four years they didn't find the 52,000 regulatory hoops that we've already eliminated in less than a year. That speaks volumes to how important it is to have the political will and strong leadership to tackle red tape, which the NDP did not have.

This bill is just a small piece of the puzzle, Madam Chair. Like I said in the beginning of this speech, we have over 670,000 regulatory hoops that Albertans have to jump through. Of those, only 20 per cent exist in legislation and regulations. The other 80 per cent lie in forms and policies. This is where I spend my time, ensuring the right protections stay and rooting out the ones that hold Albertans back. It's called moving government to an outcomes-based approach to regulation. There's a great quote by Laura Jones of the CFIB that I'll read in closing: one of the worst consequences of red tape is that it undermines the relationship between a government and its citizens. Albertans can trust that we will make Alberta the freest, fastest moving economy in North America because, Madam Chair, Alberta is open for business.

The Acting Chair: Are there any other members wishing to speak? I see the hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Ms Ganley: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. I am pleased to rise and speak to this bill. It is my first opportunity to speak to Bill 48. I'd like to address a couple of issues. I think, first, that it's worth commenting on the bill overall. This bill is one of many in this session. It's also one of many that amends multiple acts, and it's quite long. I have always prided myself on reading the legislation that comes before this place. I know that many of the members opposite find that laughable, but I think it's important that as legislation moves through this place, we as individual members are well versed on what that legislation says, because we have been sent here to represent our constituents for this very purpose.

What troubles me about this government's tendency to bring in omnibus bills like this bill, that amend, again, multiple acts, is that the length and complexity of these bills is not aimed at me. It's not an attempt to dissuade me from finding out what's in this bill. It's aimed at the public. It's an attempt to dissuade the public from understanding what it is that the government is acting on, and I think that that is incredibly troubling. The most important relationship a government can have is the relationship with its citizens. Deliberately attempting to obfuscate that relationship in such a way that the citizens are not able to comprehend what the government is doing or saying because it's just pushing so much at

them with so little information about it is incredibly troubling to me.

Governments have a lot to get done, and I completely understand that. There's a lot of legislation in the Alberta government, and it needs to be updated and amended, and certainly many of the changes in this act do that. Many of them appear to be sort of superficial, right? All governments do this. It's not new to the UCP. Everyone does this. Processes modernize. Particularly right now we do more and more things online. Processes are modernizing as a result of the pandemic quite quickly. Even courts, which are, arguably, often well behind the curve in terms of modernizing their procedures, have shifted forward significantly as a result of this pandemic in terms of their willingness to recognize things like electronic signatures or electronic appearances or any number of things.

[Mr. Milliken in the chair]

I do think that a lot of this bill is just that. It's really not much, right? It's just a modernization of certain processes, modernizations that occur automatically over time. Because this modernization occurred under our government and it occurred under the government before us – I mean, this is just something that governments do – it's a bit strange to sort of toot your own horn and tout this kind of normal updating of legislation as some sort of great victory. But, that aside, there's nothing sort of nefarious about it.

4:40

But what concerns me is that mixed in are substantive changes. The minister rose and said: well, this isn't like a miscellaneous statutes act. That's absolutely true. It isn't. I mean, the thing about a miscellaneous statutes act is that it's generally corrections of typos. It's minor amendments of various varieties. Sometimes they are a tiny bit more substantive. The really critical piece is that it's almost never debated, miscellaneous statutes, because it's agreed to between House leaders for the government and the opposition. This isn't anything like that because that agreement occurs by way of a conversation and everyone understanding what's in the bill. The purpose of this bill is quite the opposite. It is to try to get it past the public without them noticing. So they have very little in common.

Like I said, many of these things are just updates, and that's fine. I think the concern is with the things that aren't necessary or with the things that may be but won't immediately be obvious. Again, it's usually the public that raises concern, right? Certainly, the opposition reads the bill – we have a certain take on it, as the members opposite did when they were in opposition – but often concerns about bills come from the public. They come from people who've seen the legislation, who work in the area, who understand it on the ground, writing in to our offices and raising those issues, right? That's exactly how democracy is supposed to work. So it troubles me that we sort of attempt to circumvent it in this way.

There are a couple of things in this bill specifically that I wanted to talk about, and I think the biggest is about the removal of the power for municipalities to determine their own development timelines. My concern with this here is – and we've had this conversation, certainly, ongoing in Calgary. When the price of oil was very high, there was a lot of money in this province, and that resulted in people not always doing things in the most efficient way because they didn't have to, right? There wasn't that sort of normal constraint that exists. That's not the case anymore. It hasn't been the case for a while, and I don't anticipate that it will be the case again in the future. We're under an environment of sort of fiscal constraint that maybe hasn't existed previously, and as a result we have to be a little bit smarter about the decisions we make.

In Calgary there is a history of essentially forcing communities closer to the centre of the city to subsidize development at the edges of the city. Communities that are in the middle of the city are expected, through increased property taxes, to essentially pay for the services at the edges of the community. Of course, there are a lot of these services. There's water, and there's fire. What I'll discuss is the sort of coverage by police and fire and EMS, because that's the part that I'm familiar with from having dealt with police budgets in years past.

These sorts of big communities are built at the edges. The roads aren't straight, right? They're kind of squirrely. It costs a lot to cover those communities. When the community is approved, as soon as people start living there, it needs to be covered even though it's often the case that not all the lots are filled in yet. There's not that much population there, but it still has to be covered, not just by police and fire but by things like transit. The result of that is that each of those individual residences is a disproportionate cost to the system. It costs way more to cover those houses on the fringes compared to the ones in the centre because it's more difficult to get there, and there are fewer of them, but the whole area still has to be covered. Generally with emergency services we consider sort of response times. It's expected that an emergency service, whether fire, police, or EMS, is able to arrive at a certain location within a certain time. When you have sort of sparsely populated areas, it costs more because the dollar for each home is comparatively higher.

So we get these developments on the edges of the city, and the established communities in the centre are expected to sort of contribute by way of their taxes to the roads, to the building of infrastructure, to the coverage by emergency services, to the coverage by transit, to any number of things. This is expensive for city council and not just city council because city council gets its money by way of imposing taxes on people. Particularly in Calgary with the sort of continued recession, city council is in some financial quandary because there's way less business tax coming in. With significantly less business tax coming in, that had shifted the tax burden to the existing smaller businesses, who were unable to cover that, so the choice is to essentially drive them out of business or to increase taxes on individuals.

We recently had a bunch of new developments that were almost approved in Calgary, new development that, I might add, we don't really need, that were going to cost a significant amount of money at a time of significant fiscal restraint. That's problematic. Suggesting that city council shouldn't be able to make that choice, shouldn't be able to look at it and say, "Okay; this is going to add significantly to the tax burden of our existing ratepayers, so we don't want this additional development," that's not fair because it forces the hand of city council. It takes out of their discretion this sort of large spend. I think that that's really unfair, especially at a time when we're all suffering from budget constraint. It's unfair particularly, Mr. Chair, to the constituents of my riding, who are the ones who will ultimately bear those costs as property taxes increase.

I think we all know that people are struggling right now, probably more in the last year than they have in a very long time. They're struggling with the basics. Insurance rates are skyrocketing because of the removal of the cap. Income taxes are going up as a result of decisions of the provincial government. Costs all over the place are increasing, and people are having an increasingly difficult time affording things. Meanwhile this provincial government is downloading huge costs onto municipalities that they'll already have to pay for by way of increasing property taxes. This is sort of one more way for this government to force onto property tax payers costs that they don't need. I think that's really troubling because it should be the cities that have the right to make those decisions.

There's a number of other changes in here, changes being made to the Land Titles Act; to the Animal Health Act; Child, Youth and Family Enhancement Act; the Fatality Inquiries Act; Maintenance Enforcement Act; Modernized Municipal Government Act; and home-buyers' protection. One of the things this does is that it collapses several boards into one. Now, it's difficult to comment on that – right? – because the legislation may put those things together, but we don't know exactly how it's going to run because those things remain to be laid out in regulation. Again, I'm not suggesting that there's anything sort of nefarious going on here, but it's difficult as an opposition member and even more difficult as a member of the public to evaluate these sorts of changes because they're not in here, right? They're all going to happen by way of regulation. I mean, I hope that those changes will be positive. I hope that that won't remove anything, but it's a potential concern, I think.

Other changes are being made to the Professional and Occupational Associations Registration Act. Again, most of these changes look relatively okay, but these are sort of big changes that are made that are going to affect – I mean, there's a lot of regulated professions in this province, right? This is going to affect a fair number of people, and those people don't have the time to consider and to engage on those issues. I think that that continues to be troubling to me.

4:50

I would say that my biggest objection to this act is just the fact that it's one of many omnibus acts that we're seeing coming through simultaneously in the Legislature. I mean, it's one thing for me, whose full-time job it is to keep up with this stuff and to read this legislation and to understand what's going on. It's quite different for that information to filter out to the public and for the public to understand what's going on. I mean, I'm getting e-mails into my office on several of the bills that were passed in the last session, with people concerned that they're going to pass; they already have passed. The public just only has so much time to consider these things. I mean, that isn't to say that the government ought not to do things. It's just to suggest that the government ought to do a better job of communicating those things and in a genuine way, to have a genuine conversation with the public.

I think there are also a few things that I wanted to comment on in terms of the comments that the minister made immediately before me. I think the first thing to note is that he tried to frame us as having attacked small businesses or having raised taxes on small businesses. Nothing could be further from the truth. We, in fact, cut the small-business tax by a third. That wasn't the UCP government; that was the NDP government who did that. We cut taxes for small businesses by a third. Small businesses, Mr. Chair, because it's worth noting because it seems like some of the ministers over there have been confused about this, are those who post profits that are less than \$500,000 a year. The members opposite seem to love to say that they have reduced taxes on these small businesses, but they haven't. We did that.

They reduced taxes on large corporations, large corporations which to date have by and large pocketed that money and taken it and invested it in other jurisdictions, which is, obviously, problematic for employment here in Alberta. I feel the need to comment on that because I think that the facts are clear on the record, yet for some reason there seems to be – and I don't know whether it's confusion on the part of the members opposite or a deliberate attempt to imply that the facts are other than what they are. I think that that is really, really troubling.

I think one of the other things that bothers me about the bill is the way it's being framed, like all regulations are somehow problematic. I think that's a really weird way to look at it because

regulations for every act that a provincial government has – for every piece of legislation there are regulations that support that piece of legislation. They usually flesh out the legislation. They tell you how to do things. You know, the legislation is meant to sort of give you the governing principles, the “what,” and then the regulations usually fill out the “how.” That's quite normal, so the idea that somehow – because some regulations, it's true, will add sort of a burden, but some don't at all. The idea of this one in, one out, like they're somehow easily swapped for one another, is just a very peculiar way to frame that sort of legal instrument. That's what it is, a legal instrument, at the end of the day.

I find this whole concept a bit disingenuous because it attempts to frame a legal instrument, that sort of tells you how something is structured, as equivalent, right? You know, regulations that underlie the Traffic Safety Act and that tell you sort of what speeds you're permitted to travel and what the ticket numbers are for it aren't really red tape in the way the government implies. Just counting these regulations as all equivalent to each other – I mean, they do any number of things. Some of them, if you removed them, would, in fact, completely halt – I'll think of the Land Titles Act because that's one that's in here. If you just struck the regulation that supports the Land Titles Act, land titles would lose their ability to basically register anything because there would be no procedure by which that could be accomplished. So I think the entire purpose underlying this act is questionable in some ways.

Now, that isn't to say that so-called red tape reduction; i.e., looking through your procedures and saying, “Which ones of these are old and which ones should be updated, you know, to keep with the modern times?” – that's actually a really good thing. It's a good exercise. Governments do this all the time, and in fact there are divisions in the civil service in Alberta that are now – well, I presume now, but were certainly from 2015 to 2019 – aimed at doing exactly that, looking through regulations and saying: what of this is old that we don't need anymore? Like, what can we get rid of, what can we make easier? That on its own is fine. I just think this sort of framing it in terms of every time the government writes a regulation, it's all the same, it's all red tape, is just wrong.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

I see the hon. Associate Minister of Red Tape Reduction has risen.

Mr. Hunter: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I just wanted to comment on a couple of things. First of all, the hon. member said that because this is, as she calls it, an omnibus bill, it's a bad thing. The reality is that omnibus really means that multiple ministries have taken part in the bill. If she is concerned about the size of the bill, I would really ask the question, then: did she vote for Bill 6, the farm safety bill? I'm sure she did. Did she vote for the bill that actually added a hundred pages on to the Occupational Health and Safety Act? I'm sure she did. So if it's a question of size, I would imagine that the hon. member – her debate, really, was actually disingenuous.

Also, the point that I wanted to make here is that where the NDP, when they were in power, Mr. Chair, focused on adding more regulations and more hoops that Albertans had to jump through, tens of thousands of new hoops that they had to jump through. In fact, in my riding of Taber-Warner – at the time it was Cardston-Taber-Warner – how it affected our job creators in farming and ranching was devastating. And, in reality, it almost crippled that industry.

What's interesting about it is that when the farmers and ranchers had probably the largest display of displeasure in our history of Alberta, the NDP didn't understand, didn't understand why that

displeasure was there. But what we know is that Albertans want the government to leave them alone. I've heard that many, many times: get out of the way of our job creators, and they will do what they do best, create jobs and get Albertans back to work.

This is the thing that's different between the NDP and us: we actually do trust Albertans. We trust them to be good actors. There are some that are bad actors, but unfortunately what happened when the NDP were in there was that they actually created regulations that treated everybody as bad actors. That is the difference. We saw what happened in B.C. back in 2001, when they started, under Gordon Campbell, is that they recognized that you don't have to be prescriptive in the way that you approach regulatory burden. What they said was: have the lightest regulatory touch, but you also need to make sure that you have a strong response to those who are the bad actors. You do not want those bad actors, that pool to get bigger.

We have almost 20 years of evidence that you can actually reduce regulatory burden within a jurisdiction. Just to our west they actually reduced it in 10 years by 49 per cent, Mr. Chair. Did you see any of the NDP, any on that side say how it was unsafe or it was environmentally unfriendly? No. Because they can actually do it responsibly and carefully and safely, which is what we've seen here. We've had many bills come forward now that are red tape reduction bills, and we've proven that if you have political will, you can actually find these things whereas the NDP never found it, and they never even tried to find it. This is one of the reasons why they got an F, not just in the election but also with our job creators here.

5:00

The other thing that the hon. member was speaking about was how somehow this is undemocratic, the approach we're taking. I can't see how this is undemocratic. In fact, it's the opposite of that. We have over 7,000 submissions from regular Albertans that have come into our Cutting Red Tape alberta.ca website that have helped craft our response to be able to get rid of red tape responsibly. Mr. Chair, you don't get any more democratic than that. It came right from the people. They are living in the trenches. They are experiencing. They recognize how badly the NDP government added tens of thousands of these regulatory hoops that Albertans have to jump through, how bad that is to being able to actually start a business and work well in this province.

Mr. Chair, I can see why they could be concerned about this initiative, because it makes them look bad. It makes them look like they didn't do their job when they were four years in government. They focused on adding regulatory hoops. They were the puppet master. That's what they did. We're going to cut those strings. We're going to make sure that we set our businesses and our job creators free.

You know, Mr. Chair, the neat thing about getting rid of red tape is that it actually helps innovation. It helps our job creators look for ways of being innovative. It doesn't stop them from being innovative. These are the types of things that this bill helps to do.

Now, there was also another comment that was made where they were attacking the Minister of Culture, Multiculturalism and Status of Women for her addition to this bill. They said: this doesn't matter; it doesn't matter what they're doing. You know what, Mr. Chair? The reality is that every hoop that we get rid of helps at least someone in Alberta. For them to minimize the value to at least that little piece of the pie just goes to show how they're not listening to Albertans. They're not getting out there and actually listening to them.

Mr. Chair, I actually am very interested in hearing any more arguments or concerns that they might have with the bill. I would be very willing to be able to comment on them in the future.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. minister.

Are there any members? I believe I see the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

Member Ceci: Hello again, Mr. Chair. Thank you very much for the opportunity to stand up to debate this bill. Just a few things off the top. That CTF A-plus-plus that you keep talking about, you know, I want to remind you – oh, whoever it was; CFIB, CTF. I want to remind you that the C.D. Howe Institute gave this side when we were government an A for budgeting and transparency. I think it would be fair to say that the Auditor General recently gave that side and your Finance minister an F with regard to the \$1.67 billion in misdirected, mislabelled funds that he said weren't properly accounted for. You got an F on that, a most recent F, and we got As several years running with regard to the C.D. Howe. I'll put ours up against yours any day.

The other point that the associate minister made is that, you know, what's the big problem with an omnibus bill? I agree with my colleague from Calgary-Mountain View that it is omnibus. I look at the index that is in this Bill 48, and I can tell you that there are the Alberta Centennial Medal Act, the Animal Health Act, the Child, Youth and Family Enhancement Act, the Fatality Inquiries Act, Historical Resources Act, Land and Property Rights Tribunal Act, Land Titles Act, Maintenance Enforcement Act, Modernized Municipal Government Act – that's only part of them – New Home Buyer Protection Act, Post-secondary Learning Act, Professional and Occupational Associations Registration Act, and the Wills and Succession Act. Fourteen acts are amended by this. I would put that in the omnibus category. The argument that Bill 6 was pretty long: it was all in one area. It was called the farm safety act. One bill for one issue. We've got 14 here, and that's just the start. This is number two before us and before this Legislature.

I want to agree with my colleague that we are dealing with an omnibus. I think the MGA changes are the ones that I'm particularly interested in. I think they're the biggest, and it would've been probably better if the Minister of Municipal Affairs would have brought those forward on her own.

I want to take a few minutes to talk about what's in the MGA changes, starting on page 30 and going to – what? – 66. You know, it's quite hard to follow, I think, in terms of the changes. But I think those amendments with the MGA are the most significant and need to be dealt with separately. It would've been great, as I say, if the minister had brought those forward in one act and called it modernizing municipal government or something. It would also be good if there was some consultation with regard to the changes that are proposed there with urban and rural municipalities.

We did hear from the former Minister of Municipal Affairs, I think, when this was introduced or at second reading, where I believe he said, you know: my consultation was in the summer of 2019. That consultation included talking with the associations and municipalities and the developers and the association of planners. Then I looked at the web page for Municipal Affairs to see – regularly previous governments came up with what-we-heard documents. I don't see a what-we-heard document on that consultation. It may be there, but I can tell you that it's not easily found.

I just wonder why the rush to do such significant changes to the MGA, around section 640 in particular, are here before us. During times of COVID, where many planners are working from home and consultation among staff and council members is not ideal because it's all virtual, do municipalities around this province and planning partners around this province understand what's in this bill? My colleague made a really good point around: when you have a bill

like this, though 7,000 people weighed in on aspects of it, as we hear from the associate minister, do they really know what's in it?

Section 640 outlines the contents of the land-use bylaw for every municipality within the province. We know that. It provides a shopping list of the land-use contents to create a consistent approach throughout the province. The list of contents has been in the MGA for many, many decades and provides excellent guidance to all municipalities in the regulation of subdivision development within their jurisdictions. So why is section 640.1 being removed?

The concept of a land-use bylaw will change with the deletion of section 640 that's in here. There is a shift away from prescriptive content of the land-use bylaw. Currently the words are "must." That's used in the contents of the land-use bylaw. There is a list. It's a long list. That's going to be replaced by a shorter list which places an emphasis on design standards.

Also, the new wording is "may" versus that "must" that I mentioned in the old wording. This is a shift from the land-use bylaw that divides the municipality into districts with a list of uses. That new wording is – and I'll just give you a small sample of it, under (1.1). "A land use bylaw may prohibit or regulate and control the use and development of land and buildings in a municipality, including, without limitation, by," and then it's got a list of five different sections.

Section 640(4) is another shopping list from (a) to (r) regarding the contents of the land-use bylaw. This list is being removed. The contents of the land-use bylaw are being changed significantly with this omnibus legislation.

5:10

Again, the concept of a land-use bylaw, which has been in the Planning Act since 1978, is being changed without consultation, I would argue, with rural and urban municipalities and without any public consultation. It would be interesting to find out: of that 7,000 that the minister talks about, how many of those were the public talking about the specifics and the changes in the Municipal Government Act?

A new system as proposed will fundamentally shift the regulation of land and development in this province. Another question I could pose is: will there be a time frame by which all current land-use bylaw changes to the new shortened list of contents will be expected?

On to changes to the time to make a decision. These are critical to the substance of an amendment that I'll be putting shortly. Section 640.1 of the MGA sets the time frame to make a decision within the municipality through their land-use bylaw. The new changes will be dictated by a time frame in the MGA. The previous timelines will be in effect for six months, so you're giving a six-month grandfathering clause, essentially, with this, but by that time, after the six months are up, the municipality must follow the new 60-day decision date for substantive decisions. These may be easier for a lot of municipalities where they're small and they have a lower volume of subdivision and development applications, but the complexity of the subdivision and development applications has a direct correlation on the time it takes to process an application.

There are always circulation referees that comment on applications. During COVID circulation timelines have been protracted as staff are working from home, and it's difficult to discuss issues with colleagues and management for things like detailed team reviews and other processes.

There is not a one-size-fits-all approach to subdivision development applications, and this omnibus legislation, the MGA changes under 640.1, makes a one-size-fits-all approach. For instance, the complexity of a multistorey office building in an urban

setting will take more time to review and discuss with the applicant than an industrial building in perhaps the same urban setting. The new suburban subdivision of 600 residential parcels and a few parks and local shopping areas and a school will take longer to evaluate than a farmstead separation, for instance.

Why can't municipalities set their own timelines? Why can't we keep the enabling legislation that's in place for municipalities in the current Municipal Government Act in place? Why can't municipalities set their own time frames for those complex applications with the agreement of the developer or applicant? What's the rush? Development is necessary and vital to our economy. There's no doubt about that. It must be done thoroughly. Remember, we're building heritage buildings for the future. That's what's taking place under the development guidelines that are in place throughout the province.

Those are some of the comments I want to make with regard to the importance of the current Municipal Government Act timelines in place for development permits and subdivision approvals.

Lastly, I just want to finish off by saying, before I hand over this amendment, Mr. Chair, that I want to recognize that I'm not really sure where the information comes from with regard to the consultation with municipalities. That was done under the previous Municipal Affairs minister. He stood up and talked about that a week ago in response to some original debate that I had.

Mr. Chair, do you want me to – it's really brief. I can read it into the record.

The Deputy Chair: Yeah, absolutely. Just for the benefit of everybody here, it will be referred to as amendment A1 because it's the first.

Member Ceci: Which amendment is it called? A1?

The Deputy Chair: A1. Then for everybody's benefit, if you put up your hand, you can get one delivered. However, there will also be, of course, copies at the tables at both entrances.

Please, if the hon. member could . . .

Member Ceci: Right. Member Ceci to move that Bill 48, Red Tape Reduction Implementation Act, 2020 (No. 2) be amended in section 10 as follows: (a) by striking out subsection (29) and (30) and then (b) by striking out subsection (37)(a), and . . .

The Deputy Chair: Sorry to interrupt. I hesitate, but just to remind, in the future, because there are sometimes many amendments to several bills, when referring to the mover of the amendment, please refer to the riding. I realize it was just a slip, so please continue.

Member Ceci: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair, for reminding me of the protocol here.

I just want to finish off my time period by saying that on page 42 there is the first part of the amendment that I talked about, subsections (29) and (30). You can see where under this red tape reduction it's talking about removing important provisions of the application and completeness of development permits and application for subdivision approvals. There may be good reason why some municipalities take more time to do those, Mr. Chair, and we should let the more complex situations that exist in large urban centres have the opportunity to come up with alternative time periods for doing that. One size fits all won't work for large municipalities unless they're not doing the full job. The 20 days and 40 days that are identified in this bill are not in the best interests of good long-term planning.

The next section has to do with striking out subsection (37)(a), and that's at the bottom of page 48. It talks about "if applicable, in

accordance with the land use bylaw.” What it means is there may be an opportunity to extend time frames beyond what is talked about in this bill. I think I’ve outlined a good reason for municipalities to have that capability, and it’s always been in there for decades. The changes being proposed don’t benefit municipalities. They benefit stakeholders, who I think we know are the development industry by and large. I think there’s a tipping towards the development industry and away from municipalities being able to make good decisions and being able to work with the applicants that are before them.

Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any members wishing to join debate on amendment A1? I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-South has risen.

Mr. Dang: Thank you, Mr. Chair. It’s a pleasure to rise and speak to amendment A1 on Bill 48, Red Tape Reduction Implementation Act, 2020 (No. 2). As I get started here, I think it’s important to note that there are significant concerns that the opposition has with this bill. I’m thankful that my colleague from Calgary-Buffalo was able to introduce an amendment that makes the bill, perhaps, a little bit less bad.

I mean, I think that when we’re looking at omnibus legislation, I won’t belabour this point, but perhaps the associate minister needs a bit of a dictionary when it comes to what an omnibus piece of legislation is. It appears quite abundantly clear from his comments earlier that he doesn’t actually understand the definition of an omnibus piece of legislation. An omnibus piece of legislation, as we know, is something that addresses multiple pieces of legislation at once. It appears that the minister simply did not know that. That’s okay. I think that he should take the opportunity to perhaps educate himself and be prepared when he comes into this place with his prepared remarks.

5:20

Mr. Chair, when we look at this amendment and we look at this piece of legislation and the changes that are being brought forward in this legislation, we know that the changes to the MGA, the Municipal Government Act, are so substantial that they’re hidden in a way that is unfair to Albertans and unfair to municipalities, right? We know that the minister doesn’t understand what an omnibus piece of legislation is, but this is what happens when you create omnibus legislation. You happen to hide things inside, and you try to obfuscate the intent of your legislation.

Mr. Chair, I think that we’re looking at a very reasonable amendment, an amendment that strikes out changes that would involve municipalities giving up their ability to set their own development timelines, right? When the minister says it’s red tape to give the municipalities that level of authority, instead it looks like what the minister is obsessed with doing in this case is taking authority away from municipalities and attacking our municipalities and hurting our municipalities. I mean, I think it’s pretty clear and disappointing what the minister is doing here. He’s trying to hide through, again, what we call an omnibus piece of legislation, for the associate minister’s benefit, and it seems that perhaps the changes that are being made are a bit unfair.

Of course, Mr. Chair, we know that a one-size-fits-all approach will not work for the unique differences from municipality to municipality. We know that whether you’re in Fort McMurray or Lethbridge or Taber or Edmonton or Calgary, it turns out that there are local differences from community to community, from municipality to municipality. Those unique circumstances and those local differences are what cause the differences and necessity

for municipalities to have the ability and the authority to create changes themselves.

I mean, obviously, I think these are quite substantial changes. It is a substantive policy change that the Associate Minister of Red Tape Reduction, of course, is not administering, right? As I’ve mentioned in this place before, it does appear that the Associate Minister of Red Tape Reduction’s entire job appears to be to run from ministry to ministry, push all the paper together into one binder, one stack, and then present it as a bill. It appears as though in this case he’s gone to the Minister of Municipal Affairs, and he’s taken that piece of paper and moved it into his ministry’s office, created that extra regulatory burden, the extra bureaucracy, cut a couple of pieces out with some scissors, and then presented that as a bill for this place.

I mean, a paper-pushing errand boy appears to be what we’ve seen here in this place. It appears that the minister – because he’s not administering it. He’s not actually responsible for the MGA. He’s not actually responsible for implementing the changes because that’s not in his job description. Indeed, it doesn’t actually appear clear what his job description is at all, Mr. Chair.

Instead, it appears that what we’ve seen now is a significant change made in the middle of a global pandemic that is going to significantly and adversely affect the ability of municipalities to have their own development timelines, to be able to regulate their own industries and regulate development in their communities adequately. It appears to be hidden in the pages of this omnibus piece of legislation. Again, “omnibus,” by definition, is something that touches multiple acts. It appears that the minister thinks that it just means it’s a big bill, but that’s incorrect. The minister is wrong. The minister needs to look at a dictionary.

Perhaps, I think, certainly, the newly appointed Minister of Municipal Affairs should have brought these changes forward herself and should have done the proper consultation with municipalities and should not have relied on the errand boy to bring this forward to this place, should not have relied on the paper pusher to bring this forward into this place, and instead should have actually done the work required.

As we know, Mr. Chair, development is essential to our economy. Even the Finance minister knows that. The Finance minister and the Infrastructure minister have mentioned in this place that expanding development and expanding growth in this province, particularly during this pandemic, particularly during this global pandemic, are so vital to rejuvenating our economy, are so vital to making sure we keep Albertans working, are so vital to making sure there are jobs here in Alberta. Yet we see the Associate Minister of Red Tape Reduction making sweeping changes to development in municipalities, in the MGA, without the understanding and without actually consulting with municipalities on what those adverse effects would be. It’s taking the ability of municipalities to do their job away from them.

Mr. Chair, it’s pretty disappointing. I think it’s pretty upsetting that the minister is introducing this in this omnibus piece of legislation, that the minister (a) doesn’t understand what omnibus legislation is and (b) doesn’t understand what’s actually happening in this change. Of course, we know that the Associate Minister of Red Tape Reduction, by definition, is also not the Minister of Municipal Affairs, so why is the associate minister bringing this forward on behalf of that minister? I mean, it’s pretty disappointing because we should be seeing the proper consultation process being followed. We should be seeing local elected officials actually being consulted on this, local communities actually being consulted on this, actually having the engagement being done.

Mr. Chair, I think it’s pretty clear that at this point what we’ve seen is the associate minister go around, create extra red tape, create

extra burden in ministries in terms of having to go from minister and minister and compile all the papers together, go and ask them to put them all neatly into the binder for him, and then cut them up into little pieces. That appears to be what the minister has presented here, but because the minister, again, is not the Minister of Municipal Affairs, is not actually responsible for administering or implementing any of these changes, we are going to be unable to get fulsome answers on why these changes are necessary. Relieving what the minister claims is regulatory burden instead is actually going to adversely affect the ability of municipalities to control development within their own communities, which we know is something that municipalities and local elected officials should have the authority to do.

[Mr. Hanson in the chair]

Mr. Chair, when we look at this legislation, when we look at the impacts of this legislation, when we look at what the minister is actually presenting in the middle, again, of a global pandemic in which the Minister of Infrastructure and the Minister of Finance have already said that increasing our infrastructure spending, increasing and encouraging development in our communities is going to be a key part of our economic recovery strategy – and I would suggest that it's probably one of the only things this government got right when it comes to economic recovery, right? When we talk about economic recovery, this government gave \$4.7 billion away to profitable and wealthy corporations, and then what we got in return, before the pandemic began, was 50,000 jobs lost. Then after the pandemic, of course, and throughout the pandemic we've seen additional jobs being lost as well.

So, Mr. Chair, when the Finance minister and Infrastructure minister said that they were going to expand the infrastructure spending – and I think that's also a little bit misleading. They weren't expanding the infrastructure spend; they were accelerating the infrastructure spend, moving some of the money in the back years forward. When we saw the minister do that instead, that was perhaps the only thing they got right, this countercyclical investment. Actually having investment in communities for development would actually create jobs and would actually at least partially help negate the effects of the global recession.

Mr. Chair, when the Associate Minister of Red Tape Reduction, who, again, seems to be – his job seems to be to go from office to office and pick up, in this case, pieces from the Minister of Municipal Affairs and bring them back to his office and then put them into a bill together, which seems to me to be additional red tape and additional burden, additional work created in the ministry, additional busywork created in the ministry for this associate minister. What appears to be the case is that this minister has now actually reduced the ability of us to have municipalities involved in that development process, to have municipalities involved in making sure the infrastructure spends make sense for their communities, reducing the ability for locally elected officials to actually have that input in their local communities. I think that means, essentially, that the implementation being put forward here is not in line with the plan for economic recovery, one of the only parts of the plan for economic recovery that could possibly have positive impacts.

Again, it's very disappointing that the minister gets up in this place, cannot even properly define what an omnibus piece of legislation is when he's presenting a piece of omnibus legislation, and then, Mr. Chair, it's really disappointing that we see this piece of legislation that simply is a composition of different ministers', different ministries' work, going to different ministries and then compiling them and what appears to be, basically, a waste of

government resources. It appears to be a waste of government resources because this could have been a miscellaneous statutes amendment act.

In many cases I think that this would have been incredibly misleading. The MGA changes would have been incredibly misleading to put in a miscellaneous statutes amendment act. In the same way, it's incredibly disingenuous to put them into an omnibus piece of legislation like this because it hides those changes. It makes it difficult to parse out those changes. It makes it so that there wasn't a proper consultation process with municipalities for those changes. When we see this type of legislation introduced, when we see these types of changes being introduced in this manner, we believe that there's something underhanded going on.

I think it's pretty clear that the Associate Minister of Red Tape Reduction is unable to fulfill this because he's not going to be administering it himself, right? It simply isn't the case. The Associate Minister of Red Tape Reduction's job is indeed to create more busywork inside the government. It's to go from minister to minister and compile the paper together and, in this case, compile pieces of the MGA together and then cut them up. Mr. Chair, (a) the Municipal Affairs minister should have done that herself. That's literally why we have a Minister of Municipal Affairs. We've now created redundancy and additional red tape in government simply by having this minister even exist.

5:30

On top of that, it's very clear that the Associate Minister of Red Tape Reduction simply has no idea of the adverse impacts that are going to be created because the minister did not do any consultation, because the minister did not actually talk to municipal governments, did not actually talk to local elected officials, did not actually talk to CAOs, did not actually talk to city managers, did not actually talk to anybody involved in these decision-making processes. We know that because this is a misleading omnibus piece of legislation, right? It's an omnibus piece of legislation that obfuscates the intent and obfuscates the policies that are going to be changed.

When we look at this implementation, I think it's particularly concerning that this government, which purports to be a large "C" and a small "c" conservative government that wants to reduce red tape, instead has this minister bringing forward legislation that is basically additional busywork in the government. Mr. Chair, it appears that the government was successful in creating one job; they created the associate minister of red tape. So they were successful in creating at least one job, the associate minister of red tape. Unfortunately, it looks like the associate minister of red tape happens to just be paper-pushing around from other ministers' offices.

In this case, in the MGA, with the Minister of Municipal Affairs, I'm particularly concerned with why the Ministry of Municipal Affairs was not bringing this forward themselves, why the new Minister of Municipal Affairs did not do the legwork required in terms of consulting with communities, in terms of consulting with CAOs, with city managers, with elected officials, whether that's reeves, mayors, councillors, or otherwise, Mr. Chair.

I think that's certainly essential when we look at these changes, when we look at development and infrastructure spending inside of a province like this in the middle of a global pandemic, when this government is giving \$4.7 billion away to profitable, wealthy corporations, which, again, resulted in 50,000 jobs lost before the pandemic even began. Now we know that there are over 260,000 Albertans that are currently out of work. Infrastructure spending and development is essential as part of the economic recovery strategy, right? That's why this government even accelerated some

of the timelines, and they said that they expanded the infrastructure spending. I don't think that's true. They move the back years forward again, so, I mean, it's a little bit disingenuous from this government.

But then we see changes like this, where they're actually taking decisions away from local government, and they're actually taking decisions away from municipalities to, you know, determine what type of development works for them. Mr. Chair, again, the same type of timeline will not work if it's in Taber or Boyle or Barrhead or Edmonton or Calgary or Leduc county or Fort McMurray. It turns out that all these communities are different. They're geographically different, they're administratively different, they have different people involved, they have different projects involved, and it turns out that if we want to work on these things, we need to enable the municipalities to make decisions on their own. So what this minister is actually doing, what the Associate Minister of Red Tape Reduction is doing is that by cutting up the MGA, he has actually created a situation that will adversely affect the ability and will adversely affect and degrade the authority of municipalities. It will actually diminish the authority of local elected officials.

For a government that claims to respect communities, that claims to respect local governance, it doesn't make any sense to me that this government would then on the other hand also diminish and remove authority from those municipal governments. Of course, I mean, the Associate Minister of Red Tape Reduction, again, simply is compiling the information from other ministers and is simply going to other offices and moving the papers around and putting them into one big binder together. I mean, of course, when we look at how it was obfuscated in this omnibus piece of legislation, when we look at how it was hidden in this omnibus piece of legislation and why there was no adequate consultation done and why there was no work in terms of working with municipalities done on this, it's very clear that the associate minister simply is in over his head.

When they created the errand boy position, when they created this position that exists only to move paper around, only to create additional government work, only to create additional bureaucratic work, create additional red tape within the government, when they created this ministry, they surely couldn't have considered that the associate minister would make some wide-sweeping changes, that the associate minister would go in and create such adversely affecting positions on the MGA.

They could have anticipated that, and the Minister of Municipal Affairs, I think perhaps, should have gone out and done a proper consultation on this, should have gone out and introduced this as their own piece of legislation, should have gone out and actually talked to reeves, mayors, councillors, CAOs, and city managers, actually gone and understood what this would mean in terms of development, what this would mean in terms of infrastructure spending, what this would mean in terms of economic impact.

Mr. Chair, the insistence of this government, the insistence of the UCP, the insistence of the associate minister to attack municipalities and take away the ability of municipalities to do their jobs, to actually use their authority to do their jobs: it doesn't make any sense. It's simply wrong, and it simply doesn't make any sense that the government, instead of having the Minister of Municipal Affairs, whose literal job description includes administering the MGA, would hand this off to the errand boy, whose job is to compile papers together, right? That's the most shocking thing – right? – that they've created this ministry to . . .

Mr. Ellis: Point of order.

The Acting Chair: Point of order noted.

Point of Order Allegations against a Member

Mr. Ellis: Mr. Chair, you know what? I believe that you have offered a lot of latitude. I rise under 23(h), (i), and (j), "makes allegations against another Member," "imputes false or unavowed motives [against] another Member." You know, he just finished calling the hon. member and associate minister an errand boy. He's mentioned that he's a paper-pushing errand boy, that he's not a real minister, that he's attacking municipalities. I think there's been a lot of latitude as we get closer to the dinner hour, but there comes a certain point where it really is not a matter of debate in this House but more of a time period for which this member is just insulting other members within this House, which I think is completely disrespectful. In fact, I would argue that he needs to apologize to the hon. minister and, if he can even remember, begin to withdraw many of the insulting comments that he's made over this period of time.

Thank you.

The Acting Chair: The Member for Calgary-McCall.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I do understand that my colleague has used that word; however, we have a bill before us which puts together 15, 16 pieces of legislation from different ministries, and every time the minister has risen on this, we haven't heard anything substantial on these changes. We don't know how they will be enforced, so quite frankly the member is referring to the fact that the minister is just collecting this information, putting it together. He's still not responsible for its enforcement. As offensive as it may sound to the member or the minister, I don't think it's a point of order.

The Acting Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

I'm prepared to rule on that. I actually agree with the government House whip. I was on the verge of stopping the conversation, or the debate, if you can call it that, at that point. I've only been in the chair about seven minutes, and I've heard the minister being called an errand boy about six times as well as when I was watching it from inside the lounge. Now, Bill 48 is 143 pages. I would suggest to the member that there's plenty of material to discuss in there without taking personal attacks at the minister. If you're not prepared to do so, I'll move on to the next speaker.

Mr. Dang: Mr. Chair, I would happily withdraw my comments.

Debate Continued

Mr. Dang: Mr. Chair, I think that when we talk about the MGA changes, when we talk about the substantive changes in this legislation, when we talk about how it's being implemented, we see this massive omnibus legislation – this massive omnibus legislation – that simply the associate minister of red tape is unable to comment on because, again, we see that it's an MGA change that needs the actual consultation, that needs the actual work in terms of understanding why the changes make it so that there are 20 days to determine whether a development permit application is complete and then 40 additional days to approve or deny it. Those types of policy changes, those prescriptive policy changes are the responsibility, by definition, of the Minister of Municipal Affairs, right?

Instead of having the Minister of Municipal Affairs present this information and do the consultation and talk to city managers and talk to city councillors and talk to municipalities and talk with local elected officials, what we see is a government that continues to attack municipalities, a government that continues to on one hand give \$4.7 billion away to profitable and wealthy corporations while they say that they want to encourage investment, while they say that they want

to accelerate their infrastructure spending, while they say that they want to do these things that will help rejuvenate the economy in the middle of a global economic recession, in the middle of a global pandemic. Instead of doing that, we see the Associate Minister of Red Tape Reduction here bringing forward a piece of legislation that does obfuscate these changes and then adversely affects the ability to actually implement them – right? – that actually adversely affects the ability of the Minister of Infrastructure and the Minister of Finance to implement the changes, that actually adversely affects municipalities' ability to have the authority that they deserve to control development timelines in their own communities.

Again, Mr. Chair, when you look at communities from southern Alberta to northern Alberta to central Alberta, they're going to be different. They're going to have different situations. The elected officials are going to want different things, the communities are going to want different things, and the residents are going to want different things.

Mr. Chair, when we look at these policies, when we look at how they've been implemented, it doesn't make any sense that instead of bringing this forward in its own piece of legislation, which would have allowed proper consultation, which would have allowed the minister who's actually responsible for this – again, the MGA is not under the purview of the Associate Minister of Red Tape Reduction. The MGA is not under that purview. The MGA should be and deserves its own consultation, deserves its own process by the minister that's responsible for administering it.

5:40

Mr. Chair, when we see the associate minister bring this forward in a massive omnibus piece of legislation, it simply seems to serve the purpose of obfuscating these changes, to hide these changes from Albertans, to not have daylight shown on these changes, right? It simply doesn't make any sense. It simply doesn't make any sense that the associate minister would bring this forward. It simply doesn't make any sense that the associate minister would bring this forward without having done the proper work in terms of having ensured the Minister of Municipal Affairs had done the consultation. It simply doesn't make any sense that the associate minister would bring this change forward and then not include policy pieces around consultation, around why it was implemented, around these types of changes. It simply doesn't make sense, because we know development is essential.

Chair's Ruling

Allegations against a Member

The Acting Chair: Thank you very much, Member.

Just before we carry on, I want to make it very clear. It seems that I have to get in the habit of doing this every time I'm in the chair lately. I will not tolerate personal attacks. There's plenty of material in these bills that we can discuss and have proper debate on. Because we're in Committee of the Whole, you'll have many opportunities to speak again to this bill if we carry on with it. If you continue with personal attacks, I'll move on to the next speaker, and that goes for everybody, on both sides. Thank you.

Is there anybody else wishing to speak to amendment A1? The Associate Minister of Red Tape Reduction.

Debate Continued

Mr. Hunter: Mr. Chair, I appreciate the opportunity to just respond to a couple of the questions that were stated over and over again. The question that was asked, really, was about, well, a couple of things. Number one, first of all, the member said that I don't know what "omnibus" means. I'd like to be able to just help him see that

I do and that what we're doing here is actually good for Albertans. "Omnibus" is derived from the Latin and means two, four, bi, with, or from everything. An omnibus bill is a single document that is accepted in a single vote by a Legislature but packages together several measures into one or combines diverse subjects.

This is exactly what we're providing, an opportunity to be able to get rid of hoops that Albertans have to jump through. We have to get rid of one-third. We promised Albertans in the last election that we'd get rid of one-third. There are 670,000 of those hoops that we have to be able to reduce by one-third. This is going to take a lot of work, and as the member rightly said, this is truly a government-wide initiative. Fantastic. We're not going to apologize for that. The truth is that each minister works very hard, even the Minister of Culture, Multiculturalism and Status of Women, who the members opposite were ridiculing for her part. She took it seriously. She recognized that any piece that they can bring forward to be able to get rid of those hoops is what we need to do.

Mr. Chair, that is exactly what the initiative is about. If the hon. members want to call me names – you have to have that leadership. You have to have that associate ministry. We didn't create a ministry; we created an associate ministry. We wanted to keep it small and nimble, but we wanted to make sure that there was someone that was going to have a mandate to be able to get rid of the one-third so that at some point we can go back to Albertans and say that we accomplished it or we didn't accomplish it. That's what we've done with these bills.

Now, remember that we've said that we did do consultation. The consultation was done with the representatives from the city of Calgary, the city of Edmonton, elected officials in the administrative municipal associations, the Alberta Professional Planners Institute, and the Building Industry Land Development Association. Mr. Chair, it was sad to hear the hon. member say that these are just stakeholders. That's not true. These are job creators. These are the actual people that put it all on the line to be able to create jobs. This goes to show, again, the disrespect that the NDP had and still have to this day for our job creators.

I remember when I was in opposition, and they would say: we really wish that they would be able to go after the 185,000 jobs, the unemployment numbers. Then they would go and attack our job creators. Well, no wonder they weren't able to do what they needed to do. They added tens of thousands of hoops that these job creators had to jump through, to the point where they drove them out of this province, and for them not to understand that is shameful.

The consultation was done. It was done, actually, in December 2020. There was also good feedback that was brought forward, and there were virtual meetings that were also provided, so the consultation did happen. I have no problems being able to speak to the questions that were asked over and over and over again by the member, but if there are any substantive questions that the members have to ask, I would be very interested in hearing those.

With that, Mr. Chair, I would like to have the committee rise and report Bill 45 and report progress on Bill 48.

[Motion carried]

[Mr. Hanson in the chair]

Mr. Horner: Mr. Speaker, the Committee of the Whole has had under consideration certain bills. The committee reports the following bill: Bill 45. The committee reports progress on the following bill: Bill 48. 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.

Having heard the report, are we agreed?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Acting Speaker: Any opposed? Thank you. It's carried.

Government Bills and Orders Second Reading

Bill 46

Health Statutes Amendment Act, 2020 (No. 2)

Ms Ganley moved that the motion for second reading of Bill 46, Health Statutes Amendment Act, 2020 (No. 2), be amended by deleting all of the words after "that" and substituting the following:

Bill 46, Health Statutes Amendment Act, 2020 (No. 2), be not now read a second time because the Assembly is of the view that it jeopardizes the confidential health information of Albertans by failing to put adequate safeguards in place for the use of that information.

[Adjourned debate on the amendment November 30: Ms Ganley]

The Acting Speaker: Any speakers wishing to speak to Bill 46? I'll recognize the Member for Edmonton-City Centre.

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the opportunity to rise and speak to the reasoned amendment put forward by my colleague the Member for Calgary-Mountain View, recognizing that, indeed, this is not a bill that should be proceeding. Now, we have spoken at great length about the considerable concerns that have been brought forward by the Information and Privacy Commissioner regarding this particular bill. One of the very serious concerns which she indeed brought forward is around the area of expressed wishes. Now, to be clear, these are the words of the commissioner: "An Albertan's expressed wishes are currently met where an authorized custodian decides to limit the information made available, by applying a global mask to the individual's health information."

Basically, Mr. Speaker, the expressed wishes are an Albertan's ability to say: I do not want my information accessed. They can file a request with the government of Alberta and ask that if someone is given permission to access health information from the province of Alberta, depersonalized or otherwise anonymized, they can still choose to have their information excluded. This is an incredibly important provision. This goes right to the core of the rights of every single Albertan, rights that this government has said that they consider to be utterly paramount, to the point that they are willing to skate up to the line of jeopardizing public health out of respect for rights.

That is the standard they claim they have set, yet these changes to the Health Information Act contained within Bill 46 would limit this right of Albertans. What it says here, what the commissioner notes is: "The proposed section 56.4(2) would impose limitations on expressed wishes, in accordance with yet to be drafted regulations."

5:50

There are two areas on which she expresses real concern here. One is that it appears that the expressed wishes requirement does not apply to a health service provider located outside of Alberta. That would lead to a lower standard of protection and control of health information for an Albertan who receives a health service from a health service provider outside of Alberta. To be clear, Mr. Speaker, one of the other provisions of this bill is that it gives the Health minister, him personally, the ability to make Albertans' health information available to providers outside of the province of Alberta. So we have a bill which makes that possible but provides

no protection, no guarantee for Albertans who have given their expressed wish that their information be not accessed, that it not be made available. This bill takes that protection away.

The bill also repeals, she says here, section 107(6.1), the section that makes it an offence for a person to use masked health information in contravention of the provision. Now, the effect of that, she says, "is untested at this time," that it is possible that it could be addressed later, but there is no provision here to protect that. She says that it is her view that the specificity of this particular section reflects the seriousness of not respecting an Albertan's expressed wishes that their information be masked. She notes that this "expressed wishes provision is extremely important to the [proper] operation of Netcare" and that "without being able to consent, this is the last measure of control an Albertan has over what health information is made available via Netcare."

Again, we have here a situation where this government claims that the rights of individual Albertans are absolutely paramount for them. That is the highest order. That is the most important consideration when they are making a decision or crafting legislation or indeed enforcing a public health order, yet what we have here is that they are taking the expressed will of Albertans, the right for Albertans to say, "My health information is mine and mine alone, and I do not wish it to be used for any other purpose," and they are putting that at risk, potentially to parties outside the province of Alberta, over whom the Information and Privacy Commissioner has no jurisdiction.

For a government that claims to hold Albertans' rights so sacrosanct, you would think they would put something in the legislation itself to provide this protection. Perhaps it's because they failed to actually consult with the Information and Privacy Commissioner that they missed this. Perhaps it was an oversight because they did not actually sit down and talk to the person who has the expertise, but she has at least corrected that error on the part of the government, Mr. Speaker, and provided that suggestion to the government that they close that loophole.

Actually, what she suggests, Mr. Speaker, is that they engage in "detailed consultation [to] be held with the [actual] health service providers and my office on this amendment and the development of related regulations," so all of the stakeholders involved. Indeed, I would note for the benefit of the minister of reduction of red tape that these stakeholders are also job creators, yet they are not considered worthy of consultation on a piece of legislation which has sweeping impact on how they conduct their work, on something that impacts the very privacy rights of every single Albertan, which is why I support this reasoned amendment, because this government has not done its homework. They have not done their due diligence. They haven't even approached the work that should have been done before this bill ever came anywhere near the floor of this Legislature.

It is very clear that there are serious issues in potentially overriding, stripping away this core and fundamental right for Albertans in terms of their personal, private health information, their ability to say: that information, even when anonymized, even when masked, I do not wish to be accessed by anyone other than the health care provider whom I am directly authorizing to provide me care. I find that incredibly concerning, Mr. Speaker. It shows, I think, that this government is very selective as to which rights it wishes to enforce or which rights it considers paramount. It is certainly willing to look the other way when they feel it is convenient for them.

I cannot believe, Mr. Speaker, that any member of this government, that any of the private members who sit here in this Chamber would choose to support this bill simply on the say-so of

their minister when the clear representative, the independent officer of the Legislature, who is the expert in this legislation, is levelling such a clear warning, when she is clearly stating that this bread is half baked, that this homework is not done, that they are fundamentally abrogating the rights of Albertans. Indeed, I think that for any elected representative in this House to allow this legislation to go forward when the commissioner has been so incredibly clear about the many flaws and the many things that stand to be addressed, that is a failure of their duty to the people that they were elected to represent here.

I think that if you were to sit and talk with any Albertan and say, "Look at this; look at everything that this commissioner has identified as being an issue with this bill; do you want me to vote for this bill to go through?" I'm fairly sure that any constituent you sat down and explained that to would say no, Mr. Speaker, which is why I am appreciative that my colleague brought forward this amendment that this bill not be moved forward, that it not continue at this time. I think that is the least we owe Albertans.

I guess, should we see this House decide not to move that forward, then I look forward to bringing forward some amendments to try to make this very bad bill, hopefully, a little better since this government seems to be indicating – and it seems that private members from the government may choose to support forgoing the kind of robust and in-depth consultation that would be rightfully owed to Albertans before making such profound changes to legislation that affects their private health information so very deeply. That is the least we owe our constituents, Mr. Speaker. Certainly, as the Official Opposition critic for Health that is the very least that I could be doing right now, standing in this House and pointing out these issues and agreeing with my colleague.

The Acting Speaker: I hesitate to interrupt, members, but the House will stand adjourned until 7:30 this evening.

[The Assembly adjourned at 6 p.m.]

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