



Province of Alberta

The 30th Legislature
Second Session

Alberta Hansard

Tuesday morning, May 25, 2021

Day 103

The Honourable Nathan M. Cooper, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta
The 30th Legislature
Second Session

Cooper, Hon. Nathan M., Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills (UC), Speaker
Pitt, Angela D., Airdrie-East (UC), Deputy Speaker and Chair of Committees
Milliken, Nicholas, Calgary-Currie (UC), Deputy Chair of Committees

Aheer, Hon. Leela Sharon, Chestermere-Strathmore (UC)	Nally, Hon. Dale, Morinville-St. Albert (UC), Deputy Government House Leader
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Amery, Mickey K., Calgary-Cross (UC)	Nicolaides, Hon. Demetrios, Calgary-Bow (UC)
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Bilous, Deron, Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview (NDP)	Nixon, Jeremy P., Calgary-Klein (UC)
Carson, Jonathon, Edmonton-West Henday (NDP)	Notley, Rachel, Edmonton-Strathcona (NDP), Leader of the Official Opposition
Ceci, Joe, Calgary-Buffalo (NDP)	Orr, Ronald, Lacombe-Ponoka (UC)
Copping, Hon. Jason C., Calgary-Varsity (UC)	Pancholi, Rakhi, Edmonton-Whitemud (NDP)
Dach, Lorne, Edmonton-McClung (NDP), Official Opposition Deputy Whip	Panda, Hon. Prasad, Calgary-Edgemont (UC)
Dang, Thomas, Edmonton-South (NDP), Official Opposition Deputy House Leader	Phillips, Shannon, Lethbridge-West (NDP)
Deol, Jasvir, Edmonton-Meadows (NDP)	Pon, Hon. Josephine, Calgary-Beddington (UC)
Dreeshen, Hon. Devin, Innisfail-Sylvan Lake (UC)	Rehn, Pat, Lesser Slave Lake (Ind)
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Ellis, Mike, Calgary-West (UC), Government Whip	Renaud, Marie F., St. Albert (NDP)
Feehan, Richard, Edmonton-Rutherford (NDP)	Rosin, Miranda D., Banff-Kananaskis (UC)
Fir, Tanya, Calgary-Peigan (UC)	Rowswell, Garth, Vermilion-Lloydminster-Wainwright (UC)
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Getson, Shane C., Lac Ste. Anne-Parkland (UC)	Sabir, Irfan, Calgary-McCall (NDP), Official Opposition Deputy House Leader
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Jones, Matt, Calgary-South East (UC)	Sweet, Heather, Edmonton-Manning (NDP)
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Long, Martin M., West Yellowhead (UC)	van Dijken, Glenn, Athabasca-Barrhead-Westlock (UC)
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Loyola, Rod, Edmonton-Ellerslie (NDP)	Williams, Dan D.A., Peace River (UC)
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Madu, Hon. Kaycee, QC, Edmonton-South West (UC), Deputy Government House Leader	Yao, Tany, Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo (UC)
McIver, Hon. Ric, Calgary-Hays (UC), Deputy Government House Leader	Yaseen, Muhammad, Calgary-North (UC)

Party standings:

United Conservative: 60

New Democrat: 24

Independent: 3

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Martin Long	Parliamentary Secretary for Small Business and Tourism
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Standing Committee on Alberta's Economic Future

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Bilous
Irwin
Reid
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Sabir
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Ceci
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Special Standing Committee on Members' Services

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Dang
Deol
Goehring
Goodridge
Long
Neudorf
Sabir
Sigurdson, R.J.
Williams

Standing Committee on Private Bills and Private Members' Public Bills

Chair: Mr. Ellis
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Amery
Dang
Getson
Glasgo
Irwin
Nielsen
Rutherford
Sigurdson, L.
Sigurdson, R.J.

Standing Committee on Privileges and Elections, Standing Orders and Printing

Chair: Mr. Smith
Deputy Chair: Mr. Reid

Armstrong-Homeniuk
Barnes
Deol
Ganley
Gotfried
Jones
Lovely
Loyola
Rehn
Renaud

Standing Committee on Public Accounts

Chair: Ms Phillips
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Armstrong-Homeniuk
Lovely
Neudorf
Pancholi
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Schmidt
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Walker

Select Special Committee on Real Property Rights

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Ganley
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Goodridge
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Milliken
Nielsen
Orr
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Schmidt
Sweet

Standing Committee on Resource Stewardship

Chair: Mr. Hanson
Deputy Chair: Member Ceci

Dach
Feehan
Ganley
Getson
Guthrie
Issik
Loewen
Singh
Turton
Yaseen

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

10 a.m.

Tuesday, May 25, 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.

Ordres du jour.

Orders of the Day

Government Motions

Adjournment of Spring Sitting

77. Mr. Jason Nixon moved:

Be it resolved that pursuant to Standing Order 3(9) the 2021 spring sitting is extended until Thursday, June 17, 2021, unless on an earlier date the Government House Leader advises the Assembly that its business for the sitting is concluded.

The Speaker: Hon. members, pursuant to Standing Order 3(9) Government Motion 77 is not debatable.

[Government Motion 77 carried]

The Speaker: The hon. the Government House Leader.

Mr. Jason Nixon: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'll pause to check if you would like me to read all of it. I will, then.

Amendments to Standing Orders

79. Mr. Jason Nixon moved:

A. Be it resolved that the temporary amendments to the Standing Orders passed by the Assembly on February 25, 2021, pursuant to Government Motion 64 remain effective until 11:59 p.m. on June 30, 2021.

B. Be it further resolved that Standing Order 32(3) is suspended for the duration of the 2021 spring sitting of the Second Session of the 30th Legislature.

C. Be it further resolved that the following temporary amendments be made to the Standing Orders of the Legislative Assembly, effective February 25, 2021:

- (a) by adding the following after Standing Order 20(1):
(1.01) Immediately on a Member moving an amendment, the Member must
- (a) provide the Clerk with 45 paper copies of the amendment, and
 - (b) ensure that an electronic copy of the amendment is provided to the Clerk.
- (1.02) If a division is called on a vote on an amendment, an electronic copy of the amendment is to be distributed to all Members immediately on the calling of the division.

(b) by adding the following after Standing Order 32:
Remote voting during division
32.01(1) Notwithstanding any other Standing Order or practice of the Assembly, a Member who is not

physically present in the Chamber when a division is called may vote in that division only if

- (a) the Member votes
 - (i) using the electronic means made available by the Speaker to all Members for the purpose of remote voting, and
 - (ii) in the manner directed by
 - (A) in the case of business under consideration by the Committee of the Whole, the Deputy Speaker or Deputy Chair of Committees, as the case may be, or
 - (B) in any other case, the Speaker, and
- (b) the Member connects to that electronic means before the final division bells for the division have ceased ringing.

(2) Notwithstanding any practice of the Assembly and for the purpose of the application of this Standing Order

- (a) a Member who casts a vote remotely in accordance with this Standing Order is not considered to be present in the Legislative Assembly for the purpose of determining whether quorum of the Assembly is met under Standing Order 5,
- (b) a Member who casts a vote remotely under this Standing Order is considered, for the purpose of Standing Order 10, to have attended the service of the Assembly on the day that the Member casts that vote, and
- (c) any Assembly staff who are required to assist in carrying out the remote voting procedure under this Standing Order are not considered to be strangers to the Assembly, as referred to in Standing Order 14, while they are providing such assistance.

(3) The Speaker is empowered to exercise discretion, in consultation with the House Leaders or their designates, in the interpretation of any Standing Order, including this Standing Order, that may require leniency or alteration to allow all Members to fully exercise their duties and rights during a division to which this Standing Order applies.

D. Be it further resolved that

- (a) Parts A and B come into force on passage of this motion, and
- (b) Part C comes into force on the passage of this motion and the temporary amendments in this part remain effective until the conclusion of the 2021 spring sitting of the Second Session of the 30th Legislature.

Mr. Jason Nixon: Mr. Speaker, a fairly self-explanatory motion. I will just take my seat.

The Speaker: Hon. Government House Leader, thank you for indulging the Assembly by reading that long memo. Given the unique nature of a potential change of this size, I think it's reasonable that it's read into the record of *Hansard* to permanently see it.

This is a debatable motion pursuant to Standing Order 18(1)(j). The hon. Member for Edmonton-South has risen.

Mr. Dang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I'd like to thank the Government House Leader for moving Motion 79. I think it's something that's very important. I think it's something that's very important, and it's something that we would have supported three weeks ago – right? – to talk about ways in which we could have had this Legislature work while we saw workers such as servers, workers such as teachers, and other Albertans that are at essential workplaces across this province continue to work throughout the pandemic. Whether it was a front-line health care worker or somebody working at the grocery store, it was important that we made sure that we could have supported those people. We would have been able to support those people if three weeks ago this government had not fled this place and had not shut down the Legislature and, instead, had brought in things like paid sick leave, had brought in things like a learn-from-home fund, had brought in things like improved testing for variants and other public health enforcement measures. We had an opportunity to do all this three weeks ago and throughout the last three weeks.

This government decided to take a three-week vacation and decided to leave this place for three weeks, and unfortunately what that meant is that we were unable to provide the supports that Albertans needed. But today we think it is important that we move forward with a Legislature that is dynamic, a Legislature that is able to adapt, a Legislature that is going to be able to continue to sit and meet throughout the remainder of this pandemic and is able to bring in the essential measures and essential debate that will provide security and safety for every single Albertan.

That's why I think it's important that this government work in consultation with the opposition and, of course, yourself, Mr. Speaker, as we navigate this difficult time and as we navigate how this Assembly should function, and that's why I do have an amendment, which I will pass over.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. Member for Edmonton-South. If you just want to wait a moment while we get some copies to the table and to myself, then I'll call upon you to proceed.

Hon. members, this will be referred to as amendment A1.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-South.

Mr. Dang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I will read it into the record for you. I would move that Government Motion 79 be amended in clause (b) of part D by adding “or until such earlier date as agreed to by the government and opposition House leaders based on regularly reoccurring consultations” immediately after “the 2021 spring sitting of the Second Session of the 30th Legislature.”

Mr. Speaker, I think this is a fairly straightforward amendment. I think it's something that would allow us to ensure that these new voting methods and new division methods work effectively and allow us to make changes on the fly. So I hope that this is something that every member of this place can support, and I look forward to testing out the new division system.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Hon. members, amendment A1 to Government Motion 79. Is there anyone wishing to provide question or comments?

Seeing none, is there anyone wishing to comment? I am prepared to call the question.

[Motion on amendment A1 carried]

The Speaker: Is there anyone else wishing to speak to Government Motion 79?

Seeing none, I am prepared to call the question.

[Government Motion 79 as amended carried]

Statement by the Speaker

Remote Voting during Division

The Speaker: Hon. members, I do have a statement with respect to remote voting. I would like to provide some guidance with respect to the temporary standing orders that have just been adopted by the Assembly, in particular in reference to virtual voting. The temporary standing order provides members with the ability to vote remotely in addition to being able to vote in the Chamber. That means that for participation in a virtual vote, members join a Microsoft Teams meeting, the link for which will be sent out to all members before each sitting of the Assembly; that is, each morning, afternoon, and evening sitting. Members may join the meeting at any point during the proceedings and view what is happening through Teams.

10:10

When a division is called, the *Journals* unit of the Legislative Assembly Office will send out an e-mail to all members indicating that a division has been called, the subject matter of the division, and the time at which the division is to take place. If a division is on an amendment, the amendment will also be sent out. Once a division is called, the division countdown clock will appear in the Teams meeting so that members will know how much time is left before voting will commence.

Members, it is important to note that while you have 15 minutes once a division has been called to join the Teams meeting, it is highly advisable to join the meeting as soon as possible if you intend to vote. This will ensure that you have time to resolve any technical issues should you encounter them, and it will also help the table officers compile a list of those wishing to vote virtually. Once the 15-minute period has elapsed, the doors of the Chamber are closed, and similarly the ability for members to join the Teams meeting will likewise end. In other words, members may not participate in the virtual vote if they do not join within the 15-minute division period, just like they would not be able to come into the Chamber once the Chamber doors have been closed and a division has been called.

The division will commence with a vote in the Chamber, following the usual way of conducting the division. After the yeas and the nays have been recorded in the Chamber, the virtual vote will start. This vote will be conducted by calling on the members who have joined the Teams meeting in alphabetical order by last name. Once a member's name has been called, they must unmute their mic and indicate yes or no clearly and loudly. They must then remute their mic.

After the roll call voting is completed, the presiding officer will ask those online if there are others who wish to vote who have not yet done so. If a member has encountered difficulties voting and was not able to vote when called upon or perhaps a member was missed, this will be the point at which they should unmute and speak their indication if they would like to vote.

As an important reminder, members voting remotely must ensure that their video is on for the entire voting period. Also, if members are having Internet connection difficulties that cannot be resolved, it is recommended that you use an LAO-issued device, cellphone, or tablet and connect to the Teams meeting in that way. Once all members have voted, the votes from the Chamber and the Teams

meeting will be tallied, and the results will be announced as per the usual practice. I would also like to point out that members who intend to participate in the proceedings and vote in the Chamber should not also join the Teams meeting. A tipsheet on virtual voting has been posted to the House business portal on OurHouse. I would recommend that members read these materials to become fully familiar with the virtual voting process.

As well, green sheets will be distributed shortly in the Chamber and will be posted to the House business portal for members' reference. The green sheets contain the temporary standing order amendments that have been passed pursuant to Government Motion 79, by which the ability for members to vote virtually has been initiated.

Government Bills and Orders Second Reading

Bill 64 Public Lands Amendment Act, 2021

Mr. Sabir moved that the motion for second reading of Bill 64, Public Lands Amendment Act, 2021, be amended by deleting all of the words after "that" and substituting the following:

Bill 64, Public Lands Amendment Act, 2021, be not now read a second time but that the subject matter of the bill be referred to the Standing Committee on Resource Stewardship in accordance with Standing Order 74.2.

[Adjourned debate on the amendment April 19: Ms Sweet]

The Speaker: Hon. members, we are on an amendment that has been proposed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning. She has four minutes remaining should she choose to use it.

Are there others wishing to join in debate? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. Schmidt: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise and share my thoughts on this amendment to send Bill 64 to committee for further examination. In my comments today I hope to touch on a few items related to this bill, mostly about who really should pay and who shouldn't pay for accessing public lands recreation in the province of Alberta. Then in the second part of my speech I want to get into some of the problems with the fee structures that have been presented by members opposite pursuant to the passage of this piece of legislation.

Now, just so that we are all on the same page as to what we are talking about, the government wants to pass this piece of legislation so that it could start charging fees for using public lands that it hasn't previously been able to charge, and those fees include the creation of a so-called Kananaskis Country conservation pass, that will cost Albertans \$15 a day or \$90 a year to access parks and public lands in Kananaskis Country. They're also contemplating the development of a random camping pass, that will cost families \$20 per person for a three-day pass or \$30 per person for an annual pass. All told, we're contemplating about \$18 million increases in the fees that Albertans are being asked to pay to access their own parks and their own public land here in Alberta.

Now, one thing that I'm going to come back to, hopefully, if I get time, is that the government has in its estimates projected that the conservation pass will generate approximately \$13 million in revenue and that the random camping pass in combination with some off-highway vehicle fee will generate \$4.5 million. We haven't yet seen the breakdown from members of Executive Council as to what the balance will be between random camping fees and off-highway vehicle fees, and this has been particularly

concerning to a lot of the people who have contacted my office about this issue because they are afraid that off-highway vehicle users are getting a free pass. I'll talk about that a little bit later in my speech, but my point right now is that I hope that somebody from Executive Council can stand up and tell us right now what the off-highway vehicle fee is going to be this year and when it will be implemented. Certainly, when I asked the minister in budget estimates on March 15, he was not forthcoming with details and assured us that those things would be released soon, but here we are a little over two months later and still no details yet on what fees off-highway vehicle users will be charged, if any, this year.

In sum, Albertans are being asked to pay \$18 million more this year than they were last year to use the parks and public lands in the province of Alberta. I fundamentally disagree with the model of payment that this government has developed for recreating on public spaces, and this is a fundamental difference, I think, between us in the NDP and our colleagues across the way in the UCP: who should pay for public goods? We believe that parks and public lands are public goods and that those things should be paid through a progressive tax system so that those in our province who benefit the most from the economy in the province that we've created pay the most in taxes and provide those services for all. The UCP, on the other hand, believes in charging user fees for every public service that they haven't yet gotten around to privatizing. We know that the government has temporarily backed away from privatizing 180 or so parks in the province of Alberta for now, and I hope that they never get the chance to implement that plan. But for those public services that remain, the UCP believes that Albertans should pay through user fees and not through a progressive taxation system. We suspect that this is the model that they're going to implement in health care, if given the chance, increasing user fees for health care. But we're talking about parks right now.

10:20

Any public good should be paid by a progressive tax system, and this government has decided to destroy what progressivity remained in the tax system. That was one of their first acts in this 30th Legislature, to cut the corporate tax rate from 12 per cent to 8 per cent, a cost to the treasury that we estimated to be about \$4.8 billion. Of course, the government has said: oh, well, this will create untold numbers of jobs and economic prosperity. I don't think I need to remind everybody here in the House that right now there are over 200,000 Albertans unemployed, 10 per cent unemployment. We've gone through the largest economic crash since the 1930s. I'd be brazen enough to suggest that maybe the corporate tax cut didn't help restore the economy, Mr. Speaker.

What did we see? In the first quarter of 2021 we see the top four, the big four oil companies posting incredible profits. CNRL posted over a billion dollars in profits. Suncor was close to a billion dollars. Cenovus and Imperial Oil have extremely healthy balance sheets. Those four companies combined posted 2 and a half billion dollars in corporate profits just in the first quarter of 2021. Now, any responsible managers of the province's treasury would say: "Hey, we've got these people who are doing well. They've benefited from the public goods that we've provided through government. Maybe they should pay their fair share and contribute to the things that Albertans enjoy, that make life worth living here in this province, including parks."

Not only, Mr. Speaker, have they let the big oil companies off the hook when it comes to paying their fair share of corporate taxes; they also let them off the hook in paying in any number of other ways. They don't pay their property taxes. There are hundreds of millions of dollars in unpaid property taxes that oil and gas companies owe right now in the province of Alberta. They're

getting royalty holidays, drilling credits. Surface lease payments: last year the Environment and Parks department paid \$44 million in unpaid lease payments that should have been paid to landowners from the oil and gas companies that hold those leases, not the province of Alberta.

When you add it up, we've got billions and billions of government handouts to the most profitable corporations in this province, and then the government has the temerity to turn around to the people of Alberta and say: "Oh, the cupboard is bare. We can't afford to pay for these parks. Looks like you guys are going to have to cough up \$15 a day to access a service that was, up until that point, free for every citizen of the province."

But even if you don't agree, Mr. Speaker, that the most profitable corporations in the province of Alberta should be paying their fair share to contribute to the things that make life worth living here in this province, you should probably agree that the government has mismanaged the finances of this province spectacularly and has wasted billions of government dollars on failed projects and have, as a result, starved the parks system. We don't yet know how many billions of dollars this government gambled away on the Keystone XL pipeline. The Treasury and Finance department refuses to release the details of that deal. We know that it's at least \$1.3 billion. We suspect that it's many billions more, but nobody yet knows the full cost of that reckless gamble.

The government continues to fritter away \$30 million on its embarrassing war room, \$30 million a year to continually put its foot in its mouth and do more damage to the reputation of the province of Alberta than it's actually helping. We also see the Ministry of Energy spending \$27 million, aside from the war room, in other industry advocacy, and when my colleague from Calgary-Mountain View presses the Minister of Energy to say where that money is being spent, how that money is being spent, what value for that money Albertans are getting, she refuses to answer.

We also saw in the fall of 2020 that the Ministry of Indigenous Relations came forward to review its 2019-2020 annual report. The government, in its first budget, set aside \$10 million for an indigenous litigation fund to help advance the energy priorities of the province of Alberta. It turns out that \$9.8 million, I think, of that money went unspent because indigenous groups were not interested in carrying the government's water in defending these projects.

My point is that there are billions and billions of dollars that this government is wasting while turning around and asking Albertans to cough up \$90 a year to go to K Country to generate \$18 million in annual revenue. Now, I've heard the members opposite say that, well, people support user fees. I have a couple of issues with that statement. First of all, it's the way that the government has framed the question that has yielded the answer that they want. They don't ask Albertans whether or not they favour raising corporate taxes and scrapping the war room to pay for parks; they frame it this way. They say: either you pay \$15 a day to go to Kananaskis or you lose your park. Of course, when the question is framed that way, Albertans will say that, yes, they would rather pay a fee than have their parks taken away from them.

And then they point to a survey that was conducted on Crown land use, from the end of November to the middle of January of 2021, as support for their plan because a slim majority of the people who responded to that survey said that they favoured the introduction of parks fees. Now, I have a couple of methodological flaws that I'd like to point out with that survey; first of all, the time in which it was conducted. Now, the members opposite probably don't remember what Alberta was like between the end of November and the middle of January because they were on tropical holidays, but we were in the middle of a second wave. Everybody was locked in their houses trying their best to avoid contributing to

the spread of COVID-19. Not ideal circumstances under which a public survey on the opinion of user fees in parks would be conducted, in my view.

Not only that, Mr. Speaker; in the results that were published, they identified the demographics of the people who responded to the survey, and it's interesting that more than half of the respondents were over the age of 45, 60 per cent were men, and 60 per cent had incomes over \$100,000 a year. So there's no way that this is representative of what average Albertans think about user fees in parks.

10:30

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

Member Irwin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to my hon. colleague from Edmonton-Gold Bar. He shared a number of really important points when it comes to public land. He's got a far superior knowledge and understanding of these issues than I do, and I would just like to ask him to continue to share his thoughts. I hope that the members opposite are listening because this is another example of a bill that clearly does not have Albertans' overwhelming support, and they would be wise to heed my colleague from Edmonton-Gold Bar's advice.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Schmidt: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I want to thank my friend from Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood for her question. One of the things that I'd like to say in response to her question was this issue around who supports fees and who doesn't. That was one of the things that I was touching on when the time ran out on the speech that I was making.

The government continually points to this survey that they conducted in the middle of the second wave and says: look, a majority of Albertans support paying user fees for the parks. As I said, over half of those respondents were over the age of 45, 60 per cent were men, and 60 per cent had household incomes of over a hundred thousand dollars. Now, this is not a representative sample of Albertans by any means, Mr. Speaker. Of course, we know that the average age of Albertans is approximately 38. We know that there's a small majority of women that make up the population of the province of Alberta, and the average household income is around a hundred thousand dollars. So the people who said that they support fees are: older than the average Albertan, more likely to be men than women, and they make much more money than the average Albertan.

To me, it's unfair to base their decision to implement these user fees and hold up these survey results as a legitimate defence, saying that this is something that the public is demanding when, in fact, it is a very small slice of the public, a nonrepresentative slice of the public, that they're using to justify this decision. I suspect that if the survey results were representative of Albertans, a majority would not support using these fees.

I know that I don't have much time left over, but one of the things that was interesting in the demographic data that was discussed in the results was the demographic data that was not collected, Mr. Speaker. We have no race-based data on the survey respondents, and this is something that is critically important, I think. In an Alberta that is trying to be inclusive and much more diverse, we need to make sure that everybody in our province has fair and equitable access to the outdoors. It doesn't take too many trips to campsites and hiking trails in the province of Alberta to understand that going to the outdoors is not the purview of every Albertan. It is

a select group of Albertans, and I would say that we need to do more work to encourage Albertans from all walks of life to get out into the outdoors.

By introducing these fees, I think we favour maintaining access to people who already have the means and the ability to access the outdoors, and we just put up another barrier for people who don't have access to that. I think it's incredibly unfair for the government to say, "Well, look, a majority of Albertans support this fee" when, as I said, it is a majority of older men who make a lot of money who support these fees. So I hope that members opposite reconsider this fee based on the issue of fairness.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Hon. members, that concludes the time allotted for 29(2)(a). Are there others wishing to join in the debate this morning? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore.

Mr. Nielsen: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the opportunity to rise this morning after a bit of a hiatus here from the House and get a chance to add some comments around Bill 64, the Public Lands Amendment Act, 2021, and, of course, the referral motion to committee. I'm hoping to maybe build a little bit off some of the things my friend from Edmonton-Gold Bar had mentioned around access to the public lands and who is able to do so.

I think about the constituents of Edmonton-Decore. Certainly, Mr. Speaker, I'm very, very blessed and so honoured and humbled to be able to represent such a diverse riding here in the city of Edmonton, not just in the different cultural backgrounds, the different ages that call Edmonton-Decore home, all the businesses and things like that but also the diversity in terms of economic places that people come from. When my friend from Edmonton-Gold Bar was talking about the different fees that are being associated with this, I believe it was \$20 per person for a three-day pass and more for an annual pass. You know, some folks will look at that and they'll say: well, that's really not that much money. Well, when I think of some of the folks that call Edmonton-Decore home, that actually is a lot of money. As my friend mentioned, over 200,000 Albertans are currently unemployed, and it's not even just the folks that are unemployed but some of the folks that are underemployed as well. The reality is that there are Albertans that live paycheque to paycheque to paycheque, and a little, modest \$20 fee all of a sudden becomes an insurmountable hurdle.

When I think of some of the things that the current government has done to actually make the lives of Albertans more difficult – they say that they're making it easier, but I have to, you know, disagree with that adamantly. As we know, right out of the gate this government gave away a great big corporate handout to the great big, massive profitable corporations, all in the claims that it would create jobs, which it didn't. Prepandemic we saw over 50,000 jobs lost. That was supposed to make jobs happen. We heard this being touted, that corporations would be irresponsible to not come to Alberta, to not set up in Alberta, to not grow in Alberta; it'd be irresponsible not to do so. Yet we saw corporations take the money and literally run out the door and go set up shop somewhere else. When you're looking at that, well, now the government is faced with: how are we going to make this money up?

10:40

We've seen changes over the course of the last two years or so which have increased what Albertans are paying. Their utilities have gone up. We've seen legislation move forward through this House that has allowed those fees to go up, costing Albertans more. We've seen legislation come through which has made changes to insurance, which has caused insurance levels to skyrocket in some

cases. I've had constituents of Edmonton-Decore calling me up, having visited my office, brought their insurance papers.

I remember a senior that came into my office and was flabbergasted that his condo insurance was going to be going up by I believe it was 47 per cent, and his auto insurance was going to be climbing by 58 per cent. I remember him saying, you know: look, I think I've made some pretty good choices throughout my life, and retirement was going to be okay. You know, I believe his words were "wasn't going to be living high on the hog," but he was going to do all right, he said. But this change to his insurance rates was a significant cost that he was not planning on.

We've seen property taxes go up because there's been a constant underfunding to municipalities, so the municipalities are now forced to have to make decisions. There's only one of two ways that they can generate money to run the city, and that's either user fees or property taxes. It's very, very difficult sometimes to come up with the user fees, but the property taxes is an easy one. Up they go. Or city council says: no; if we're going to try and hold the property taxes, then we're going to have to cut back on the services.

These are the people in Edmonton-Decore that are facing these same things. We've seen significant rises in child care costs. I know a good portion of the residents of Edmonton-Decore: hard-working Albertans that have kids that are now facing barriers because they can't find affordable child care. Families are going to start making the decision that one parent is going to stay home, which means you've got one less person in the economy participating, spending money, which is going to hurt the businesses that call Edmonton-Decore home, of which I have many.

School fees are going up. We're seeing an increase in school fees because there's been an underfunding of the education system. I won't even get on the whole part about the curriculum. That's another debate all by its lonesome.

Additional costs to Albertans that are making their lives more difficult. We saw right off the hop, of course, too, their income tax, when that was deindexed. Over the course of time as they start to maybe get some raises, well, now they're going to be paying more on their income tax.

When you start adding all of these things up, Mr. Speaker, it starts to make a significant cost. Then you want to say: "Well, as we're, you know, hopefully very soon going to be coming out of this pandemic, people will be able to start going out, spend time with each other. A great place to do that is a campsite." But for Albertans that are unemployed or underemployed, this now is going to be a barrier for them, and you're essentially taking away an outlet that they may have had.

Again, I know that it doesn't seem that significant: "Oh, \$20. Not that much." But when folks are maybe having a hard time buying a bus pass because they're deciding, "Well, do I buy a bus pass or do I pay for my utilities or do I pay for a camping fee or do I pay for my child care?" these are not the things that make the lives of Albertans better. If we take the opportunity, Mr. Speaker, to send this to committee, to be able to look at these things not just through a little survey that seems to, as my friend from Edmonton-Gold Bar pointed out, have some rather odd results, we can get a better picture of the things that Albertans face and how maybe, you know, they actually can't afford to do this.

You know, I mean, Mr. Speaker, we've heard in this House about wanting to get Albertans participating in their democracy, and we're going to allow referendums so that they can decide things. I'm not saying, "Let's hold a referendum on this," but why don't you at least send it to committee so that we can get a clear picture from Albertans, so that we can hear from the folks maybe that are unemployed, that are underemployed while all the costs that they've now had to take on, likely to make up for the \$4.7 billion

corporate handout or maybe the \$30 million war room, which couldn't get a couple of logos right – maybe we should give them the opportunity through a committee to express whether this is actually a good thing to do or not. It seems that we're missing a very large chunk of information, and we would be remiss if we didn't go and try to find that out.

You know, I think that some of the things that we would be able to explore by sending this to committee, that we could start to ask about – I used to hear this all the time in the 29th Legislature, Mr. Speaker – are what kinds of economic or, in this case, even socioeconomic impact, any studies that the government has done showing that this will be a good thing. Let's see what those are, what's been done. I'd like to see, as I've mentioned, the cumulative effects of all the different things that I mentioned earlier that have made the lives of Albertans more difficult and all the extra money that they're having to spend in their day-to-day lives. We would get a chance to ask those questions of Albertans, and they would be able to provide us with that background.

I wouldn't mind finding out why it was that the government chose not to create a dedicated revenue fund around this. What other options were explored that led to this decision to just create a user fee base system for this? I must say that I am curious. I think that through a committee we would get the opportunity to be able to talk to the ministry, maybe even the minister directly, and find out what other kinds of fees might be waiting in the wings. We've certainly seen, shall we say, a lack of notice time when it comes to decisions that the government has made. You know, if you are planning to up things here a little bit, maybe it might be an idea to warn Albertans ahead of time. We would be able to explore those things through the committee process.

I'm also curious as to just how high these fees will go. I mean, here's what they're being set at the outset. Are there plans to increase them even further? You know, has there been a roof established, where if we do have to bring them up, this is as high as they'll ever go? It would be interesting to see how those decisions were reached and be able to communicate that to Albertans so that they can provide us feedback.

That's what it's supposedly about. At the end of the day, the decisions we're making are the ones that are affecting Albertans, so why don't we do our due diligence, send it to committee, and find out if that's actually the right decision that we're making here through Bill 64? We don't want to potentially eliminate an outlet to Albertans to be able to go and enjoy – and, you know, the reality is that we're just not going to be getting back to normal as fast as we all would like to, but as soon as we can at least get to a good point, enjoying our amazing parks and our public lands, we'll give Albertans an opportunity for an outlet.

We can quickly move this through a committee. You can't tell me that we can't. My gosh, I sit on the private members' committee. We're able to go through a small piece of legislation and are required to report back in – well, now it's 12 days; it used to be eight. So you can't tell me that we can't send this to a committee, Mr. Speaker, and get some answers quickly. I'm sure we have the capabilities. I'm concerned with this moving forward and the different impacts that it has on Albertans. I think there's a better way to do that, but we need to send it to committee to be able to find out what those are.

10:50

The Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available if anyone has a brief question or comment. The hon. Member for Lethbridge-West.

Ms Phillips: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm wondering if the hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore can talk a little bit about access to

high-quality outdoor experiences and what he's heard from folks in his community, whether it's boys and girls clubs or immigrant-serving organizations or perhaps organizations that serve off-reserve indigenous peoples or children at risk, if there are some stories that he can tell about that value of being able to access the outdoors and how important those public spaces are to our overall well-being, not just of our smaller communities but the overall province, please.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Nielsen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to my friend from Lethbridge-West for that question, a very good question. I know that I have a boys and girls club literally a block and a half from my home in Edmonton-Decore. As I mentioned earlier, you know, usually for families that struggle with their day-to-day needs – paying their utilities, paying their rent, paying their insurance, buying groceries, things like that – this potentially becomes now a barrier by setting up these fees on the public lands that an organization like the boys and girls club can be able to take part in. Alberta has, in my opinion, at least – I'm pretty sure the majority of Albertans would share this – probably some of the most pristine lands in the entire country. Getting a chance to go into the outdoors, maybe do a little bit of camping, day hikes, things like that: those are the kinds of things that really allow especially kids to be able to enjoy nature, to be able to enjoy the outdoors in a way that can very much impact their lives.

I mean, I remember being part of Cubs and Scouts and even cadets, for that matter, and getting a chance to go outdoors, into the wilderness, and learning all the, you know, different aspects of camping and, in some cases, survival. It was a lot of fun. I try to think back to what it would have been like had there been financial barriers to these kinds of things and how that would have affected my experiences. Would I even have had the chance to have that experience to begin with?

I think about the boys and girls club in Edmonton-Decore. When you're coming from an economic background that doesn't allow you a lot of room to manoeuvre, we're now saying that, well, it was more important to give great big profitable corporations a handout than it was to provide these kids an outlet, to be able to go and enjoy, as I mentioned, some of the most pristine lands in the country and to be able to teach them those skills so they get the opportunity to embrace it and have fun with it. Why on earth would we make those kinds of decisions? We have to be able to come up with another way.

I mean, for that matter, you know, we could have saved ourselves 10 and a half million dollars, just simply drove the concept of red tape reduction from each of the ministries, which, quite honestly, seems to be happening anyway. I don't see why we need a dedicated ministry for that when that could have – there's 10 and a half million dollars right there. Eliminate the war room: you've just funded this whole thing and actually made the lives of Albertans better by not creating any barriers.

As I said, Edmonton-Decore is very, very blessed for its diversity. Let's not take away something simply because we're now trying to scramble to figure out a way to create revenue from a decision that we clearly knew failed.

The Speaker: Hon. members, on REF1, are there others wishing to join in the debate? The hon. Member for Lethbridge-West.

Ms Phillips: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise to discuss the merits of sending this bill by referral to a committee such that we may, I think, as MLAs study it further but also further hear from Albertans, because even though the government has

heard – we have certainly heard on this side, and I know that our colleagues across the way have also heard a great deal about how much Albertans care about parks, public land, wild spaces, wildlife, and high-quality outdoor experiences and access to those experiences – I am not sure that they are in fact listening. It would, I think, be an incredible opportunity for us to send this bill to committee such that we can discuss in a more intellectually honest way what Albertans actually want to see from their parks, protected areas, public land base, and recreational infrastructure more broadly.

Now, there is a question of access embedded in this piece of legislation. The government purports that Albertans support user fees of the type that have been proposed in this legislation. My hon. colleague from Edmonton-Gold Bar has indicated that this is not, in fact, a representative sample. It is overweight on income, age, and gender. Certainly, it is not the type of data that I would counsel anyone, if I was in the business of free political advice – I'm not, to my colleagues across the way – that they base any kind of strategy on. One wants honest data. One does not want to paint oneself into a corner like Mr. Trump did when he had his pollsters come and tell him fancy tales because he would fire the ones who told him the truth. It's best to walk into this clear eyed.

What we know: Albertans have told us that indeed they do want access to high-quality public infrastructure in our parks and public lands. We also know that we can guarantee access to parks and public land and high-quality recreational opportunities if we simply set it as a direction of government and have the right priorities in place; that is to say, not giving away billions of dollars on a pipeline that never got built; that is to say, not frittering away \$30 million a year on yelling on Twitter and setting forth the Internet forces of the Streisand effect for animated movies that were previously low rated and no one had seen.

If we have our priorities straight, we can in fact invest in infrastructure, and we can invest in accessibility, which has the twin virtues of, on the one hand, protecting the environment in a way that the land base can then support recreational activity for 4 million people, who are, as my hon. colleague pointed out, more likely to be younger than other Albertans. We are of an average age of 39. We're a younger population, meaning that, you know, people want to get outside in various ways. If we have that as a priority, one might do things like undertake proper planning and even modest infrastructure in public land where we see what is so-called random camping. It's not so random at all; people return to relatively the same areas every year. Alberta Parks and Alberta public lands has all of this data.

What one can do if one actually thinks about it, you know, maybe more than one or two chess moves in advance: one can provide portable firepits to those areas where people are random camping, one can provide garbage infrastructure such that it does not pile up in rotting piles and attract bears and other unwanted attractants, and one can ensure that random camping occurs in areas where it is not immediately adjacent to watercourses and effecting very damaging erosion and other deleterious consequences for fish habitat in particular. I'm thinking in particular here of southwest Alberta. This does occur elsewhere, but some of the largest impact and challenges to the carrying capacity of the landscape we see in random camping is in some of the areas around Ghost-Waiparous, McLean Creek, Livingstone-Porcupine, and previously in Castle, where we still have random camping in designated zones even in a provincial park. One might do those things if one is interested in access.

11:00

If one wants to say, "Look, we understand that people want to be able to access public land areas outside of the provincial parks, but

what you may not do is leave your disused mattress, your piles of rotting garbage, your shotgun shells where you had some fun shooting at toilets," which is absolutely a thing I saw with my eyes, "and otherwise disturb the banks of creeks or rivers where we're trying to do, you know, restoration of fish habitat, for example – those are things you can't do – but you can random camp; we'll have you register; you can go here; please use the firepit so that we don't have another Kenow fire," that is absolutely a way that this can be approached.

What one can do as well, if one is worried about access, is do things like invest in, for example, a fully accessible fishing experience at Bathing Lake, which is within the Castle parks, such that people who have mobility challenges, people who are in wheelchairs or otherwise require mobility aids can access a fishing experience without a fancy boat, without all kinds of other fancy equipment, just a way to be able to go and quietly enjoy fishing. What one can also do is invest in some of what we call comfort camping huts, which are just simply, you know, sort of four-wall structures that people really like. Why? Because, one, you can camp in them more often in the shoulder seasons – so you can actually maybe get a reservation – and, two, you do not need a big RV. I don't know if anybody has had a look on Kijiji recently, but these things are expensive and not all families can afford those. You can also, then, potentially take your elderly relative with you out to these experiences or people who are recently arrived Canadians, who have never gone, quote, camping before and who don't necessarily have any inclination to sleep in a tent. Those are also things that you can do to make our parks and protected areas more accessible.

You can also, for example, partner with other organizations, as we did in Castle. We made sure that there was an accessible hike into an overnight hut, but it was accessible for people in wheelchairs and other mobility challenges so that going hiking isn't just for, you know, people who are younger than me, because it's already starting to hurt, Mr. Speaker. The fact is that if we have a government approach that is not just on the infrastructure but also on the programming parts of parks, so that when you are staying in parks, there's interpretation, there are activities for the kids, and there are ways that people can learn about our natural history and engage with a high-quality outdoor experience that we know feeds us not just on an intellectual level of understanding our space in wild spaces and the benefits of conservation, the climate adaptation benefits, the biodiversity benefits, all of those things, but also on a much deeper level – I'm talking here about our health. I'm talking here about our spiritual well-being, whatever that looks like for people. That connection to each other, the relationships that we make with each other via that experience of being outside are foundational to the human experience, and there is a role for government in ensuring that access.

That is why people are so upset with the way that this government has conducted itself with respect to access to the outdoors. That is why, Mr. Speaker, we see 90 per cent of Albertans who want nothing to do with the idea that they're going to take those places and are now going to charge a camping fee this year to go random camping but that by next year they will be ripped up by exploration and other activities of the Australian carpetbaggers that we have given away the eastern slopes to so that they can strip-mine the mountains.

That is why Albertans did not respond well to the survey that the province put out that was saying: "Oh, what should we do about coal mining? By the way, you know, you need to answer this questionnaire in a way that if you don't have a PhD in mining engineering, then somehow we're going to try to discount your opinion." Ninety per cent of Albertans, despite that, said that the

reason why we do not want these plans is because we want access to the outdoors and to the eastern slopes.

Also, in another poll, that is an actual representative sample, we see that in February Marc Henry's ThinkHQ reported out to the public that 70 per cent of Albertans in this case opposed those plans for strip-mining on the eastern slopes. Importantly, 49 per cent of those Albertans opposed it strongly, and importantly 56 per cent of the UCP's own voters opposed this strongly, again because Albertans want to see their access to the eastern slopes maintained regardless of income or background or other ability to pay. They understand that those areas are part of who we are, and access is broadly defined and understood. But, also, I think it would be important to run all of this, you know, grand plan of a bunch of fees past Albertans, not just a weighted sample of a majority of high-income men over 60.

Another reason why one might want to have a more fulsome conversation with Albertans about this matter that is being proposed is because when we look at what Albertans actually told, you know, in this case that pollster that reported in February 2021 on the reactions to the coal piece, one of the most interesting responses, to me, was that 56 per cent of Albertans did not trust the UCP government on this topic. Essentially, what the UCP government has done for Albertans is written them a story that they cannot be trusted on parks, protected areas, wild spaces, and public land management, whether it was the debacle around parks that resulted in an explosion of park signs all over UCP ridings in Calgary or whether it was the way that they tried to skulk around in the darkest recesses, hiding behind Friday afternoon press releases, one of the most expected of government tactics to hide what they're actually doing on coal, or whether it's simply cutting parks' budgets, cutting interpretation, cutting investments in infrastructure for access.

Albertans don't trust the UCP government on these issues, and that is why, in fact, we should be able to hear from Albertans in a much more open way, which is what this referral might accomplish. A committee could then study this topic and could certainly provide a better interaction, a more iterative process for Albertans to be actually heard on these matters. But, also, it would seem to me that the government may want to actually take the opposition up on this referral and this gentle tap of the brakes on this legislative initiative simply because it may be an opportunity to restore trust.

Instead of simply saying to the media, "Oh, well, you know, there might be some more fees later on; I don't know what they are yet; we'll have a look" – because that was how this bill was announced. That does not inspire confidence for Albertans who already have questions about this government's commitment to access infrastructure and to protection of our wild spaces and indeed who we are as Albertans. This might be an opportunity for the province to be, in fact, quite clear. "Here is what we mean by these fees. Here is where they will apply. Here is how much they will cost. No, you will not have to pay a random camping fee this year for an area in the Livingstone Gap that tomorrow is going to get bulldozed by the Australian friends that we made promises to, and now we have to figure out a way around it to actually make good on those promises."

11:10

There may be a way, in fact, to redeem this lamentable history and record of this government with respect to these topics and actually, then, come to Albertans with a much more fulsome plan about, you know, if there is going to be a fee: "Here is the type of infrastructure it will fund. Here is how it will be applied. Here are the groups of low-income Albertans who will get a free pass in the mail." That could be something that certainly a committee could examine.

You know, if not giving away billions to people who don't need it but putting the tax burden on the middle class and those who struggle to get into it is a bridge too far for the government, then perhaps they can take some other remedial action to make sure that access to public land and parks is, in fact, not conditioned by ability to pay. Those are the types of initiatives that one could contemplate if one, in fact, supports the referral motion today, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Hon. members, Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available if anyone has a brief question or comment. I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar does.

Mr. Schmidt: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I want to thank my friend from Lethbridge-West for her thoughtful comments on this piece of legislation, and I just want to offer a few thoughts of my own in response. She outlined a number of potential investments that the government could be making in enhancing access to public spaces that they aren't accessing, and I know as a colleague on the Public Accounts Committee that the Member for Lethbridge-West is extremely interested in the numbers that are related to the fees that are being collected and where it's being spent. You know, one of the things that has occurred to me and has occurred to many of the people who have looked at this issue of increased fees for Kananaskis use and public lands is: where is the money going?

As I said in my comments earlier, the government is projecting an increase of \$18 million in fees that it's collecting in uses, but where is that money going? It says that it's being spent on public land management, parks operations, parks visitor experience, parks conservation management, and parks public safety and security. Now, we do see an \$11 million increase over last year's budget for public lands management, but we are seeing a \$3 million cut in parks operations, a \$200,000 cut in parks visitor experience, a \$100,000 cut in parks conservation management, and a \$2 million increase in parks public safety and security. If you add those numbers up, Mr. Speaker, we find that there's approximately \$18 million in fees that are being collected and only a \$10 million increase in the line items that the government has said they intend to spend these fees on. So where is the other \$8 million going?

I think my friend from Lethbridge-West really, really hit home the point: we could be making those investments in enhancing access and creating different camping experiences, accessible fishing experiences so that people from all walks of life can enjoy the outdoors and not just the people who already have access to trucks and campers and boats and those kinds of things.

But it also speaks to this issue of trust, right? The government has said multiple times, loudly, that all of the money collected from fees is going to be reinvested in parks, but it's not. The government's own estimates show that it's not being invested in the things that they're saying they're investing in. There's \$8 million in revenue that's being collected that is not being returned to the parks or the public land management line items in the budget. I'm wondering if my friend from Lethbridge-West can talk about this issue around public trust and what the government is saying it's doing.

The Speaker: And how that relates to the referral motion, I'm sure. The hon. Member for Lethbridge-West.

Ms Phillips: Well, certainly, Mr. Speaker, if we were to refer this bill, then a committee could have a look at the whole basket of ways that we both invest in and support and keep sustainable our parks, protected areas, public lands and ensure that we are supporting those recreational experiences. But, also, because there are a number of different places that actually fund these recreational investments – there are some in culture and tourism, there are some in Environment and Parks, and there are some federal – getting a

good sense of where the money is going would be, in fact, something that a committee could undertake, and then Albertans would be, I think, more likely to perhaps support this course of action if they had trust in where the money is going. Right now what we have is a situation where people do not trust the UCP government because they have not necessarily levelled with the people of Alberta in a number of ways on where, quote, the money is going, in ways big and small.

But the other thing that it could allow us to do is provide us with an opportunity for another assessment of how the enforcement picture works. I know that we put quite a large investment into enforcement and working closely between enforcement employees, that is to say conservation officers, park rangers, and the overlap with other branches of enforcement in Justice and Solicitor General such as sheriffs, fish and wildlife officers, and so on. Knowing where that money is going as well would be very helpful for municipalities and for people in general.

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

Are there others wishing to join in the debate? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Whitemud.

Ms Pancholi: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise again in second reading on Bill 64, the Public Lands Amendment Act, 2021, and to speak to this referral motion brought forward by one of my colleagues to refer this bill to committee for further review and consultation. As rightly noted by some of my colleagues, you know, that's for the benefit of all the MLAs in this Assembly but mostly for the benefit of the public.

[Mr. Horner in the chair]

I had the opportunity, Mr. Speaker, to speak in second reading on Bill 64 prior to the prolonged break that the government members felt they needed from the Legislature and from public accountability and transparency. I had an opportunity on April 14 to speak to Bill 64, and during that time I spoke a little bit about what was actually in Bill 64. There's a big, I guess, disconnect between what we're hearing the government and the minister say about what the purpose of Bill 64 is and what's going to happen as a result of it and what's actually in the bill. This is why I think it's important for this bill to be referred to committee, so that Albertans have an opportunity to truly understand really how broad the powers to charge fees are within Bill 64.

Some might think that Bill 64 might be very detailed and prescriptive and include, for example, the specific announcements that we've heard this government make already, that there would be a \$20-a-day random camping fee, \$30 for multiple days, that that would be prescribed in the legislation. But, of course, as I pointed out last time I spoke to this bill, Bill 64 is quite small and, in fact, is very light on detail.

In fact, really, the most important aspect and the reason why we're all talking about this bill today, the reason why Albertans are talking about this bill today is because of one line in Bill 64 which basically allows – it's an amendment to section 9.1(1)(a) of the Public Lands Act – for the minister, by order, to prescribe or provide for the manner of prescribing “fees relating to the use or occupation of public land, including the carrying on of activities on public land.” It's pretty short, but that short statement allows for the minister, by order, which means, you know, not by changing necessarily the regulation or certainly not by bringing it forward to this Assembly for public transparency and debate, but simply by order the minister may prescribe fees for the use and activities on public land.

[The Speaker in the chair]

That is, I think, the core of the problem that we're discussing here today, which is that it is extremely broad. It is not limited to the small, random camping fee that the Minister of Environment and Parks talked about when this bill was introduced. It's not limited to that. We could get no clearer example of the fact that it is incredibly broad than when not two weeks after I had the opportunity to talk about Bill 64 and how broad the power is to charge fees for use and activities on public land – two weeks later, Mr. Speaker – we find out that actually one of the reasons for this bill is so that the government can bring in a, quote, Kananaskis conservation pass. Before even passing this bill through second reading, we found out, again, another example of how this change is being used to charge Albertans more for the use and access to our land – our, Albertans', belonging to Albertans – to public land, land that Albertans are so proud of, and with good reason.

We are in such a beautiful province. We have the privilege of exquisite, extraordinary outdoor spaces. It is our land, and right away we found out that – oh, guess what? – there's going to be yet another fee charged to Albertans to access their land.

11:20

So this is precisely the reason why my colleagues, the members for Lethbridge-West, Edmonton-Decore, Edmonton-Gold Bar, and even I spoke last time on this bill, and we talked about the lack of trust that Albertans have in this UCP government, because we now know that Bill 64 is not about a small random camping fee, a one-time fee. It's now going to include a Kananaskis conservation pass, and we know it could include many other fees that could be charged to Albertans for them to access their own lands.

I want to speak a little bit about that issue of the Kananaskis conservation pass, because like many Albertans, last summer, you know, with the extraordinary times that we're living in and the limits on travel that most Albertans followed last year – not all Albertans, but certainly most Albertans took seriously the orders not to travel and were wise to not follow the example of many of the UCP caucus members – I spent a lot of time with my family exploring more of Alberta's beautiful lands. I had the opportunity to do that.

We normally would have travelled out of province, but we did not because of the pandemic. I, like many other Albertans, got a chance to get a better experience and spend more time in our beautiful public lands, including, by the way, in Kananaskis. I don't think that's unusual, right? We saw, we know the numbers reflect quite clearly that Albertans were camping more, they were going out to parks, they were exploring public lands, they were making use and experiencing – some for the very first time, some maybe just amped up their existing activities in our public spaces and our lands. But, really, Albertans embraced with enthusiasm the beauty of our province and explored.

I know that Kananaskis was busy, and I understand that the minister and the UCP have indicated that it is because of that increased use that they are bringing in this fee. However, I think it's important to note a few things. I actually would like to commend my colleague the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar for talking about, you know: this is public land; it is a public good. The increased use of those spaces, first of all, is a good thing in the sense that it shows that Albertans are engaging more with our outdoor spaces and are enjoying our beauty right here.

By the way, when we travel to – my family, when we travelled to Kananaskis, we also spent more money in the local economy there. We stopped in Canmore, we picked up groceries, we went and grabbed meals there before we went out to go camping. Those

are all great for our local tourism economy, to have Albertans spending their time and their dollars out in our province. But those are public goods. The public lands are public goods. They do belong to all of us.

The decisions and the choices that this government has made around stripping our ability as a province to support public goods, to support public services, by giving away billions of dollars to profitable corporations – and thank you to the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar for detailing the large profits that these companies are making – none of that goes back to Albertans. None of that has gone back to Albertans.

We have not seen any of the things that we were promised by this government when it came to corporate tax cuts. We have not seen increased investment. We have not seen more Albertans going back to work. What we have seen is a depletion in our ability in this province to support public goods and public services, and this is a prime example of that. Now the UCP government is putting that onus on individual Albertans, Albertans of all incomes, all backgrounds, all stripes.

Yes, I think what's going to happen is that there will be a decreased demand on Kananaskis Country as a result of this conservation pass. It goes without saying. I believe there are examples of other jurisdictions where they have put in these kinds of conservation passes, and they've seen that the number of people accessing those spaces decreases. If that was the goal, this probably will have that impact. But, as the Member for Lethbridge-West indicated, there are so many other things – I don't think the goal is to decrease the number of people accessing it. If it is truly about making that experience about conservation, about protecting the lands, about supporting proper use of the lands, there are many other policy measures that can be taken. Introducing a conservation fee or, let's be honest, it's just an access fee: all that's going to do is just keep people from going there.

But that doesn't mean that they won't go to other lands. That doesn't mean that they won't travel to other public lands and public spaces. We're just spreading out the problem. We're not actually doing anything to encourage, you know, proper use of that land. We're not doing anything to educate Albertans about why it's important to protect that land and to use it carefully.

No clearer example of the fact that this is really not about conservation, it's not really about protecting these lands, is the fact that certain areas, even within Kananaskis Country, are excluded from this fee, particularly McLean Creek – right? – which is an area which is known for frequent use by off-highway vehicle users and riders. I've seen, and I'm sure many of the members in this House have seen the pictures of years of – you know, frankly, it's difficult to see these pictures of the land being torn up and really destroyed by the use of these OHVs on these lands, yet that's excluded. So if this is really about conservation, why is that area excluded? Because this isn't about conservation. This is actually about making up, off the backs of Albertans, the millions and billions of dollars that this government has given away. It's saying: "You will now pay for it, individual Albertan, individual family. If you're a frequent user, you'll be penalized." Maybe you're thinking about accessing Kananaskis Country or our other public lands for the first time. Maybe you got a taste of it last year and you thought, "This is great. I'm going to do more of this," but, oops, now you're going to be dinged for it. Now you're going to pay for it because the government has chosen to mismanage public funds so that it cannot support the proper use of public lands. It cannot support the proper delivery of public services.

I have to say, Mr. Speaker, that I've spoken in this House about how it's a relatively newish experience for families like mine. My family did not have a long history of camping, exploring the public

lands or even our parks as much as I would've liked, and I'm trying to raise my kids with a different experience, with a different connection to this land. As much as I've enjoyed that as an adult, taking my family out and exploring our public lands, even I as an elected official was surprised by the vehemence and the strength of the anger and frustration from Albertans last year when they found out that, you know, the UCP government wanted to privatize parks.

In Edmonton-Whitemud – and I have to say, of course, you know, that we don't have a ton of public land use around, in my specific constituency, but of course the people in my constituency travel across this province to enjoy camping and recreational use in our public lands and our parks – there was an outpouring of frustration and opposition to this way the government is managing parks by threatening to privatize them. They've had to backtrack on that. There was an outpouring from the residents of Edmonton-Whitemud against the decision by this government to support coal mining on the eastern slopes of the Rockies, and of course they're having to backtrack on that. I don't know how much more it takes for the UCP government to understand that, as my colleagues have said, Albertans do not trust them when it comes to the management and the conservation and the preservation of public lands and parks and those things that are most precious to so many Albertans, but it has been very clearly articulated now to all of these members because we're seeing them have to backtrack.

I think one of the things that I struggle with the most, Mr. Speaker, is that this is just these random camping fees, and this is why we need to go to committee and hear from Albertans on this, but the thing that I believe is so, I guess, disappointing, yet also not surprising, is that it's just one thing after another from this government of making life more difficult, more expensive for Albertans. Like, to put on yet another user fee when we've talked about, you know, the increases – their utility costs have gone up, their car insurance costs, postsecondary tuition, child care fees, school fees, their personal income taxes have gone up, their property taxes have gone up, particularly in rural areas, and this government has introduced tolls on roads – it's just exhausting, and this is just one more thing after the year that we've had where so many Albertans tried to explore our public lands and really take advantage of them and appreciate them and enjoy them. Even that, the UCP has to say: "Sorry; we're going to make that more expensive, too. We're going to make that more difficult for you, Albertans."

Honestly, I believe it when I hear from my constituents that they're just exhausted by how out of touch this government is with the things that they value. Everything in their lives has become more difficult as a result of this UCP government. That's not hyperbole, Mr. Speaker. I would genuinely challenge the UCP to stand up and say how they have increased the quality of Albertans' lives, and I have not even gotten into the way that they have handled this pandemic, when they prioritized, you know, some Albertans' lives over others.

11:30

Honestly, this is just another example of how the government continues to make life more difficult for Albertans. They're taking away their enjoyment. They're making it more difficult for them to enjoy public lands. It's that simple. It should be something that we should be embracing and encouraging. We could talk about responsible management, we could talk about conservation, but that is not what this is about. This is about this government making up for dollars that they've given away, and we know now from their budget that they're doing it without actually dedicating that money to the things they said that they would do it for. There is no trust with Albertans in the UCP.

The Speaker: Hon. members, Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available if anyone has a brief question or comment. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar has one.

Mr. Schmidt: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I want to thank my colleague from Edmonton-Whitemud for her thoughtful comments on this piece of legislation and why we should send it to committee for further review by members of the Legislature. One of the interesting points that she raised was the issue of the effectiveness of using a \$90-a-year fee for access in Kananaskis Country to actually conserve the parks and public lands that make up Kananaskis Country. This is one of the things that I've heard from many people who have contacted my office about this issue. The stated goal of conservation is not actually being achieved by implementing this fee.

My friend from Edmonton-Whitemud pointed out one of the concerns that has been frequently raised, the issue of potentially pushing people out of Kananaskis Country and into other areas close to Kananaskis Country that don't have fees applied to them and may not have the corresponding infrastructure and staff in place to actually manage the potential increase in numbers. I think she's quite right in that.

If the government is correct that the increased numbers of people visiting Kananaskis Country are causing issues around conservation in that area, there are a number of public policy options available to the government to actually conserve the area. One of the potential policy options that I know that the national parks have explored and used is just limiting the number of people who can access certain areas, and one of the prominent examples that many people here in the House might be familiar with is Lake O'Hara in Yoho national park.

Now, Lake O'Hara is one of the most beautiful parts of any of the national parks in the country, and because it is so beautiful, it was being overrun with people every year until the park decided to restrict users. Now it tightly limits the number of people who can camp there every year. It limits the number of people who can go up there by bus every day, and it says: well, if you are motivated enough, you can make the hike. I can't remember how long it is. It's a 10-kilometre hike along the fire road, I think, to get up to Lake O'Hara. If you're willing to make that hike up to the spot, well, you can stay there for the day. Oddly enough, Mr. Speaker, very few people, I think, make that hike, so the number of people who are allowed to visit Lake O'Hara in a given year has been drastically reduced. It didn't take a user fee; it just took a different set of management tools that the national parks used to limit that. It's been tremendously successful.

I only raise that because if the government were genuine in its concern about conserving the parks and restoring some of the damage that has allegedly been caused by the increased number of visitors over the last year, then it should explore a lot of these other public policy options. That's why I think we should refer this bill to committee. I'm sure that my friend from Edmonton-Whitemud would agree with me, if I gave her the chance to respond to my comments, that there are a whole host of options that are available to the government for actually conserving these areas in Kananaskis Country, and I think that it would be wise for the committee to look at what other options are available.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I look for a response of any kind from my friend from Edmonton-Whitemud.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Pancholi: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I agree. I think that that was an excellent example from the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar

about various other options available to government through policy to manage the conservation of public lands. That's a great example of why referral to a committee would be so valuable because we don't know what other options this government explored or has considered exploring. As the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar has laid out, their claim is that the money is all going to be invested back into conservation, but we already know that to be untrue because they are not investing \$18 million into conservation in Alberta parks and public lands in this upcoming fiscal year.

The Speaker: Hon. members, are there others wishing to join in the debate? The hon. Member for St. Albert.

Ms Renaud: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise and speak to Bill 64, Public Lands Amendment Act, 2021, more specifically to speak to the referral motion that this particular piece of legislation be given more time to correct some of the glaring errors that have been pointed out by some of my colleagues. Now, obviously, there are a couple of problems, I think. Even before I read legislation that this particular government puts forward, I always have a few things in my mind to look for, and one of the first things is always around consultation. Now, that's a pretty sweeping word and sweeping activity, and it can include all kinds of activities and actions, but what this government has demonstrated time and again is their complete inability to do it properly before introducing legislation and before passing legislation. This particular bill is no exception.

One of the things – I went and had a look at the what-we-heard document from the government that talks about their consultation, so we know that it was done during a pandemic, obviously, and that it was done during Christmas, because, you know, people have nothing better to do during that time. It was just over 8,000 people that participated. Now, what was quite interesting is that when this announcement came up: “Yes, we're going to introduce these fees, and we're going to do all these great things. But don't worry, AISH recipients will get a deal. They'll get an exemption.” Okay; that's great. That's great for one group of people. That's great for 70,000 Albertans that rely on AISH.

The problem is that there was no real consultation. If you look at the government's own page and their list of stakeholders, not one – not one – stakeholder on that list represents groups that have experience with access difficulty, with reducing barriers, with inclusive recreation, with anything like that. There is nobody on that list of stakeholders that were invited. Now, this wasn't random; this was by invitation by this government. Not one of those stakeholder groups appear to have any experience around issues related to low-income Albertans and their lack of access. Not one. That tells you, once again, that this particular consultation activity was very narrow in focus, and it certainly seems like adding AISH as an exemption – so if you're an AISH recipient, you don't have to pay this fee – is an afterthought once again because this government got it wrong again.

There is another group that was overlooked that is always overlooked by this government, and that is a group on income support. You have people on AISH that are making over \$1,600 a month. They have disabilities. You also have a group on income support, on barriers to employment. We've got 60,000 people on income support. They are living on half of what AISH recipients get. Many of them are disabled, many of them have chronic health – about 30 per cent of them are actually single parents supporting a dependent. But that group was not included. Why? This government got it wrong when it came to consultation once again as evidenced by their own documents.

Now, go a little further, and you see their suggestions. They actually point out some of their bullets – and the header is Suggestions for Sustainable Recreation. I think that the 8,194 participants that passed on their thoughts and ideas were really on the right track. Who knows how many points government selected to include on their page.

11:40

Some of things that came out from this very limited, poorly done consultation sort of support what we're saying here today, three of those points in particular. The first one says that this work that we're talking about "should be funded by public money." We've been saying that this morning. This is a resource. This is a public resource. Once again, this government is looking to make money on the backs of Albertans while they frivolously spend millions of dollars on their platform promises, things like a ridiculous war room.

The second bullet: funds collected "should go back to public lands not general revenue." Once again, here's another example of the government doing the opposite of what would be open and transparent. Like we've suggested, if indeed you're going to charge these fees – that's fine – show Albertans where every dollar is going. If you say that you are supporting conservation, show it. If you say that you are opening up opportunities to reduce barriers for people to use this land, show it. If you are going to hire more people to do this work, show it. Don't throw it into general revenue like you did with the Alberta lotteries fund: "Trust us; every dollar will go to nonprofit groups and communities. Trust us; it won't get lost in the mix." Well, here we are. Those statements were made in 2019. Here we are in 2021. We see the results. We see that the organizations that relied on grants that were funded by the Alberta lotteries have been reduced. There's less money going out to groups. Fact. You could spin it all you like. That is fact.

The third bullet says that these lands should be held in trust because they "are crucial to healthy, viable watershed ecosystems." You know, we hear the government say a lot of things, "We value this land; we're going to preserve it for the future, for future generations," but they don't give Albertans details that they're looking for and transparency. Not only that, but, I mean, we can look at the other consultations that are going on on similar issues or related issues where there has been, I believe, a deliberate attempt to narrow the focus of the consultation. I think it appears that government has in mind exactly what they want to hear from their consultation. And I use the scare quotes because that's what it is.

Again, this piece of legislation, not very different from other pieces, is dismal in consultation. Dismal. Things are added after the fact: "Oh, we don't want to anger this group. Let's put that in there." It's just ridiculous. This isn't about the fact that we believe that if we're going to collect funds, it should be used to invest and conserve and hire people and do that. That's not what this is about. This is about a framework of decision-making from a government that has completely lost the trust of Albertans.

You know, some of the other things that we heard on the what-we-heard document from the government are some points that government says that they will invest money in; that is, to upgrade infrastructure. Yes, we've heard different members across the way talk about washrooms and things like that. Of course, those things are important. Improving education, conservation, enforcement, public safety, improving the environment, and waste management: well, those are all terrific goals. Those are all things that we all support. I don't think there's any question about that. What we do not support are government promises where there's no accountability and no transparency so that any Albertan can look at the books, look at the documents that the government puts out and

say: yes, I'm happy to pay that fee because I know it's going towards A, B, C, D. But this government doesn't allow that. That's not how they roll.

You know, it's been a while since we've debated this because all of us were sent back to our constituencies for weeks. I had to go back through *Hansard* to look at some of the debate that had gone on. A lot of things get said in this place. A lot of things. I went back to the most recent evening, actually, that this bill was debated. It was April 19, '21. I'm actually stunned at some of the comments that were in there. The Minister of – I'm trying to think now – Municipal Affairs was making some statements that don't even make sense, actually. The reason I went back and looked at this and the reason that I'm highlighting some of this is because this is how this government tends to operate. There's a piece of legislation. We've proposed some really solid amendments. This government is just ignoring it. Instead of saying, "Well, you know, I like that part, maybe we can adjust this, and that makes sense," they're throwing out these statements that are just incorrect. They're dog whistles, as usual. They're so misleading that it's almost laughable.

In *Hansard* we've got the minister saying, and this is a direct quote: "Most people believed that the minister" – and he's referring to the four years that the New Democrats formed government – "was about to cut off the same usages in the west country." That's ridiculous. This is just absolutely ridiculous, and that an hon. member would come into this place and say something so blatantly wrong and incorrect is mind-boggling.

Then we've got the member who represents, I think – and I may be biased – one of the most beautiful areas in Alberta, Livingstone-Macleod, praising the consultation through the survey and targeted discussion with key stakeholders. Again, it underlines the fact that this consultation did not do what it needed to do, again a reminder that these stakeholders were invited. It wasn't open. They were invited.

Further down we've got, again, the same minister going back – and this was some time later – and I'd like to point this out. Now, keep in mind we're talking about Bill 64.

Our government is trying to fix the insurance business that they broke . . .

"they" being the NDP.

They wouldn't let them make a profit . . . They were trying to starve them out and put in government insurance.

This is about Bill 64. Now, you know, I would like to remind the House – and this isn't sort of relative to the referral motion that we're discussing here – that I think the insurance industry was doing quite well in 2019, 2020, and again in '21.

Going back to this piece of legislation, I think that this government is doing everything they can to distract, as usual. Things aren't going well for them; they're trying to distract. What we're saying is: take this piece of legislation and make it better. Take the time to think about it, to send it to committee so that it is fixed. Fix it. You know, I know that there was at least an attempt to make it more inclusive, but it didn't quite get there. There is much more that this government can do.

Now, you know, one of my colleagues talked about barriers. It's not just people with disabilities that have barriers to using the land that really belongs to all of us, but there are people that live on very limited incomes. I think that that has been exacerbated with this pandemic, with all of the hardships and the economic difficulties that we've had in the last couple of years. The reality is that in the summertime going camping is probably one of the only things that you can do for your children or for yourself in terms of affordability. I'm not talking about the tent trailer or renting something. I'm talking about a tent, but that's still expensive. Most of us do not live on those kinds of budgets anymore, but there are

thousands and thousands and thousands of Albertans that do. Adding another fee to camp or another fee to access this part of Alberta seems reasonable, seems okay, but it will prevent thousands of people from being able to do that.

Think about a camping trip – most of us don't think this way anymore because we earn far more than those Albertans – about the cost of gas, if you're lucky enough to have a vehicle, the cost to camp, the cost of food, perhaps the cost of wood, the cost of a fishing licence, all of these things, and now you've added on another cost.

11:50

You know, my colleague talked about her constituents, and she herself is just tired of all the nickel and diming. People's insurance has gone up, all kinds of costs have gone up, but people's incomes have not matched that. Now, you've addressed that, yes, people on AISH live well below the poverty line, so you made some exceptions there. What you neglected to mention is that you deindexed their benefits in 2019. They are slipping further and further and further below the poverty line. But that's okay; they get a free pass to go to Kananaskis Country. That is insufficient.

I would really encourage this government to actually think about this and the value of referring this piece of legislation to committee. You still have a majority. You can still sort of do what you want, because you like to flex your muscles that way, but actually listen to what was missed in the consultation, not just on access and reducing barriers for all Albertans but on all of the other things that my colleagues have said around transparency, ensuring that the investments do what they are meant to do instead of just going into general revenues and covering – covering – what this government is really doing.

The Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available if anyone has a brief question or a comment. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

Ms Sigurdson: Riverview.

The Speaker: Edmonton-Riverview. Sorry.

Ms Sigurdson: That's okay. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I was very interested in what the Member for St. Albert was sharing, and one particular piece of what she was sharing and, I think, why it's so important that Bill 64, Public Lands Amendment Act, 2021, through this amendment REF1, be sent to committee is because it's something that the UCP government has said that they will do but that the legislation has no provision for.

The hon. Member for St. Albert was talking a bit about how the reinvestment of the fees that they're now, you know, wanting to give themselves the authority to charge Albertans is not – they're saying that they will invest them in these public lands to improve the visitor experience, conserve and protect wilderness spaces, but of course there is no provision in the legislation that actually, you know, indicates that this is what they must do. That's a little bit bizarre. Like, if they're going to do that, why don't they write that into the legislation, as the member has rightly indicated? I mean, this is a concern certainly for myself and, I know, my constituents and Albertans all across the province because, sadly, the UCP government has not always been trustworthy. Certainly, they've done things that I take great concern with, and I know, having contacted and spoken with many Albertans during this break, having had phone calls with many Albertans, that it's shared by so many people.

We know that the UCP, you know, were elected in good faith. We think that they will follow the rules and laws of sort of what is

in place, yet this is a party that fired an Election Commissioner when the Election Commissioner had fined the party over \$200,000 and was investigating the leadership race. When they say that they're going to reinvest these fees that they're going to be gathering now with this new legislation, I'm wondering because of some of the behaviour of the UCP previously, so that's why it's so important that it go to committee.

Most recent, I guess, is the, you know, concern that I have – and I know many Albertans have this, too – on just the repeated extensions to the energy war room, that's really an embarrassment to us as Albertans and a significant waste of government money. If they are indeed planning to fulfill this reinvestment in actually supporting public lands, then certainly this needs to be in the legislation, and it is a bit confusing to me that it's not.

I just want to give the hon. member an opportunity to further elaborate on her already wise comments regarding this issue.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Renaud: Thank you, and thank you to my colleague. You know, I just wanted to make a quick comment. If you have a look at Bill 64, the Public Lands Amendment Act, 2021 – and, again, we would like to refer it to committee – what I find is really quite interesting, because you don't see this very often with this government. The preamble, in terms of word count, is probably longer than the actual bill and what it's doing, which is unfortunate. It's pretty heavy on the words with the intent of the bill. The preamble is very important. It sort of talks about what they're going to do. The government "is committed to sustainable recreation management that ensures that public land is accessible to all Albertans." It goes on to talk about that we're "committed to ensuring the costs are shared in a way that is fair," and they're also "committed to using fees collected for recreational uses of public land . . . related to the maintenance and management of [the land] and recreation and public safety." Those are all great things to say. That's great.

The preamble is sort of talking about why it's important, what the intent is, but it, once again, is just like this six-bedroom house with no furniture. There is nothing in here that says, "Here is how we are going to restore trust and show Albertans that the funds collected will actually fund these activities, and here's how you, inquiring Albertan, can check on us to see that we are doing what we said," because that is not entirely how this government rolls.

The Speaker: Hon. members, are there others? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

Ms Sigurdson: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to join the debate on Bill 64 and the amendment specifically to, you know, refer this bill to committee, because there are some significant ones missing, I think. I just previously, along with the Member for St. Albert, discussed a significant one, that there is nothing that actually fulfills the reinvestment in the public lands, that we want to, of course, preserve, and to make sure that those are supported. Despite the words of the UCP government, there is nothing in legislation. As I said previously, it's really important that we be transparent, that we fulfill our commitments, and certainly putting it in legislation would ensure that. Sadly, the UCP has not done that.

I guess another reason to send this bill to committee is just because of the timing. Like, really, look at the timing. We are here, you know, over a year in COVID-19. Albertans are suffering. We know that if they're following the chief medical officer of health – we have seen that some UCP members have not by travelling internationally, but here in our NDP caucus, along with the vast majority of Albertans,

we have respected those orders – Albertans are staying here in our province and are thus wishing to get into our beautiful wilderness. This is the time. It makes no sense, Mr. Speaker, that these kinds of fees would be implemented. Of course, there are concerns about just how much is going to be implemented and that it could change at any time, increase. There are no limits on this. This is kind of a bit of a sad joke. Like, during a time when Albertans are really struggling, the UCP believes it's time to impose fees on Albertans.

We know that we have 73,000 Albertans unemployed and looking for work for more than a year here in Alberta. This is our

long-term unemployment rate, and it's the largest – there are 3 per cent of Albertans in this category, and that's the largest number that we've had since data was first collected, in 1982. That's when they first started collecting that long-term unemployment data, and it's a huge . . .

The Speaker: Hon. member, I hesitate to interrupt, but pursuant to Standing Order 4(2.1) the House stands adjourned until 1:30 p.m.

[The Assembly adjourned at 12 p.m.]

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