



Province of Alberta

The 30th Legislature
Second Session

Alberta Hansard

Tuesday afternoon, April 20, 2021

Day 100

The Honourable Nathan M. Cooper, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta The 30th Legislature

Second Session

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New Democrat: 24

Independent: 1

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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Tuesday, April 20, 2021

[The Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

The Speaker: Lord, the God of righteousness and truth, grant to our Queen and to her government, to Members of the Legislative Assembly, and to all in positions of responsibility the guidance of Your spirit. May they never lead the province wrongly through love of power, desire to please, or unworthy ideas but, laying aside all private interest and prejudice, keep in mind their responsibility to seek to improve the condition of all.

Please be seated.

Members' Statements

Affordable Child Care

Ms Pancholi: Mr. Speaker, we have a real opportunity in this province. Yesterday's federal budget included a landmark commitment of \$30 billion over five years for early learning and child care. This is a significant investment. It can change lives and transform our economy and who has the opportunity to participate in it fully. I want to take a moment and acknowledge the outpouring of emotion and joy being felt by women right across Alberta. I want to take a moment to congratulate and pay tribute to the generations of women before me who have fought for this for decades. It is on their behalf that I intend to lead the charge to push this Premier and this government to act.

We know the uphill fight to convince this government to put aside its ideology isn't easy. This government recently cancelled the \$25-per-day child care pilot program launched by the NDP, abandoning working parents, children, educators, and operators. This was a move in the wrong direction. Just last night the Minister of Finance and the Minister of Children's Services put out statements relying on the tired fiction of parent choice and saying that they would only play ball with the federal government if the UCP has flexibility over how the funding is used. Here's the thing. Their approach won't work. What has been done by Conservative governments for decades when it comes to child care and what the UCP is advocating for doesn't work. Instead, we'll continue to see tens of thousands of women unable to participate in the workforce and help grow the economy. We'll see children left behind. This government is calling for flexibility because it doesn't want to support affordable child care for all. This is despite the evidence and studies by so many economists, bankers, and experts that have all come to one conclusion: there is no economic recovery without affordable child care.

The issues surrounding child care became more apparent during this COVID-19 pandemic, but they existed long before. If this government is serious about supporting Albertans through the unprecedented challenges they currently face, then I call on them to put their money where their mouth is, work with the federal government to make affordable child care for all a reality, and help us build Alberta's future.

Thank you.

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

National Volunteer Week

Ms Glasgo: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. National Volunteer Week will be celebrated from April 18 to 24 in communities across the province. This year's theme is the Value of One, the Power of Many. This theme reflects on the awe-inspiring acts of kindness by millions of individuals and the magic that happens when we work together towards a common purpose. From seniors to the very young, from new Canadians to those who have called Alberta home for generations, Alberta's volunteers reflect the rich diversity of the province, with volunteers representing every demographic group. In fact, many newcomers to Alberta and Canada get involved as volunteers as a way to learn about, build relationships in, and contribute to their new community.

Volunteers are such a gift to our community. Their work truly comes from the heart, Mr. Speaker. I saw this in action when I visited the Medicine Hat food bank on Friday to build hampers and lend a hand. The food bank was abuzz with smiling, generous, energetic citizens donating their morning to serve those who need help the most. Volunteers like the ones in Brooks-Medicine Hat don't want special recognition. They donate their time, talent, and resources with no incentive other than the kindness in their hearts. But I think they deserve all the recognition that they can get, and during National Volunteer Week is the perfect time to recognize the care and compassion of these amazing Albertans.

There are many ways to thank a volunteer. You can nominate an outstanding youth, adult, or senior volunteer in your community for a Stars of Alberta volunteer award, recognize an everyday hero through the Alberta northern lights volunteer recognition program, and highlight individuals, teams, or projects by sharing volunteer stories on social media or other platforms. You could send them a personalized thank you. You could write a reference letter for a volunteer who is applying for a job.

If anybody wants to get in on the volunteer action, I encourage them to visit the Alberta Cares Connector at volunteerconnector.org to find out about opportunities near them. Mr. Speaker, Alberta has some of the highest rates of volunteers in Canada, and that is something to be proud of.

Happy National Volunteer Week.

Federal Carbon Tax

Mr. Stephan: Mr. Speaker, the March 25 decision of the Supreme Court is concerning. It confers a fiscal power on Ottawa ripe for abuse. Under the guise of an authority to impose a carbon tax, Ottawa can inflict harm on Alberta businesses and families. This is a constitutional Trojan Horse. Similar to equalization, carbon taxes can be used to leverage de facto transfer payments and power from Alberta to favour political power bases in the east. This decision will embolden the Trudeau Liberals. Their carbon tax is \$40 a tonne. They plan to increase it each year to \$170 a tonne. How will this impact the competitiveness of our oil and gas industry? How about the impact on Alberta families and businesses? Crickets.

Mr. Speaker, let's be honest. Carbon taxes are as much political as they are environmental. If Quebec was an oil and gas jurisdiction, Ottawa would never impose these carbon taxes. This is a troubled partnership. Entrenched interests benefiting from it will seek to impede efforts by Alberta for fairness. What shall we do?

We must prepare for the future, and we must increase self-reliance from a rudderless federal government, morally challenged and now fiscally bankrupt, without a principled vision of hope. Yet we are

free to act for ourselves and can trust in the truth, that small and simple things can be magnified into great outcomes.

Thank you.

Premier's Remarks on COVID-19

Mr. Nielsen: I will start by stating some basic facts about COVID-19. It is not the flu. It has affected both the young and old. Our homeless population is not immune. Those infected with COVID-19 are sick. Keeping our schools safe will require more than having teachers tidy up. It's dangerous and must be taken seriously. These are the essential facts, essential because from the start of this pandemic the Premier has argued against each of these points. At every single chance this Premier has used his position to dismiss the seriousness of COVID-19, from the start of this pandemic, where the Premier six times in one day called COVID-19 the flu, to this week, where the Premier invented a birthday party rather than admit schools might not be safe.

Albertans have been looking for serious leadership during this pandemic, and they have been disappointed time and time again by this Premier. They look to him to support them with the restrictions and were disappointed with his paltry response, that has caused thousands of small businesses to struggle. They look to him to show leadership with our health care heroes, only to see him wage war with them during the first and second waves and plan to fire 11,000 front-line workers. They look to him to lead by example, only to watch him sign off on tropical vacations during Christmas while everyone else was told to stay home. They look to him to lead his caucus and party, only to watch him defend the selfish, reckless actions of 17 of his caucus over the health and well-being of Albertans.

From day one he has made unsubstantiated, unscientific claims, and when called on it, he blames everyone else, from the unknown briefers, who he blames for his invented birthday party in Athabasca, to members of the media, who he accuses of bashing Albertans. For a Premier who claims that he's responsible for the government response, I certainly can't find him taking responsibility at a time when we need real leadership.

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

Mental Health

Mr. Singh: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This past year has been a difficult one for all Albertans. Faced with increased isolation and a lack of community support, many Albertans have felt that their mental health has been negatively impacted. Albertans have been forced to adjust to a new normal. For many, this means setting up an office at home, attending online school, or meeting with loved ones virtually. This has been the new normal, but that doesn't mean that it is ideal.

While we look forward to a new year and a gradual return to how things were before, we need to acknowledge the challenges that Albertans currently face, particularly in maintaining their mental health. Albertans have made great strides recently to destigmatize asking for help and to encourage healing for mental health. This is very important because a person's mental health can influence every aspect of their lives.

1:40

Mr. Speaker, I'm also happy to recognize that Alberta's government has provided many mental health supports to the province this past year. Through the mental health and addiction COVID-19 community funding grant organizations have been able to apply for funding to enable them to serve their communities'

needs and provide spiritual and mental health support to others. Alberta Health Services, too, provides resources and support for those in need. This includes the 24/7 Health Link line, that Albertans can access by dialing 811, and also includes the addiction helpline, mental health helpline that Albertans can access through the Alberta Health Services website. I encourage everyone in need to use the supports that are provided by the Alberta government and by AHS.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-McCall is next.

COVID-19 Impact on Education

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Some days it's as if the Minister of Education doesn't even talk to parents, students, teachers, and school staff. She actually had the audacity to stand in this House yesterday and claim that COVID-19 has not affected the learning of students for 99.6 per cent of Alberta students. I was floored. I couldn't believe the words coming out of her mouth.

Perhaps if she talked to families in my constituency, in Fort McMurray, in Sherwood Park, she would realize that nearly 90,000 students are currently being forced to learn from home because the government sat on its hands last summer and did nothing to prepare for the second and third waves of COVID-19. Perhaps if she talked to teachers, she would realize that so many continue to do their jobs in fear of variant strains discovered in their schools, that they continue to do all they can to keep themselves and their students safe, but they are stretched far too thin.

Perhaps the minister would be reminded that she fired 20,000 educational assistants at the outset of this pandemic, and those staff would help so greatly right now as schools attempt to maintain social distancing and proper hygiene. Perhaps if the minister talked to school staff, she would realize that funding support for school PPE and cleaning supplies ran out long ago, and so much more support is needed just to allow for basic cleaning of schools. And perhaps if she talked to parents now at home with their kids, she would understand the need for a proper Alberta learn-from-home fund to help pay for the additional costs being piled onto household budgets that are already stretched.

Perhaps this minister should do her job and talk to Albertans. This is not the time for her to stand in this House and pat herself on the back. She hasn't done the job at all.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Keyano College Flood Mitigation

Ms Goodridge: Last spring Fort McMurray experienced a 1-in-100-year flood that caused extensive damage to businesses, homes, critical infrastructure throughout the area, including at Keyano College. With the spring river break-up upon us again, protecting critical infrastructure is priority number one in Fort McMurray.

Last week I had the opportunity to meet with Keyano College to discuss some of the steps they are taking to protect themselves against potential flooding. During their meeting I learned that Keyano has decided to use an innovative, Alberta-based company, Tiger Dam, to help provide flood mitigation and protections.

The Tiger Dam flood barrier is a leading-edge system that can be quickly deployed in the event of an emergency by using flexible, water-filled bladders to block flood waters. Each dam is reusable, and it replaces about 500 sandbags and is half the price of sandbags on first use.

Keyano will be deploying the Tiger Dam system for the first time this month, in time for the river break-up. The company Tiger Dam has employees on scene providing training to the Keyano employees

to teach them how to safely deploy this system. It's spectacular to see Keyano College taking flood mitigation so seriously. Part of their emergency preparedness will also include an annual deployment of the Tiger dams that will be timed with the spring river break-up.

Keyano will continue their collaborative efforts with Alberta Advanced Education, Alberta Infrastructure, the Alberta Emergency Management Agency, and the regional municipality of Wood Buffalo on finding longer term solutions for flood mitigation.

During my visit I was also made an honorary member of the Keyano College Huskies athletics and was even presented with a jersey with my name on the back. Keyano College does so much for our community and our region, and I'm happy to know that they are taking proactive steps to protect one of the pillars of our community. Go, Huskies, go.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek.

COVID-19 Community Response

Mr. Gotfried: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today with hope and measured confidence that Albertans will do what we are more than capable of, pulling together during difficult times. Yes, we're in the middle of a public health emergency and an economic crisis, and all of us in this Chamber need to be committed to a common goal.

We need to work together and build on the strength of character that has been a hallmark of our great province, and we must turn the wave of negative energy that seems to be threatening to overwhelm us into positive action for Albertans. Can we blame ourselves or others for a global virus? No. But we can all work together to invoke our famous prairie work ethic, can-do attitude, and sense of community spirit, that just a few short generations ago cleared fields, raised barns, and took care of neighbours in need. People – yes, people – working together are the real Alberta advantage, not the divisiveness that seems to be gripping too many, including those of us privileged enough to represent in this Chamber. We've seen throughout history that Albertans are indeed stronger together in seizing opportunity, overcoming adversity, and building not only the lives and livelihoods we collectively seek but a compassionate and civil society, now and for future generations.

But it is clear that COVID fatigue has set in, and many Albertans are moving from impatience to frustration to anger. Yes, our hope is that we are indeed in the final battle of a long and arduous war against this devastating virus, but we must not give up. Long-awaited vaccines are being dispensed while the Herculean efforts of the dedicated souls in our seniors and health care community provide us with hope and light at the end of the tunnel. Each of us as Albertans holds the key to turning to positive action through selflessness, personal responsibility, compassion, volunteerism, collaboration, and respectful discourse. I challenge each and every one of us inside and outside of this Chamber to learn from generations past as we all recommit to doing our part in keeping Alberta strong, healthy, and free.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster-Wainwright.

Red Tape Reduction

Mr. Rowswell: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Lately there's been a lot of doom and gloom in this House, and today I'd like to stand up and talk about something positive for a change. One of our platform commitments in 2019 was to reduce the burden of red tape on Albertan entrepreneurs and businesses by one-third by the time our term was up, in 2023. This was definitely an ambitious goal given

the impressive amount of red tape the NDP managed to wrap around the province during their four-year term. Well, I am pleased to report that we have to date reduced the red tape in this province by just over 16 per cent and are well on our way to achieving that one-third reduction goal.

Allow me to highlight four specific accomplishments within the current 16 per cent reduction obtained. First, we modernized liquor by giving responsible Albertans and Alberta businesses more options when choosing to purchase, consume, and produce alcohol. Second, we updated regulations to eliminate more than 15,000 outdated provincial commercial carrier permits without affecting safety on Alberta roads. Third, we streamlined the child care subsidy application process by replacing paper forms and phone calls with an up-to-date, easy-to-use online system, that'll save Albertan taxpayers approximately \$1.1 million per year. Finally, we brought in electronic pink cards in order to make both physical and digital pink cards a valid form of proof of insurance.

Our efforts have not gone unnoticed, with the Canadian Federation of Independent Business giving Alberta an A on its 2020 report card. Given the fiscal impacts of COVID-19 it is critical that we make it as easy as possible for businesses to operate, create jobs, and drive Alberta's economy forward. To support Alberta's economic recovery, we will continue to cut red tape and get out of the way of our job creators and our innovators.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Presenting Reports by Standing and Special Committees

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

Mr. Ellis: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. As chair of the Standing Committee on Private Bills and Private Members' Public Bills I'm pleased to table the committee's final report on Bill 214. That's the Eastern Slopes Protection Act, sponsored by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona. The bill was referred to the committee on April 7, 2021. The report recommends that Bill 214 proceed. I request concurrence of the Assembly in the final report on Bill 214.

Thank you, sir.

The Speaker: Hon. members, the motion for concurrence in the report on Bill 214, Eastern Slopes Protection Act, is a debatable motion pursuant to Standing Order 18(1)(b). Are there any members wishing to speak to concurrence? Having seen members wishing to speak to the motion in concurrence of the report, that debate will take place on the next available Monday under the item of business Motions for Concurrence in Committee Reports on Public Bills Other than Government Bills.

1:50

Oral Question Period

The Speaker: The Leader of Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition has the call.

COVID-19 Vaccine Rollout and Paid Leave for Employees

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I know that question period isn't always the friendliest of exchanges in the House, but today I'd like to try bucking the trend for a moment and provide the Premier with an opportunity to work together and make a difference for Albertans. Right now we need to do everything we can to get vaccines into the arms of Albertans, full stop. In B.C. the government just proposed legislation to ensure that employees are entitled to three

paid hours if they have to leave work to get their shot. Saskatchewan did the same a month ago. Front-line workers need this in Alberta, too. Would the Premier agree to work with us to pass this legislation here?

The Speaker: The hon. the Premier.

Mr. Kenney: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the constructive spirit in which the hon. Leader of the Opposition makes that suggestion, and I think it's a very constructive one. I've just heard of the suggestion earlier today. I'd like to consult with officials and colleagues in Executive Council, but I'm certainly open to the idea. I would implore all employers – I think it's clearly in their interests to ensure that their workforce is vaccinated. They shouldn't have to be compelled by legislation, but if there are some employers who are not doing the right thing in providing that time for vaccination as necessary, I will certainly be open to consider working with the Leader of the Opposition on this.

The Speaker: The Leader of the Opposition.

Ms Notley: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. That's really good news. We know that we don't want people right now to be logging in to book their appointments just to find that the only spots left are ones they simply can't miss work for. We don't believe a single Albertan should miss their shot because they feel they can't afford it. We know the variants won't wait for a vacation day. The legislation put forward in B.C. is a good idea, and interestingly it had the support of labour groups and also employer groups. So if the Premier agrees, will he commit to a time within which he would come back to put forward that legislation?

Mr. Kenney: Well, Mr. Speaker, I would undertake to come back to the Leader of the Opposition by this time tomorrow. Allow me one working day to make the appropriate consultations to see if there might be unintended consequences of which I am not aware. Once again, with or without legislation we would implore employers to do the right thing, ensure that their employees have every opportunity to get vaccinated. It's only in the interests of employers and safe workplaces, and we would encourage them to do so immediately.

The Speaker: The Leader of the Opposition.

Ms Notley: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm very pleased to hear about that 24-hour timeline. I really, very much do appreciate that because, of course, we know we have a break that's coming up next week. B.C. already has the blueprint. We could literally do a cut-and-paste, and Parliamentary Counsel could have legislation ready to go tomorrow if the discussions go well with the Premier. Our caucus is prepared to waive the rules and pass whatever procedural amendments are required to get it passed this week. I look forward and want to thank the Premier for that consideration and hope that he will consider going along with us to get that done by Thursday.

Mr. Kenney: I appreciate that, Mr. Speaker. Again, we'll have to do a quick policy scan on the proposal and what's happened in other jurisdictions. I'll take this up immediately with the hon. the Minister of Labour and Immigration. I would just advise the Leader of the Opposition that we have limited Parliamentary Counsel capacity right now. One of our lead statutory writers was drafted to become the Clerk of the Nova Scotia Assembly, I believe, so our small but mighty team of drafters is working overtime, but we'll do our best working with them.

The Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Ms Notley: Well, thankfully, we do have examples that already exist in both Saskatchewan and B.C.

Affordable Child Care

Ms Notley: Now on to a different topic. It is past time that we recognize the economic and social value of truly affordable and universal child care and then make it happen. A 50-cent reduction in fees next year and a \$10-per-day cost by 2025: the federal budget was actually quite welcome news for young families. But instead of celebrating it, we heard the Finance minister say that they weren't interested in taking part. Will the Premier stand up today, support quality, affordable, universal child care, and commit that he will do whatever it takes to get that \$800 million a year from Ottawa for our kids?

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, what parents need is support for their child care choices, not a one-size-fits-all, Ottawa-based approach. We will study the proposal embedded in yesterday's federal budget, but if it is, as it appears to be, a cookie-cutter approach, nine-to-five, government-run, union-operated, largely urban care that excludes shift workers, largely excludes rural people, excludes informal forms of child care, that would not meet the needs of most Albertans. But we'll certainly review the proposal.

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, it doesn't appear that the Premier understands what most Albertans are going through. Let me help. Right now the hunt for child care starts pretty much right after the positive pregnancy test. You get your obstetrician, and then you start looking for child care spaces. After sitting on a wait-list for two years, the excitement of a call evaporates when you see what the bill will be and you realize that the math just doesn't add up. Women who are skilled, instead choose to leave their careers. It is demoralizing. Why won't the Premier help them stay in the economy?

Mr. Kenney: Well, Mr. Speaker, we certainly understand the very incredible need of so many Alberta families for that support, which is why we took a program that was subsidizing in part the very wealthy, the NDP pilot program, and have made it focused on lowest income Albertans, who most need that assistance. But we don't want to exclude the tens of thousands of spots that are available through private-sector operators, we don't want to exclude the parents who have informal child care arrangements, and we don't want to exclude rural parents or shift workers through a one-size-fits-all Ottawa approach.

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, Alberta families with young children will choose the highest quality option they can afford, and it's up to us to provide it. The Premier uses words like "choice," but he needs to understand that the last-minute stopgap arrangements made by frantic parents are never actually the choice, including the types that he talks about. Parents are forced to give up their careers when the costs are too high or the care is too low, and that hurts the economy. Why doesn't the Premier support growing the economy by helping more women to be part of it?

Mr. Kenney: Well, Mr. Speaker, not only do we support growing the economy, but the central organizing principle of this government is growing the economy. We will review in detail the federal proposal. But, you know, it used to be that Alberta governments before the NDP was in office used to join provinces like Quebec in fighting for maximum flexibility so we could design programs that

are most relevant to our people on the ground. Institutional, nine-to-five, urban – subsidies for urban institutional child care don't assist rural families or people with shift work or so many other needs.

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

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, those arguments are just distractions.

Carbon Pricing

Ms Notley: You know, the Premier considers himself a great fighter of Ottawa, but he hasn't uttered a peep about Erin O'Toole's new carbon tax. News flash: he's from Ottawa, too. I can't image a more top-down, authoritative approach to consumer carbon pricing than the federal Conservative plan. They want to take your money, hold it hostage in a spending account entirely under the control of bureaucrats and money managers. Does the Premier really support a carbon tax with Ottawa peering into the bank accounts of each and every individual Canadian?

The Speaker: I'm not sure what Alberta government policy you might be referring to, but if the Premier would like to respond, he's welcome to do so.

Mr. Kenney: Yeah. Thanks, Mr. Speaker. For viewers at home, question period is for questions about government of Alberta policy, not opposition policies in the federal Parliament.

Having said that, Alberta remains opposed to punishing people for living normal lives, for filling up their gas tanks and heating their homes, while at the same time we are committed to real action to reduce carbon emissions to address the climate imperative. What we won't do is what the NDP did, which was to bring in a tax as a tax grab on ordinary Albertans.

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, like it or not, right now most Albertans get more back from the carbon tax than they paid, and they get to decide what to do with it. But under the federal Conservative plan low- and middle-income Albertans will get less money and bigger government. These are the very Albertans the Premier claims to be standing up for. The Premier is spending millions to fight against international investment firms, environmentalists, scientists, and the federal government, but when it comes to the guy he endorsed as Conservative leader, crickets. Why the hypocrisy, Premier?

The Speaker: Again I'd like to reiterate for the Leader of the Opposition that there are many creative ways to ask a question relevant to government policy. Asking a question about some federal politician certainly isn't government policy. [interjections]

Mr. Kenney: Well, she's now laughing at the chair. Mr. Speaker, a moment ago she said that rural parents and people who do shift work are, quote, a distraction, and now she's mischaracterizing the policy of a federal political party. This government repealed the NDP carbon tax as our first act; promise made, promise kept. We sued the federal government over their unfair tax grab, the federal carbon tax. Regrettably, we did not succeed, with only three justices ruling on behalf of the six aligned provinces. We are reviewing all of our options and will listen to Albertans, take onboard their advice about how we can have an approach that imposes the minimal possible cost for . . .

2:00

The Speaker: The Leader of the Opposition.

Ms Notley: So we're apparently not able to talk about federal politicians.

Anyway, between the Supreme Court and his Ottawa boss's plan, it is clear that carbon pricing is here to stay. Now, I've said this for four years: a made-in-Alberta plan is better than one made in Ottawa. While the Premier may not have liked my plan, his plan to simply fight the plan has just gone up in smoke, and now Albertans are left to follow Ottawa's marching orders. When will the Premier read the writing on the wall and step up with a made-in-Alberta strategy that will actually last and support Albertans?

The Speaker: To provide some clarity, you're more than welcome to speak about Ottawa. You just need to ensure that the question that you ask is relevant to how Ottawa politicians or politics impact Alberta government policy. You're welcome to speak about Ottawa politicians.

The hon. Premier.

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, the NDP carbon tax in Alberta was a made-in-Alberta tax grab; 60 per cent of every dollar raised by punishing people for filling up their gas tanks went to NDP coffers for things like low-flow shower heads and light bulbs and renewable energy subsidies that were completely unnecessary. You know, I don't like the federal carbon tax, but at least they give 90 per cent of it back. One thing we won't do is replicate the NDP's tax grab.

Eastern Slopes Protection and Coal Development Policies

Ms Ganley: Mr. Speaker, yesterday Albertans once again saw this government run and hide from their own constituents. This time it was about our legislation to protect the Rocky Mountains and vital headwaters from the devastation of open-pit coal mining. This bill was brought forward by the opposition leader after we heard from tens of thousands of concerned Albertans. Yesterday we tried to ensure that this vital legislation is debated before the spring session rises. The UCP voted down our attempt. Will the Premier admit that he hopes to kill this bill by delaying debate?

Mr. Kenney: Well, no, Mr. Speaker. In fact, I understand that the standing committee on private members' business approved the legislation to come to the floor of the Assembly, and it's being dealt with in the normal fashion, as well it should be. I don't understand why the member is objecting to the rules for private members' business, which apply to all private members' bills.

Ms Ganley: In addition to thousands of Albertans, Bill 214 is supported by dozens of scientists at the University of Alberta, who wrote a letter which stated that they expect MLAs to, quote, be personally accountable for protecting our beautiful province and its inhabitants, regardless of their party affiliation, and asked them to, quote, show that you take responsibility seriously by supporting the movement of Bill 214 for immediate discussion in the Legislature. End quote. Can the Premier explain to these scientists why he wouldn't do that or commit to bring it back as a government bill?

Mr. Kenney: Well, first of all, Mr. Speaker, the bill will proceed as any normal private member's bill would. I'm not anticipating prorogation until this fall, so it has some time in this Legislature. I would point out that the previous government supported and approved both thermal and metallurgical coal mines. Suddenly they're like Claude Rains in *Casablanca*; they're shocked to see that there's coal mining happening in Alberta.

Ms Ganley: Our position, Mr. Speaker, is clear in the bill.

The Premier secretly lifted the Lougheed coal policy on the Friday of a long weekend. Then he launched a bogus consultation that doesn't even include the ability to discuss the very things at risk, land and water. What exactly are they consulting on? If this government doesn't have the backbone to debate our bill to protect Alberta's land and water, will they at least include these subjects in the consultation? If not, what message does the government think it's sending to tens of thousands of Albertans, or does the Premier just not care?

Mr. Kenney: Well, Mr. Speaker, perhaps the hon. member is not aware that Albertans spent the better part of a decade developing the South Saskatchewan River regional land-use plan, and there have been endless consultations, as well there should be. We now have specific consultations on coal policy, and we look forward to it and this eminent panel hearing from Albertans about their views on how we can balance responsible resource development with the protection of particularly sensitive ecosystems in the province.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Livingstone-Macleod.

Technology Industry Investment in Alberta

Mr. Reid: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday brought another piece of good economic news for Alberta. Amazon has made their first renewable energy investment in Canada, and they picked southern Alberta for this investment. The *Calgary Herald* reports that the project will create "hundreds of jobs during construction" and that "Alberta is the only open power market in the country where these kinds of corporate deals can happen." To the Minister of Jobs, Economy and Innovation: what does this kind of investment show about investor confidence in our province?

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

Mr. Schweitzer: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you for that question. This might shock the NDP, but look at this. Private-sector-driven investment in renewable power right here in Alberta, the only jurisdiction in the country that can attract this type of investment, hundreds of millions of dollars, hundreds of jobs, shocks the NDP. They'd rather use your taxpayer dollars for light bulbs, hiring people literally – literally – to put a light bulb into your house, than let the private sector do what it does best.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Livingstone-Macleod.

Mr. Reid: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that we've received news today that Absorb Software, a tech company based right here in Alberta, is receiving an investment of over \$500 million from a major U.S. private equity firm and given that this is a huge investment and a vote of confidence for our province, can the Minister of Jobs, Economy and Innovation tell this House what investments like this will do for job creation and diversification of our economy?

Mr. Schweitzer: Mr. Speaker, when it comes to the technology sector, it's an exciting time in the province of Alberta. The Canadian Venture Capital Association reports: 2018, \$100 million of venture capital in Alberta; 2019, double, \$220 million; 2020, a record year, \$455 million. Again, Alberta is becoming a player in the tech space, but we're not happy with just being a player; we want to become a dominant player. We have so many companies here. They're having a huge amount of success, with huge job opportunities for Albertans in a diversified economy.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Livingstone-Macleod.

Mr. Reid: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the minister for his response. Given that Alberta has seen five years of economic hardship and that COVID-19 caused one of the greatest economic contractions on record for our province and given that my constituents have spent over a year hearing about economic devastation caused by the pandemic after we finally begin to recover from the disastrous policies of the former NDP government and given that news like this appears that we may be turning a corner, can the same minister tell this House whether or not Alberta is actually experiencing an economic turnaround?

Mr. Schweitzer: Mr. Speaker, we have lots of work ahead. Here you have the NDP cheering against Alberta at every opportunity that they get, but look at this. Here is what the forecasts say: Alberta is going to lead the country in GDP growth, job creation. Right now we're seeing a rebound in commodity prices from oil and gas to agriculture to lumber. We're seeing positive indicators there from our traditional economy plus huge growth in the technology sector and film industries, the best years on record in forecasting. This is good news for Albertans. We have a bright day ahead.

The Speaker: The Opposition House Leader.

Jobs Now Program

Ms Gray: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. For months now we've been asking about this government's elusive Alberta jobs now program. This Premier and his ministers dragged their heels on using \$185 million the federal government offered for jobs programs last year and gambled that the feds would let Alberta use that money this year instead. To the minister. The 2021 federal budget is now out. Can you please inform this House whether the federal government provided the missing-in-action jobs now funding into 2021, and if so, where does that appear in the federal budget?

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

Mr. Schweitzer: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Our minister of labour is working diligently with his federal counterparts on our jobs now program. Again, we've put this into our budget for jobs now. We want to continue to do this and deliver for Albertans, making sure that they can get back into the workplace.

Ms Gray: Mr. Speaker, given that I'd prepared for a yes answer, a no answer but didn't prepare for a we-don't-know answer, I'm highly concerned for unemployed Albertans in this province. Given that the Minister of Finance made a commitment to launch his Alberta jobs now program and put unemployed Albertans back to work and given that Albertans have been waiting almost half a year for that steady paycheck that a job provides, can the minister please confirm: is the \$185 million extended, and when will the Alberta jobs now program finally launch?

2:10

Mr. Schweitzer: Mr. Speaker, we're talking about jobs right now in this House, yet when Infosys announced that they were creating 500 jobs in Alberta, what did we hear from the NDP, the members of the opposition? That right there: crickets, absolutely nothing to cheer on job creation in Alberta. We're going to continue to work with the federal government on job creation. The jobs now program is going to launch with jobs for Albertans. Again, maybe we're going to give the NDP an opportunity right now. Do you welcome Infosys? Do you welcome job creation in Alberta? [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order.

Ms Gray: Mr. Speaker, it appears this minister doesn't realize the federal government gave the province of Alberta \$185 million to create jobs. Your government sat on that money and let it expire. I am asking on behalf of unemployed Albertans: is this money going to be put to work? Right now it appears the UCP can't put anyone back to work. Will the Minister of Finance lose \$150 million in funding that could have helped unemployed Albertans? How do you have nothing to show for it right now? Where is the program? [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order.

Mr. Schweitzer: Mr. Speaker, that was a clear opportunity for the NDP to welcome investment into Alberta, 500 jobs for Albertans. Where is the NDP? Crickets when it comes to private-sector investment into our province. Of course we're going to continue to diligently work with the federal government on our jobs now initiative. That's going to happen. Again, the NDP: they can't cheer for private-sector investment; it's against their DNA.

Seniors Advocate Act

Ms Sigurdson: I'm proud that my private member's bill to create an independent Seniors Advocate was voted to proceed from committee to the Legislature. This is an important piece of legislation that I have developed in consultation with seniors to ensure that their concerns are heard. After so many seniors have died from COVID-19, it is apparent that change to seniors' care is needed. Over 1,200 residents in continuing care have died. Now that the bill has come to the Legislature, will the Minister of Seniors and Housing and the UCP government support it?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Health.

Mr. Shandro: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. As I said last week, our government is focused on protecting seniors in the middle of this pandemic, vaccinating them as fast as possible, supporting the home-care workers and the continuing care workers who provide care for many of them, and reviewing the continuing care system to make it better and safer. In the middle of the pandemic the focus for the NDP is to grandstand about a single former public servant and whether they have an office called the Seniors Advocate or the Health Advocate and which department the advocate works in. This is unfortunate behaviour that we're going to continue to see from the NDP. Let them behave that way; we're going to focus on seniors.

Ms Sigurdson: Given that the UCP-dominated committee refused to invite seniors to speak to how this bill would impact them and that the UCP members had a very combative tone towards the proposed legislation and given that this bill is at the bottom of the Order Paper, I doubt this bill will be debated. This is unfortunate for the seniors counting on it. I've received letters, e-mails, and calls asking for this change, and I know the government has, too. If this bill is not debated, will the minister work with me and Alberta seniors, who helped draft my bill, to create a Seniors Advocate as soon as possible?

Mr. Shandro: Mr. Speaker, again, we continue to have an advocate devoted to addressing the concerns of all Albertans, including seniors, and connecting them to the staff either in Alberta Health or in Seniors and Housing. All of the former staff of the Seniors Advocate office, other than the former advocate herself, continue

to work in the two departments, and we continue to have an entire Department of Seniors and Housing, and we're spending more than ever on health care, including \$260 million to help continuing care providers care for seniors. But the issue for the NDP is: why does the sign on the door of a single public servant say "Health Advocate" and not "Seniors Advocate"?

Ms Sigurdson: Given that the way seniors' services are approached should be fundamentally changed as a response to COVID-19 and given that my bill is modelled after the B.C. Seniors Advocate, who has done important work during the pandemic, including investigating continuing care homes with outbreaks of COVID-19, this pandemic has hit seniors the hardest. Does the minister believe that the over 1,200 lives lost in continuing care warrant the creation of an independent advocate? If not, please explain what exactly is being done, because not a heck of a lot is being done.

Mr. Shandro: Mr. Speaker, the focus of this government is so focused on seniors throughout this pandemic that we are vaccinating them as fast as possible, the first province to make sure that all the residents in long-term care get their second dose of vaccine. That's the focus of this government, not playing games and grandstanding like the . . . [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order. I'm having a hard time hearing the minister.

The minister.

Mr. Shandro: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. As I was saying, that's the focus of this government, making sure that those folks are vaccinated, investing \$260 million in continuing care, and making sure that the home-care providers and continuing care providers have all the supports they need to care for our seniors. The NDP meanwhile, throughout this pandemic, grandstand about the location of a single position in an org chart in the government.

The Speaker: Banff-Kananaskis has a question.

Public Health Act Amendments

Ms Rosin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. COVID-19 has been the very first public health emergency ever declared in the history of our province, and one thing we've learned fast is that the powers that are in the Public Health Act, once activated, can be very far reaching. A little-known fact that I discovered during my time as the deputy chair of the Public Health Act Review Committee is that the act actually allows for forced examinations and treatments in its current form, which should concern anyone. Thankfully, Bill 66, proposed by this government, changes that. Can the Minister of Health please tell Albertans what checks and balances are included in Bill 66 to make sure that these powers are not abused?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Health.

Mr. Shandro: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Checks and balances play an important role in balancing protection of public health with individual rights. Bill 66 amendments will remove all sections of the act that allow a minister to modify legislation by order, powers that date back to 2002; remove unnecessary powers to order mandatory vaccinations or conscription, which date back to 1910; and enhance individual rights by establishing that individuals must be immediately informed of the location if they are going to be detained. Bill 66 strikes the right balance between protecting the health and safety of Albertans during public health emergencies and maintaining the rights of individuals.

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

Ms Rosin: Thank you, Speaker. Thank you, Minister. Given that another overreach currently in the act, as mentioned, is the ability to force vaccinations, which, although it has been in place for over 100 years, has sparked concern for many Albertans, and while I am pleased to see that Bill 66 will remove this power altogether from the act, many are now concerned about the threat of the possible emergence of vaccine passports. Can the same Minister of Health please provide information to this House and all Albertans about our government's immunization plans?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health.

Mr. Shandro: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. We encourage all Albertans who are eligible to get their COVID-19 vaccine. I actually joined Dr. Hinshaw this morning to be able to receive my AstraZeneca vaccine with her, and we've been clear that the decision on whether to get vaccinated is a personal choice. Through Bill 66 amendments we're keeping our commitment to remove government's excess power to force people to get vaccinated, a power that existed since 1910 I'm told by folks in the ministry. We're rolling out vaccines to Albertans as quickly and as safely as possible. That said, vaccines will not be mandatory in Alberta, and there are no plans for vaccine passports.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Rosin: Thank you again, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the minister. Well, given that the Public Health Act had gone quite some time without a full review until last summer in Alberta and that our review committee identified many other issues within the act that are cause for modernization, many of which have never been enforced in Alberta but would probably be of concern if they were, can the same minister please tell us what other amendments Bill 66 proposes to protect Albertans from government overreach?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health.

Mr. Shandro: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Public Health Act in Alberta is one of the oldest laws here in this province. We're modernizing the act to provide greater transparency during public health emergencies such as requiring orders that apply to the public or to groups to be published online, establishing the qualifications of the chief MOH, modernizing the act to reflect current and emerging public health challenges such as chronic illness, and requiring a periodic review of the act every 10 years. The health and the safety of all Albertans is and always will be top of mind for this government.

COVID-19 Impact on Education

Ms Hoffman: Yesterday the Education minister said, "99.6 per cent of students and staff are in schools right now, and COVID is not affecting their learning." Just days earlier she sent nearly 90,000 students home, Mr. Speaker. When the minister says things that everyone knows are not true, she does a disservice to students, staff, families, her office, and this place. Will the minister stand here and admit to Alberta families that what she said yesterday was completely false?

2:20

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Education.

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. What I will admit to parents and to everyone out there is that right now we have less than 1 per cent of students and staff with active cases of COVID, in

fact, .4 per cent. When we looked to shifting to online programming for grades 7 to 12 in Calgary and again in Fort McMurray, it was at the request of the school boards because they are suffering from chronic substitute teacher shortages. In fact, the school divisions have approached us because of those chronic shortages.

Ms Hoffman: Given that what the minister said yesterday is completely untrue and given that she has already sent more than 90,000 students home and given that student learning has been impacted by forced isolation due to close contacts, stress, anxiety and that for many an entire school has been shut down multiple times, will the minister confirm that learning has been negatively impacted across the province as other school boards are actively considering closing schools or entire grade levels? Will she admit that here and now?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Education.

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for the question. We are so proud of the work that has gone into keeping schools open. Between parents and teachers and administrators and the school boards, everyone, superintendents I'm in constant contact with all of our education partners who've worked so collaboratively – so collaboratively – to keep our schools open, and we are keeping them open safely.

Ms Hoffman: Given that a teacher wrote us in response to the minister's ridiculous claim that learning wasn't being affected saying, "We're barely getting through the day. Students and staff are exhausted and anxious . . . We're living [with] the effects of Covid-19 every day, and it's draining us completely," and given that it's appalling that this minister attempts to give herself a pat on the back while students and staff are barely getting through the day, will the minister immediately apologize for her remarks yesterday and implement any of our 18 recommendations to actually make schools safer and keep them open? We want action, Minister, not nice words about other people.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Education.

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The NDP put forward a plan last year that would've called for 13,000 additional teachers that we don't have. In fact, we're short on substitute teachers. The very reason that schools are having to go online is because of operational issues. Yes, in fact, there is COVID, and that is being reflected. What's in the community is coming into the schools, but the decisions to move to online have to follow four criteria: the chronic substitute teacher shortage, a significant number of students and staff in quarantine or isolation, recent requests from the school board for short-term shifts for a number of schools, and substantial COVID cases in the community.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-McCall is next.

Police Street Checks and Carding

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Earlier this month this government introduced a bill that they claim will ban carding. However, this bill does nothing of the sort. Instead, it creates loopholes for the practices of carding to happen and allows broad authority for police to collect information without proper oversight. Professor Irfan Chaudhry from MacEwan University said that the bill has the potential to legislate racial profiling. To the minister: what action will you take to fix your broken bill and avoid legislating racial profiling?

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

Mr. Madu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This is typical NDP politics, grandstanding. We took action to accomplish something in six months that the NDP could not accomplish in four years. We have put forward a ban on carding that is going to statutorily ban carding. Perhaps the Member for Calgary-McCall should have addressed that particular question to the Member for Calgary-Mountain View, who, despite two years consistent protest at the steps of the Legislature, could not get carding moving. We got that done.

Mr. Sabir: Given that Imam Syed Soharwardy with Al Madinah Calgary Islamic Assembly agreed and said that, and I quote, racism is getting legalized with this bill and given that Vanesa Ortiz with the Association of Mexicans in Calgary says that this bill will strengthen and perpetuate institutional racism and given that Amira Shousha with the National Council of Canadian Muslims said that she's concerned about the ability to gather and retain information under the premise of crime-prevention activities – she said, and I quote, that's not progress – will the minister commit to consulting these and fix this legislation?

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

Mr. Madu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. If the NDP is really interested in banning carding, now is the time for them to join us and unanimously pass Bill 63 because that is precisely what that particular bill does. We will not be lectured by the NDP on what racism and carding is. I am confident that the bill that I have put forward on an issue that affects the very community that I come from would address those concerns, something that the NDP did not do in four years.

Mr. Sabir: Given that this bill does not ban carding and given that this bill uses vague language in legislation and creates mass confusion and given that Alberta's community leaders have raised concerns and that I will be bringing forward several amendments to fix this bill after consulting with those groups, Minister, community leaders are calling that this bill is flawed. Will you accept my amendments and work with those community leaders and look into this bill? This bill doesn't ban carding.

Mr. Madu: Mr. Speaker, the usual NDP talk; it's all talk. They talked about it for four years. They talked about carding. There were consultations for four years in this very building. They did nothing, and that is very typical of the NDP's politics when it comes to race issues. They want to use that as a political football. We will deal with the issue, and that's exactly what we have done. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order. Order. Order.

The hon. Minister of Justice has five seconds remaining.

Mr. Madu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. You know what? We have, through Bill 63, banned carding. The Member for Calgary-McCall knows that. This is their typical politics.

Home-schooling Supports

Ms Glasgo: Mr. Speaker, home-schooling is growing as an educational choice for many Albertans, and many Brooks-Medicine Hat residents have decided to pursue this alternative form of learning. I speak with many of them regularly. According to the 2020-2021 school year enrolment numbers over 25,000 Alberta students enrolled in a home-learning program in the Alberta Homeschooling Association. With so many families exercising this educational

choice, can the Minister of Education tell Albertan parents what supports are available to them right now?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Education.

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The pandemic has been challenging for all students, including those who are home educated. Alberta has a long and successful history of school choice, and supporting school choice is a priority for our government. We recognize that it is important to give home education students opportunities to learn from and with other students, just as students do in the classroom, during the pandemic. Some funding supports are also available for those who choose to home educate.

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

Ms Glasgo: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you, Minister. Given that socializing and communication are key factors in the mental health of students as well as a significant aid in a child's education and given that many of the over 5 per cent of Alberta students who chose to home-school are often searching for opportunities to come together during the pandemic, can the minister tell concerned parents across Alberta about the supports that may exist for those who would want to ensure that socialization and interpersonal skills and connection remain a part of their child's education?

The Speaker: The Minister of Education.

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for the question. To ensure that students who are home-schooled do not miss out on important learning opportunities, we've allowed home education students to engage in group learning activities outside of their homes while COVID-19 restrictions are in place across the province. That is in addition to extracurricular activities such as sports and performing arts. These groups must – must – follow all health measures, just as all students in schools do.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Glasgo: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you again, Minister, for your response. Given that many home-schoolers have expressed to me that they feel the province's COVID response to education focuses primarily on public and Catholic school systems and given that our party was elected on a platform that would ensure and honour a parent's choice in education, can the same minister please tell Albertans who exercise this choice through their decision to home-school what supports may be available to them to assist in learning throughout this scary time?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Education.

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On this side of the House we respect parents' choices as to which type of education they choose for their children. We provide funding for home education students supervised by a school authority. Parents may be reimbursed for the costs of instructional materials such as workbooks, learning aids, technology, and lessons, including sports. I encourage everyone who would like more information to visit the home education page on alberta.ca.

Thank you.

2:30 Racism and Hate Promotion Prevention

Mr. Dang: Last Monday the Legislature passed my motion to condemn hate symbols here in Alberta. Despite the government

patting themselves on the back, we know that they've taken no action, done nothing but point to months-old statements, and just continue to stand by. The government is doing nothing to prevent people from continuing to display these harmful symbols in public in Alberta. To the minister: what tangible action will the government take now to ensure that these hate symbols are no longer allowed in public?

Mr. Madu: Mr. Speaker, you know, here we go again. There is no question that this side of the aisle has continuously condemned racist symbols, but what we will not do is play politics with as important an issue as racism and discrimination. We have all condemned that, and I will continue, as long as I have the honour of being the Minister of Justice, to do that to ensure that we build a province where anyone that calls our province home can be respected and live their life in dignity.

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

Mr. Dang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that the minister didn't even speak to the motion and indeed this minister actually seems to only be able to repeat redundant talking points and given that allowing people to display swastikas and other hateful symbols in public only emboldens those who would seek to spread hate and terrorize Albertans in their own communities and given that we have seen violent attacks on Muslim women in Edmonton and Calgary in recent weeks, attacks that this Premier still has yet to condemn, to the minister. These symbols of hate are more than just symbols. They generate fear and lead to horrible acts of violence. Will you act to ban hate symbols, and what other support is being provided to the victims of the attacks?

Mr. Madu: You know, Mr. Speaker, the Premier and myself and the members on this side of the aisle have at every opportunity condemned those racist actions against those minority vulnerable women. But for four years what did the NDP do? Absolutely nothing. In fact, before the floor of this House they ridiculed the Member for Calgary-West for trying to get them to move carding along. The *Hansard* record will show that. We will not play political football with an important issue that affects Albertans.

Mr. Dang: Given that my question had nothing to do with carding, yet this minister continues to play political football and given that the minister of multiculturalism said, "This is about real action, and it's time for us all to stand up together collectively," when debating my motion against hate symbols and given that I agree with that minister – we need real, tangible effort from this government if we are hoping to make a difference – and given that voting through a motion without action is just the same as hoping it will go away, to the minister. Tell Albertans right here, right now, people who have been targeted time and time again for their ethnicity or race: what is this government doing to prevent another racist torch rally on the steps of this building?

Mr. Madu: Mr. Speaker, we have taken action, and we will continue to take action. We banned carding in November 2020. We have followed through with Bill 63. We are reviewing the Police Act to make sure that interactions between law enforcement and members of our community are courteous and respectful. We appointed a special adviser to the government of Alberta from the cultural community to help with the Police Act review. We are taking action. Again, so long as I have the honour of being the Minister of Justice, we will continue to make progress to advance prosperity and equity for all.

Bill 47

Mr. Nielsen: On April 1 this government's changes to OHS and WCB came into effect under the guise of red tape reduction. In the weeks since three Albertans have died on work sites. In Edmonton two workers were injured while servicing an excavator, with one of those workers succumbing to his injuries. In Calgary a contractor was crushed by a slab of concrete, and a bus driver was run over while inspecting the vehicle. Three Albertans went to work and never returned. Changes to OHS removes the requirements for these deaths to be reported and accounted for annually. To the minister of labour: can you please enlighten this House on why it's no longer necessary to report these deaths?

Mr. Schweitzer: Mr. Speaker, our minister of labour is continuing to work diligently with our OH and S to make sure that we have safe work environments across this province. Again, it's important for us to make sure that we have those protocols in place to ensure that all Albertans, when they go to workplaces, can come back home from a safe environment. Our minister of labour is diligently working on this as well in collaboration with health officials where required and necessary.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Nielsen: Why no reporting?

Given that every workplace injury and death is preventable and given that OHS and WCB laws exist to protect workers, establish responsibility, provide fair compensation for injury, and improve practices and given that Bill 47 weakened, not improved, safety for workers and Alberta workers should not have to pay the price for employers who don't want to do the right thing, to the same minister: is cutting red tape really worth risking the lives of Albertans?

Mr. Schweitzer: Mr. Speaker, we're going to continue to have the right frameworks in place here in Alberta to make sure we have safe work environments. I think this goes to the tone of that question right there. It appeared to me when the person read that question – again, they're reading that question – is that they don't trust employers at all. Every single employer I know wants to make sure that their employees are safe in the work environment. We're going to continue to make sure we have the right regulations in place, the right safety protocols in place right here in Alberta. [interjections]

Mr. Nielsen: You should hang out with me.

Given that the changes of OHS and WCB were pushed through by this government in the fall without due consideration or debate and given that these changes include removing workplace safety committees, removing the requirement for workplace fatality reports, removing worker participation in injury and death investigations, removing presumptive coverage for PTSD, removing access to benefits for workers and surviving families, and much more, to the same minister: what is this government actually doing to improve safety for workers? Give me one example. How does a government build an economic strategy without any support for workers and safe workplaces?

Mr. Schweitzer: Mr. Speaker, again, throughout this pandemic our minister of labour, the Health team as well have worked diligently to make sure that we have safe work environments across this province. Again, this question that's coming in here: it's typical for the NDP. Very loaded question. They don't trust employers. They don't trust people that care about their employees as well. We're making sure that we put in place the right measures here in Alberta to create safe work environments. Again, I asked this question to another NDP

member. Why aren't they welcoming investment into Alberta and job creation in this province? We're focused on that as well.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek.

Land Development and Home-building Industries

Mr. Gotfried: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The residential land development and home-building industries have gratefully proven to be incredibly resilient throughout this pandemic. However, there remains a lot of uncertainty around increased costs for new investment due to provincial and municipal policy, much of it related to off-site levies and city charters. To the Minister of Municipal Affairs: are we looking at these policies and other ways to remove uncertainty, to enhance housing affordability, and to spur further investment and job creation in one of Alberta's most important sectors?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Transportation and Municipal Affairs.

Mr. McIver: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the member about the question. I join the member in acknowledging the resilience of the residential land development and home-building industries and the very many jobs and opportunities that they create every day for Albertans and have done so for a long time. I can confirm that we are happy to work with this very important industry. We must make sure that the rules and regulations are in place to be reasonable, and we have to balance the costs with what they deliver. We have to protect both municipalities and industry, and we're working hard to do that.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek.

Mr. Gotfried: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that the land development and home-building industries have managed to protect many jobs with continued and arguably risky investments throughout the pandemic and given that one of the most immediate challenges facing them is a rapid increase in the cost of material inputs, perhaps attributable in some instances to pandemic-related production and transportation challenges, to the minister: is there anything we can do as a government to help address this concerning trend and resultant impact on housing affordability?

Mr. McIver: Well, one of the things we did, Mr. Speaker, is that we made sure that construction workers were considered essential so that the industry could go on providing the buildings and materials that Albertans needed. Our government is focused on encouraging economic growth through stimulus, especially in the private sector. We've seen investment in job creation, like Absorb Software of Calgary, valued at \$500 million, in a deal announced today. Economic growth and creation will make it easier for Albertans to get past the pandemic. The important construction and building industry is central to that, and this government is working with them.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Gotfried: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the minister. Again, given that land development and home-building industries are not only big investors in our economy but also deliver much-needed housing stock across the housing continuum and given that these industries are significant contributors to provincial GDP historically and through this pandemic, to the minister: can you please share with Albertans how many jobs the residential building industry supported across this province during 2020 and how we might help to sustain this much-needed employment creation going forward?

2:40

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Transportation and Municipal Affairs.

Mr. McIver: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the member. Based on 2020 data, residential construction involved about 12 and a half billion dollars in capital investment and supported about 90,000 jobs across Alberta. That's equivalent to Airdrie and Leduc if every resident in those communities worked in the home-building industry. It's an enormous contribution to Alberta's economy, and it doesn't go unrecognized. Our government is committed to reducing red tape and promoting job creation. Again, the building, construction industry: we consider it essential. We still do. We'll keep working for them. They provide the homes that Albertans need now and will in the future, and we won't forget that.

The Speaker: Hon. members, that concludes the time allotted for Oral Question Period.

In 30 seconds or less we will return to the remainder of the daily Routine.

Tabling Returns and Reports

The Speaker: Are there tablings?

Ms Rosin: I have a tabling for the Clerk.

The Speaker: My guess is that you actually want a tabling, not a tabling to the Clerk.

Ms Rosin: Yes.

The Speaker: So the hon. Member for Banff-Kananaskis, followed by Edmonton-Glenora.

Ms Rosin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, last night I had the opportunity to give a very eloquent speech on the pervasive issue of human feces in the backcountry of Waiparous. I cited a document written by the Ghost Watershed Alliance titled Recreational Issues in the Ghost Watershed – A Focus on Random Camping and Shooting: Then, Now, and Next. With that, I would like to table the requisite number of copies.

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

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have here for tabling again today many pieces of correspondence from people who are incredibly frustrated with the curriculum process. Many of these folks are putting their feedback through the survey but wanting to ensure that it actually is reported somewhere, so they're sending it to me to table in this House, and I do so today.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Are there others?

Hon. members, there were no points of order today. As such, we are at Ordres du jour.

Orders of the Day

Government Bills and Orders Second Reading

Bill 62

Red Tape Reduction Implementation Act, 2021

The Speaker: The hon. the Associate Minister of Red Tape Reduction.

Mr. Hunter: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to move second reading of Bill 62, the Red Tape Reduction Implementation Act, 2021.

Bill 62 reflects our government's ongoing commitment to reduce red tape. It moves us that much closer to our goal of a one-third reduction across government by 2023. To put it another way, Mr. Speaker, when we are finished, we will have removed over 223,000 red tape hoops that Albertans and our job creators had to jump through in the past. The changes we are making are common-sense approaches and are designed to get out of the way of our job creators, allowing them to do what they do best, create jobs and jump-start our economy.

Mr. Speaker, almost two years ago we set out on a bold path to help make Alberta the freest and fastest moving economy in North America. In order to do that, we needed to identify how deep the problem was. A good quote I like to use is: you can't manage what you don't measure. Right away we got straight to work to count all regulatory requirements in Alberta. We documented requirements found in all statutes, regulations, forms, and policies for government departments and all agencies, boards, and commissions. This number is what we refer to as the baseline count of the regulatory requirements. The effort was monumental, and the result was sobering.

We found out that Albertans were saddled with almost 670,000 regulatory hoops that they were required to jump through on a daily basis. I am proud to say that in the first two years we have been able to remove over 107,000 red tape pinch points. This means that we have exceeded our goal of a 12 per cent reduction for the fiscal year, achieving an overall reduction of over 16 per cent. It also means that we are well on our way to meeting or exceeding our commitment of a one-third reduction by 2023.

But the most important thing, Mr. Speaker, is that our successes have put us well on the way to making Alberta more efficient to attract investment. As we have seen in the past, when people invest in Alberta, good jobs accompany those investments. Bill 62, the Red Tape Reduction Implementation Act, 2021, will make it easier for businesses to operate by clarifying rules, streamlining approvals and processes, and reducing unnecessary costs.

Changes to eight pieces of legislation across six different ministries will save time and money for businesses, job creators, and all Albertans. These amendments support economic growth for our innovators and our job creators. Now more than ever it is important that we continue to cut red tape and make it as easy as possible for businesses to expand and create jobs.

One of the ways we will support this is through changes to the Builders' Lien Act, which would support construction businesses by clarifying how prompt-payment rules apply to public-private partnerships. Other important amendments include allowing prompt-payment rules to be extended to professional consultants, contractors such as those for engineers and architects; changing adjudication decisions from final and binding to interim and binding; and allowing electronic sharing of the certificate of substantial performance. These changes continue the work that began with the passage of Bill 37, Builders' Lien (Prompt Payment) Amendment Act, 2020, which received royal assent in December 2020. The current amendments being proposed are intended to address issues raised by construction industry stakeholders during ongoing consultation around the regulations.

[Mr. Milliken in the chair]

This bill will also clarify the criteria, terms, and election processes for the board of the Real Estate Council of Alberta and industry councils, which will ensure more effective governance for

Alberta's real estate industry. This builds on the work that's already been done this past year when the government worked closely with real estate professionals to establish a new governance model that included elected councils representing specific sectors of the real estate industry.

Another change in Bill 62 enables government to establish maximum timelines for Alberta Utilities Commission proceedings if necessary, including decision timelines for new power plants or setting electricity transmission and distribution rates. These amendments will reduce industry costs associated with delayed approvals and decisions, but it's important to note, Mr. Speaker, that this will not prevent ratepayers or other interested parties from participating in AUC proceedings. However, more predictable approval times will support economic recovery and growth by providing more certainty for job creators looking to invest in the province's natural gas, wind, or solar generation.

This bill also proposes to expand Travel Alberta's mandate, giving the agency a more active role in working directly with communities and businesses to develop new tourism destination products and experiences in Alberta. This change will make Travel Alberta a one-stop shop, a full destination management organization that will assure programs and services previously provided by Jobs, Economy and Innovation. This will better support the ongoing development and growth of the tourism industry in the province and help drive Alberta's economic recovery.

Bill 62 also proposes to continue to modernize Alberta's security laws and ensure that they remain harmonized, where appropriate, with other Canadian jurisdictions. These proposed changes also enhance existing protections for investors and expand opportunities for companies to raise capital more efficiently in Alberta. They will achieve this by reducing costs for corporations associated with applying individually for certain exemptions while also eliminating the up to 60-day waiting period for exemption approvals.

In addition, an amendment to the Employment Standards Code will maintain the requirement for employers to record daily work hours of their employees but will no longer prescribe the frequency of recording. This will save time for employers who manually record hours of work each day, particularly for schedules that don't tend to change, and will allow employers to continue using their existing payroll practices using a schedule that best fits their needs.

Finally, there are changes being made to Justice's legislation relating to wills and succession laws and to the division of family property. Updates to the Family Property Act will ensure that a beneficiary or family member of a deceased spouse or partner cannot make a claim against the property or money that has already been given to the living spouse or partner, which will save Albertans time and money dealing with these claims in court. Changes to the Fatal Accidents Act will allow for online posting of the government report that reviews the amounts of bereavement damages that can be claimed by the families of Albertans who died from fatal accidents, which will ensure that the information is more quickly and easily accessible.

2:50

This concludes my overview of Bill 62, Mr. Speaker, the Red Tape Reduction Implementation Act, 2021, but I want to leave you with this. Reducing unnecessary red tape is a key component of Alberta's recovery plan, which takes bold action to create jobs and get Albertans back to work, build infrastructure, and diversify our economy. We are working hard to deliver on our commitment to reduce red tape to save Albertans time and money and to become the freest and fastest moving economy in North America, and we will continue to respond to the ideas we hear from Albertans about

how government can further reduce red tape, making life easier for Albertans and Alberta job creators.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. Associate Minister.

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

Mr. Nielsen: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Appreciate the opportunity this afternoon to, I guess, add some additional comments around the opening discussions of Bill 62, the Red Tape Reduction Implementation Act, 2021. You know, I hate to say this, but it just seems like every bill that the minister brings forward – it seems like there are components that are simple hand-me-downs from other ministries, either changes that could be addressed through statute amendment acts, or where we do see some more substantial pieces, they really should be getting led by the ministries themselves. But I guess when you're looking at trying to justify spending 10 and a half million dollars on an associate ministry over the course of four years, you better look like you're doing something.

You know, it was interesting. In some of the opening comments talking about all the great work the minister has been up to and patting themselves on the back for how much they've been cutting, that in between, of course, either giving out plaques to their colleagues about all the great work they've been doing or not hitting their own targets, I understand the associate ministry is behind by about 60 per cent or so on those targets.

Despite all of that, as the minister said, we do have some changes across multiple ministries. I'll probably go quickly through them because my time is short, and I know that second reading is not always the best place to be able to get some of the answers to those. I understand that, so hopefully, you know, not presupposing the decision of the House, I assume we'll get an opportunity to maybe explore some of those questions more thoroughly through Committee of the Whole.

When I see some of the changes around the Alberta Utilities Commission Act, of course, one of my initial comments was about government, I guess, getting involved in the timeline decision. You know, I guess I get a little nervous on there. I wonder: will there be due diligence? Or will it simply be that we think this is taking too long, that you need to make a decision now? Yeah, we realize that you haven't done your due diligence and explored all the potential – what's the favourite word? – unintended consequences, I believe it is, so just make that decision. Hopefully, we'll see a little bit more discussion around that as we move forward.

Moving on to the builders' lien prompt payment now, I have to wonder. The original bill itself, Bill 37, hasn't even come into force yet, and we're already seeing changes to it, so I'm wondering: what has been the feedback around those compared to when it was originally introduced? Now, certainly, saying that prompt payment was definitely much needed in the province – you know, I think earlier in question period, the Minister of Jobs, Economy and Innovation and whatnot asked me why I don't trust employers and whatnot. Well, because sometimes these employers don't promptly pay their bills when creating projects, among a host of other things that we're not going to be discussing here right now around Bill 62. This is one of the components.

I'm wondering why the Minister of Service Alberta is not carrying this. These are some significant changes, and I know the minister is very, very involved around prompt payment. So we're kind of wondering a little bit about what's going on there. I did notice within the legislation, when they were adding things like P3s and whatnot, with some of the initial discussions that I've heard wondering why – okay. You're putting professionals in, but there

could be a component around maintenance. Why potentially were they excluded from this piece of legislation?

I guess one of the other final comments I have, seeing as how we're already making changes now to a bill that doesn't seem to be in effect – well, is that bill in effect? Is Bill 37 ever going to be proclaimed or granted royal assent? Are companies obliged to work under that currently, right now?

Then we've got changes to the Business Corporations Act and the Securities Act. Normally when we've seen these kinds of changes come forward, they've come through a statutes amendment act, because I do understand that when there are changes to federal legislation around that, provinces have to keep up with that. Why didn't we see some of these changes from the minister of Treasury and Finance around a statutes amendment act? Again, it's kind of looking like just a little bit of a hand-me-down to try to look like the red tape ministry is doing some work. You know, maybe the associate minister can explain how some of these changes that are being proposed are reducing red tape. Would these changes still be made if there wasn't an associate ministry of red tape reduction, or would, say, for instance, Treasury Board still have gone ahead with these kinds of changes?

That brings me now to the changes around the Employment Standards Code. When I hear about reductions about recording hours, I must admit that I start to get a little bit nervous. Maybe reducing the frequency is not necessarily a bad thing, but not prescribing it at all is cause for concern because what happens, then, if an employer only does it once a year? Technically speaking, if it's done once a year and it's even done on the same day, that would be considered regular reporting. What happens to the other 364 days if an employee does run into a problem around hours and there's a dispute involved?

I'm wondering: what was the logic of this change, and what did you hear back from employees on this? I know there's certainly a big focus on employers and reducing red tape and making this, you know, a fast-moving economy and all that. Don't make changes at the expense of hard-working Albertans. What is being done, though, to ensure that these hours are tracked regularly? Simply removing that and then saying, "Yeah, we're done; we've reduced red tape": I don't think you've done your homework on that, so I'm hoping to see a little bit more substance and explanation around why maybe some of that has happened.

And if indeed you do run across a situation where an employer is not tracking the hours, is being difficult when a dispute arises, what's the plan to deal with that when it comes up? I know it's going to come up. The experience that I've had over my time in labour: it comes up, especially even when you're dealing with an employer under a unionized contract that consistently has scheduling problems, payroll problems. The one I'm thinking of: there are even fines in the contract to the employer when they don't live up to these expectations. Do I have faith in most employers? Sure. Do I have faith in absolutely every single one? No, because I've seen too many problems going forward.

Hopefully, we'll see a little bit of explanation around that, which brings us to the Family Property Act. I guess I could take in also the Fatal Accidents Act. Again, could these changes have been done simply through a statutes amendment? Why maybe did the Justice minister not present around the Family Property Act? Again, was it simply a hand-me-down in order to be able to justify to Albertans 10 and a half million dollars of their money being spent over the course of the term? I guess the question around the fatal – what red tape was holding up reporting being done online, and how has that benefited the Alberta economy?

3:00

You know, could tablings not be done online and then some kind of notice that it's just going to be tabled here in the House? Hopefully, we'll see some answers around that a little bit.

That then brings me to the Real Estate Act. Definitely, some significant changes there. Again I'm wondering why the Minister of Service Alberta is not leading on this, especially given everything that's going on. Some of the initial consultations that I've heard around this is that there's been a lack of consultation on this topic. It's a little bit more, as I like to say, consul-told rather than consult.

There's potentially some imbalance that could be going on. My understanding is that, you know, you might have industries that maybe, sort of, kind of, could be placed under the real estate umbrella, but not so much, and then maybe grouping together a couple of different industries, and they don't really necessarily know what's going on in one or the other. So if you only have one representative from that one industry, you're excluding the other one for a period of time, and then all of a sudden maybe even roles could be reversed, and now you're excluding the other one.

I'm interested to hear a little bit about what was heard back from all of those industries that are finding themselves under the changes there. What process was done to ensure that industry did actually approve of all these changes? Hopefully, we'll be hearing from the Associate Minister of Red Tape Reduction about the things that he heard around these changes, because if indeed he's going to lead on this, he should be able to answer the questions that are going to come up inevitably with this.

Of course, it does seem that the minister is receiving a lot more power out of this. And I know that members of the government bench, members of the government caucus that served in the 29th Legislature had significant problems any time it seemed that the previous NDP government was giving more authority to the minister. Here we are: roles reversed. Did you actually believe that back at the time? What's the change of heart? Why is it now okay to be doing these kinds of things?

Finally, we're seeing changes around the Travel Alberta Act. You know, this one appears not necessarily to be of concern. Hopefully, my friend from Edmonton-Castle Downs will have a little bit more to say on this, probably later in the debate, about how this will help the industry, what could be holding it back, things like that. Again, not necessarily a negative change here, but I would like to see a little bit from that.

Overall, you know, I'm interested in the discussion moving forward on this. I haven't come to the decision yet, whether I'm prepared to support Bill 62. I'd like to get some of the answers back to the questions that I've proposed. I really do want to hear from the various ministers about why they felt that these components, especially the prompt payment, especially the real estate changes, why they felt that it was okay to place these within the Associate Ministry of Red Tape Reduction rather than keeping them within their own ministries, where if concerns come forward once this is implemented, they would be answering the questions. We've kind of seen in the past where once this is done, somebody would call up maybe the ministry and say, "What's going on with this?" and immediately a finger gets pointed somewhere else: well, you need to go and talk to them. It kind of seems like increased red tape, a little bit, around that.

I am looking forward to the rest of the debate here on Bill 62, obviously, more appropriately, in Committee of the Whole, when we get a chance to get some of these answers to the questions. I look forward to seeing what we hear, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any members wishing to join debate? I see the hon. Member for Livingstone-Macleod has risen.

Mr. Reid: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my honour to rise today and speak in support of Bill 62 in second reading, the Red Tape Reduction Implementation Act, 2021. I would like to thank the Associate Minister of Red Tape Reduction for his work on this bill and for his steadfast determination to reduce red tape across the province. Intentionality, I think, is the key. The work of the associate minister and this government is bearing fruit as the province has already reduced red tape by 15 per cent, which is appealing to investors and job creators from across Canada and around the world. It is great to see that after many years of receiving a failing grade, Alberta has received an A on its 2020 report card on red tape reduction from the Canadian Federation of Independent Business. Thank you, Minister, for your great work.

Bill 62 continues this important work of reducing red tape, especially for job creators. It is no secret, Mr. Speaker, that rural Albertans hate red tape. There's no farmer, no roughneck, or no small-business owner that relishes the thought of their operations being shackled by unnecessary burdens. That does not mean that rural Albertans are hostile to regulations. It's just that we do not like unnecessary regulations that create inefficiencies and additional costs. Reducing unnecessary red tape is a fundamental component of Alberta's recovery plan, and it is what will make Alberta the best place in North America to do business.

Bill 62 amends eight pieces of legislation from six different ministries: Energy; Service Alberta; Jobs, Economy and Innovation; Labour and Immigration; Justice; and the Treasury Board and Finance. The first amendment that I would like to speak on is in regard to the Travel Alberta Act. The travel and tourism industry is an important one in my riding of Livingstone-Macleod. As I mentioned yesterday in the House, we have beautiful parks, breathtaking hiking trails, and a diversity of geography that you don't see in most constituencies in Alberta. As the pandemic fades away in the coming months, international and domestic tourism will increase and will be a key component of our economic recovery. To ensure that our tourism industry thrives once more, we must streamline the process that will help businesses receive support and services.

Amendments within Bill 62 will expand Travel Alberta's mandate, which is currently focused on tourism marketing and promotion. These amendments will enable the agency to become a full destination management organization and assume programs and services that were previously provided by the Ministry of Jobs, Economy and Innovation. This reduction of red tape will support the development and growth of the province's tourism industry and see a vibrant tourism industry return to the province. If this bill passes, tourism businesses will only have to go to Travel Alberta for the programs and services that they require instead of to both, Travel Alberta and the ministry. This change will remove duplication and confusion over the rules of Travel Alberta and the government department. The agency will take on a more active role by working directly with communities, businesses, and entrepreneurs to develop new tourism destinations, products, and experiences in Alberta.

Bill 62 will also make amendments to the Builders' Lien Act. Last year the Legislature passed the Builders' Lien (Prompt Payment) Amendment Act, 2020, which established prompt payment rules and introduced an adjudication process. Bill 62 will amend the Builders' Lien Act to clarify that these rules apply to public-private partnerships, also known as P3s, with the exception of P3s governed by the Public Works Act. This clarification will save time

and effort for construction businesses to determine which payment rules apply to their projects, whether a business is in contravention of the rules, and what collection remedies are available for late payment.

There will also be amendments to the Builders' Lien Act that change adjudication decisions to interim and binding rather than final and binding. This approach reduces the risk and cost for parties involved in disputes by allowing them to take the matter to the courts or to arbitration if they are not satisfied with the adjudicator's decision. Prompt payment rules will also be extended to professional consultant contracts such as engineers and architects. I'm happy to see this change because it will enable consulting businesses to receive timely payment for their work and access to a faster and less costly adjudication process for payment disputes. These amendments will also allow for electronic sharing of the certificates of substantial performance, which will reduce the need for various parties to visit each job site to view the notice.

3:10

Bill 62 amends the Alberta Utilities Commission Act by enabling cabinet to set formal timelines through regulation to improve the Alberta Utilities Commission approval processes. This will allow for a more predictable and a shorter tariff rate approval time for transmission and distribution operators, resulting in faster approvals of new power plants, which will, in turn, provide more certainty for job creators looking to invest in natural gas, wind, or solar power generation.

Mr. Speaker, this bill is great for the job creators in our province. It provides an environment with more certainty, which reduces the risks that these job creators take on to keep the economy of our province moving forward. It will allow employers to record the hours of their employees using a schedule that best fits their needs by repealing the Employment Standards Code requirements that employers record their employees' hours of work daily.

This bill does not just improve our business environment; it also reduces red tape on the processes that deal with the more negative or sadder side of life. Bill 62 reduces red tape by replacing outdated references to repealed wills and succession in the Family Property Act and by amending the Fatal Accidents Act to have reports tabled electronically, which allows impacted families easy access to the report without having to visit the Legislature Library.

Mr. Speaker, reducing red tape is good for business, it's good for job creators, and it's good for everyday Albertans. It reduces unnecessary burdens and creates a more efficient and effective job environment, and that's why I invite all members of this House to join me in supporting this bill.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available.

Seeing none, are there any members – I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-West Henday has risen to join debate.

Mr. Carson: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's an honour to rise this afternoon to speak to Bill 62, the Red Tape Reduction Implementation Act, 2021, and I have appreciated the conversation that we've had so far this afternoon. I would echo the thoughts of my colleague from Edmonton-Decore, that, once again, we have a piece of legislation before us that is amending several different pieces of legislation.

That's concerning, first and foremost, because when we consider things like changes to the Builders' Lien (Prompt Payment) Amendment Act, 2020, or changes to the Real Estate Act, that we see within this legislation, the fact is that both of these pieces of

legislation were not amended or created that long ago, Mr. Speaker. In the instance of the Builders' Lien (Prompt Payment) Amendment Act, 2020, we haven't even begun to see if that process was going to work in the first place, yet here we are amending that legislation. It's frustrating for myself and for stakeholders in the community and in industry to be already considering amendments.

The more frustrating part for me, Mr. Speaker, is that, first of all, the Minister of Service Alberta isn't the one handling the consultation process, as far as we can tell, on this and the amendment process. The fact is that within his role as the minister he is the one that has these relationships and is building these relationships, so if indeed these amendments to that act are coming forward because of consultations that he's continued to do, then I truly don't understand why the Minister of Service Alberta isn't the one bringing these changes forward.

I would echo the comments once again of the Member for Edmonton-Decore, that it seems that this government is looking for any way to justify the fact that they are spending such a large amount of money on an associate minister who is really just taking on the job of what ministers should already be doing in their own portfolios. That's frustrating, Mr. Speaker.

When we look at the amendments to the Builders' Lien (Prompt Payment) Amendment Act, we see that it's being amended to allow prompt payment to be expanded to P3s for municipal and postsecondary projects, and this is something that we should be willing to consider. But I really don't understand why we are in a situation where we are coming back so quickly or so promptly, Mr. Speaker, to amend these pieces of legislation that just came forward such a short amount of time ago.

The fact is that it really is the government admitting that they got it wrong the first time around, so here we are amending this legislation so shortly after it was brought in in the first place. I appreciate that we'll have more opportunities to speak to some of those changes, but I am concerned that even with what we're seeing here, we're going to be back here in a short period of time amending the legislation again because they didn't get it right the second time. That's very concerning.

When we look at changes to the Real Estate Act that we're seeing in this legislation, once again I would ask why the Minister of Service Alberta isn't taking these issues forward and isn't being the lead on these issues. These are some very important changes that we're seeing in here in terms of the power dynamic of the council and industry stakeholders.

It wasn't long ago – you might remember, Mr. Speaker – that this legislation was before the House. The fact is that when we were in government, we saw some very concerning trends when it came to how that council was being administered or potentially managed, so we had conducted a review of RECA in October 2018, after hearing numerous complaints about that issue. Of course, that KPMG report was released on June 28, 2019. We had the Service Alberta minister not a long time ago once again bringing forward amendments to that legislation and changes to how the council acts and their ability to make bylaws, potentially, or change the way that the dynamics work there.

Unfortunately, while the government at the time was supported, I believe, to some extent by industry stakeholders in the changes that they made for the minister to have more power to administer things like bylaws, now we see what I would call a substantial change and potentially even a one-eighty in terms of how the government and the minister are going to allow the Real Estate Council to administer bylaws. I'm hearing quite clearly from the industry that they're very concerned and from stakeholders that they're concerned about the changes that we're seeing here.

It wasn't long ago, once again, that the minister took on these important powers to try and strengthen the relationship of industry stakeholders in regard to real estate, and unfortunately what we're seeing here is a massive change in how they're able to create and administer bylaws. I'm hearing once again, Mr. Speaker, from industry stakeholders that this is likely the wrong direction, that this isn't the position that we should be taking, and they're asking that we put a complete pause, as far as I can tell, on the changes that we're seeing in here.

I will continue those consultations, most definitely, but I think it's frustrating that, as far as I can tell, the minister doesn't seem to be listening to the concerns of those stakeholders, doesn't seem to be interested in fulsome consultations, which would result in better legislation, at the end of the day.

With that, I imagine I'll have more comments on this, but at this time I think that it's important that we pause and take a look at exactly what the government is proposing in regard to the changes to the Real Estate Act. Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available.

Mr. Hunter: Mr. Speaker, I hope to be able to provide some clarity on some of the speaking points that members opposite have provided this Assembly. First of all, we've heard for two years now members opposite complain about our approach to stand up an Associate Ministry of Red Tape Reduction. I will remind the members that in any jurisdiction around the world that we have studied, in every jurisdiction that has had a material effect on reducing regulatory burden on their job creators or on their people, they have stood up a person or a small ministry in order to be able to address the issue. It has to be purposeful, it has to be done by someone driving the process, and this is what the Premier has recognized and that the government has recognized, that there has to be someone driving the process. That was my role.

I had actually been quite passionate about this. I come from business, Mr. Speaker. This is something that I've lived. I've recognized the burden on small businesses, and there is a disproportionate effect on small businesses when it comes to red tape.

3:20

I wanted to just remind the members, and I've said this before, Mr. Speaker, that when it comes to actually achieving something – both the speakers from the opposite side that have spoken so far have said that there is no reason to do this. But let's just take a look at history. History always teaches us. Hindsight is always 20/20 vision, so let's take a look at it.

Take a look at our record, what we've accomplished in two years versus what the NDP have accomplished in four years. Mr. Speaker, I humbly submit to you and to this Assembly that the hon. members have done nothing when it comes to red tape reduction. They did not set up an associate ministry or a ministry of red tape reduction, and because of that, there was no purposeful effort on their part to do anything in terms of reducing regulatory burden.

On the other hand, in two years we have been able to reduce almost half of the regulatory burden that Albertans have to face on a regular basis, the hoops that Albertans have to jump through. We have cut the strings that bind our job creators and innovators in Alberta to the tune of 107,000 of those strings that are stopping the progress of Albertans, the progress of innovation, the progress of not-for-profit organizations. We've stood up nine industry panels that address these things right from the trenches. These are the people that actually live it daily. They've given us fantastic

information. We've now actioned much of that information and recommendations.

The other thing that I wanted to say, Mr. Speaker, is that I have heard them complain about the budget that we have. Let's be clear. Rather than addressing the historical, you know, creating history when it isn't there, the reality is this. We did not set up a separate ministry. Our ministry is actually under Treasury Board and Finance. In other words, we took some of the resources that were already there. We reallocated those resources in order to be able to address red tape reduction. We have not spent any extra money in being able to reduce 107,000 pinch points to date and a 33 per cent reduction in four years. We will spend no extra money on that, and the members opposite, when they say, "Why would Albertans be willing to spend an extra \$10.5 million?" are not correct, and the members know it. They know that it is falling underneath Treasury Board and Finance. That is called an associate ministry. We fall under Treasury Board and Finance.

They can continue with the narrative that there is no good happening, but talk to any Albertan out there, Mr. Speaker, and they will tell you many, many times how grateful they are for the purposeful efforts of this government to be able to get out of the way of regular Albertans and our job creators to let them do what they do best: jump-start the economy and get Albertans back to work. Our end goal is to be the freest, fastest moving economy in North America.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available, with about 20 seconds.

Seeing none, are there any members looking to join debate? I see the hon. Member for Calgary-East.

Mr. Singh: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for this wonderful opportunity today to speak here on the important topic and concerns around Bill 62, the Red Tape Reduction Implementation Act, 2021. I would like to applaud the Associate Minister of Red Tape Reduction for tabling amendments to eight pieces of legislation from six ministries during this spring sitting and would like to extend my appreciation to all Albertans that have supported it to protect job creators and to protect workers in the province.

As we all know, the pandemic brought world-wide economic impact at the same time that oil prices struggled, which really made things difficult in our province, so there is really a need to find ways to somehow lighten the burdens that businesses face, brought by our legislation and regulations but without impeding the safeguards, to conduct business in Alberta. This bill ensures that business owners, investors, and Albertans have the ability to efficiently become part of Alberta's growing economy. This is a part of our platform to reduce unnecessary procedures by one-third, that is required under legislation and regulations, and at the same time to reduce governmental cost and speed up approvals while adapting to modern and smarter ways of maintaining consumer protections.

Jobs, Economy and Innovation's Travel Alberta Act. Amendments to the Travel Alberta Act will expand the mandate, currently focused on tourism marketing and promotion, to enable the agency to become a full destination management organization and to assume programs and services previously provided by the Department of Jobs, Economy and Innovation to better support the development and growth of the tourism industry in Alberta. This will make Travel Alberta all-inclusive in the delivery of programs and services to support the growth and economic recovery of Alberta's tourism industry, removing duplication and confusion over the roles of Travel Alberta. The government department is also unnecessary to ensure the agency will take on a more active role

working directly with communities, businesses, entrepreneurs to develop new tourism destination products and experiences in Alberta.

Labour and Immigration's Employment Standards Code. The Employment Standards Code as well will be amended to repeal the provision that requires employers to record the hours of work of their employees daily. Despite the amendments to the code, employers will still be required to record daily work hours of their employees, but it will no longer recommend the frequency of recording. Mr. Speaker, this will save time for employers who manually record hours of work each day, particularly for schedules that don't tend to change, and will allow employers to continue using existing payroll practices such as recording daily hours using a schedule that best fits their needs.

Service Alberta's Real Estate Act, 2021. The amendments will establish the authority of the RECA, the Real Estate Council of Alberta, board of directors to determine, in consultation with industry councils, eligibility criteria for candidates running for election for industry council positions and to screen nominees on these criteria. The amendments will clarify that members elected to the industry councils and public members appointed to the board and industry councils can serve for less than three full years. The amendments as well establish the minister's regulation-making authority that will advise and determine new board bylaws, and industry council rules will be approved once the current requirements for the minister's approval of the bylaws and rules expires on December 1, 2022.

The amendments will require the board to consult with the industry councils prior to making bylaws that address critical elements of the RECA governance structure such as the conduct and the roles and responsibilities of the board and council members. The amendments will now allow the board to make bylaws to establish requirements and standards related to education courses offered to licensees or prospective licensees and approved third-party education providers and enable the minister to make regulations establishing requirements related to training and education. Overall, these amendments will provide clarity on the authorities of the government and RECA's board of directors. In the longer term, by creating a more efficient regulator, these amendments will result in less direct intervention by government in overseeing the real estate industry.

Justice and Solicitor General's Family Property Act. Further, Mr. Speaker, the amendments to the Family Property Act will remove repealed references in this legislation and add references to the Wills and Succession Act to apply retroactively to February 1, 2012. This will ensure that Albertans do not unnecessarily spend time and money on legal costs in bringing claims into court to determine who has the right to the property of a deceased spouse or partner.

3:30

Justice and Solicitor General, Fatal Accidents Act. Madam Speaker, the government must review damage amounts every five years under the act. The amendments will repeal the requirement for the government to table the report that reviews legislation, amount of bereavement costs, damages resulting from fatal accidents and replace it with a requirement to publish the report on a government website or make it available by other electronic means. Providing the report by electronic means such as posting it on a government website will allow Albertans, including family members of individuals killed in fatal accidents and their legal counsel, easy access to the report. Currently the only means by which the report can be accessed is through the Legislature Library.

Treasury Board and Finance, securities amendment act 2021. These amendments to Treasury Board and Finance's securities

amendment act will enhance existing protections for investors and the ability for companies to raise capital more efficiently in our province. The proposed amendments will support and facilitate the continued modernization of Alberta's securities laws and ensure they're synchronized with the securities law of other Canadian jurisdictions. This is consistent with the practice of enacting similar legislative amendments between 2005 and 2018 that were designed to reform the securities regulatory system to better meet the realities of current capital markets and to assist Canada in meeting its international G-20 commitments.

Energy, Alberta Utilities Commission Act. Further amendments to Bill 63 will enable cabinet through regulations to set formal timelines to improve the Alberta Utilities Commission approval processes where necessary. Shorter and more practical traffic rate approval, times for transmission and distribution operators, and faster approval of new power plants will support economic recovery and growth by providing more certainty for job creators looking to invest in natural gas, wind and solar power generation.

Service Alberta, Builders' Lien Act. The amendments will clarify the prompt-payment rules established in the Builders' Lien (Prompt Payment) Amendment Act, 2020, generally applied to public-private partnerships, P3s, except those governed by the Public Works Act. By providing clarity around prompt-payment rules applied to P3s, construction businesses will save time and effort involved in determining which payment rules apply to their projects, whether a business is in contravention of the rules, and what collection remedies are available for late payment.

The amendments will establish that the decision on payment disputes will be interim and binding rather than final and binding. This approach reduces the risk and therefore the potential legal cost for parties involved in disputes by allowing them to take the matter to the courts, or if they are not satisfied with the decision, the amendments will allow for extending prompt-payment rules to professional consultant contracts such as engineers. This will enable consultant businesses to receive timely payment for their work and provide them with access to a faster and less costly process for payment disputes compared to the courts.

Other changes to this act will allow for electronic sharing of the certificate of substantial performance innovation to posting notices on the job site. This will reduce the need for parties to the project to spend time visiting the job site to view the notice.

Removing red tape for job creators is the primary objective of this bill. If these amendments are passed, Albertans will see faster approvals, shorter wait times, and cost savings. Cutting red tape is about saving time and money for our job creators so they can feel supported in creating jobs and boosting the economy. Mr. Speaker, with this bill we are removing government oversight where it impedes growth and job creation. Where it protects the safety or the well-being of the public and the environment, the main goal is to get rid of outdated and unused requirements. Albertans have been voicing their concerns loud and clear, which addresses several key concerns in regard to the issues raised.

Mr. Speaker, Bill 62 highlights a number of impactful amendments that will remove red tape for our job creators such as amendments that include reducing delays on municipal development projects and speeding up municipal off-site levies and the development of permit appeals. The focus is to eliminate red tape that is holding back the economy. These changes will bring more investment, more jobs into our urban communities and build communities and create jobs for Albertans. This platform promise will always be a commitment and a way to protect workers, restore balance, and strengthen democracy.

Again, I would like to applaud the associate minister, all the stakeholders, leaders, and Albertans that have taken the time to

provide feedback to not only better the economy of Alberta but to respect and support the feedback of our workers and employees.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you to the Member for Calgary-East.

Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available should anybody wish to take any questions or comments.

Seeing none, are there any members looking to join debate? I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadows has risen.

Mr. Deol: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my honour to rise in the House and to be able to make some comments to Bill 62, Red Tape Reduction Implementation Act, 2021, on behalf of my constituents and Albertans. When I see what this bill proposes, if I just recall my memory, it wasn't really long ago when we debated these very issues under Bill 37, and we provided feedback to the ministry during the debate on Bill 37. It seems like all of those concerns were not taken seriously. All this bill does is – you know, Bill 37 was passed and, it's my understanding, still not proclaimed yet, but the government has introduced other changes to their own bill that we discussed in the House not long ago.

Some of the changes I see that the bill proposes are to the builders' lien amendment act. What this would do: the Builders' Lien Act is being amended by allowing prompt payment to be expanded to P3s for new school and postsecondary projects. The bill also makes industry include consultants such as architects and designers as part of prompt-payment rules.

Mr. Speaker, I remember debating this bill. I provided feedback based on my experience talking to people, my clients from 14 years of business. This bill is still not even complete. If you really wanted to discuss the concerns of the industry having to deal with a similar concept and the similarity of operations, as I mentioned, you know, the contracts aren't even written. I think that verbal contracts were included after that, and there are a whole lot more people.

3:40

Truckers: that is one of the industries that I've been hearing a lot from, those folks. I mean, working for months and months for a contractor and then ending up losing the money or the compensation due to them. In many cases the employer or the contractor actually disappeared after the completion of the job. To me, I seriously wanted to provide my feedback on this, if this government has actually gone back again to look back on their changes to try to complete the work they couldn't in the past Bill 37. This is the time when they need to do thorough consultations. There are many sectors, actually, that work within the same concept that we're trying to address in this bill, and this is the time, I think, the ministry should actually seriously look into that.

The other changes. I see the corporations act and Securities Act. I will not go through all the changes. The only question that rises in my mind is: like, were these changes not applicable had not this ministry actually existed? The Ministry of Service Alberta actually would have been able to easily propose these changes or been able to make these changes, so why are they being done under the ministry of red tape? Also, I would have a concern because I worked in this industry, the security industry. I would also like to know from the minister that the changes to the Securities Act are not compromising the security of the consumers within the industry. I would really like to have the feedback on this.

The Employment Standards Code. Once again, the employer no longer needs to record hours of work daily. I would like to hear more on this from the ministry. How does the minister think that this will not really impact the areas of disputes between employer

and employee, having the employers no longer record the regular hours of their employees?

Changes to the Family Property Act. This could have been simply done through a statutes amendment act, and it would have been good to see the Ministry of Justice actually present in this change.

Basically, I wanted to say something I remember that bothers me and worries me. When the Executive Council was being announced and the way the ministry of red tape reduction was narrated and being claimed that it is so critical to the Alberta economy in respect to, you know, the recovery of the economy, attracting investments, creating jobs, yet so far, for the last two years or so – it was just last week, on the 16th, when the government completed its first two years in office. How the ministry can provide their report, how that ministry has contributed to attract the investments, that was their primary mandate when this ministry was established, how it has been playing its role to bring investments to Alberta by reducing red tape in the past two years – then we see the unprecedented unemployment rate in the province. More than a quarter of a million people have no jobs. Or the working people, you know, under the conditions of growing inflation, struggling to make ends meet, or what this ministry has done to complete the report, basically, of – the ministry was not able to achieve its mandate.

What has the ministry learned, you know, from investment flying away from the province? What kind of assessment have they done of the money that has moved to Wisconsin, U.S., even taking the tax credits from Alberta? What is the report on the jobs and projects that have moved from Alberta to Nova Scotia, Newfoundland, and to the other parts of the country? I think that was the mandate of this ministry, and this is what we are not seeing in this bill. Those are some of the concerns that I would really like to get feedback on from the ministry.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I move a motion to adjourn the debate on this bill.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Bill 58 Freedom to Care Act

[Adjourned debate April 14: Mr. Long]

The Acting Speaker: Are there any members wishing to join debate? I see the hon. Member for St. . . .

Ms Goehring: Edmonton-Castle Downs.

The Acting Speaker: Edmonton-Castle Downs. Thank you very much. My apologies for that.

Ms Goehring: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise this afternoon to speak to Bill 58, the Freedom to Care Act. I know you're no stranger to me talking about nonprofits and charitable organizations and the incredible gratitude that I have for all of the services that these organizations provide to Albertans all across the province. We know that there are more than 26,400 nonprofit organizations in the province, and I know that every single member of this House has an impact in their community from these nonprofits and the incredible work that they do supporting Albertans.

When we look at the importance of this sector, there are some numbers that I would like to share with you before we get into this bill, just to give you some understanding of the importance of this sector when it comes to our province. We have here that more than 1.6 million Albertans provide more than 262 million volunteer hours to support their communities. The value of volunteer time is

estimated to be worth \$5.6 billion per year. That is incredible. There is absolutely no shortage of Albertans that want to provide their time and volunteer in their communities.

When I have been speaking with volunteer organizations, nonprofits, charitable organizations, something that has continuously come up is the feeling of lack of support from this government. There is a feeling of lack of consultation and a lack of understanding about what this sector actually needs. So when this piece of legislation was introduced, Bill 58, the Freedom to Care Act, that definitely confirmed the messaging that we've been hearing from Albertans that are involved in nonprofits, that are volunteers. There was a general consensus that the majority of those that are working in nonprofit or volunteering in this sector weren't consulted with. They weren't asked: "What does your sector need? What would benefit you as a nonprofit or a charitable organization?"

3:50

So I'm curious how this legislation came to be. I know that there was a survey that was done by this government. One of the organizations that I spoke to said that that was the only consultation that they were aware of that had occurred. They submitted their feedback. Their feedback loud and clearly said that the most pressing barrier for this sector is funding. It's not regulation barriers.

The organizations that I spoke to that were in support of pieces of this legislation said that they needed clarity when it came to the exemptions, that they felt that that was a barrier, that there wasn't an ease of access. Part of this bill announcement was that a website would be included, which is incredible. But a piece of legislation isn't required to make a website. The nonprofit sector is very appreciative that this website is going to exist, that all of the lists of exemptions are going to be in one spot. There was gratitude for that. However, it's not required in a bill.

The government could have done that. They could have simply created a website as per what the sector was saying, that they needed access to be aware of what exemptions already existed. There are over 420 exemptions that exist. They wanted an ease of access so that when they're in an emergency situation and they want to provide a service, they had somewhere to go. So I think that giving credit to government for doing that is well deserved. Was a piece of legislation required to do that? Absolutely not.

What we did hear is that the sector is struggling. Just yesterday in question period I asked about charitable organizations and the support that is required and when this government will step up and actually do something that's going to support these organizations. We're seeing charities close all over the province. What does that mean, Mr. Speaker, when a charity closes? Well, it means that those services that are being provided to support Albertans don't exist. So what's going to happen is that other places are going to have to step up and create the service that the government isn't supporting.

That's where we get into the liability portion of this piece of legislation. There are exemptions for liability for volunteers. When you say that – the government has said that it allows access of ease for people to want to step forward to volunteer when they feel that they're not going to be sued, which sounds wonderful. But the reality of how that comes into practice isn't so clear. The organizations have indicated that they weren't asking for that. They don't want an exemption from liability. They have indicated that their insurance companies already provide support should some sort of accident happen or some incident happen.

There's a fear that part of this legislation is causing unforeseen consequences, consequences that perhaps weren't intentional. But if you have an organization that's coming forward and applying for an exemption, does that then put their insurance at risk because they no longer would qualify under their insurance policy? What I did

hear from organizations is that they need an understanding of what their insurance policy already says. There are organizations that are having their insurance changed, and they're not aware of it. There needs to be some sort of education around what exemptions and what liabilities already exist under your current insurance policy. That isn't in this. That is not part of this legislation.

What we've heard is that they need support. There are incredible organizations all across the province that are doing incredible work, but they're being forced to close their doors because they're not being properly supported and funded. What we're seeing is that other organizations and other well-meaning volunteers in the province want to help. Instead of supporting the organizations that already exist and do that important work, they're forced to close their doors, which leaves a huge gap in services in some communities. Then well-meaning citizens say: "You know what? I would like to help. We're not qualified to drive individuals, but we would like an exemption to be able to do that."

When this first came out, we heard from the food bank. They expressed concern that individuals would be at risk with the potential of exemptions because individuals that don't normally provide a service, meaning well, could inadvertently put Albertans at risk. That was a fear – that was a fear – I can tell you, Mr. Speaker, from every single nonprofit, charitable organization that I spoke to when talking about this bill. They were all concerned about the unintended consequences of this legislation, that if an organization is granted an exemption, we are inadvertently putting Albertans at risk.

When we look at the examples that the government gave as to why they were providing this exemption, they provided two scenarios that already had exemptions. The issue was the ease of knowing what the exemptions were, which is being resolved with the website. At no point does it support the reason why they would put this legislation forward. We know that Albertans want to help. They want to step forward and support their community however they can. The solution is not creating the opportunity for exemptions to be granted. It just simply doesn't make sense.

There are services and organizations that offer services to Albertans. Why aren't individuals being funnelled to those organizations that already exist? Could that perhaps be included in the website? When an organization is looking to say, "You know what? We could really use some drivers; we have a lack of supports to get our rural Albertans to a pharmacy, to somewhere that is offering vaccinations," they truly want to help. It seems that that service doesn't exist. If they were to go on to the website and search the exemptions, could they not also go on to the website to see what organizations already provide that service, the ones that already have their policies and their regulations and their insurance in place to do that service?

Just because I'm meaning well and want to help doesn't mean the vehicle to do that is an exemption. That person could then go to the organization that already offers that service, take their training, have an understanding of what that organization does, and provide that service. It doesn't mean that we just start giving out exemptions when well-meaning people want them, because it inadvertently could put those that they're providing the service to at risk. That's a big concern, and that's something that I've heard from all of the organizations that I spoke to.

We have been asking for over a year now for supports for this sector. Mr. Speaker, I can tell you that throughout this bill, seven pages of it, there is nothing that provides actual, tangible support to organizations that already exist to provide services to Albertans. They want to help. They want to be able to provide services. They've come to us asking for the ability to meet with the minister

to talk about what their concerns are, to talk about their solutions, but it's not reflected in this piece of legislation.

We're looking at the risk of losing so many volunteers because there aren't organizations for them to go to. Part of this government's budget talked about increasing volunteerism in the province, and I can see why they would say that if we look at liability exemptions, perhaps that would increase volunteers. When I spoke to some of the organizations, their concern was that what this legislation was doing was off-loading the government's responsibility to support Albertans on to individuals who want to help, volunteers. It's creating a volunteer support system because the government hasn't adequately supported and provided those systems in already existing charitable organizations and nonprofits. They're closing their doors because they do not have the support that they require to get through this pandemic. They need hands-on, tangible support.

4:00

They have offered projects to talk about ways to get Albertans back to work when Albertans are struggling. They're living paycheque to paycheque. Some don't have a paycheque coming in. Your community organization is saying: hey, we have a project that would put some local contractors – plumbers, electricians, drywallers – back to work. This government has said no. They've cut the CFEP grants. They've cut the ability for these community organizations to not only provide services in their community in a new and creative way in COVID, but they've taken away the funding to allow them to invest in their community buildings, their structures. That's what the organizations are asking for.

There was a concern expressed about the urgency of some of these exemptions, that there was a need to make it a fast process to allow for emergency circumstances such as COVID. I know that some of the other examples that the government had provided were during the floods and during the Fort McMurray fires. When decisions are being made on an emergency basis and it has to go to the minister and to cabinet, who is responsible for looking at the capacity of that organization to actually meet the services that they're saying that they can provide? Are they looking at what insurance is already existent within that organization? Are they looking at what their actual capacity is to do that job?

Are they requiring background checks, vulnerable sector checks? When we have people that are transporting seniors, that's a vulnerable sector. Organizations that do those services, that drive seniors, have a vulnerable sector check through the RCMP. Who's going to be watching for that in cabinet? When we asked the ministry that, they didn't have answers, and some of the organizations, they're asking those clarifying questions, too.

When you're dealing in an urgent situation and you're asking for exemptions, who's going to be ultimately responsible for the decision to give that exemption if something goes terribly wrong? Part of this legislation is to remove liability, so when you're removing liability from a volunteer – it's been expanded in this piece of legislation to include a director, an officer, or a trustee of the nonprofit organization.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs.

Are there any members wishing to join debate on 29(2)(a)?

Seeing none, are there any members wishing to join debate? I see the hon. Member for Brooks-Medicine Hat has risen.

Ms Glasgo: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I just wanted to start off by saying that I think it's really interesting that we are talking about Bill 58 today as we are marking National Volunteer Week here in

the country and in the province of Alberta. I know I gave a member's statement earlier today talking about the amazing volunteers in Brooks-Medicine Hat and in our province, and I think that it's quite fitting that we are talking about the Freedom to Care Act this week because one of our best natural resources in Alberta – we do have some amazing ones under the ground, but I think our best natural resources are people.

The people that we have in this province are truly exemplary, Mr. Speaker. Not for the recognition, certainly not for a kickback, they do it all. They spend extra time. They give their talent, their money, their resources, their families. They sacrifice a lot just to make sure that everyone in our province can live a better life, and I think that's something that is truly unique about Alberta, because we do have some of the highest volunteerism rates in the country. We know that Alberta has this pioneer spirit and can-do attitude, and I think that that is perfectly shown when we talk about volunteerism.

You know, I've grown up in Medicine Hat all my life, and Medicine Hat is the kind of city where if you have an event or something going on and you need volunteers, the last problem that you are going to have is not having enough people to help. In fact, I remember speaking to someone about the proposed Special Olympics that were supposed to be happening in Medicine Hat. They said: well, you know, our problem isn't that we don't have enough volunteers; it's that we have so many volunteers that we don't know what to do with them. So they were making up – and among other reasons, even during my campaign people are just so willing to help. You have these moments where you go, "Okay; we're going to have to try to make other positions because we don't want anyone to feel excluded, and we want everyone to feel like they can help," because you know that volunteering is just such an important part of our social fabric. It's such an important way to feel involved in the community.

Last Friday I saw a post on Facebook from my friend Celina, who is the executive director of the Medicine Hat and District Food Bank, and she had posted that due to COVID they were actually experiencing a little bit of a volunteer shortage. They had some shifts that needed to be filled, and I thought: well, I think I'm free on Friday morning. I didn't even really look, but I was like: I think I'm free on Friday morning. So I texted her, and I said: hey; I'll come and volunteer. I met Linda and some other people at the food bank on Friday morning, and we assembled hampers and baskets and all the other kinds of things. Through the cattleman's program at the Medicine Hat food bank there are local ranchers who are able to donate their livestock to make into ground beef for families who need it because we know that beef prices are very high. Of course, providing nutritious and delicious meals to families is essential but also quite costly. In order to make sure that the food that we are getting in Medicine Hat to these families is nutritious, there are interesting programs and stuff that we have to do.

Now, we also know that when we're doing community service work such as this in food banks and otherwise, there's a considerable amount of regulation that you must follow. Of course, there are health and safety rules, and those are important rules, Mr. Speaker, because we want to make sure that while we are helping people, we're truly helping them. I mean, there are health and safety regulations that must be followed, but time and time again you find that there are regulations that are for commercial purposes that can prevent not-for-profit organizations from addressing immediate needs in the community. These regulations often have exemptions. I think that Bill 58 just gives an expressway to kind of get around these regulations and make sure that our not-for-profit sector is not inhibited by onerous regulation when it doesn't necessarily need to be.

From what I understand, the Ministry of Culture, Multiculturalism and Status of Women responded to a survey that went out earlier last year asking not-for-profits what we could do to help. That's kind of where the Freedom to Care Act was born. A key finding from the stakeholder consultation from spring 2020: stakeholders expressed a preference for changes to existing regulations, noting that good policy should already have exemption provisions.

Another key finding was that stakeholders had difficulty in navigating the regulatory exemptions due to a lack of awareness on available exemptions and not knowing how to access them. Like the hon. member who spoke previously, who I understand has a very deep connection to these issues – and she has, I think, very articulately expressed some of her concerns, but I would just like to respond and say that this isn't necessarily about the regulations themselves. It's about the fact that Albertans need the ability to find those regulations readily and be able to get these exemptions processed quickly so that they can help the communities that need them.

I think that, especially in COVID, it's an excellent time to be talking about this because we know that our not-for-profit sectors, as the hon. member opposite mentioned before, are stressed to their max. Because of increased poverty, because of people who've lost their jobs, people are accessing food banks and other resources at a higher rate right now. That's by no fault of their own but just because of the circumstance of the world that we're in right now. We know that we need to be able to have the tools to respond to those needs in our community. I think that Bill 58 is one example that's going to greatly help my community, for sure.

Other examples in Medicine Hat of charitable giving: we just saw the 50/50 jackpots for juniors that was organized by the ministry of status of women and multiculturalism and culture and tourism and – anyway, she has a lot of portfolios. I just lost track there. She helped us to establish a way for us to help our WHL and AJHL teams. In Medicine Hat we have the Medicine Hat Tigers, and in Brooks we have the Brooks Bandits, who are beloved and treasured and, for sure, have had a tough year as well. Albertans responded to that in record amounts. Albertans were so excited about that. I know that myself and the hon. Member for Spruce Grove-Stony Plain filmed a video, and it was a great time to be able to show community. Even though we can't be physically together, we can connect in ways like that, which is why I think volunteering and our not-for-profit sector are so important.

I also was touched by an example from a little girl named Mila Schaitel from Medicine Hat. She raised \$281 of her own money, and she gave it to the food bank because she thought that families in COVID needed help more than she needed to keep that \$281. It kind of makes me a little emotional because I think about little people in our communities and, you know, all the things they could be doing with that \$281. Miss Mila thought that a family in need would be a better use for that than herself, and I think that that's a true act of servant leadership even from the youngest people in our communities.

4:10

I know that in Medicine Hat we've also experienced floods. It seems to always flood around my birthday. It's just the curse of being born in June during the only rainy season in southern Alberta ever. It seems to be a time where, you know, we see an increased effort by many community members to help each other, which is great. But imagine if a group of volunteers wanted to bring 1,000 home-baked muffins or coffee to feed sandbaggers or whatever, or they wanted to prepare food at a local church or something that wasn't accredited. They would need an exemption to public health guidelines even though everything is clean, everything is good to

go, and all they wanted to do is help. These people shouldn't be penalized for helping, and their good efforts certainly should not go to waste. But that is a reality for many, and a similar situation has happened before. The Freedom to Care Act would make their efforts possible and expedite their efforts to make sure that they're getting the people who need the help the most. The Freedom to Care Act is also a fulfillment of a promise that was made in 2019.

We know that Albertans – because they're giving their time and money, we have to make sure that those efforts are not given and not being able to be used. Right now not-for-profits looking to lend a hand may need a one-time exemption from the government to assist in areas that aren't explicitly in their mandate, but many of these groups, like I said before, might not know which ministry to contact to seek that exemption. I mean, we know we have several ministries here today, and even sometimes as an MLA I have to sit there and go: "Okay. Which ministry does that fall under? Is it Service Alberta? Is it Municipal Affairs? Is it this, that, or the other thing?" Even for somebody who is connected in this whole situation, sometimes we have to think about that.

For the average person who is directing the food bank or running a local shelter, you can only imagine. They have 17,000 other things on their mind. The last thing that they're worrying about is which government department they should have to contact in order to figure it out and get the people the help that they need. All they want to do is help. The passing of Bill 58 fills a gap, and it will create a website to serve as a one-stop shop for not-for-profits seeking a one-time exemption that may not already exist. The website will direct their request to the appropriate ministry, and it will allow the ministry to know that recommendation and then make a recommendation to cabinet. Then cabinet will decide if a one-time exemption is necessary.

It keeps the process intact in that we are still making sure that regulations that need to be followed are being followed but also makes sure that there's an expedited way to get Albertans the help that they need. Most nonprofits might never even encounter a need, and there are existing exemptions that they can get, but if this can even help one organization, I think it's well worth passing, Mr. Speaker. This act also protects volunteers from liability when serving in their community, and it provides opportunities and protection while volunteers are serving.

While there might be red tape for our civil society to navigate, the Freedom to Care Act gives them a direct path through it and expedites approvals. Governments should always be creating conditions for success. We shouldn't be creating roadblocks. That's the role of government. It's our job to find ways to get to yes, not to constantly be saying no to people and throwing up more issues for people to try to dance around. Bill 58 balances protecting Albertans while making sure that they continue to play a vital part in building our strong communities. I'm very proud of our government for proposing this bill that will meet Albertans' needs and fulfill one of our campaign promises. It's another show that Conservatives are compassionate, that Conservatives care about our communities, and that we know that the best place for our not-for-profit sector is to be empowered. The best role for the government in that is to take a step back and create the conditions for success rather than more roadblocks.

I wanted to say thank you to the Minister of Culture, Multiculturalism and Status of Women for undertaking her vital work in this role. I want to say thank you to all the other ministers who have previously granted exemptions and helped our not-for-profit sector, and I want to encourage all of my colleagues to support this bill as I will be today. I would hope that something as important as this is not used as a political wedge, that it's not used

as a football but, rather, can receive the, I guess, uninterrupted support of the House so that we can help Albertans who need it most.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, for the opportunity to speak today.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available should there be any takers.

Seeing none, are there any members wishing to speak? I see the hon. Member for Lacombe-Ponoka has risen.

Mr. Orr: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to speak to Bill 58, the Freedom to Care Act. Over the last year we've seen many nonprofits and civil society organizations stepping up to help Albertans through the COVID-19 pandemic, and I just really want to say thanks to all of those different organizations. In a time of crisis it really is important what our volunteers and what our people can do to help each other out, to care for each other, to provide for each other. Unfortunately, red tape, outdated legislation, and prohibitive commercial regulations have sometimes been a hindrance to these organizations when doing acts of just social good and benefit to the community.

The Freedom to Care Act was drafted in response to feedback that Alberta's government received from a survey that was open to nonprofit stakeholders, so this is a direct response to the requests of many different groups that expressed that these were some of the challenges that they were facing. The purpose of commercial regulations is to protect the health and safety of Albertans and the public good, but there are instances when such regulations become ineffective and prohibitive, especially for civil society organizations when doing charitable work. And let's be honest: the motive for nonprofits and civil society groups is not profit. They have no incentive to create dangerous situations by cutting corners or doing anything like that. They are there to do good, and that's their intent and their purpose.

Good policy – all good policy, quite frankly – should have exemptions in place for situations in which they don't really apply well, in which they can be counterproductive, in fact. There are some exemptions in place, but nonprofits have expressed a complete lack of awareness of that. Many of these people didn't even know that there are these kinds of things available to them. They have difficulty accessing the existing regulation exemptions that are beneficial, and they found that a significant challenge. In fact, until recently I didn't even realize that exemptions were a very likely way to go, and I've had nonprofits in my community raise issues that have really hindered them in the ability to deliver a public good. A request for an exemption might have actually been an appropriate response for them, so I hope they will find this useful moving forward.

Nonprofits need to be able to respond quickly and appropriately in emergency situations, and having to navigate hidden but existing regulation exemptions means that their time is wasted, that their money is wasted, and essentially they're just in many cases throwing up their hands, giving up, and are unable to provide the support that they otherwise could to people.

To support the Freedom to Care Act, part of the solution will be the provision of a central website that will be created to help nonprofits identify and access appropriate and existing regulatory exemptions and provide a way for agencies to request new ones, one-time, short-term exemptions. Advice from the Alberta public service will be taken into account when considering a new, one-time exemption to ensure that it continues to still protect the health and the safety of Albertans.

Alberta's government also does not currently track how often these exemptions are used. The officials in charge don't really know

quite how that works, so creating a centralized system will provide better data, a better sense of how exemptions are used, when they're used, when they're needed, and annual reports to that effect will be made to cabinet on the outcome of these exemption requests to ensure that the provisions of this act are meeting the needs of communities, producing expected results, increasing, really, the public benefit through organizations while also not putting Albertans at risk.

4:20

As we all know, Alberta is a province filled with good-hearted people who aren't afraid of putting in some elbow grease and helping their neighbour out. In fact, in rural Alberta in many cases, quite frankly, people would just prefer to see big government get out of the way and stay out of their lives and let them look after themselves and their neighbours and their communities. Just let us do what we need to do in our community: that's all they want. In fact, every year 1.6 million volunteers in Alberta put in over 262 million hours to support their communities. But as the saying goes, no good deed goes unpunished, and that should not be the case, which sometimes regulation does.

If passed, Bill 58 will ensure that the individual – not the organizations but the person, the individual – that volunteers and performs services for a nonprofit organization will not be personally liable for damages or harm as long as harm was not caused wilfully or through some sort of criminal misconduct or when a volunteer is operating in some way that they aren't really qualified to do and/or operating a motor vehicle, for which there are other rules and regulations that apply.

This doesn't mean that volunteers are absolved of all responsibility, as some would like to suggest. They will still need to be properly licensed, certified, authorized, and act within the scope of their responsibility and their ability. These liability protections are also limited to individual volunteers, assuring the public that there is still legal recourse against nonprofit organizations or institutions, whichever the case may be, and that the insurance applies to the organizations, and none of that changes. The Freedom to Care Act will provide volunteers with the common-sense liability protections they deserve and encourage more Albertans to help their neighbours, serve their communities, and make our province a better place to live.

Mr. Speaker, there are over 24,600 nonprofit organizations in this province. Our nonprofit sector employs 280,000 Albertans and contributes \$5.5 billion in GDP annually. As our province starts to recover from COVID, the contributions of our nonprofit sector will continue to play a key role in our economic recovery, and if passed, the Freedom to Care Act will give nonprofits a reliable framework that will help them continue to provide essential services to communities and individuals in Alberta as well as build our economy.

I want to thank the Minister of Culture, Multiculturalism and Status of Women for bringing this legislation forward. Bill 58 will have long-term positive impacts on civil society organizations in our province and on the many Albertans who rely on the services they provide, especially in rural areas, because many times government services aren't immediately available, and they are provided through these nonprofits. It is important that as a government we support the good work that's being done by civil society organizations and nonprofits, and I believe the Freedom to Care Act will do just that, so I encourage everyone to support it.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available.

Seeing none, I believe I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview has risen.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise and speak to Bill 58, the Freedom to Care Act. I'll start out by making the comment that I don't think any member in the Chamber doesn't appreciate all of the incredible work that volunteers do. We all have experiences and have worked with volunteers. In fact, I think it would be safe to say that none of us would be here if it weren't for volunteers in our own capacity in order to get elected. We recognize that volunteers play a critical role for so many different services and service providers, especially during COVID, as members of the government have pointed out.

I'll start off by saying that my comments are going to be sticking more to the bill as opposed to the value that volunteers contribute to our society. I mean, I'll be the first to say that they are invaluable. In fact, you know, the volunteers: if you did actually put a dollar amount on it, I would imagine it is in the tens of billions of dollars through their volunteer services. With that, I do want to thank every volunteer in this province for whatever service they provide, especially during these really trying times.

Now, with this legislation, I'm coming, I think, more with questions than comments on the legislation, Mr. Speaker. I will thank the minister in advance for her answers, and I'm very much looking forward to Committee of the Whole on this bill.

I know that there are 420 exemptions which currently – wait a minute. I might already be messing that up. It might not be 420 exemptions. No. I believe it is the exemptions that currently exist.

Now, I appreciate that members on both sides of the House have been fairly engaged with the nonprofit sector, who have raised a number of concerns and brought them to government. I appreciate that the government with this piece of legislation is trying to fix a problem which currently exists, and that is for these organizations to know what the exemptions are, who provides which service in which community. But I think, as my colleague the Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs pointed out, those challenges are going to be resolved through the creation of a website, which I am one hundred per cent behind. I think that's a fantastic idea. Get the information out to them, and make it readily available so that it's less confusing. I think that's fantastic. Now, at the outset, if it was just about the website reducing confusion and providing clarity, then at this point the legislation is not necessary. There's no need to bring in a bill to be able to put up a website.

Now, I understand that if this legislation passes, Mr. Speaker, the Lieutenant Governor in Council – in other words, cabinet – has the authority to grant exemptions or to grant to an entity for the purpose of this act, basically, that they'd be considered a nonprofit. Now, I'm still, you know, looking at: what are some practical examples when businesses or other entities would be requesting of government that they're in need of that status? I'm not quite sure.

I do see that there's also an expansion in this legislation on the definition of a volunteer, and now directors, officers, or trustees can be considered a volunteer, which I find is interesting. I don't know if this is about a liability issue, where having that status means that they are personally no longer liable. I know that, you know, in the private sector your board of directors are liable for actions that the company may take. It's, you know, a significant responsibility, so I'm just curious: under what circumstances should directors be considered volunteers and therefore not liable? I'm hoping that the minister can provide not just an overview but some specific, concrete examples of when this would be applied, maybe how it's possibly been applied in the past, if that existed through an OIC, an order in council. That would be very, very helpful.

The other thing or, I guess, the broad question I have, Mr. Speaker, is: how many not-for-profits have been asking for some of these substantive changes? I know that my colleague the Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs is in direct contact with many of these

organizations, more so than I am, and I know that we've had a lengthy conversation regarding what this sector has been asking government for. My understanding has, again, more to do with the clarity around the exemptions: who's getting them; who's providing what services in a community?

You know, quite frankly, Mr. Speaker, I've worked in rural parts of Alberta. I've also worked and lived in other provinces in Canada in rural communities, and having a sense of who's providing which service I think could be very, very important, especially in our larger urban centres, to ensure that there isn't a duplication of services. That would be very, very helpful. A website: I mean, honestly, that seems like the best solution, that people can access it 24/7 and find out very, very quickly.

4:30

Again, you know, within this bill the other changes that the minister is proposing as far as exemptions and how they work: which organizations are asking for these exemptions? Again, under what circumstances does a for-profit or a corporate entity – or maybe it's a different association or organization that is looking for a not-for-profit status. I'd be curious to know why that is.

Again, Mr. Speaker, the way that I try to look at legislation as it comes through is really to identify: what is the problem that the legislation is trying to fix? In this piece of legislation at the moment – and I'm asking in all sincerity – I don't know what problem this legislation is fixing. Again, there is a process for not-for-profits if they are in need of an exemption. Now, it is possible that due to COVID there have been some extraneous circumstances that, you know, not-for-profits need a very prompt turnaround. If an OIC is needed, having served in the government benches, I recognize that cabinet can get jammed up very, very easily and very quickly. Is that part of the impetus behind these proposed changes?

Now, I'm under the impression that the government conducted an online survey that is part of the reason that these changes are being brought forward through this legislation. I would love to know if the government is planning to make that survey public. You know, it could consolidate the data, remove personal information but at least publish so that Albertans can see that there was, in fact, a demand for this change, and that's what the government is responding to.

You know, again, I appreciate that there are times that governments have the best of intentions of solving a problem and in the process end up creating a number of others. I believe that every government in the history of countries around the globe has had that challenge – I don't think there's a government that hasn't – but an important one to keep in mind. Unintended consequences can actually sometimes have a greater impact than the solution would have.

Again, I'm curious to know why the definition to designate an organization as a nonprofit for the purpose of this act – my understanding, then, is that there's a different definition that is used in other pieces of legislation. If that's the case, I'm curious to know why the definition in this bill is different from other pieces of legislation. Why the differentiation? If the minister can please expand on that.

I don't know at this point in time, quite frankly, Mr. Speaker, in part because of the portfolios I held when we were government, what the process is currently. You know, ahead of this legislation presumably passing, what's the process right now that exists for the minister who receives an exemption request? Again, does it then move through cabinet, and is this a way that the government believes that they're reducing red tape or expediting this exemption process?

I do find it interesting just in the whole conversation around when exemptions are needed and for what kinds of organizations, in what

circumstances. Again, conversations with the Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs revealed that the challenge with some good-intentioned changes – I’m hoping that I can use the one example that the member and I spoke of, which is: let’s say that you have a faith group that wants to provide a service for their elderly members. Maybe, especially during COVID, it’s delivering groceries or something along those lines or maybe not delivering groceries; maybe it’s taking them to go see a doctor or get a COVID shot or whatever.

I would imagine that there are certain regulations or protocols in place to protect the safety of the volunteer and the person that they’re trying to assist. If an organization applied for an exemption, you know, I mean, are all the different aspects of – if an unfortunate situation occurred, what does that mean for the volunteer, who has the best of intentions, who is wanting to help one of their faith-based friends? I mean, “faith-based” just because I know that religious organizations especially provide an incredible amount of services and volunteerism for their communities, so the example is just one that jumps out at me, Mr. Speaker. I think you understand my point. The exemptions may enable an organization to deliver a certain service, but what are the liabilities that then come with that, and who is liable?

The other thing is: are there other not-for-profits providing similar services? Again, this could be creating redundancies when there might be other gaps or needs that community members have that could be served. Now, again, my hope is that the website will help cut down on that.

You know, I’m curious to know when the website will be going up should this legislation pass. I mean, interestingly, I’m going to take back what I just said because the legislation doesn’t need to pass for a website to go up. Is the intention to get the website up quickly? If so, I would love to know if the minister has a timeline. Will there be an online repository of new exemptions so that others can see, in efforts to be transparent: what are the new exemptions?

I’m curious to know what types of responses the government received from not-for-profits indicating that the personal volunteer liability exemptions were needed.

Now, I see from the bill that this is a one-time, short-term exemption for not-for-profits. I’d appreciate if the government could be a little more clear in this. I mean, a one-time, short-term exemption: well, short-term can mean a lot of things to a lot of different people. It depends. Are you asking a farmer what’s short-term? Are you asking an organization who’s doing a five-year budget what’s short-term? The point is that there are different definitions, so can the minister clarify?

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available should there be any takers on that.

Seeing none, I see the hon. Member for Calgary-East has risen.

Mr. Singh: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Thanks for this great opportunity. I am pleased to stand here today to express my support for Bill 58, the Freedom to Care Act. I would like to applaud and thank the Minister of Culture, Multiculturalism and Status of Women for listening to the stakeholders who have voiced their concern on ways to reduce red tape so that our nonprofit organizations are being fully supported by our government.

The nonprofit sector is an economic driver which employs 28,000 Albertans and accounts for \$5.5 billion in GDP annually. This is a very important piece of legislation, which will have a lasting positive impact on the hard work Alberta’s nonprofit and charity organizations do to support the amazing communities in our province. I am proud to support an initiative that will be furthering

the hard work of all the volunteers and nonprofit organizations in our communities. The Freedom to Care Act, Bill 58, will create a mechanism which will allow nonprofit organizations to perform public good free from regulatory burdens and unnecessary red tape.

4:40

Mr. Speaker, there are about 26,400 nonprofit organizations in our province, and each year more than 1.6 million Albertans provide 262 million volunteer hours to support and help our surrounding communities. The value of volunteer time is estimated to be over \$5.6 billion per year. I would like to extend my appreciation to all of the hard-working volunteers, leaders, and members for creating a supportive environment to ensure our neighbouring communities are being well looked after.

Bill 58 seeks to authorize the cabinet through order in council to grant exemptions to nonprofit groups. There will be requirements for the Minister of Culture, Multiculturalism and Status of Women to report annually an exemption request that cannot be addressed through existing processes or legislation and provide individual volunteers with liability protection. The Freedom to Care Act aims to establish a central access point for information on regulatory and legislative exemptions and guide organizations on how to apply for these examinations in a timely fashion. For example, an exemption that may exist is our food donation exemptions law, which protects donors from liability and allows Albertans to fill food hampers and donate to food banks and shelters.

Mr. Speaker, when it comes to emergency situations, government regulations hinder ways nonprofit organizations operate. Some stakeholders will express that this legislation will help with short-term projects and is responding to the crisis or emergency situations. We’ll ensure to create a mechanism to allow nonprofits performing social good to apply for common-sense exemptions from redundant and unnecessary regulatory burden without creating more red tape. We must keep in mind that Bill 58 will not be able to address challenges such as funding cuts, reporting requirements, administrative burdens, grant eligibility requirements, timely export approvals, and grant funding.

Mr. Speaker, Bill 58 will only have a mechanism that will allow for the organizations to apply for exemptions from restrictions that are implemented for nonprofit establishments. By adopting the Freedom to Care Act, this will allow charitable nonprofit groups to apply for common-sense exemptions from regulations that are designed primarily for commercial application. With the support of the Minister of Service Alberta, this will ensure the processes are regulated and correctly implemented. Sometimes there are no exemptions put in place for certain situations, so it is important that Albertans and organizations are able to quickly apply for such exemptions when needed. We need to enable Alberta’s volunteers and get them the tools they need because these requests are pushed to the front of the queue in the case of a pressing emergency. This means that Albertans will be able to quickly respond to crises as they occur. Each request is looked at by this expense and can assure Albertans that their health and safety will not be compromised by this process.

Often government regulations are tricky to navigate and can be difficult to understand. To supplement this legislation, the ministry also seeks to establish a website that will be available to all Albertans who wish to learn more about the process of applying for exemptions and to give them easy access to the exemptions that are already in place. We can also assure all Albertans that the process will be quick and easy to ensure immediate response to emergency situations. In the past our province has stepped up to help during emergencies, and the Freedom to Care Act will only strengthen the current legislations that are implemented to keep our communities safe.

Our platform commitment is to cut red tape by one-third, reduce costs, speed up approvals, and free job creators to get more Albertans back to work. Alberta's industry panels aim to help the minister identify unnecessary red tape in every sector of Alberta's economy. Cutting red tape within government will allow the public sector to focus on serving Albertans and implement an outcome-based regulatory approach.

We want to enable Albertans, Alberta's volunteers and give them the tools they need. In the past our province has stepped up to help during emergencies. There are countless examples of the selfless acts Albertans have performed, so as they go above and beyond to help during some of our province's worst crises,

Mr. Speaker, Bill 58 also introduces volunteer liability protection, which aims to protect volunteers. They cannot be held personally liable on behalf of the organization as long as the harm was not caused by wilful or criminal misconduct. The volunteer must be acting within the scope of his or her responsibilities and must be properly licensed, certified, or authorized.

This liability protection will align with other Canadian jurisdictions that have similar legislation to protect Albertans and cut unnecessary red tape. For example, Mr. Speaker, Nova Scotia's Volunteer Protection Act has similar legislation to address similar concerns, which has been in place for around 20 years. Nova Scotia's act protects volunteers from being held liable for damages if they were acting in good faith within the organization's mandate.

The Freedom to Care Act will create a mechanism which will allow not-for-profit organizations to perform public good free from regulatory burdens and unnecessary red tape. The government's focus is to eliminate red tape that is holding back the economy. These changes will bring more support and protection and more jobs into our communities and build trust with Albertans. This promised platform will always be a commitment and a way to protect workers and protect our thousands of volunteers, restore balance, and strengthen democracy. With this legislation, more Albertans will have the freedom to support others free from unnecessary burdens and the fear of potential liability. At the same time, it is also important to remember why such regulations are in place. If this legislation is passed, Albertans will see faster approvals, shorter wait times, and a sense of trust in the community, especially during emergency situations.

We want to enable Albertans, Alberta's volunteers, and give them the tools they need. In the past our province has stepped up to help during emergencies. There are countless examples of the selfless acts Albertans have performed as they go above and beyond to help during some of our province's worst crises. Everyone remembers the flood of 2013 in Calgary. This was the largest flood since the year 1932 and had a lasting impact on our city. Tragically, five people lost their lives during this time, and many others lost their properties or were devastated by the costs of repairs to infrastructure.

Mr. Speaker, I note that we would not have been able to recover from this disaster without the help of the volunteers. I'm proud of the way Calgarians stepped up to the challenge, sacrificing their time and energy to help rebuild our city and support those most in need. Sometimes Albertans don't have time to worry about unnecessary regulations as the need is too pressing and time is short. In this situation it was important for Albertans to be able to respond to the call for help. We appreciate their work and do not take it for granted.

Cutting red tape is about saving time and money for our job creators so that they can feel supported in creating jobs and boosting the economy. Mr. Speaker, the Calgary-East constituency is home to hundreds of families that will benefit significantly from Bill 58, and it will allow organizations and volunteers to grow strong

through the implementation of this legislation. Again, I applaud the minister and all the staff and the team members that have been involved in the crafting of Bill 58, that will ensure the protection of Alberta and will ensure that our population is supported and protected.

Mr. Speaker, I encourage everyone in this Chamber to support this bill and support all individuals that are dealing with the challenges and the families that are affected. I hope that everyone will put forward their full support for such a significant piece of legislation, which will enable Alberta's volunteers to support others and give them the tools they need to succeed.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

4:50

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available for any questions or comments. I see the hon. Minister of Jobs, Economy and Innovation has risen.

Mr. Schweitzer: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I move that we adjourn debate.

The Acting Speaker: Unfortunately, that's not available under 29(2)(a).

Mr. Schweitzer: Oh, sorry. I wasn't doing a 29(2)(a). I thought you were back on the regular piece.

The Acting Speaker: All right. Sure.

I see the hon. Member for Calgary-McCall.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. A couple of things with respect to this bill. I do recognize that volunteers and different organizations, nonprofit organizations, do critical work in our communities, and they should be appreciated and supported in every way that we can.

[The Speaker in the chair]

But what's not clear from this legislation – if anybody, including the member who just spoke, can share with us: was there an issue in nonprofits that volunteers were hesitant because of the liability to be part of volunteering activities?

The second thing is that this bill limits the liability of the volunteer in that they will still be liable for wilful, reckless, criminal misconduct, which is general negligence law. But section 3(3) says, "Nothing in this section affects the liability of any non-profit organization." So it means that nonprofit organizations still may be liable for the actions of their volunteers. How will that encourage more volunteerism?

Have we heard from nonprofits about this? There are 26,000 of them. The definition about doing charitable work is not clear on how you will assess which nonprofits in Alberta are eligible and which ones are not. If anybody wants to answer those questions – I will give the opportunity to the hon. Member for Calgary-East because he was talking about how this will encourage volunteerism. But what I see is that it may have a chilling effect because nonprofits may not want to take on liability in cases where they know that volunteers are liable.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-East should he choose to.

Is there anyone else under Standing Order 29(2)(a)?

Seeing none, the hon. Minister of Jobs, Economy and Innovation, the Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Schweitzer: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. Now that we're off 29(2)(a) – I appreciate it – I'd just move to adjourn debate.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

**Bill 51
Citizen Initiative Act**

[Adjourned debate April 14: Ms Renaud]

The Speaker: Is there anyone wishing to join in the debate? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning has risen.

Ms Sweet: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's an honour to rise this afternoon and talk about the Citizen Initiative Act, another piece of legislation that we've seen come forward by this government in a package of different pieces of legislation that relate to democracy, too. Many are pieces that were discussed at the Democratic Accountability Committee, that I was a member of as one of the members of the opposition.

Now, in those discussions there were, well, a variety of different things that were looked at, and we had experts attend the committee to give some advice to both the government and to the opposition around how we would move forward with some of these pieces of legislation. What we've seen, however, is that, once again, as we've seen in other pieces of legislation that came out of those committees, the advice was not necessarily adopted by the government. In fact, some would even say that some of the advice that was provided by experts was completely ignored by the government.

Now, we also are starting to see a very significant trend when it comes to democratic bills in this government and the idea of – this government continues to go out and say: we want to make democracy better in Alberta, and we're going to bring all these pieces of legislation forward so that Albertans have mechanisms to be able to do different democratic tasks, whether it be recall legislation or citizen initiatives or referenda, plebiscites, all of these different things. Yet what we continue to see in these pieces of legislation is that the terms of reference are not put out in the legislation. They are all being done within regulation.

What does that mean? Well, there's a significant lack of transparency when it comes to these democratic pieces of legislation that the government continues to bring forward. If they were truly democratic, Mr. Speaker, all Albertans would be able to pick up a piece of legislation and see all of the different requirements, all of the contribution limits, all of the expenditure limits, all of the different things that we currently see in already-established election legislation such as our financial act. Yet two bills we've already seen in this sitting alone are redirecting all of the rules and regulations through regulation. They're not being legislated.

An example of that, again going back to clear expenses and contribution limits, would be citizen initiatives. As we are discussing the differences between all these bills, I mean, the idea of citizen initiatives is that you could get a group of citizens together to decide that there is an important issue that they would like to discuss. That's fair. But in doing that, you would think that the government would want to ensure that there are contributions, fundraising expectations in place that are in legislation, not regulation, to ensure that this piece of legislation cannot be used for certain groups to create a movement in the province around issues that could raise millions and millions of dollars.

We've seen this in the United States. We've seen it with the movement around Uber in California and what happened with that and the amount of money between the pros and the cons that was raised and the fact that industry, when we talk specifically about

Uber, was able to outspend. The very working people that were trying to protect their jobs and have the ability to unionize were out fundraised and outspent because there was no restriction, and there is no restriction in California to prevent that from happening. Well, currently, with the way this piece of legislation is written, we have the exact same issue here.

The other issue that we have here as well is that citizen initiatives are also, for example, able to open up constitutional debates. Citizen initiatives can be about constitutional discussions. What this piece of legislation does is that it allows us to take huge steps back in movements around constitutional challenges and reopen, let's say, for example, the abortion debate and whether or not women should have a right to their bodies and to be able to make those decisions. Again, there's no limit. There are no expectations or anything within this legislation to prevent the pros and cons. And when we start talking about constitutional changes around citizen initiatives, I think we're walking on a very, very slippery slope. There are certain things that, I would argue, don't need to be relitigated and rediscussed and, you know, taking us back to the 1950s, where we have to start talking about women's rights, again, to autonomy of their bodies and reopen a variety of those different discussions.

As was recommended by the subreport or the minority report that was written by the opposition, we clearly said that constitutional citizen initiatives should not be within this legislation for that very reason, which is, one, that constitutional challenges – you can have a whole discussion about constitutional challenges within the provinces. You then have to challenge the Constitution. We all know how that works as legislators. It's very, very hard for a province to decide to try to change the Constitution, so it becomes an exercise that really becomes divisive in our province, because constitutional questions tend to create division. That is why most of them are fundamentally protected, because they are very contentious. To have that ability to create division within the province: I don't know why as legislators we would support that.

5:00

Now, again, if we look at, of course, B.C., it has something similar – I find it interesting that this government keeps adopting B.C. policies – but there are some differences. Again, when it was recommended to look at the B.C. options, it was also encouraged that we don't necessarily make it exactly the same. Now, the National Conference of State Legislatures indicated that citizens' initiatives can have good policy, but there's a significant educational requirement that needs to occur to ensure that citizens are aware of what they're voting on. There is a huge portion of this where you can't just put a question out and expect that those who are voting on the question are going to have all of the information, especially if you're creating some pretty complex questions. We don't see any of that in this legislation. We don't see any responsibility around education, where the government will ensure that both sides of the conversation are happening. In fact, there's really no accountability on that. You know, I see that as a problem.

The other problem that I see within this piece of legislation is that it is regionally based. For example, if the government so chose to support the idea of having a citizen initiative, because ultimately the government would have to decide on some of these, you could see a citizen initiative started in rural Alberta on an issue that excludes urban communities. It could literally be a citizen initiative – for example, let's talk about the RCMP initiative. The government likes to talk about trying to get rid of the RCMP and creating a provincial body. Let's say that that was done under a citizen initiative and that it's decided that only rural communities get to vote on that and not urban settings. Well, that's an issue because you're talking about a provincial program. Although I know that

there are members on the government side who I've had this discussion with who have said, "Well, you know, Calgary and Edmonton don't actually have RCMP," well, that is factually incorrect. We actually do, so it couldn't be a regional question put forward. However, the legislation would allow it to be.

We could talk about looking at coal, for example. There might be a certain community around coal who decides, "You know what; economically this makes the best sense for our area" and ignores the rest of southern Alberta and the impact on farmers and ranchers. They create a citizen initiative. It could be decided that part of the question is that it only impacts that certain region. Within this piece of legislation that would be allowed.

How, then, does the government decide where these regional representations start and where they end, who gets to decide that they are regionally appropriate, and why would the government want to put in an ability to only have regional questions put forward? Ultimately, these questions would create legislation. Ultimately, these questions would change the context of Alberta, which means that all Albertans should have their say. If it were to be a municipal issue, well, then you know what the government could have done? They could have looked at having something where it was municipally led, but that's not written in this legislation. It's not created that way.

There are a variety of different concerns around this, and I think the biggest concern is that it is all being done in regulation. Again, I mean, I spoke about this last night in regard to the fact that when things start getting put in regulation – and, you know, to be clear, I've asked the minister's office about this as well – we start seeing things not aligning with other pieces of legislation. The issue with citizens' initiatives, recall, referenda, the Senate is that there's a whole bunch of money that starts to float around with all these pieces of legislation when it comes to political engagement. Typically those rules would be found in alignment with the Alberta financial elections act. Contribution limits, disclosure limits: all of those things would be required.

To not have them explicit in the legislation to ensure that they're aligned brings serious questions on the accountability measures that are going to be in place around these regulations and how much money is actually going to be allowed and the fact that because it's not legislated, it could be arbitrarily changed in a regulation. So we could go from a \$5,000 cap to a \$50,000 cap because someone decides that this citizen's question is actually really important to that individual, and we want to change the ability to influence it.

It's a huge liability question around accountability by the government, the ability for the government to just arbitrarily change contribution limits, who can get involved, third-party advertising, which makes this bill absolutely flawed in that sense. This is opening up, because everything is in regulation and not legislated, third parties to be able to substantially influence the legislative process in Alberta, to make significant changes to the livelihoods of Albertans, to create the struggle between working people and corporations, as we have seen in California with Uber, and there is no protection within this legislation to prevent that from happening.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I would say that I will not be supporting this piece of legislation.

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

Mr. Getson: Yes, sir.

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

Mr. Getson: Yeah. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It was a pleasure to hear a lot of the dialogue and the debate taking place, and the citizens' initiative is pretty exciting. It's a pretty exciting piece of legislation. It's one of the platform commitments that we made, again, in bolstering democracy. The other side may not take that as seriously as we do or that we actually want to put a little bit of control and power back in the hands of the people.

The opposition has talked about incidents that are taking place in California, and what was resounding out of there was that they were talking about citizens' initiatives and corporations and unions being excluded. Now, I understand that there is always a slant towards one side of the optics, but my concern on that one is: what is the concern with putting more power back in the hands of the people?

Mr. Speaker, you know full well that when we go into a nomination, we have a lot of people lining up to say who their candidate is going to be. When we go into an election, everybody is on their best behaviour, and they're going to say what they're going to do. Then we get into this languishing period, quite frankly, and I've observed – and maybe it's only because I'm new here – that it languishes kind of within four years. So you kind of bounce between those barriers and do what you can. But where is the voice of the people?

When we're talking about referendums, that's a big concern to the members opposite because – heaven forbid – at a municipal, which spans periods between the provincial, other people get involved and get excited about that, that we can have more democracy, more participation. It shows time and time again that when you have more participation in the process, you have less protest because things are actually moving forward. If that's what the real concern is, then just say it.

I have a difficult time trying to understand some of the lines. There is always the bogeyman effect: what happens if? Oh, my gosh, you actually might have a region that's concerned about something that's specific to that area, and it's going to apply it to downtown Edmonton. Oh, my gosh. Come on. Let's put it in perspective here. Allow people more participation. It doesn't always have to be the bogeyman, but it does have to be about giving people the choice again, people like a lot of us, who have stepped out of our normal lives to participate in the process because we've finally had enough. We've had enough. The fact that you've gotten enough people together that volunteered or organized or supported and that felt common interest and common concerns to unify and come together to solve a problem: yeah, that would be pretty disconcerting to some.

I'm going to sit down, give the rest of my 29(2)(a) time back to those concerned people that actually do not support democracy, do not support a lot of the fundamental changes, nor respect the voice of the Albertans that put a bunch of us here for the first time to come together and change some of the narrative and some of the ways that we operate so that we can have a more fulsome debate, have more representation, and deal with items as they come along. Citizens' directive, citizens' recall, referendums: very healthy for democracy.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

5:10

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

Ms Sweet: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm going to be really quick and short on this. If it was truly about democracy and holding people to account, the government would legislate all the open contributions, disclosures, and all the other things that are currently in the Election Act. What is not happening here is the government being open and transparent about creating these democratic laws.

So it's not about democracy. It's about putting big money back into politics and trying to influence elections. That is the fundamental issue. If the hon. member across the floor would like to fix it, then get everything in legislation and make sure that your government is being open and transparent about contributions and who is paying for these elections.

The Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available. If there are no others, the hon. Member for Lac Ste. Anne-Parkland.

Mr. Getson: Absolutely. To the hon. member: we tried to talk about interventions, actually, yesterday on a private member's bill, and this actually works out pretty good, when we can have debates going back and forth in the House. But the members opposite, while they used political procedures to meander and jammer that one and jam it all up, we couldn't talk. I actually like this format, going back and forth.

The member opposite talked about money. Let's talk about how the unions work. Let's talk about the contributions that go to your parties. We had a whole row in here when we actually gave people the choice on the unions, whether they wanted their monies going to a certain political campaign or not. If you want to talk about dark money, I didn't even hear about or understand that it took place, how some folks from that side operate. Let's talk about cash. Let's talk about that one.

I'll cede my time back to the member if she would like to reply.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning should she choose to do so.

Are there others? Standing Order 29(2)(a) is still available.

Seeing none, the hon. Member for Sherwood Park, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-West Henday.

Mr. Walker: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's an honour to rise and a privilege to speak strongly in support of Bill 51, the Citizen Initiative Act. We've had great discourse on this bill so far, on both sides of the aisle, and I just want to make my own contributions. I will attempt to the best of my ability, actually, with this bill to be quite mellow in my presentation. I don't speak too often, but when I do, I seem to get the opposition really riled up. That's okay, but I'm going to be mellow. It might be boring for the good people of Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills and perhaps Sherwood Park, but I'm just going to be real even keel, and we'll see how it goes.

Mr. Speaker, as I was saying, I strongly support Bill 51, the Citizen Initiative Act. Again, as the Member for Lac Ste. Anne-Parkland was saying, this is about giving Albertans a more direct role in their democracy, complementing and enhancing the great traditions we have inherited from our Mother Parliament in Britain regarding Westminster parliamentary democracy.

Bill 51, Mr. Speaker, would strengthen democracy and enable Albertans to initiate legislative action on issues that affect them. This bill is part of a bold package. We were speaking to recall last night, which I greatly enjoyed, perhaps fairly energetically. It's democratic reform that will significantly enhance and bring in more Albertans to political engagement, in this case with citizen initiatives and referenda.

Philosophically, what I and the constituents of Sherwood Park and the members of the government caucus see in this bill, my own values, is that we fundamentally believe that the people of Alberta are in control of their destiny and that politicians take orders from them. That is how it works, and this just further reinforces that important fact. There's so much great wisdom in this Chamber, Mr. Speaker, among the 87 representatives, and how privileged we are to be here. But I've got to think that there are also 4.4 million sparks of individual genius right across Alberta in our beautiful cities of

Edmonton and Calgary and Sherwood Park, all over our great province. Let's hear from them, including through submitting proposals for legislative and policy changes and constitutional referendum questions for consideration.

Who's afraid of a little more democracy? Certainly not me, Mr. Speaker, and, I would say, through you, certainly not the Member for Lac Ste. Anne-Parkland, and I sure know that the good people of Lacombe-Ponoka ain't too afraid of that. I suspect they want it quite a bit.

Where I'm going to go, Mr. Speaker, to begin in my support for Bill 51, is that I want to talk about the mechanics specifically of the bill, which I really like and that I want to highlight and have in *Hansard*. I support the nuts and bolts of this bill because it's been thoroughly researched and fleshed out policywise, in my view. That much is clear.

I also want to take time to thank the Select Special Democratic Accountability Committee, that looked into questions of strengthening Albertan democracy, including citizen initiatives and referenda. I want to thank, of course, the chair of that committee. Great work. Democracy in action.

I want to recognize the MLA for Drayton Valley-Devon. He is a great person, always fighting for direct democracy, and that influence comes from his father, Wayne, who really strongly believes that, got involved years ago, going back to the Reform and Preston Manning. We're seeing the prairie populism contained in this bill manifesting itself, and that is absolutely beautiful. It's in keeping with Alberta's best democratic traditions.

I want to turn to part 1, divisions 1 through 5 of this bill. Mr. Speaker, imagine citing actual parts of the bill. It's quite a thing. This bill reasonably lays out a thoughtful and fair process for citizen initiative legislative action and constitutional referendum questions, which I am very excited about. Through a petition process and thresholds for such petitions to make the petition eligible for citizen initiated legislative action, I believe this bill strikes a fair balance between ensuring that Albertans may consider questions of great political interest in the process while also ensuring that Albertan democracy is not overwhelmed with frivolous, narrow, parochial proposals. In B.C., for example, where we take some influence for our model that we're putting forward with Bill 51, since 1995 there have only been 12 petition initiatives. That gives you a sense of maybe what we can expect over the next generation or so, but who knows?

Specifically, what I enjoy about this bill – you can find it, Mr. Speaker, on pages 12 through 14, just riveting reading. I know everyone has read it. For big constitutional initiatives I want to talk about the thresholds for the petition signature, which I think are very reasonable: 10 per cent of voters province-wide for legislative and policy initiatives and then 20 per cent for province-wide voters and 20 per cent of voters in each of two-thirds of Alberta's electoral divisions for constitutional initiatives. I think that's really important. Again, this is found on pages 12 through 14. On the constitutional question – I think other members have been talking about this – yeah, these are matters of great import to our country, to our province. I think it is very sound and fair that we do ensure that there is proper geographical representation. It's not just Edmonton or rural Alberta or Calgary flooding the petitions, if you will. There needs to be broad geographical representative support for a citizens' initiative constitutional referendum petition. I just really strongly support that, and I think it's been done well.

Finally, on the specific mechanics of the bill itself, Bill 51, I support, again, the identity verification process, that's overseen by the Chief Electoral Officer, whereby they would review all signatures collected in a petition to ensure that all signatures are in fact from Albertan electors or voters. That's fair. We need to make

sure we know that the people who are signing this are actual Albertan electors. That is responsible, fair, and well balanced. Mr. Speaker, I'm in the mellow mood today. We're going to have an orderly House. I could say a lot about how the left views, you know, responsible voter identification, but I'm not going to bother. I'm mellow today. That can be found on pages 12 through 14 of Bill 51.

I also support, found on page 12, setting a time frame for the collection of signatures. You need to have some sort of time frame. It can't be just the never-ending petition gathering, if you will, so I think that is sound and reasonable, and it's something I can support. You know, it's interesting. Right now everything, as I understand it, in this bill would be done through physical gathering of the signatures, no online, but this is a start, and who knows where things will go with that? I know, for example, that in Italy, I think, the Five Star political party, they're big on online democracy, as are some German parties. Anyway, we'll see how that goes years down the road. But this is a strong start on the time frame and collecting the signatures.

Mr. Speaker, how much time do I have?

5:20

The Speaker: Six minutes.

Mr. Walker: Okay. Thank you so much.

I guess, then, where I want to go is that I want to talk the Albertan experience, 115 years into Alberta being a great province here in Canada, where this all comes from, and why Albertans are yearning for this. Yeah. Albertans have been yearning for more direct democracy, including referenda, citizens' initiatives for over a century. Our political culture fundamentally believes in bottom-up, grassroots democracy, not top-down, centralized decision-making from the so-called central authorities. I know that's certainly true in Lacombe-Ponoka. By golly, I know that's true in God's country, Lac Ste. Anne-Parkland, and all across Alberta. We know that. We know it's true in Sherwood Park.

This bill is a reflection of that political culture, and I ask all 87 members to deeply reflect on that. As far back as the early 20th century, agrarian reform and political action organizations were advocating for direct democracy, including specifically referenda. We've had groups like the UFA, the Society of Equity, the Non-Partisan League, all going back over 100 years, advocating for this. In fact, a farmer from Carstairs, Mr. Speaker, a historical constituent of yours, Henry Wise Wood, American-born, was a key figure in advocating for more direct democracy. God bless everyone in your riding, including those no longer with us, for all the great work they've done. This bill should be seen as a century-plus achievement of Albertans coming together, wanting more say.

Again, who's afraid of a bit more democracy, putting more power, more influence in the hands of the people? I love all 87 people here. We're pretty wise, but I think the 4.4 million – there's even more wisdom outside this Chamber, so let's hear from them. Let's support this. This is good.

Finally, Mr. Speaker, in the time I have remaining, just quickly I want to offer a comparative jurisdictional perspective in terms of why I support this bill. We have amazing, mature, prosperous democracies who have for quite a long time had citizens' initiatives and referenda. Some of that was mentioned in earlier discourse here today. For example, we have Switzerland and California. Switzerland since 1891 has had citizen-initiated referenda, and California has had it since 1911: mature, robust democracies.

I'm sure lots of people have been to the Golden State. Lots of people have been to the beautiful cantons of Switzerland. Guess what? They're great democracies, and everything is fine. The sky isn't falling. They hear from their people. And, by golly, I'm being mellow. I'd say through you, Mr. Speaker, to Lac Ste. Anne-

Parkland that I'm being mellow. Those jurisdictions are okay. Let's support this. Let's have 87 members supporting this.

In conclusion, Mr. Speaker – I hope I have time – I strongly support this bill, Bill 51. It's a bold bill, part of the United Conservative broader package of democratic reform, and would significantly enhance Albertan democracy. Albertans' exceptional political culture showcases beliefs in individual liberty, grassroots democracy, market capitalism, equality of opportunity, and a ferocious – ferocious – hostility towards centralized decision-making and socialism. Not so mellow there, but I had to get it out. Bill 51, with a view to history, I firmly believe is a legislative manifestation of Albertans' long desire, a palpable yearning, in fact, for more direct democracy to ensure that all Albertans are always in charge. Today I am proud to support this bill. It achieves all that and more, and it's why I strongly support it. I urge all members of this House, as we continue with this fruitful discourse, to support this bill.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I now conclude my remarks.

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

Seeing none, the hon. Member for Edmonton-West Henday.

Mr. Carson: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's an honour to rise this afternoon to speak to Bill 51, the Citizen Initiative Act. I'll start off by pointing out that it's a relatively hefty bill before this House, with a lot of information contained in it, but unfortunately there are many questions that go unanswered and, I would say, in some respects more questions left than answers within the legislation.

Just to start things off here, Mr. Speaker, I want to take a moment to reflect on the words from the Member for Lac Ste. Anne-Parkland. In his 29(2)(a) response to one of our members he made reference to the fact that nomination meetings are not as transparent as, say, something like a referendum put forward through Bill 51, the Citizen Initiative Act. I suppose that's a fair point, especially when we reflect on some of the things we saw take place within the UCP's nomination meetings. We all remember the MLA for Calgary-East. After their nomination meeting multiple UCP candidates had written to the executive director of the UCP asking that that nomination be overturned because of allegations of fraud and bribery. Of course, further after that point, in the 2019 election the MLA for Calgary-East's place of business was raided by the RCMP in relation to allegations of UCP voter fraud in that scandal. So when we reflect on the type of democracy that the UCP has seen within its own nomination meetings, I can completely understand that the Member for Lac Ste. Anne-Parkland is very concerned about the democracy or lack thereof within their own party.

Once again, when we reflect on the lack of democracy across the board from this government, whether we're looking at Bill 26, Bill 27, Bill 29, changes to municipal referenda, changes to Senate elections that have taken place, it's hard for Albertans, I guess, as we compare it to Bill 51, the Citizen Initiative Act, to take it at face value from this government that they really have their best interests at heart.

Once again, looking further at the nomination processes of this government and the election processes, an ongoing RCMP investigation into members of that party, we saw the Member for Cardston-Siksika, who was questioned by the RCMP. We saw the Member for Sherwood Park also questioned.

Mr. Ellis: Point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Point of Order
Imputing motives

Mr. Ellis: Standing Order 23(h), (i), and (j), imputes false, unavowed motives against other members. He's insinuating that the

mere conversation that a police officer has with an individual in some way means that that person is guilty of something.

Now, unless that member knows something that law enforcement doesn't know, unless that member knows something that no one else in this province knows, I suggest that he talk about this bill which is before him right now because I can tell you right now that unless he knows something – the election, if I recall, was over two years ago. Now, I can get into the great details if the member wishes – and we can have it off-line or in the House – of how an investigation works or how long an investigation may or may not take, but there are many, many factors, and the mere conversation that somebody has with an individual does not mean that that person is guilty. I would suggest and make an argument that the conversations that I had with the multitude of citizens throughout my history in law enforcement do not mean that every person that I spoke to in the investigation is guilty of something.

I suggest that that member either apologize, withdraw his comments, or move on.

The Speaker: The hon. opposition deputy House leader.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I do understand that the member is passionate about law enforcement and has a background and spoke quite loudly, but I didn't hear arguments how it's a point of order. It was mostly – I think he was arguing that he may argue this or he may argue that based on his experience. I don't think it's a point of order.

5:30

The Speaker: I am prepared to rule on the point of order as raised by the government whip. While I think that we may have a matter of debate with respect to some of his comments, I think that sticking to the matter at hand and ensuring that the Member for Edmonton-West Henday's comments are more relevant to the piece of legislation are certainly more in order.

I would like to provide an additional comment. While I might not necessarily agree with the chief government whip today about the point of order that he raised, I was in fact considering standing and encouraging the member to speak not about internal party matters but about the legislation before the Assembly.

At some risk I want to just provide context that this isn't actually just me suggesting this. In 2013 then Speaker Zwozdesky spoke on May 7, on page 2147 of *Hansard* for those of you following along at home, and he was quite impassioned when he said:

How many times have I reminded you that matters dealing with internal party issues ought not be raised or brought forward in this House? Five, six, seven? I think about eight different times.

Then he went on to communicate the reasons why it's important that we don't speak about internal party matters and more to the important issues of the day.

I know that Speaker Zwozdesky spoke about this on numerous occasions, and I have been noticing it becoming a more common theme here in the Assembly, which is why I prepared for this potential inevitability. On April 8, 2014, Speaker Zwozdesky said:

I'm well aware that we're entering a very sensitive time in provincial politics, and that's why we like to leave party matters outside the doors. But if you have something that suggests that there is some [sort of] wrongdoing [that] the Member for Edmonton-Centre . . .

He goes on to talk about the issue that they were discussing, which was the uses of LAO resources. But then the Speaker goes on to say:

I would therefore ask that the leader of the loyal opposition refrain from using that particular train of thought in her future questions.

The train of thought that he was referring to, of course, was this issue of internal party matters being brought before the Assembly.

While I won't find a point of order on this specific issue, I did want to provide some cautionary rulings from past Speakers about this matter and encourage the member to stick to the bill.

Mr. Carson: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate that clarification, and I will do my best to continue to speak to this bill.

Debate Continued

Mr. Carson: Now, once again, when we reflect on the decisions that have been made by this government and members of the government, it's very concerning when we talk about changes to democracy here in our province. I think that past actions speak for themselves in that respect. In my perception and when I reflect on the things that we've seen, it seems that this government truly only makes decisions such as creating the opportunity for referendum to happen on a municipal level, of course, leaving many of those expenses to be figured out by the municipal government. Whether we're talking about Senate elections and the inability or unwillingness of this government to actually implement regulations at the time of the legislation coming forward and, just across the board, the prevalence and the influence that is going to be opened up or left to spend hundreds of thousands if not millions of dollars through, once again, Bill 26, Bill 27, and Bill 29, Albertans are rightfully concerned.

I think that these decisions are made not to benefit regular Albertans who are interested in having their concerns heard. We've seen very clearly over the past two years – whether we're talking about draft curriculum, whether we're talking about insurance, whether we're talking about utilities – on pretty much any issue that's come before this House, unfortunately, that this UCP government has been unwilling to listen. If the government is not even willing to listen to the people that elected them when they bring their concerns to the Legislature, I am very concerned that they will not have their voices heard with respect to past pieces of legislation regarding referendums, and the same goes for Bill 51, the Citizen Initiative Act.

I think that members on this side of the House have laid out their concerns quite clearly about concerns with how votes are taking place, where they're taking place, the unwillingness, once again, of this government to implement spending limits and saying: "Don't worry. Trust us. We'll make sure that that's done through the regulations." A perfect example, once again, when we look at initiative advertising spending limits, 26(1): "A registered third party shall not incur initiative advertising expenses exceeding the prescribed amount that applies to the initiative petition period." Once again, Mr. Speaker, the answers to what those prescribed amounts are going to be are not in the legislation. The government is asking Albertans and asking the opposition to take them at their word that they're going to be reasonable, but when we looked at Senate elections, when we looked at municipal referendum opportunities, the numbers were very unreasonable. We spoke at length about those issues.

It is interesting, reflecting on the past of the UCP, that, once again, we see in subsection (3) that "a registered third party shall not circumvent, or attempt to circumvent, an expense limit set out in this Part by colluding with a proponent or third party." Very interesting that we see that here, Mr. Speaker. Of course, I imagine that we can support that, but I would venture to say that Albertans are concerned with the past history of this UCP in that respect.

Once again, when we look at what is in Bill 51 and what has been left out, there is a lot to be concerned about. We can reflect on

issues. Whether we're talking about issues of our parks system, on strip-mining the Rocky Mountains in our province, on the importance of nurses and doctors and other health care professionals during this pandemic, this UCP government has been very unwilling to listen. Now the UCP government is asking, essentially, for Albertans to sign off on this, what is essentially a blank cheque at this point, Mr. Speaker, for third-party advertisers to come in and, you know, try to convince Albertans one way or another.

That's fine, but the main concern continues to be that there are no spending limits in this, just like there were astronomical spending limits on Senate elections and other pieces that were contained in Bill 26, Bill 27, and Bill 29. I think that the majority of Albertans would agree that we should be doing as much as possible to limit the influence of political action committees, of any third-party activity that's happening, whether it's corporations and unions. That was why the very first piece of legislation that we brought in when we formed government in 2015 was to ban corporate and union donations.

Further to that, we strengthened democracy by increasing opportunities for Albertans to vote. In many respects there were hurdles for Albertans to vote if they were potentially outside of their community on election day, whether it's outside of the province or outside of their polling stations, so we created more opportunities for Albertans, who have the right and freedom to vote, to ensure that they had no barriers to do so. While I would appreciate seeing further lessening of restrictions when we talk about those barriers that are in place, instead what we're seeing are astronomical levels of third-party influence potentially coming to our province. It's very concerning, Mr. Speaker.

When we review what we're seeing in this legislation, proposals for legislative, policy, or constitutional changes, Mr. Speaker, there are some red flags there. The Member for Edmonton-Manning spoke to some extent about issues of bodily autonomy that I am sure certain special-interest groups in this province would love to relitigate. Thankfully, we have come to a place where we have been able to move forward on those issues, but I know that those are issues that – I'm sure there are people out there in our communities that would love to relitigate. Unfortunately, when we talk about constitutional changes and opportunities for that to come to a referendum, that could be very chaotic and very costly to our system and, at the end of the day, potentially out of jurisdiction for our province.

5:40

When we consider what we see in this bill and, again, what is missing from this bill, there is a lot to be left to the imagination. I guess that is the best way to put it, Mr. Speaker. There are too many unanswered questions for anybody to be able to support this, in my opinion. I know that Albertans in my community of Edmonton-West Henday are going to be concerned about this, the prevalence of money flooding into our system through Bill 26, Bill 27, Bill 29, and now Bill 51. They expect answers before we could ever vote on this in good conscience.

I would comment and reflect on the comments, again, from members on this side that without significant changes to fix the issues that are in this legislation and that have been brought forward through committee proceedings, the select special committee, there's just no way for us to be able to support this without major amendments and major changes to fix this. Maybe I went too far there, Mr. Speaker. There might be an opportunity, but it's a very slim chance, in my opinion.

Now, you know, I've spoken at length at this point on the lack of clear expense or contribution limits to third-party advertisers. It seems, again, that this government is creating and drafting legislation

to benefit themselves, to benefit their special-interest groups that are pushing for these issues that will potentially influence, once again, if we're talking about past pieces of legislation that have come forward, municipal elections, potentially influence advertising that's happening to attack a policy issue one way or another that might reflect on the local elections that are happening at that time. It seems very clear that this government will do anything in their power to give themselves an upper hand on upcoming elections. I suppose that if that doesn't work out for them, then, as we've seen with other pieces of legislation that come before this House, they'll just bully them and potentially use these same bills or opportunities to say, whether it's a school board or a municipal government: we'll just start a petition to make sure that either your feet are to the fire or we fire you undemocratically. It's very unfortunate, Mr. Speaker.

The absence that we see here of a requirement to collect signatures from every electoral district, as the Member for Edmonton-Manning spoke about, is also an issue.

Mr. Speaker, there are just so many issues, and unfortunately – I hope that we will hear from the minister responsible for this legislation. I hope that we will get some answers to the questions that we've been asking regarding: what limits are you expecting to set? This was discussed at length at committee. I believe all parties respected the fact that these limits should be put in place, yet here we are once again reflecting on this legislation, an unfinished piece of legislation, in my opinion, with zero discussion about expense and contribution limits here.

When we look at the prevalence of these opportunities in other jurisdictions, as members have spoken about, in California we've seen hundreds of millions of dollars influencing those opportunities, whether it be interests like Uber trying to undercut labour laws in those jurisdictions or other parties who have their own special interests.

Once again, when we reflect on conversations that this Premier had – I'm not going to spend a very long extent on this, but there were discussions about what would happen if this party formed government and how they would change labour codes and occupational health and safety and worker compensation legislation and laws to benefit local large businesses if those organizations supported this Premier. So here we are once again having a government asking us to support a piece of legislation that is unfinished and is to the benefit of third parties, is to the benefit of PACs and dark money influencing our elections.

Mr. Speaker, with that, it's hard to stand and see how, with so many glaring issues within this legislation, this is going to benefit Albertans. While I completely understand and appreciate in principle what we see in Bill 51, the Citizen Initiative Act, I think we should be doing everything in our power to support and strengthen democracy, and that would start by ensuring that there are reasonable contribution limits. Unfortunately, we don't see that in this legislation.

So a lot of questions to be answered before I can come to a conclusion on whether I'll be supporting or not. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Seeing none, the hon. the Premier.

Mr. Kenney: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am truly pleased to rise in support of Bill 51 at second reading, the Citizen Initiative Act. I can hardly believe hearing myself saying those words in this Assembly because it was, believe it or not, 30 years ago – 30 years ago – when I was executive director of the then Alberta taxpayers association, which subsequently became the Canadian Taxpayers Federation,

that I was working downstairs in the Legislature Library researching direct democracy and, particularly, citizen initiatives, ultimately to draft a bill which I proposed on behalf of the taxpayers association and which was subsequently introduced as a private member's bill by a then Progressive Conservative member. It did not pass. But I promised myself then that I would never give up and that I would continue to work for direct democracy as a complement, an important complement to our parliamentary system. I am so proud to stand here as a member of a government that has made good on that commitment with the introduction of this historic and profoundly important democratic reform.

Mr. Speaker, maybe I'll just start briefly with a word of rebuttal to the hon. member who just spoke and the notion that this is about big money. The record is absolutely clear that the only big money in Alberta politics is NDP special-interest union money from the government unions, \$7 million in the last 10 years, that's traceable, dumped into Alberta politics. But I appreciate the member's concern. He wants to get big money out of Alberta politics.

I have good news for him. Help is on the way. This fall – he'd better tell Gil to start spending the money right now – we're shutting down the NDP big-money machine in Alberta politics. We're putting it out of business. We're getting the big money out. We're going to bring forth, as we committed to Albertans, a cap of \$30,000 on contributions to third-party campaigns or so-called political action committees. That is going to reduce the NDP and Gil McGowan's campaign budget by millions of dollars. Big union money should not have a bigger advantage to speak and influence our politics than that of severely normal Albertans. I can't wait to watch them vote. I know they'll support the bill. I can't wait for them to support the bill to get the big money out.

Mr. Speaker, the NDP is not opposing this because of that. They're opposing it because they're opposed to democracy. Do you remember when we introduced a bill allowing for referendums on nonconstitutional questions, where the government could consult Albertans in a direct democratic forum? Do you remember that the NDP actually said that this was – what was the word? – tyrannical, profoundly undemocratic, allowing 3.2, I think, 3.4 million adult Alberta voters to have a direct say on important issues rather than just 87 elected representatives? For the NDP that is undemocratic.

Mr. Speaker, just to give you a sense of how extreme Alberta's NDP is, it was the British Columbia NDP, which used to be regarded as being further to the left, that brought in a British Columbia citizen initiative law and a recall law in 1993. I should know because I worked with them on that when I was with the Canadian Taxpayers Federation.

5:50

This should not be a partisan question. Do you know why it is? They've always been and they always will be a minority party in Alberta, and they are afraid of the judgment of the people. They like politics where the loud special interests get to dominate the debate rather than ordinary people being able to make the decision at the ballot box.

Now, Mr. Speaker, a point I want to make is that I have here a really tremendous book, that I read 30 years ago, by my friend Patrick Boyer, former Member of Parliament, published in 1983, entitled *Lawmaking by the People: Referendums and Plebiscites in Canada*. It's a great compendium if you want to know about the history. Interestingly, this is not the first proposed initiative bill in Alberta. In fact, in 1913, quote, the Alberta Legislature enacted The Direct Legislation Act, which provided for submission of legislation to or by the electors at the provincial level. The legislation had been introduced by the Liberal government of Premier Sifton and was supported by opposition Conservatives. Initiative was provided for

under this act by petition of voters although the legislation so sought could not provide for the spending of public money or go beyond the legislative jurisdiction of the Alberta Legislature – as does this bill, it goes without saying.

Quote: section 6 provided the limited initiative by allowing 20 per cent of the electors meeting certain conditions to petition the Legislature to pass the proposed act, which if not enacted at the session to which it was presented would be submitted under section 7 to the voters and if approved, it would then effectively be enacted. Unquote.

Now, Mr. Speaker, it was very interesting. It was then quickly used, by the way, to have a referendum on prohibition, and in 1916 voters passed by a large margin the Liquor Act. As a good Irish Catholic I want the record to reflect that I would have voted against prohibition. Unfortunately – yeah, but that's the thing about democracy that the NDP doesn't like. You always get your say, but you may not always get your way. I would have voted against it, but Albertans back then wanted to get rid of the demon alcohol, and they had every right to do so.

Now, it was challenged by a liquor seller, Nat Bell Liquors. He didn't like this one bit. It put him out of business, Mr. Speaker. He challenged it all the way up to the Privy Council at Westminster, our then Supreme Court, and they looked at very interesting jurisprudence. They looked at whether the Legislature could effectively bind itself to a referendum through an initiative process, and the Privy Council said that a law is made by the provincial Legislature when it has been passed in accordance with a regular procedure of the House or Houses and has received the royal assent duly signified by the Lieutenant Governor on behalf of His Majesty. Such was the case with the act in question. It is impossible to say that it was not an act of the Legislature and is nonetheless a statute because it was the statutory duty of the Legislature to pass it. Unquote. The court effectively went on to say that it was constitutional.

Now, that same year, 1916, Manitoba followed along, and this is all part of the – by the way, the original meaning of progressive had nothing to do with political correctness or the left's political agenda; it meant grassroots, typically agrarian populism with a strong emphasis on democratic reform like this, and that happened in Manitoba. In 1916 they passed a citizens' initiative law, but, Mr. Speaker, they made the mistake, they made the fatal error of writing the Lieutenant Governor out of the law-passing process, which was unconstitutional. That went up to the Judicial Committee of the Privy Council, who, in 1919, ruled that law unconstitutional.

And many years later, 1958, Premier Manning's government is in office, and some poor fellow writes in to the Deputy Attorney General and says, "I want to launch an initiative petition under that 1911 statute." The Attorney General digs around, and he comes up with this old 1919 Privy Council decision and says: "Oh, no. This is ultra vires. This is null and void. It was nullified by the British court." Actually, that was a mistake because the Alberta legislation never wrote out the Lieutenant Governor, all of which may sound politically arcane, but the point is this. Initiative is not a violation of our parliamentary traditions or system; it is, rather, a complement to it and, I would anticipate, only to be used really in extremis.

Mr. Speaker, the B.C. New Democrat government of Mike Harcourt brought in, as I mentioned, the initiative act, on which many of the thresholds here are based. It has been triggered once successfully in that period of time, which is not exactly overdosing on democracy, by the way. I know that the NDP is terrified that we might actually have democracy break out in this province like they do in California. The voters are not smart enough, according to the NDP, to actually answer a couple of substantive questions on a

ballot along while they're choosing their mayor and their councillors. They have a very low opinion of Alberta voters.

But, Mr. Speaker, in B.C. they've had one initiative. It was triggered by the harmonization of the provincial sales tax with the goods and services tax under the Campbell government. It was former Premier Bill Vander Zalm who led the initiative, and amazingly they got 10 per cent of signatures in 60 days, and they had to do it in every one of the – what? – 86 ridings in British Columbia. This is a much more accessible process in Bill 51 because it's a 10 per cent threshold, no geographic requirement, unless you're seeking a constitutional amendment, in which case it's a 20 per cent threshold, and two-thirds of the ridings have to be represented in that threshold.

I want to thank the members of both parties who sat on the democratic reform committee for their good, diligent work, including the chair, the deputy whip of the government, on this.

Mr. Speaker, as I draw to a close, I truly believe this provides a critical outlet. There are times when people in elected office, for one reason or another, don't listen to or have become insensitive to broader public opinion on critical issues. This is a – you know, imagine: if this had been in legislation, if I had won that fight 30 years ago and we had an initiative law in place, I guarantee you that Albertans in the masses would have signed an initiative petition to force a referendum vote to repeal the NDP carbon tax. They never ran on it. They hid it from voters, the biggest tax hike in Alberta history. It's through initiative that voters can undo sneaky tricks by dishonest politicians like the previous NDP government. That is – I call it the in-case-of-emergency-break-glass kind of mechanism to enhance our democracy.

Mr. Speaker, I look forward, in the anticipation that this will pass at second reading, to further study on this. I implore members of the House on both sides to empower Albertans to trust the common sense of the common people with the most important democratic reform in this province in over a century.

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

Seeing none, is there anyone else wishing to speak?

If not, I am prepared to call on the minister to close debate.

Mr. Madu: Waived.

[The voice vote indicated that the motion for second reading carried]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 5:59 p.m.]

[Fifteen minutes having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

[The Speaker in the chair]

For the motion:

Ellis	LaGrange	Schweitzer
Getson	Orr	Singh
Glasgo	Pon	Stephan
Goodridge	Reid	Turton
Gotfried	Rosin	Walker
Guthrie	Rowswell	Wilson
Hunter	Rutherford	Yao
Kenney		

Against the motion:

Bilous	Eggen	Shepherd
Carson	Goehring	Sweet
Deol	Sabir	

Totals:	For – 22	Against – 8
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[Motion carried; Bill 51 read a second time]

The Speaker: Hon. members, pursuant to Standing Order 4(1)(c) the House stands adjourned until 7:30 this evening.

[The Assembly adjourned at 6:16 p.m.]

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