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The 30th Legislature
Second Session

Alberta Hansard

Tuesday evening, 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
Allard, Tracy L., Grande Prairie (UC)	Neudorf, Nathan T., Lethbridge-East (UC)
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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)
Eggen, David, Edmonton-North West (NDP), Official Opposition Whip	Reid, Roger W., Livingstone-Macleod (UC)
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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Glubish, Hon. Nate, Strathcona-Sherwood Park (UC)	Sawhney, Hon. Rajan, Calgary-North East (UC)
Goehring, Nicole, Edmonton-Castle Downs (NDP)	Schmidt, Marlin, Edmonton-Gold Bar (NDP)
Goodridge, Laila, Fort McMurray-Lac La Biche (UC)	Schow, Joseph R., Cardston-Siksika (UC), Deputy Government Whip
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Gray, Christina, Edmonton-Mill Woods (NDP), Official Opposition House Leader	Schweitzer, Hon. Doug, QC, Calgary-Elbow (UC), Deputy Government House Leader
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Hanson, David B., Bonnyville-Cold Lake-St. Paul (UC)	Shepherd, David, Edmonton-City Centre (NDP)
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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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Standing Committee on Private Bills and Private Members' Public Bills

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Sigurdson, L.
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Standing Committee on Privileges and Elections, Standing Orders and Printing

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Standing Committee on Resource Stewardship

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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

7:30 p.m.

Tuesday, May 25, 2021

[The Speaker in the chair]

The Speaker: Hon. members, please be seated.

Government Motions

The Speaker: The hon. the Government House Leader.

Time Allocation on Bill 64

80. Mr. Jason Nixon moved:

Be it resolved that when further consideration of Bill 64, Public Lands Amendment Act, 2021, is resumed, not more than one hour shall be allotted to any further consideration of the bill in second reading, at which time every question necessary for the disposal of the bill at this stage shall be put forthwith.

Mr. Jason Nixon: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. We have had about 10 hours of debate so far on Bill 64. There will be more over the next several stages inside this Chamber, but it has become fairly clear that the Official Opposition continues to want to slow down this important piece of legislation, which is important to be able to implement the budget that has already passed in this Chamber and needs to be in place by June 1. The government will take action to be able to make sure that this legislation can make its way through the legislative process, continue to have the appropriate amount of debate for its importance but not allow the Official Opposition to derail the process. It does not surprise me, when it comes to this important piece of public land legislation, that the Official Opposition would want to derail this process.

Hopefully, I'll get an opportunity to speak about this a little bit more tonight or during another reading, Mr. Speaker, but we do know that the Official Opposition's main purpose when they were in government when it came to the management of the eastern slopes or public lands was to attempt to shut Albertans out of their backyard, in fact, to, famously, try to ban them in Clearwater county, or the places that I call home, through their secret Bighorn plan that they worked very, very hard on to make sure that people would not be able to utilize the backcountry – fortunately, we were able to stop that – not to mention the debacle that was taking place in the southern portion of the province in the Castle area, which I look forward to having an opportunity to be able to discuss.

The reality is that this important piece of legislation is supported by environmental organizations, by municipalities, and by user groups. Mr. Speaker, that is an extraordinary, rare moment. Trout Unlimited, in regard to this legislation, says that the collection of user fees for random camping on public land is a good first step for the province in investing back into the protection and rehabilitation of areas that are overutilized. Recent increased interest in use of our wild spaces makes this a timely investment.

You go to RMA, Mr. Speaker:

RMA applauds Alberta Environment and Parks for creating a fee program for backcountry random camping that will support responsible use of Alberta's public lands. The program provides for an important revenue stream that will be invested directly in the safety, services, and protection of our public lands.

Or to the Alberta Fish and Game Association, an important user group:

Outdoor enthusiasts from around the world cherish Alberta's wilderness. With increased pressure every year in our

[backcountry] from visitors, a Public Land Camping Pass means we can provide sustainable reinvestment on public lands for the boots on the ground needed to promote better conservation and waste management.

That's what the NDP wants to stop. They want to stop that level of co-operation on our Crown lands because, Mr. Speaker, again – and their record shows it – when it comes to Crown land, the NDP's primary goal is to stop Albertans from being able to access their own backyard.

Now, earlier today the Official Opposition Environment critic also said something along the lines, Mr. Speaker, of the fact that he felt that oil companies were doing good inside their first quarter and that job creators – job creators – should pay for people to be able to go random camp or have that type of experience. Not only do you see their secret plan to shut Crown lands to Albertans, but their main goal is to make oil companies pay for people to be able to go camping. What's next? Do they want the oil companies to pay for us to take our kids to the zoo? Where does it end when it comes to the Official Opposition?

We know where they are headed. They want to block this legislation and go towards their plan, which was to ban all access to the eastern slopes from human activity, to stop people from doing the traditional activities that they have done for generations, Mr. Speaker. I know that most of them don't even know where Rocky Mountain House is, but they tried to do that. But – guess what? – we're not going to let that happen, and we'll use every procedural means necessary at our disposal to make sure that we can stop the NDP's secret plan and make sure that Albertans can continue to enjoy their backyard.

The Speaker: Hon. members, one member from the Official Opposition has the opportunity to join in the debate. You have up to five minutes to speak. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

Mr. Feehan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm very happy to be back in the House, talking about important aspects of legislation for the province of Alberta, after having gone through a strange week in Alberta in terms of weather, having got a bit of a sunburn on one day three days after a big snowstorm. And here I am in the Legislature getting snowed again by the minister of the environment, who has made a speech filled with so many misleading statements that I'm just quite discouraged and would really like us to stick to the point here and not go on all this long tirade of various things, mythologies they have about the past, of what happened, when, in fact, I can demonstrate that much of what he said would not be validated by the facts.

I do want to stick to the point of the matter here, and that is that this government has made a decision that Albertans do not get a chance to have a fulsome discussion about how they will be taxed. A fundamental question of democratic liberty is the ability to question how you have been taxed and how that money will be spent, and this government has come forward and made the decision that Albertans are not going to be allowed to have that fully addressed and laid out on the table, and why? You might ask: why? I'm sure you are. Why is it the government would want to shut this down and not hear from Albertans? The answer is quite simple. This government has the absolute worst record on the development of the public lands in this province that we have ever seen in the Legislature. They have contravened years of history, including Conservative Party history, of the development of lands in this province so that people may access lands that are truly wild and natural lands in which they can enjoy that which Alberta has

available in a way that allows them to engage the land without scarring and ruining the land.

Now, this Conservative government doesn't understand that, doesn't understand that that's what people want to be able to do. They want to be able to engage Alberta, the natural Alberta, the wonderful thing that we have been all gifted with. Instead, they want to take this opportunity to take the voice away from Albertans and keep it in that small cabal of people that they apparently talk to about all these kinds of things. We know that over the last number of months they have been losing at extreme levels the support of Albertans around their handling of the environment, and this is a chance for them to shut down that concern, to stop Albertans from voicing what it is that they have to say about the environment and instead move on to other, I'm sure, dastardly things toward the environment consistent with what they've done so far.

I think this is very discouraging, using this political manoeuvre to simply make the decision that Albertans do not have representation attached to their taxation, a fundamental idea of democracy that whole countries have been established around, that there should not be taxation without representation. [interjections] And here they are using this chance, they are using this Legislature to stop them from doing those kinds of things, and they're mocking Albertans right now. The thousands of Albertans that have put up signs that say Save Our Parks have just been mocked by their own environment minister. The thousands and thousands of people that have gone to albertasfuture.ca to talk about environmental policy have just been mocked by this environment minister, as he mocks people all the time.

7:40

This is consistent with this government. I know it fulfills their way of being in terms of their relationship with Albertans, and it is one that's clearly not okay with Albertans. One only has to look at the polls to see that they absolutely are disgusted with this kind of manoeuvre by this type of government.

Thank you.

[The voice vote indicated that Government Motion 80 carried]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 7:40 p.m.]

[Fifteen minutes having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

[The Speaker in the chair]

For the motion:

Aheer	Jones	Rowswell
Allard	Long	Rutherford
Amery	Lovely	Savage
Armstrong-Homeniuk	Nally	Schow
Copping	Neudorf	Schulz
Dreeshen	Nicolaides	Sigurdson, R.J.
Fir	Nixon, Jason	Smith
Guthrie	Nixon, Jeremy	Toews
Hanson	Panda	Toor
Horner	Reid	van Dijken
Issik	Rosin	Yaseen

Against the motion:

Ceci	Feehan	Hoffman
Dach	Ganley	Loyola
Eggen	Gray	
Totals:	For – 33	Against – 8

[Government Motion 80 carried]

Speaker's Ruling Dress Code of the Chamber

The Speaker: Hon. members joining us remotely, and not naming any particular members, but a friendly reminder to everyone and those particularly from Airdrie-Cochrane that it is mandatory that your attire would be the same as if you are in the Chamber. I use the word "attire" appropriately here. In the future you may be prevented from casting a ballot should that come into question. If you are more clever, like the hon. Member for Edmonton-North West, it is very difficult to tell if he is – ah, his attire is appropriate.

8:00

Government Bills and Orders Second Reading

Bill 64

Public Lands Amendment Act, 2021

[Debate adjourned May 25]

The Speaker: Hon. members, we are on amendment REF1. Are there any wishing to join the debate? The hon. member . . .

Ms Gray: Apologies, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Oh, correction. Defeated on division.

Ms Gray: Thank you.

The Speaker: We are on the main bill, Government Bills and Orders, Bill 64, Public Lands Amendment Act. The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Ms Ganley: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I am pleased to rise and speak to Bill 64. I would urge all members to vote against this bill, and that is for several reasons. One is that the way this bill is implemented, where it applies to won't necessarily encourage the goals that the government claims that it will. Number two, it was brought in with very little notice. In fact, some folks had already booked camping reservations prior to the notice of this. Number three is that I don't believe it is appropriate to charge these fees. That's for a couple reasons, one being that the purpose of these sort of public areas is for everyone to be able to have access to it, not for access to only be allowed to some people who have the money to do it, and the other being that the government states that the money will go into parks, but this is kind of on a trust-us basis. I think in light of recent events and the best predictor of future behaviour being past behaviour, people are reluctant to trust this government for a number of reasons. I think it's insufficient to just say "Trust us," especially since there is no legislative requirement in this bill that would require the money to be so used.

I'd like to begin by sort of talking about camping in the province of Alberta. Historically and generally camping and hiking and that sort of thing, particularly in K Country, has been something that's available to everyone. Certainly, I know going through the University of Calgary multiple times, in law school, you know, with a lot of people in from out of province, many of us used that as our form of recreation. Why? Well, because students notably tend to be a little short on cash, especially students at this time, when tuition is flying up through the roof. The amount charged on student loans is going up under this government. It has always been the case, I think, that students struggle to make ends meet. I can remember doing food bank drives on campus, and we would talk about the \$1.67 that students on student loans had to eat in a day. Notably, there are some people for whom \$90 is quite a lot of money. I think it's unfair for those individuals to essentially be barred.

Now, I think another thing worth noting here is that the government says that everyone's willing to pay to have money go back into the parks, but there's no way to know with certainty that the money will go back into the parks. There's no legislative requirement in here. I think Albertans are right not to really trust this government's follow-through. There have been a number of issues on which this government has said one thing and then done another. They certainly didn't announce that they were rescinding the 1976 coal policy. They then, with great bluster, announced that they had rescinded the leases except that it was a tiny portion of the leases because it was only the leases after a certain date. That statement: I think that when the public heard it, they probably relied on it. It turned out not to be true, so I can see where people might have been troubled by that and might be troubled going forward.

You know, this, too, was another situation. Even the bringing in of the fees was a situation in which it was a bit of surprise to people. It's not like people were given a year's notice or people had lots of time to adapt to this; it just came in sort of very suddenly. I think members of the public can be forgiven for being skeptical that that money will in fact go back into parks simply on this government's say-so because they have demonstrated – I mean, the coal consultation as well they announced, and then the consultation wasn't about water. It wasn't really willing to consider sort of cumulative effects. It wasn't willing to consider a number of different things, and these were the things that were the primary areas of concern for people. I think all of that is highly, highly problematic.

I want to read a little bit here because I think it speaks very much to people's concerns here. Earlier this evening we heard from the Government House Leader referencing, you know, the NDP and the secret plan and this and that, and I just want to clarify that there was no secret plan. It was passed by way of legislation and published as a regulation, like most regulations are, as they're required to be done. Really all that did is say that, like, you know, some uses are inconsistent. It can be very challenging if you're on a horse and an OHV goes by you. I think it's not unreasonable for people who are hiking or on horses to be able to say: well, this other use is inconsistent with our enjoyment of the land, so let's all get together and make some rules about who can go where.

That's not locking anybody out. That's merely designating certain trails for certain uses, which is – I mean, we plan our entire society this way, right? You know, you can't do certain things on a highway because the highway is for use by vehicles. You can't drive your car in the bike lane. You can't in some circumstances ride your bike on the sidewalk. We have designated different areas for different uses, and this is a totally normal part of people living in society. In fact, that tends to increase as the population increases, and the reason for that is because as you get more and more users, you'll get sort of more of these interferences. I want to clarify that there was never any plan to lock anyone out. In fact, this does a lot more to lock Albertans, quote, unquote, out of their own backyard than land-use planning or designating certain trails for certain uses ever could because in this case if you don't have the money to pay, you really are locked out.

I would like to quote here, and this is from an article that was published in the *Calgary Herald*. It's from the Alberta Wilderness Association.

The exemption off-highway vehicle users will receive from paying the Kananaskis Conservation Pass fuels suspicion the OHV constituency is a special interest that has Nixon's ear. McLean Creek is the focal point of one of four Public Land Use Zones (PLUZs) in K-Country. The McLean Creek Off-Highway Vehicle PLUZ, as its name suggests, is land dedicated for OHV use. McLean Creek is the only area in K-Country where you

don't need to purchase the \$90 vehicle permit. OHV users will not pay the conservation pass when they travel to ride their machines at McLean Creek.

I think what I want to point out with that particular quote is that some people have been subject to this, and some people have not. The government has claimed that it is for conservation purposes, but if it was for conservation purposes, why would you concentrate on people travelling on foot, which has significantly less impact on the land, compared to people travelling by vehicle?

8:10

Now, I absolutely believe that regardless of how you choose to access the outdoors, you should have a right to do that regardless of what your means are. But why is it the case that some users – i.e. those in off-highway vehicles – are being exempted from the fee whereas other users – those who are pedestrians, who are walking, who are hiking – are subject to the fee? I think, you know, to me, that really undercuts the government's argument that this is about conservation. Arguably, if you have a bunch of folks coming in that are going to sort of hike on foot, it would take a lot of people to have the same impact on trails and on riverbeds, in particular, that one OHV has, yet those people would be putting over \$100 into the park system whereas the OHV puts in nothing. I think this is creating a differential impact, and I think that that differential impact is unfair.

I also think that – you know, as Albertans it's always been the case that we can go and take our families camping. Often there's a nominal fee on booking camping ahead of time, which I understand, but this is piling another fee on top of that fee, and I think that's going to be difficult for some Alberta families. I mentioned the students that I used to be with who often used these areas. There's no way they would've had the money to pay for this fee. So I think that's extremely problematic. It also locks out a number of low-income families, and I think that's extremely problematic. This is just another way in which this government is placing a burden on families.

Life is getting more expensive. We all know that average incomes have not kept pace with average costs. I know that I talk about this a lot. This sort of income inequality, this unaffordability is something that drove me to run in the first place. I think this adds to that. It's just one more thing that's going to price a lot of families out. It's one more reason that, you know, people who think, "Hey, it seems like a nice weekend to take the kids for a hike" might think twice and ultimately not do that. I mean, one of the nice things about camping and hiking in the Kananaskis Country when I was growing up was that it was accessible to everyone, and that lack of accessibility is going to be problematic, I think.

So those are, you know, the different reasons that I am deeply suspicious of this, and I think it plays into an overall problem with this government. When I was first elected in this House with many members in 2015, at that time it was common for folks to talk to each other across the floor and to talk to people on the other side. There was more of a congenial relationship shall we say. I'd often find myself talking to people and think: how did we wind up on different sides? Like, we seemed to have a lot in common. One of the early things that made me realize that maybe what we lacked in common was just, like, deeply different perspectives on the world was the Member for Calgary-Hays – we were at the time debating progressive taxation in Alberta – stood up, and he was complaining about it, saying that, like, it was going to impact people. He said something that really made me go: oh, maybe that's what the difference is. He said: I don't know anyone who makes less than \$125,000 a year. I thought: ah, this perhaps explains the distinction that exists here. I feel like this is just a continuation of that, a

continuation of sort of failing to consider the different life experiences that people have had, failing to consider that not everyone has the same circumstances that we have, failing to consider that when we are sent to this place, we are sent here to govern for everyone, and that includes individuals who don't have \$90 to pay for hiking.

I think, you know, it comes in with a number of actions, right? You see a government who has done nothing with respect to skyrocketing insurance rates, that are a real burden on families, not to mention a number of other increasing fees. You see also the withdrawal of support for municipalities, who are not permitted to run deficits and who do some pretty important things: policing, fire, that sort of thing. I think that that's one of the many reasons I object to this bill.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Hon. members, Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available. I see the hon. the Government House Leader has risen.

Mr. Jason Nixon: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the Member for Calgary-Mountain View for her comments, though I would appreciate it if the next time she comes to the Chamber, she may take the time to actually read the bill. She spent most of her time talking about the Provincial Parks Act. This legislation has nothing to do with provincial parks, nothing at all. In fact, provincial parks are governed underneath a different act. Now, I do appreciate that she may want to talk about provincial parks like Kananaskis, but the reality is that this legislation has nothing to do with provincial parks, showing yet again that the member and her party won't take anything seriously. They just come to the Chamber to give a speech, complaining about something and not even actually talking about the legislation that's in front of them.

She gave herself away in her opening remarks when she talked, Mr. Speaker, about reservations. When you're dealing with random camping on Crown land, there are no reservations. If she would like to learn a little bit about the world outside of the city, I would welcome her to come to Rocky Mountain House any time and see what random camping is. She clearly has never been exposed to random camping, and that's fine. Clearly, with that comment, she has not. Instead, she focused her attention on the Provincial Parks Act, which is not before this Chamber.

She also, unfortunately, through her friends in the Alberta Wilderness Association, who were a partnership organization with the NDP when they tried to, admitted now by the member inside this Chamber, shut Albertans out from the eastern slopes, not from dedicated trails but from an area that stretched from the national park all the way to Rimbey, a plan which was rejected by five counties, every First Nation community. I look forward to speaking about that a little later when I talk about the bill, Mr. Speaker, about how the MLA for Edmonton-Rutherford failed as indigenous affairs minister when it came to the indigenous communities inside Clearwater county, when it came to their Bighorn plan. But back to the member's comments, she uses the Alberta Wilderness Association to say that somehow ATV users will be exempt from paying anything in McLean Creek, again showing that she hasn't read the bill. That's the bill that's before the House, that would bring in a random camping fee, which, by the way, was in the platform. It was clearly discussed during the campaign and very popular with user groups, and I will look forward to a couple of speeches later on tonight and tomorrow while I talk about those user groups.

But the point is that that was in the platform, not about provincial parks, like the member is speaking about here. And guess what.

Those that are inside McLean Creek, that use that area to both random camp and to use ATVs, will be paying a fee, Mr. Speaker. Everything that that member said was categorically false. What is really appalling about it – and she should be ashamed of herself – is that she stood up in the Chamber and then said that while debating the very piece of legislation that brings in the fees for the people inside McLean Creek.

The NDP have no idea. At this point I think they don't even know where the eastern slopes are. They continually say that with their comments. They clearly have not been exposed to many of the stakeholder groups that use that area to recreate and do not take this issue seriously at all.

Member Ceci: Coal mines.

Mr. Jason Nixon: I see the Member for Calgary-Fort. Maybe he's been random camping, but if he thinks that there are reservations for random camping, clearly he has not. But I will use his words, Mr. Speaker, where he says: modest fees we support when it comes to protecting our areas. Those are his words, the Member for Calgary-Buffer; it used to be Calgary-Fort, I believe.

8:20

The reality is that this brings forward a simple user fee for random camping of \$30 a year, Mr. Speaker. Most campgrounds that the NDP ran: you couldn't even get them for \$30 a night. What it does is that it brings forward a dedicated revenue fund, which is checked by the Auditor General. It is established that it would have to be spent appropriately underneath the dedicated uses, and what it does is that it makes sure that we can keep those areas open for Albertans and stop the NDP's plan – stop it in its tracks – of banning Albertans from the very landscapes that they recreate in.

Again, shame on them for not even taking a moment, Mr. Speaker – not even taking a moment – to read the bill and instead coming here and jumping the shark and talking about an act that's not even before the House.

Member Ceci: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Mr. Jason Nixon: The Member for Calgary-Buffer: yeah, yeah, yeah. I agree with you: yeah, yeah, yeah. How could they do that, Mr. Speaker? How could they expect us to take them seriously when they come to the Chamber and debate the parks act? The parks act is not on the table right now. Not on the table. It shows you where the Official Opposition is. They just come here, obviously, not to work. They just come here to complain because they can't even be bothered to read the bill that's before them. Shame on them.

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

Is there anyone else wishing to join in on the debate on Bill 64? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

Ms Hoffman: Having reviewed *Hansard*, it seems that we've seen about six weeks since the last outburst of that kind of behaviour from that member . . .

Mr. Jason Nixon: Point of order.

Ms Hoffman: . . . in this House, Mr. Speaker, but at this point I have to say . . .

The Speaker: A point of order has been called. The hon. the Government House Leader.

Point of Order

Referring to the Absence of Members

Mr. Jason Nixon: The hon. member has been in this Chamber long enough. She knows she can't refer to a member's absence, Mr. Speaker.

Ms Hoffman: I didn't.

Mr. Jason Nixon: Yeah, you did.

The Speaker: Is there anyone else wishing to join the debate? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise on this point of order although the member did not refer to presence or absence. The member referred to looking at *Hansard* to see the last time the Government House Leader got up, railed against one of the female members of our caucus, told them to be ashamed, and belittled them. That is a point in time and has nothing to do with where he's been in the meantime. That's just how long it's been since the last time we've experienced that.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Are there any other submissions?

Seeing none, I am prepared to rule. I think the hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora didn't specifically refer to the presence or absence of a member inside the Chamber. I do, however, encourage all members to keep their comments about the content, about legislation, as opposed to individuals. Generally speaking, that will increase decorum, not decrease it.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

Ms Hoffman: I couldn't agree more, Mr. Speaker.

Debate Continued

Ms Hoffman: I want to begin by recognizing the remarks that my colleague from Calgary-Mountain View just shared and the fact that many of the points about provincial parks were in response to the Government House Leader's introduction of closure on this bill when he specifically spoke about the creation of parks shutting people out. I think it's important that the record reflect the reality of what parks are, who enjoys parks, how they're engaged when such blatant aggression and misinformation is thrown towards the Official Opposition. So I want to congratulate and thank my colleague for putting those points on the record. I, too, appreciate that this is the Public Lands Amendment Act. Of course, there are public lands. There are provincial parks. When some people talk about parks being an effort to shut people out, I would say that by increasing fees, one of the natural consequences is that people will inevitably be shut out, whether it's public lands having fees attached to them or whether it's provincial parks and camping having fees tied to them.

I will also say that, like many Albertans, I have spent much time on the provincial parks website trying to book campsites, and it's been frustrating from time to time, especially recently. The last few weeks have been very frustrating, and I think what it says is that there is a high desire by Albertans to spend time outdoors, to spend time in their parks, and, in turn, to spend time on public lands.

I would say that this year – I know there have been record sales last summer and this summer for outdoor sporting equipment, for bikes, for skateboards. An awesome skateboard shop in my riding: Local 124. They have an awesome sticker. It's on my binder. They have had record sales for most outdoor sporting equipment,

including skateboards and other paraphernalia that goes along with it. I think that speaks to the fact that Albertans are really embracing the fact that we have a great opportunity in urban, rural, and suburban centres to spend time outdoors. Part of that, of course, includes spending time on public lands, including Kananaskis Country. When we bring in fees like \$30 per person per year, for a family of four or six that can be a significant barrier for low-income families, who didn't see one before.

While some members of this Assembly don't believe that those kinds of fees are burdensome, many Alberta families do. While some members of this Assembly spent the last election talking about getting rid of taxes and then come into this place and propose increased taxes and fees and levies, it is incumbent upon the opposition and, I would argue, all members of this Assembly – now we also have independent members – to remind the government of the realities of families right throughout this province and some of the hardships that they are facing.

When the government campaigned on getting rid of a tax – and then, of course, that tax was imposed on them anyway – and now they're seeing extra taxes and fees, including, of course, personal income tax with the creep that happens through getting rid of indexing, when they see increased fees like what's being tied here to their access to public lands, they have every right to expect their elected representatives to highlight those for the government, to speak out on their behalf, and to demand better from the governing party.

So at a time when more and more Albertans are looking to spend time outside – and we know that if people are to interact socially, one of the most harm-reduced ways to be able to do that is to spend time outside, distanced, masked, in the middle of a pandemic – I think it would be wise for this Assembly and for the governing party to find ways to increase that access and increase those opportunities for Alberta families instead of slapping more fees and burdens on them.

I also have to say that we know that – I am going to talk about camping fees because it goes hand in glove when it comes to accessing the wilderness and accessing parks. I know that many people will spend time, you know, camping in public areas, including K Country, as well as spending time in provincial campgrounds. Under this government there's been a wide variety of costs that have come up, including camping fees. They've been increased for two years in a row. Now here we have the government also bringing fees to public lands.

The minister has indicated at estimates that he will potentially be looking at additional fees and didn't even provide details about what those would be. I have a quote here, Mr. Speaker.

Depending on user access and what the numbers are, the Alberta government will continue to look at user fees, including new user fees that I haven't identified today, to be able to make sure that our parks system can operate fully.

Well, it also could be funded in a way that ensures that parks could be funded fully, and so could public areas.

We all care about the eastern slopes. I certainly expect that every member of this Assembly, that all Albertans care about the eastern slopes and are proud of the tremendous natural beauty, the ecosystems, the opportunities to explore and to feel a sense of pride in something that has been a travel destination for Albertans, for Canadians, and certainly for people from around the world. I think that we deserve a government that will work to ensure that it is protected, that it is accessible, and that all Albertans, this generation and the next, can have opportunities to engage in spending time in the beautiful outdoors.

I also want to highlight that I feel that the tone of the last interjection speaks to the fact that the government isn't keen on us

talking about their track record on parks, on public lands, on coal, on water, and I understand why. I get it. I think that instead of the government trying to stifle the voices that are speaking out in support of affordable, accessible natural areas, the government should look at ways that they can increase opportunities for families to engage in those.

8:30

I recall an exchange that the Government House Leader and I had in this House about where I grew up and where he grew up. The thrust of the story is that I did grow up hunting and fishing and spending time with my dad. We lived in Altario when I was youngest. In Altario I remember the first week that my dad was principal at the school, some students brought some geese and left them on our door as a welcome-to-town present. My mom, having grown up on a farm, was very good at pulling pin feathers. They were very generous students who left a significant number of geese, and eventually she had to surrender to the knife and find other ways to access the meat because there weren't enough hours in the day for her to be able to pull enough of those feathers.

Why I tell this story – my dad was an avid hunter as well – is that of course there are fees for certain activities like hunting and fishing. We've all come to know and appreciate and respect that. We know that the fees that you pay when you get a licence go towards ensuring fairness, a fair playing field, and that rules are in place for people to follow to ensure that responsibilities around hunting on Crown land or private land, that there are fish and game officers who can enforce those types of behaviours being conducted in the appropriate places at the appropriate times by people who are licensed appropriately. That is fair and reasonable.

My frustration with this bill and, particularly, with the tone in which closure was brought in is that the government made a bunch of decisions around the budget that included passing more fees and taxes on to individual Albertans. The government says that now it's an urgent matter, that we must have closure. We can't take the time to debate this in a way that gives representation to those who are about to experience increased taxation because the government chose to adjourn the House for over a month. Rather than creating this pressure system where bills, according to the Government House Leader, need to be passed urgently and we can't have an opportunity for fair debate in this place – and I would love to hear from independent members about how they feel about this increased taxation, especially given that they represent predominantly rural areas, where there are a significant number of people who enjoy spending time outdoors, including parks and including public lands. I would love to hear from members of the governing caucus who aren't in cabinet, who are being asked to come here and defend this bill. I think it would be important for the people who live in Banff-Kananaskis to know that their representative is addressing the concerns that they've raised with me and with other members of our caucus around this legislation and others.

I think it would be important to ensure that there are accountability measures within the bill, legal mechanisms that would guarantee that the fees collected are indeed going towards, ensuring that they go towards public lands, as the minister has stated. But the legal mechanisms within the bill seem to be missing. So I would love to have private members tell us why they don't care about there being legal mechanisms within the bill to ensure that the fees that are being passed on to their constituents are indeed going towards the outcomes that the minister has declared. I think it's important that we all have opportunities to ask questions in this place and to represent our constituents, who have every right to

enjoy the natural beauty that is available to us in the province of Alberta and that we are sent here to steward.

When I think about those hunters, fishers, anglers who spend time in the wilderness and the work that they do to help conserve and make sure that there's natural habitat for the fun that they engage in but also for future generations to make sure that their children, their grandchildren can learn how to hunt and fish and engage in the opportunities that are available through recreation in Alberta, including in these public lands in the eastern slopes, I think it's important that we consider the impacts that this will have on their ability to pass on some of those traditions within their own families.

Again, I know that some people don't think that \$30 per person is cost prohibitive, but I will tell you that there are a lot of families right now who are really struggling, who are struggling because the government has failed to deliver on jobs, who are struggling because they have seen extra costs downloaded on them when they had to stay home from work to support remote home learning, who are struggling because they had to invest in additional technology or increased Wi-Fi capacity so their kids could have an opportunity to learn during the third shutdown of schools, who are struggling because they had to take time off work without pay when they were sick. There are a lot of families who are struggling right now, so to download an additional \$120 per year on simply a family of four for them to be able to continue to use the same outdoor opportunities on public lands I think is disrespectful to those Albertans who are struggling so much right now.

I think that if the government wanted to make the maintenance of public lands a priority, there are many people in Alberta, including members of this Assembly, who would be happy to support them in that, because we all, I think, are very proud, again, of the natural gifts that Alberta has, the opportunities that we have to recreate in those areas. Instead of spending time downloading costs onto ordinary families and trying to be focused on personalities, I think it would be wise for all members of this Assembly to take the opportunity to reflect on a time where maybe those of us in this room have had less disposable income than we do today. Do we think that we should be in a position to shut off access to beautiful public lands, to families who don't have the luxury to be able to pay these additional fees? I don't think we do.

I think that we are here as stewards but that the public lands we're here discussing belong to the public and that members of the public should be able to access them, full stop. I do think it is important that we have, of course, some rules, regulations to govern behaviours on them. I think that that's fair and responsible, but the government doesn't need to bring in excessive fees that limit access to so many families, so many working families who are really struggling right now, at this time.

Again, I side with my colleague from Calgary-Mountain View in calling on my colleagues in this Assembly to consider voting against this proposed legislation at second reading. I don't think that it benefits the members of this Assembly to come into this place and argue in defence of additional fees when they haven't given this full due consideration.

The Speaker: Hon. members, Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available. I see the hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Jason Nixon: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. First off, just to be clear, again, for the Chamber, as we do know that this was a very clear platform commitment, written out, right to even the money that we spent on it – that is the difference between the government caucus and that member's caucus, who, I will remind you, famously ran on a carbon tax that they lied to Albertans about. That's the

difference. This is a campaign – I apologize for pointing out their lying. I will withdraw that.

Mr. Feehan: Come on.

The Speaker: Order. Listen, if you wanted the Speaker's job, you could have run for it.

Mr. Jason Nixon: I apologize and withdraw.

The Speaker: Agreed, but I will provide direction and correction that we have spent much time speaking about the use of the word "lying." I know that you've heard it, and I encourage you to use the direction.

Mr. Jason Nixon: For sure, Mr. Speaker. One of the weird things about parliamentary process is that pointing out that somebody is lying is inappropriate, and I do apologize for that and withdraw.

The point is that they didn't bother telling anybody about a carbon tax, but they're upset about us running on a clear platform commitment that says that we would bring in random camping fees. But you know what, Mr. Speaker? With the brief time I have under 29(2)(a), I'd like to actually point out that that member, the Member for Edmonton-Glenora, was part of a government who sat on this side of the aisle while Kananaskis – she continues to want to talk about Kananaskis provincial park, though it's not a provincial park; it's not a part of this legislation, but fine – went up to 5.4 million visitors. Did they do anything to help Kananaskis? Nothing.

And what happened during that period of time? I see the Member for Central Peace-Notley inside this Chamber. He's been a passionate advocate, I want to say, for his constituents' provincial campgrounds up in that area. He's been in my office a lot and has advocated hard on it, deserves a tremendous amount of credit for it. One of the things that he will tell you and that every member of this Chamber knows is that it's a struggle to get maintenance money for the campgrounds inside our constituencies, because you know what was happening, Mr. Speaker, under the NDP watch? All of our campgrounds' money, all of the fees that our constituents pay to go camping inside our campgrounds, was going to pay for Kananaskis. Now, Kananaskis is a great place. We're going to make sure to protect it. But all the money from everywhere else in the province had to go to pay for Kananaskis's high services that they need to run the busiest mountain park in North America, 5.4 million people, more than Banff.

8:40

Last year alone it had more search and rescue calls than every mountain park in the Rocky Mountains. Think about that: more search and rescue calls. This past weekend had a record number of search and rescue calls. The officials that work very hard at our department were out on 16 or 17 search and rescue calls this weekend alone. The municipal district of Kananaskis, the MD – check this out – 50 per cent of their entire budget goes to emergency services, of which only 1 per cent are their constituents; the rest are people visiting Kananaskis. It costs a lot of money to run a place like that. It's still going to continue to cost a lot of money. The government, even with the K Country conservation fee in place, will subsidize Kananaskis to the tune of 50 per cent, which means that when that member or anybody else goes camping within Kananaskis, we will be paying, the taxpayer will be paying for 50 per cent of that experience.

At the same time, with that conservation fee coming, now you're seeing 20 new armed officers hired this year, 15 new FTEs to be able to work inside the eastern slopes, significant investments in visitor centres, being able to make sure our fire department can work inside Kananaskis, being able to make sure search and rescue

will be there when you get in trouble. Well, what did that member, the Member for Edmonton-Glenora, do when she was in government with Kananaskis? Nothing. They cut ribbons, they renamed things, and they sat on their hands while Kananaskis began to fall apart, Mr. Speaker.

There's a reason that Joe Lougheed, Peter Lougheed's son, supports the Kananaskis conservation pass, and the reason is because he knows it's the way to give stability to that beautiful park, to be able to make sure that it'll be here for future generations to come. Fees for mountain parks are not new. In fact, Kananaskis was the only location that we could find anywhere in the world of that magnitude in the mountains that did not have a fee, including in our own province. Waterton national park, Banff national park, Jasper national park, Elk Island national park here, just outside of Edmonton, all have reasonable fees, Mr. Speaker.

But, again, at the end of the day, this is actually not about park fees. It's about public land fees, things like random camping and ATV fees. Now, I do know that the Member for Calgary-Mountain View has indicated that she's okay with shutting Albertans out from their trails, indicated that she was trying to help horseback riders or something along those lines. It's interesting. The largest eastern slopes horseback riding group, the Friends of the Eastern Slopes, were against the Bighorn plan, so you may have forgotten to call the horseback guys to make sure that they were okay with your plan. The reality is that they've admitted that their main goal was to shut access to certain types of Albertans that they didn't agree with.

Well, Mr. Speaker, we reject that. Instead, we ran on a clear platform commitment to bring in modest fees, dedicated revenue. The legal mechanisms are already set up, as they know. The Auditor General will check it. But that's the alternative; the NDP want to shut you out. We're going to make sure that we protect the areas that we care about.

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

Is there anyone else wishing to join in the debate? The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

Member Ceci: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I just want to begin my debate on the Public Lands Amendment Act, 2021, of course, a \$20-per-person fee for a three-day pass and a \$30-per-person fee for an annual pass, with just a reflection on some value differences that are inherent in the approaches of the two sides. My colleagues from Edmonton-Glenora and Calgary-Mountain View, I think, and I share the value that is evident in the statement by the NDP Environment and Parks critic. This is what he said when he was at a press conference.

At a time where Albertans are looking to be outside as much as possible and explore our beautiful province, the UCP are once again doing everything they can to hammer household budgets. Bill 64, the Public Lands Amendment Act, introduces day-use fees for public lands. It's now a \$20 per-person fee for a three-day pass, and \$30 per person for an annual pass.

My colleague from Edmonton-Glenora referenced this statement made by the Minister of Environment and Parks during estimates this year.

Depending on user access and what the numbers are, the... government will continue to look at user fees, including new user fees that I haven't identified today, to be able to make sure that our parks system can operate fully.

Mr. Speaker, if that doesn't kind of give you a sense of the difference in values between the Official Opposition NDP, that is concerned for the everyday Albertans and their household budgets, and the UCP minister of the environment, that is saying: you know,

these user fees could be followed by additional user fees; we'll just see.

I would submit that the reason that those user fees are now being charged for Albertans in Bill 64, once we see what the full extent of the regulations is, is because the government hasn't been doing such a good job bringing in policy in this province. Much of it, much of the bad policy they brought in, is around fiscal issues, fiscal policy, like their failed trickle-down economic policy of \$4.7 billion in tax giveaways to wealthy corporations to the detriment of millions of Albertans who, as my colleague from Edmonton-Glenora rightly pointed out, have to pay more and more in taxes to this provincial government because the tax bracket creep was not halted, was not paid for by the provincial government like we did every year. We made sure that Albertans, during one of the worst recessions, in 2015-2016, that happened in this province, were protected from that tax bracket not changing and them not having to pay more and more taxes.

Mr. Speaker, that \$4.7 billion tax giveaway to wealthy corporations has not created any kind of growth in this province. In fact, we're on the losing end of any GDP growth relative to all other Canadian provinces. Wealthy corporations did not use it to generate economic activity for this province. What they did do with it – and we saw that repeatedly – is that they contributed to the pockets of their shareholders with additional payments on shares. What they also did was make sure that the corporation was healthy, and some, in fact, left this province. So the tax giveaway hasn't helped.

That's a failed economic policy which we are paying for through decisions like this public lands amendment act, like the charges to users of the Kananaskis that the minister of environment was just talking about, \$90 per year. We also saw that the government, again, made an equity investment in a pipeline that was killed on the first day of the President of the United States coming into the U.S. office after a long campaign. So that \$1.5 billion is a failed gamble, Mr. Speaker, and Albertans again are paying for that. They're paying for it, like through the Kananaskis fees that are new. They're paying for it through Bill 64, which, as the minister so rightly said, will make all users on public lands pay \$30 annually or \$20 for a three-day pass, and I think that's not a record that anyone can be proud of in terms of increasing the charges on people for the things that we typically – typically – have seen us be able to enjoy in our own backyard.

Mr. Speaker, the minister got up and talked about how his government was doing all the great things they're doing. I know that's not true because in my area, like so many areas of this province, Albertans do not buy it. They have sprouted Defend Alberta Parks signs everywhere. That's not something I created. That's something – I certainly understand the concerns Albertans have because this government has not been transparent. This government has not been forthright about its activities with regard to the eastern slopes. We saw that repeatedly on the concerns Albertans have brought forward with regard to coal mining on the eastern slopes.

8:50

You know, the minister got up and said: well, you brought in something you didn't run on, the carbon tax. Mr. Speaker, I didn't see eliminating the coal policy in the platform of the UCP. Maybe it was there, but I don't think Albertans knew it, so I would argue that there's not a lot of transparency, there's not a lot of clarity in terms of the actions of this government with regard to what they're going to do, and Albertans are just seeing that again in this increase in Kananaskis fees, in the public lands amendment. It may be in the platform, but all Albertans didn't participate in that platform, so it's new to them.

I would agree with my colleague from Calgary-Mountain View that for most Albertans the Public Lands Amendment Act is something that's come out of the blue. There has been little notice with regard to all of this. It does change how much Albertans have to pay, of course, and for this area of the province, the eastern slopes, not an area that I've camped in greatly – I tend to go into the parks system, whether that's Kananaskis or neighbouring parks in B.C. or Banff national park or Jasper national park and use the campgrounds in those areas – this will be something that Albertans will not see as a positive to their parks experience or their public lands experience.

I certainly think that we have outlined our concerns in detail. I'm opposed to it. I think that this will not, rightly, be applied to certain groups of people which have, as I understand it, a constitutional use of lands, so that's a positive thing. Volunteers for the area in different aspects of helping out the parks system will be exempt as well. But that still does not bring it to the point of something that can be supported, Mr. Speaker.

We know that Albertans need to be physically distant. They still are required to be physically distant from each other, and what better way for that to happen than to access public lands and to enjoy nature and to take that opportunity to explore our beautiful province together with their family cohorts?

I think that the fees on these public lands probably – this fee is just probably the beginning as the minister indicated at estimates that he can potentially look at other fees to be brought in as well. He wouldn't have to. It's a shame, Mr. Speaker. He wouldn't have to do it if his government didn't tend to misuse revenues coming into this province or expend on things like an equity investment on a pipeline that everyone knew wasn't going to happen except this government.

Mr. Speaker, I will continue to advocate for the proper investments in things like parks, in things like outdoor uses, encourage municipalities to invest in their recreational opportunities for their own citizens so that people can know that they can go outside, be safe, enjoy themselves, perhaps develop skills, abilities that they didn't have before. But to charge them for that really is a problem.

As my colleague from Edmonton-Glenora identified, I mean, the cost per person on an annual basis of \$30 for families of whatever size is prohibitive. The value set, it seems, of the UCP government is that people have to pay. Well, ours is that, you know, the individuals and corporations should be fairly taxed, and if they are, then we can afford the things that the general population can enjoy together like parks and campsites and opportunities for outdoor recreation use.

Mr. Speaker, I won't be supporting this bill. The time allocation that is brought in to make it happen for June 1 – I think that's what the minister identified – is another way that this government is endeavouring to fast-track things so that Albertans, you know, can't have an opportunity to marshal their concerns, like they've shown us over the coal policy, that was rightly pushed back by Albertans once they knew that the government was in fact pulling the wool over their eyes and kind of saying that things will be okay, selling off large tracts of eastern slope lands for coal companies to explore and to change forever the face of our mountains in that area.

So I won't be supporting that. I will be supporting good policy that encourages Albertans to have healthy lifestyles. This Public Lands Amendment Act is another charge that this government is putting on the households of Albertans. The critic for our caucus has released that information. I think that as much as possible we need to encourage Albertans to explore our beautiful province instead of hammering their household budgets, as is repeatedly done by the UCP government.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. Dach: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Listening to the comments from the Member for Calgary-Buffalo and others who preceded him, on both sides of the House, caused me to wonder about the method of payment for these fees proposed under this legislation. What a bit of time spent researching will reveal is that the government seems very intent on wanting to know who's actually where; in other words, keeping track of the location of Albertans who are using the parks. This system of payment that the government proposes is one where it's necessary to register one's vehicle licence plate number in order to pay and to access the park. It's a licence plate registration based payment system for our parks access.

They may not be using drones. That may have been caught as an excessive measure by the Minister of Environment and Parks. Indeed, what they are doing is keeping track of people who are entering the parks system by using a licence plate based registration and payment system to buy our parks passes, which sometimes is a concern to individuals who would really, if they're going random camping on public lands, like to be random for the whole time that they happen to be out there and would like to know that maybe the government isn't exactly knowledgeable about where they are. They can go camping with full knowledge that nobody in the world other than themselves know actually where they're camping.

9:00

Tell you what. Not with this government. You have to register your licence plate number to buy a pass in order to go camping rather than in, say, the national parks, where it's simply a system based on the number of people in a vehicle. You buy a pass that is going to allow you up to seven people in a vehicle. That vehicle doesn't have its licence plate recorded, and you can go any time of the day or week during the time that your pass is valid without the government having to track your licence plate. But maybe there's another reason, because this government seems to like doing things about licence plates. Perhaps it's also going to be involved in the tolling of other pieces of infrastructure in Alberta.

The Speaker: I hesitate to interrupt, but pursuant to Government Motion 80 I am now required to put all questions necessary to dispose of second reading.

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

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 9:01 p.m.]

[Fifteen minutes having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

[The Speaker in the chair]

For the motion:

Aheer	Long	Rowswell
Allard	Lovely	Rutherford
Amery	Milliken	Savage
Armstrong-Homeniuk	Nally	Schow
Copping	Neudorf	Schulz
Dreeshen	Nicolaides	Sigurdson, R.J.
Fir	Nixon, Jason	Smith
Guthrie	Nixon, Jeremy	Toews
Hanson	Panda	Turton
Horner	Rehn	van Dijken

Issik	Reid	Yaseen
Jones	Rosin	

9:20

Against the motion:

Ceci	Ganley	Hoffman
Dach	Gray	Loyola
Feehan		

Totals: For – 35 Against – 7

[Motion carried; Bill 64 read a second time]

**Government Bills and Orders
Committee of the Whole**

[Mr. Milliken in the chair]

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

Bill 64

Public Lands Amendment Act, 2021

[Debate adjourned May 25]

The Deputy Chair: Are there any comments, questions, or amendments to be offered at this time? I see the hon. Government House Leader has risen.

Mr. Jason Nixon: Well, thank you, Mr. Chair. Thank you for the opportunity to rise to discuss Bill 64 this evening. Lots of stuff to talk about with this important piece of legislation, and I expect to hear much debate throughout the evening and into the rest of the week as we continue with this important bill inside this Chamber.

I do want to take the opportunity, though, and respond to a couple of things. First of all, what the Member for Edmonton-Rutherford raised in his comments in second reading on this legislation, I think, is very important to address for this Chamber to understand this legislation. The first thing was that he indicated concerns with this legislation in regard to the context that it was not campaigned on, Mr. Chair, that it was done in secret, that it was not discussed with Albertans, and implied that this was part of a large track record when it comes to consulting with Albertans about camping fees. Pretty rich from a member who used to be a cabinet minister of a government who never bothered to mention about bringing in the largest tax increase in the history of the province, the job-killing carbon tax, and then got elected and brought it forth, particularly given that on page 88 of the platform that our party ran on, it says, "Apply a mandatory \$30 trail . . . fee to Off-Highway Vehicles . . . and camping trailers to pay for restoring and creating [off-highway vehicle] trails and preventing damage in Alberta's great outdoors." Right there, in the platform, exactly what we would do.

Now, Mr. Chair, what I think is important to understand is how that ended up in the platform. At the time that the NDP government – some of my colleagues may not have been in politics at the time; they wouldn't have known that. But the NDP was moving forward in the dying days of their government with a plan that they called the Bighorn plan, which encompassed an area from Banff national park, west of Rocky Mountain House and Sundre, all the way to Rimbey, into Ponoka county. That's a long way, for those of you who know Banff to Ponoka. Close to two-thirds of my constituency would fall under the Bighorn plan, which evidently appeared to be named after the Big Horn First Nation, that was in that area.

But – get this – nobody even bothered to call the Big Horn Nation, and that Member for Edmonton-Rutherford was the

indigenous affairs minister at that time. Nobody even bothered to call and tell them that they were going to name a plan, let alone discuss how this would work within their traditional territories.

They didn't call one county. They didn't call the mayor of Rocky Mountain House. In fact, when we pushed them, finally, to do some public consultation on this plan, they forgot Sundre. They forgot that the entire town of Sundre exists, Mr. Chair. Now, I can't forget that Sundre exists because I'm from it, so I fought hard to be able to make sure that Sundre and Rocky Mountain House would be able to have public meetings. Famously, the government of the day implied that there were RCMP investigations, and it would come out later on that there were no RCMP investigations. They implied that my constituents were threatening to them, but when people checked with the RCMP, the RCMP made clear that there was no such investigation of those issues, and in fact the minister of environment of the day had to finally apologize.

That's how we ended up in that spot, a spot where every county from Brazeau county to Mountain View county, Ponoka county, Lacombe county, Clearwater county, Bighorn county, Wetaskiwin county, on and on, the town of Rocky Mountain House, the town of Rimbe, the town of Ponoka, the town of Drayton Valley, the town of Sundre, the town of Caroline, the town of Eckville, the town of Bentley, all together, were coming out against the NDP's plan that nobody bothered to call them about.

Now, I wasn't surprised by that because that was the NDP's track record at the time. What I was shocked about, though, was when I was called by the leadership of the O'Chiese, the Sunchild, the Big Horn people, and the Smallboy camp in Clearwater county, that they were not even talked to by that minister or by that government about a life-changing plan for their traditional territory. In fact, Mr. Chair, after pressure from me, they finally went there two days before that plan was supposed to be in place. They went out and saw the Big Horn Nation. I was there at the school. It was shocking, it was embarrassing, and to this day those communities are still upset about the way that the NDP treated them. They should be absolutely upset about that.

Further to that, they never bothered to talk to any of the Albertans that also live there besides the First Nation communities, nor the people that recreated there. And you've heard the members admit tonight that their goal was to take a particular user group or particular user groups and not allow them to use their own backyard, the place that we call home. These MLAs from Edmonton, who, by the way, at the time couldn't even be bothered to drive to Clearwater county and to stand with the mountains behind them and talk about what they were going to do to my home, had the nerve to announce it at the YMCA in downtown Edmonton with a backdrop of a picture of my community. That was their consultation. It was shameful, and it was embarrassing, Mr. Chair.

Now, what was clear, though, is that those of us who have called the community home, and I've lived – I ran a lodge inside the eastern slopes for a very long time. I ran campgrounds inside the eastern slopes. I know the area well, and there are environmental concerns that need to be addressed around random camping and ATV use. In fact, the user groups have been saying that the entire time. But the NDP, working on their secret plan to stop them from being able to go in their backyard, didn't bother to sit down and talk to them. But I did, Mr. Chair, and what we heard was clearly that they needed some sort of dedicated revenue source that could go towards hiring enforcement. You know, the community of Nordegg: one fish and wildlife officer. One fish and wildlife officer. They were too short, dealing with a hundred thousand people sometimes camped outside their community. Of course they needed help.

The second thing that they would have heard is that our volunteer search and rescue crews, our volunteer municipal fire departments, and our municipalities, because they are neighbouring a community like that, where people like to recreate, are disproportionately impacted, and they needed help. Our volunteer search and rescue crews – I mean, Rocky Mountain House Search & Rescue, one of the best in the province, that's all done by volunteers, including aircraft time, helicopters, mountain rescue. When your kids go out camping west of Rocky Mountain House, if they get in trouble, it's my constituents that are going to climb in their helicopters and go and get them. If you sat down with them, you would have realized they needed help, a little bit of financial support for training and equipment to be able to make sure that they were able to do that long term as well as municipalities when they're dealing with the fire department.

Third was that all of the ATV organizations and the random camping organizations were looking for partnerships to be able to build sustainable trails, particularly water crossings, knowing that they would not be torn down later on, so that there could be stability before they installed these types of things across the eastern slopes. Now, of course, the NDP have already admitted that their plan was just to wipe those guys right out, which was terrible for tourism but certainly moving towards their goal. But this group says: no, we need a dedicated source.

These are the groups that represent the people who ATV out there, who random camp out there, coming and saying: "Look, we want to put in a modest fee structure. We want it to be dedicated to those three things, enforcement, helping with search and rescue and municipalities, because for communities like Rocky Mountain House with 7,000 or 8,000 people, Sundre with 3,000-plus people, having a hundred thousand people camping out there on a long weekend puts a tremendous burden on them, and then, lastly, a partnership with great organizations that are protecting the environment and making sustainable structure." So we said, after consulting with them, that we would put in our platform a commitment to bring in that fee for ATVs and that fee for random camping. Now, you may ask, real quick, why we're not doing the ATV fee yet; that's because there already are registration fees, and I don't want to see a situation where we end up with double-dipping. So we're working with Service Alberta to make sure that user fees are ending up in the spot to be able to help that landscape.

9:30

The point is that we ran on that commitment, extremely transparent and a heck of a lot better plan. Their plan: ban everybody that uses the area, and don't let you go random camping anymore. They're bringing in public land-use zones, and – gone – no more random camping. They want to talk about protecting access; they were going to tell everybody that they couldn't go out there and camp. They were gone, off the landscape, couldn't go out there and use the trails that they have for a generation. Instead, we said that this was our plan, we brought it forward, ran on it. It was very popular, and it had wide support during the campaign, particularly by the user groups.

It also, Mr. Chair – and I think this is very important – has support of the communities. Remember, theirs was rejected by the First Nation community, and every county and municipal district in the area rejected the NDP plan. What does Clearwater county have to say about this bill and the direction that we're headed? I quote from the reeve:

Clearwater County fully supports the province's implementation of a low-cost fee and investment of these fees into conservation and management of public lands. The county appreciates the province's proposed legislation. A random camping fee revenue

would provide an essential source of funding to ensure public lands have sufficient facilities and services to respond to the increasing visitor demands.

The MD of Bighorn is, quote, supportive of all policies and regulations that promote wise stewardship and improve public safety on remote government of Alberta landscapes; Alberta will update processes and practices for the better simply because we must; frankly, we all enjoy tomorrow what we plan for today, and abundance will only flow with the demonstration of respect.

Brazeau county, one of the most vocal against the NDP's plan: our council supports outdoor recreation and camping opportunities in our beautiful county, and we welcome this initiative where new camping fees go back into public lands and even further enhance the outdoor Brazeau experience for residents and visitors alike.

And Crownsnest Pass – not to keep it all in my neck of the woods – quote: with the municipality of Crownsnest Pass being located in the heart of the eastern slopes, we are so very proud of the recreation opportunities available to our residents and visitors alike; we are in favour of legislation that would see implementing fees that would be redirected back into the land directly for the purpose of protecting and conserving the natural habitats, enforcement of the rules for the benefit of all users, with the anticipated outcome resulting in overall visitor safety and enjoyment.

The county of Grande Prairie, last of all – there are many more, but I'll finish with this one – quote, supports Bill 64 for the improvement of public lands in Alberta; visitors to these natural areas will make a small investment with a significant impact on conservation of these natural areas; although the bill focuses on the eastern slopes, we have worked with the province on similar projects in our own backyard and look forward to seeing this initiative move forward across the province.

Quote after quote from municipalities, quote after quote from user groups, Mr. Chair, that use these locations, thanking us for bringing it forward. The members continue to want to talk about Kananaskis, and I want to stress that the parks act is different than this act. The parks act already gives the minister the ability to charge fees, which we do. We did under the NDP, and we do under this government, to be able to recoup some of the costs of running world-class parks.

But what I would really like to draw your attention to is a quote from the municipal district of Kananaskis, the community, the ratepayers that live in Kananaskis, and the chair of that group.

As a local government which shares its physical boundaries with [Kananaskis] Country, Kananaskis Improvement District Council supports implementation of the Kananaskis Conservation Pass. We recognize that public services come with costs and that user fees are a proven and effective tool for allocating these costs to those who benefit from them. [The Kananaskis Improvement District] Council believes this program will provide the sustainable funding required to ensure that facilities and services within Alberta's playground continue to be maintained and enhanced for both current and future generations to enjoy.

That is from the chair of the municipal district. Fifty per cent of her total operating budget goes just to pay for emergency services, of which 99 per cent of the calls are not her constituents. They recognize the benefit.

Now, just in case the argument from across the way would be that this is not about the environment, that this would just be that, of course, municipal districts don't want to pay all the fees for us to go camping and we should just make them do that, I think that's fairly problematic to ask a community of a couple hundred, in the case of Kananaskis, or a community of a few thousand, in the case of Rocky Mountain House or Sundre, to pay for hundreds of

thousands of people's camping opportunities. But in case that's where the other side wants to go, let me quote the Friends of Kananaskis Country, who are dedicated to protecting Kananaskis. The Friends of Kananaskis Country take pride in partnering with the government of Alberta to preserve Kananaskis Country's precious natural resources in balance with recreational needs for present and future generations; the Kananaskis conservation pass will provide a stable and consistent source of revenue to maintain the ecological integrity and strengthen Kananaskis Country's sustainability.

I could keep going all day on this. NGOs, municipalities, user groups, all supporting reasonable fees to be able to use one of the most precious resources that we have with the eastern slopes and, of course, Kananaskis within those eastern slopes, to continue to have services, and in the case of Kananaskis a lot of them: 24 hours a day search and rescue; paved roads; sewer; washrooms; visitor centres; parking lots, one of our biggest costs that we have to deal with to be able to get 5.4 million people to be able to visit that mountain park a year, 1 million more people than Banff, and what does Banff have, Mr. Chair? A fee. It has for almost a century because they are able to maintain it. In fact, every major mountain park in the world has a fee because that's the only way to be able to maintain that level of use on the landscape. Five point four million people have a significant impact on the landscape, and we have a responsibility to make sure that we protect Kananaskis for future generations.

We heard loud and clear, both through polling and surveys at parks, that people support paying modest fees as long as they go back to paying for it.

The other argument that the Official Opposition makes is that somehow this is not dedicated revenue. Now, they're being disingenuous with that, Mr. Chair, because the reality is that they know the Treasury Board process has already been established. A dedicated revenue has to go to dedicated purposes. It's audited by the Auditor General, and this is a clear dedicated purpose that this would take place, the same purpose as camping fees. It goes through the exact same process that that party used when they were doing camping fees when they were in power.

Why the NDP opposes this is because it doesn't fit with their plan. It's the same reason why the MLA for Edmonton-Rutherford didn't bother to talk to four First Nation communities before they brought in the largest land-use plan in the history of the province. It's the same way that their Minister of Municipal Affairs couldn't be bothered to pick up the phone and talk to Rocky Mountain House. It's the same reason why their Premier allowed them to forget that Sundre even existed while they tried to make a land-use plan. And, Mr. Chair, it's the same reason why their environment minister stood by while that party accused my communities of threatening government officials, and it turned out that it wasn't true. Because their goal at the end of the day – and they admitted it; the MLA for Calgary-Mountain View admitted tonight – was to go after certain select user groups that did not sit with their vision of the eastern slopes and to ban them. To ban them, though, interestingly enough: every user group was against it. The horse guys, the snowmobile guys, the ATV guys, the hiking guys, the hunting groups were all against the NDP's plan because they don't know our community, and they had no idea how to do it.

Instead, now you're going to see millions of dollars invested in protecting these landscapes: 20 new armed conservation officers out this year in this budget, 50 new FTEs on top of the landscape, Mr. Chair, an increase in the parks and public land budget to make sure that we can implement it. We have to because, at the end of the day, I won't let us fail like the NDP did. The NDP focused their

time on cutting ribbons and naming parks and didn't bother to go and help the people in those spots.

They sat by while Kananaskis went to that high-user group use with no investment and, instead, took the money from the parks inside my community and many of yours and sent it to Kananaskis to pay the bill. They stood by while Kananaskis ended up last year alone, as an example, with more search and rescue calls than every mountain park in the province and in B.C. Think about that. That's how much that community has been dealing with. Those search and rescue units are my responsibility as the minister. We need to make sure that they have the resources. This last weekend alone: a record number of search and rescue calls as they had to go and deal with that situation. Mr. Chair, they need proper funding.

No longer can the entire province pay for Kananaskis. I have to go, Mr. Chair, as the minister and make sure I can maintain those other campgrounds. As I said, and I truly mean this, the MLA for Central Peace-Notley, who has advocated significantly for his campgrounds – I just keep seeing him there, and I know he has. We've got to pay for those, too, and it's not fair for his constituents and all their money to go over to Kananaskis.

We've heard consistently from the user groups in Kananaskis that they're comfortable with it. In fact, we did a trial on cross-country skiing this winter to see how it would work. It was voluntary. Everybody was paying. They're happy to be able to come and participate with it.

Now, lastly, at the end of the day this bill itself is about public lands, and you saw tonight, Mr. Chair, the disingenuousness of the NDP, who had the nerve to stand in this House and imply that people who ATV or random camp inside the eastern slopes were somehow exempted, and only the people that went to Kananaskis were going to have to pay their fair way, at the same time that that's actually the bill that's in the House.

9:40

We're not debating a bill about provincial park fees. The Provincial Parks Act, which is not in this Chamber, already allows the minister to charge fees. We have for years. The NDP did, and governments before and governments after us will continue to use the parks act to do that. This bill is about public lands.

So at the same time as the Member for Calgary-Mountain View stood up in the Chamber and had the nerve to say that people using McLean Creek or out in Grande Prairie in the eastern slopes or down south in the eastern slopes would not have to pay while she's debating a bill that will create a framework for them to bring in a modest fee for them to pay. That either means, Mr. Chair, that she never bothered to read the bill, and the NDP just came here to argue – it wouldn't surprise me – or, two, that she wants to spend her time talking about an issue that's not before the Chamber. She can't defend or argue about why – something, by the way, their environment minister supported during the last campaign when we said that we were bringing forward a modest fee. They can't, so instead they're going to make it about something else, not random camping and ATVs inside the eastern slopes.

My communities, Mr. Chair, need help when it comes to managing this issue. That help is coming. Rocky Mountain House and Sundre: I use them as the example because I know them well, but there are other communities like that inside the eastern slopes. They need help, and I rest assured that's why they support this so much. That help is coming. We will not be like the NDP and sit by while our search and rescue guys call for help. We will not be like the NDP while our campers say: hey, where's the enforcement? We will not be like the NDP when we don't hire enough fish and wildlife officers to deal with bear encounters. We will not be like the NDP where we let our volunteer search and rescue people go

out there all alone without the proper investment. We will not abandon our mayors, and we will make sure that we manage Her Majesty's forests, make sure that they can be protected now and for future generations so people can enjoy them.

And, most importantly, Mr. Chair, we will never take the NDP's approach of locking Albertans out of their very own backyard. That was fundamentally rejected, and we will never ever let them do that to us again. They can stop that right now, full stop. Albertans are allowed in their backyard. The NDP's plan is unacceptable, and this is an appropriate plan to be able to move forward.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

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

Member Loyola: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. One of the fondest memories that I have of actually being with my boys is exploring Alberta. I'll never forget one particular summer. I happened to be reading a biography of Chief Smallboy – it was recommended to me by a friend who is, of course, indigenous – and had the opportunity to really delve into the legacy that Chief Smallboy left us here in this particular province and the history of him leading his people actually off-reserve so that they could have the freedoms of being an indigenous community on the land, right here in Alberta, something which I think a lot of people identify with.

You know, I think it's ironic that this particular bill is coming from this government because Conservative government after Conservative government, they like to talk about freedom. We just heard from the environment minister that municipalities were asking for this, but, of course, you have to put it within the context that this government is not providing enough resources to begin with to a lot of these municipalities, so of course when you're not being provided the economic resources on behalf of the province to provide a lot of the services that these municipalities have to provide, then the only option that they have at that point is to then go to this type of user fee. I think it's really important that we put it into that context, okay?

Now, of course, this is about public land – public land, meaning that it belongs to the people. It belongs to the people of Alberta, and the people of Alberta have been accessing these public lands – and, Mr. Chair, it's really beautiful land.

I'll never forget that summer when we read the biography of Chief Smallboy. We ended up taking the David Thompson highway out towards the mountains. We came across the Kootenay Plains and then drove out to Brazeau county, beautiful, beautiful, beautiful land. My boys and I spent a lot of time just hiking through that area, really enjoying it.

Like many Albertans do – a lot of people will go up there in their RVs – in that particular year we were just camping. We pitched the tent wherever we wanted to, because, of course, that's what Albertans could do until now with this particular bill. They could actually pitch a tent anywhere they wanted there for a maximum of 14 days, set up camp for a couple of weeks and then, like a lot of people do, just pick up and go to the next spot for a little bit. We had the freedom of doing so on these public lands.

Now, again I remind you, Mr. Chair, that this government isn't providing the sufficient economic resources to municipalities so that they can provide the services that they need to provide not only for them but for all the people who would like to explore these public lands, to have that opportunity to go out there and get more familiarized with the beauty that is Alberta.

Now, the other aspect of this particular bill that I have an issue with and why I believe that my colleagues on this side of the House

and I are not supportive of it is the fact that there's no legal mechanism that guarantees that the fees collected will actually go towards the public lands. This is an important factor that needs to be considered when we're talking about this bill. Now, the minister of the environment has stated that he's consulted with people, that he's heard from people that they were in favour of a fee. You know, I would very much like to know how those consultations actually occurred. What was said? It seems that, from what was quoted by the minister in this House just minutes ago, the intent or at least what was communicated to these people who are now in support of a fee is that the monies collected would actually go towards the services that would then be provided on these public lands. But within the bill that we have before us, there is actually no legal mechanism that guarantees that to be the case, and because of that, Mr. Chair, I'd like to introduce an amendment, please.

I will wait until those arrive there at the table for you.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

As is the case in Committee of the Whole during this time, of course, if you'd like a copy, then please feel free to put up your hand, and one will be delivered. There will also be copies at each table close to each entrance.

If the hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie could move his amendment, the one that is, it looks like, on behalf of the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar. If you could read it in for the record, that would be super appreciated.

9:50

Also, as all members may know from the recent standing order changes, we also need an electronic copy e-mailed to the table officers, preferably as quickly as possible. Obviously, we're doing something new here, but I'm getting a thumbs-up.

Again, if the hon. member could please continue and read it in for the record.

Member Loyola: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. On behalf of the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar I move that Bill 64, Public Lands Amendment Act, 2021, be amended in section 5 by adding the following immediately after the proposed clause (i.1):

(i.2) despite subsection (2), the manner by which the Minister must, on an annual basis, make publicly available a report on all fees collected under subclause (i.1) and the manner in which those public monies were expended by the Government.

Again, Mr. Chair, I make an issue of this. I think that this is an important amendment that we make to this particular piece of proposed legislation because of the minister's own comments within this Chamber and what he was stating when he was actually sharing with certain members of the public when it actually came to the potential implementation of a fee, right? I mean, I think that it's very important. I believe that he even quoted a letter from one of the reeves where the reeve even actually stated that, well, if this fee is going to go directly to services that will then be provided on public lands, then by all means they would get behind it.

Although, you know, I would much rather live in a world where I could access these public lands without having to pay a fee, of course – oh, I forgot to mention, Mr. Chair, that that particular summer, when I went out with my boys, we were having a particularly difficult summer economically. It's not as if we were down and out, but of course we didn't have the kind of money that we had in previous years or that I have the privilege of having right now, so it was a little bit challenging. That was one of the reasons why we actually went to a place where we wouldn't have to pay camping fees in that particular year. I would even venture to say that this is a reality that a lot of Albertans face. You know, whereas

some people do have the means, do have the privilege, not everybody does.

It's really important – okay? – if these fees are going to be charged to Albertans, that at least we can assure Albertans that the money they are paying into the coffers of the government is then actually going to be used for the services provided by municipalities on these lands, as was discussed by the minister. It's really important that this government, the minister be responsible to the people of Alberta and that they provide a report on how the monies are being spent that are indeed being collected by this fee.

I think it's the minimum, the absolute minimum, that this minister can actually do if he's going to be implementing this fee. If his government and his caucus members are going to support such a bill, this is the minimum that they can do in order to assure Albertans that the money that they're going to be paying for this fee so that they can camp on public lands will then actually be used towards that end. As I stated, the bill does not provide for any kind of guarantees that the fees would be reinvested back into public land management. I mean, I know the minister states so, but within the bill there's actually no guarantee that it will be so, so this is what my main focus is. As I stated before, there was a preconceived notion that if they were to implement this kind of a fee, they would indeed use it as such, but there is no guarantee that that is the case.

I think that with this particular amendment we would then have an actual record and not only a record, but then the minister would actually have to report back to Albertans annually describing how the monies are being implemented. This would create a greater level of transparency, something that the minister just got up minutes ago and actually stated he was all for, being absolutely transparent on how these monies would then be spent benefiting the areas where the people would actually be camping.

I think that this government has slipped on other pieces of proposed legislation, where they've lost the trust of Albertans on certain aspects. In order to actually show that they do want to be transparent, that they actually do want to follow through with what their intention is in terms of making sure that these monies are then reinvested into public land management, this is the very least that this minister could do. I encourage all members of this House to actually support this amendment.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

I see the hon. Government House Leader has risen.

Mr. Jason Nixon: Well, thank you, Mr. Chair, and thank you to the hon. member for bringing forward the amendment. The good news is that that process is already in place. In fact, this is handled through the dedicated revenue process that is already in place in government. It requires there to be a report. It is handled through the budget process. It includes the audit, and all money that goes in much be matched with going out, and it must go back to the area where the fee was collected. It already takes place. We don't need to re-establish that in every piece of legislation. The policy is already in place – and in fact it's the same policy that was in place when that member was in government – to be able to do that with things like hunting and fishing licences.

Now, I know that the Member for Edmonton-Glenora rose earlier and said that only people that hunt and fish should have to pay a fee. Mr. Chair, I found that I didn't have enough time to deal with that one under 29(2)(a), to examine that one a little bit more. Only people that hunt and fish, the NDP think, should pay a fee, but nobody else should pay a fee. That was the position of the deputy leader of the NDP inside the Chamber. Now, the reality is that when that member was in government, they did charge for hunting and fishing licences. Governments before them did that, and that money

does go back, actually, through dedicated revenue to the resource through our partnerships with the Alberta Conservation Association and through mechanisms within the department.

Another interesting mechanism of dedicated revenue – and, again, that member did it when he was in government – is camping fees, which is just like this. All the camping fees that are collected at campgrounds, even when he was in government, go to dedicated revenue, and they must go back to the resource, and that's checked and reported on through the budget process.

This amendment would be redundant. We already do that inside this province, and you should. Let me be very, very clear. Every dollar associated with the Kananaskis conservation fee and the random camping fee must, just like any other park fee, go back to the resource. Every dollar. Every dollar will, and that will be checked through the process.

I do really just want to quickly go back, though, to say that that is not a new concept. The Member for Edmonton-Glenora, as she was indicating that all hunting and fishing people should have to pay all the bill for everybody else on the public land, acknowledged that that dedicated revenue process works. You know, Teddy Roosevelt, the President of the United States, the bull, Mr. Chair, once gave a speech when he had a bullet in his lung. He still got up and gave a speech. He was a tough guy. One thing that he was very, very focused on was conservation. He brought in most of the modern hunting and fishing practices that we still use today. He brought in the concept of hunters paying to be able to help preserve the game and the landscape that we take care of and that we utilize for the resource that we're able to utilize on the landscape, and nobody – nobody – pays more for conservation anywhere, frankly, in the world than hunting and fishing groups. This same process will apply here for that dedicated revenue source to go through it.

10:00

Now, you know the other interesting thing about Teddy Roosevelt, President Roosevelt? Yellowstone national park, which ultimately would go on to make Banff national park and the national parks system that we rely on in this province. Do you know what they have, Mr. Chair? They have a fee. They have a fee. Not to access an area. There are lots of places in this province where you're still able to access for free, and there should be. But they have a fee for the world-class services that they have to provide inside a mountain park.

Again going back to Kananaskis, 5.4 million people go into a tight landscape like that, one of the most valuable landscapes in our province that needs to be conserved, and at the same time we have to provide all the services for those 5.4 million people, and we have to make sure that landscape survives so that 5.4 million people in a hundred years will still be able to go and enjoy that park, just like Banff. I don't see the NDP standing there with picket signs outside Banff national park demanding that they get rid of their fee after a hundred years of having a fee. Of course not.

But when you come into this Chamber and your main argument, your main argument, Mr. Chair, is that only people that hunt or fish should have to pay the fees to be able to preserve crown lands – and, no, I will not be supporting this amendment because it's redundant. I do also have to say to the hon. member that to quote Smallboy in any way and to refer to that in any way when he was part of a government who could not be bothered to call the four First Nation communities when they were doing land-use planning in the David Thompson corridor is shameful. He should rise in this Chamber and apologize to those four First Nation communities, to their chiefs, to their people, and to the municipalities that are also in that area that they had the nerve to bring in the largest land-use

plan ever in the history of the province and couldn't even be bothered to call the First Nation people that have called that place home for millennia and then would have the nerve to stand inside this Chamber and quote him.

That's exactly what's wrong with the NDP. Their focus is on their ideological agenda. They have admitted it today. Their focus is on stopping certain people from being able to use the landscapes that they don't agree with. They do not care, and they showed it. They don't care about the communities that are actually impacted by it because they never listen. If they listened, they would support this legislation because this is exactly what those communities and exactly what those user groups have asked for.

I also want to make one other thing very, very clear. Our First Nation friends who call the eastern slopes home as well as everywhere else, those First Nation communities that don't call the eastern slopes home, are one hundred per cent exempt from this legislation, as they should be. They have full access to their traditional lands and will continue to, Mr. Chair. Let me tell you that when I sit there and I talk – I was just, actually the other day, with O'Chiese, with Chief Beaverbones and his entire council, before COVID got bad, so I guess now about two and a half months ago. It came up, and once it was very, very clear that O'Chiese and all First Nation people would be exempt to get on their traditional lands, the entire council – overwhelming support. "This is exactly what we need you to do, Minister."

They know it's coming, all these people that are outside their community, and they know that there needs to be a revenue source to be able to manage that and that money doesn't grow on trees, and they fully support it. What's the difference there, Mr. Chair? What's the difference there? We took the time to talk to the First Nation community, took the time to talk to the chief, and took the time to talk to Rocky Mountain House.

I mean, that member must be frustrated that when his party was in power, their minister – the only thing that they could do at that time was stand up and imply that there was danger from the people of Rocky Mountain House and Sundre and that they had to shut down the town halls and that there were all these RCMP investigations happening in those town halls. How insulting to my community. I'm still offended by it to this day. I was at every one of those town halls. Nothing threatening happened. They had to admit it in the end. Imagine if they said that about the community that you represent. They said that about the communities that I represent.

So standing up inside this Chamber and pretending like you speak for a community that you haven't even spoken to about this issue is shameful, Mr. Chair, and if you're going to bring forward an amendment that already happens, quite frankly it is a waste of time, and I would encourage members to vote down this redundant amendment.

The Deputy Chair: We are on amendment A1. Are there any members looking to join debate? I see the hon. Associate Minister of Natural Gas and Electricity has risen.

Mr. Nally: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I particularly enjoyed hearing from the hon. Member for Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre and hearing the passion that he has for this bill. Particularly, what really moved me was hearing the support that we have for it, you know, the consultations with First Nations communities – remember that we decided early on in our mandate that First Nations were going to be our partners as we move forward, and I think this is just one more example – but also hearing from the hon. member about the other partnerships that use Kananaskis that support this.

You know, I think that we've made some good progress tonight, and on that note, Mr. Chair, I'd like to move that we adjourn debate.

The Deputy Chair: Just for clarity, we'll be reporting progress when the committee rises.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Bill 56

Local Measures Statutes Amendment Act, 2021

The Deputy Chair: Are there any comments, questions, or amendments to be offered at this time on the bill? I see the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo has risen.

Member Ceci: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair, for that. I just want to speak to this in Committee of the Whole. You know, last week I was looking through the reporting that was done across Alberta from many small towns, and I am starting to see municipalities across this province say that they have no other choice but to go to their constituents, to go to their taxpayers, ratepayers with increases to local property taxes and taxes of other sorts for industrial or commercial purposes, commercial properties. That was what I raised when I first spoke to Bill 56, the second part, which is the changes to the MSI, municipal sustainability initiative, monies. I said at the time and I gave several quotes from different municipal leaders across the province where they were saying: you know, we're probably going to have to increase taxes as a result of the reductions that are coming forward from the government. The major associations that are stakeholders with government for the AUMA and RMA said to a person that if there are cuts to MSI, what will happen across the province is that their members will likely have to increase taxes.

Now, in Calgary's case they're not going to be increasing taxes directly onto residents and commercial property, but they will be utilizing some monies that they had put aside for capital investments. So they're taking down their reserves, Mr. Chair, to make sure that they freeze taxes for their locals. Here's a quote from the mayor. "On one hand," he says, "they want us to build stuff and create jobs" and get this economy going – that was my addition to that – but "on the other hand, they want to take money away we need to build stuff and create jobs." So it's really contradictory and a problem that we're going to be seeing, as I said, in more numerous cases across this province, where municipalities will rightly say: you know, we are counting on these monies.

10:10

This province is unilaterally deciding to push out for three years an agreement that was promised in the platform of that government, the platform that is sacrosanct, apparently, and what the minister of the environment was just quoting as, you know, a transparent approach to government. Well, they're pushing it out for three years, so that wasn't something that anybody saw coming. It was in the platform. It talked about bringing it in in 2022-2023, during the course of this government's tenure, and that's not going to happen.

It's now been pushed back three years to 2024, to 2025, and the escalator clause for revenue increases to the province through revenue it generates has been cut in half as well. So where the previous NDP government agreed to a city charters agreement with the two large cities and an escalator to revenues that they could expect going into the future both starting earlier and a higher escalator, both of those things are chopped as a result of this government's bad fiscal policy decisions that have left it bereft of revenue and expended monies on things that were never going to happen, that all taxpayers are now paying for.

Mr. Chair, you just have to look at the newspapers when this was introduced to see quotes from around the province of municipal leaders, directors of finance for municipalities, Reeves in different municipalities, all saying the same thing, that they are bracing for the cuts not only in MSI for infrastructure spending but for all other areas where they know that they're going to be having difficulty collecting on revenues because this government has given a holiday or a pass to some bad oil and gas actors who have stopped paying their local taxes. As we know from RMA, that's this year. For this year and the last year it's up to \$245 million that they are out at the local level because of the nonpayment of taxes, and this government has made it more difficult for them to collect taxes from the oil and gas sector going forward in the future.

Mr. Chair, the situation is pretty dire with some municipalities. It means that our neighbour to the east, the Saskatchewan municipalities association, has a far different working relationship with their provincial government, Saskatchewan. In fact, the president, Mr. Hayward, says, "Saskatchewan's hometowns understand the difficulties of preparing a budget with limited resources [so they] appreciate the province's investments in municipalities, including the stable funding provided for the 2021-22 year through Municipal Revenue Sharing [agreement]." Far different than what is happening with municipalities in this province under the UCP government.

We also know that in addition to, as I said, reports from leaders across this province at the municipal level and county level, we will be seeing them report out that they can't do it with the taxes that they're getting right now. They were counting on the MSI agreement with this province, and their faith in this province to follow through with that has been, in my view, completely shattered. This government is finding every possible way to increase costs on Albertans, and we heard that from the previous speaker with regard to the Public Lands Amendment Act, 2021, that is before us.

With that said, Mr. Chair, I'd like to take the opportunity in Committee of the Whole to introduce an amendment to Bill 56, the Local Measures Statutes Amendment Act, 2021. I will wait till you have that in your hand before I proceed any further.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member. If you could please continue. If you could read it in for the record, that would be appreciated, and then continue with your comments.

Member Ceci: Sure. Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. With, of course, the concurrence of Parliamentary Counsel, I move that Bill 56, Local Measures Statutes Amendment Act, 2021, be amended in section 2 by adding the following immediately after subsection (3):

(3.1) The following is added immediately after section 11:

Review by special committee of the Legislative Assembly
11.1 Within 1 year after the coming into force of section 2 of the Local Measures Statutes Amendment Act, 2021, a special committee of the Legislative Assembly must

- (a) begin a comprehensive review of the amendments made by that section, including any impacts on the financial stability of municipalities in Alberta,
- (b) in completing its review, consult with representatives of municipalities impacted by the changes made to municipal funding by the amendments referred to in clause (a), and
- (c) submit to the Legislative Assembly, within 6 months of beginning the review, a report that includes any amendments to this Act recommended by the special committee.

Mr. Chair, the reason for a review by a committee to understand the impacts of this legislation is because we know already that municipalities across the province are having difficulties. They have a different accounting experience than the province of Alberta, meaning that they cannot run deficits. The province of Alberta can do that, and it's running massive deficits at this point in time, in part because of the failed fiscal policies that have been brought forward by this government in the hope of a trickle-down economic resurgence to our economy that has failed to happen.

What also should take place is that municipalities – over a 10-year period they say that there is a 33 per cent cut to the level of MSI that they can anticipate coming from this provincial government, this UCP government. Mr. Chair, that will have a material effect on their ability to build infrastructure, to put Albertans to work, to ensure that Albertans have the necessary infrastructure they need to launch this economy, launch this province once we get through the worst of this pandemic. This 33 per cent cut over a 10-year period to MSI is far larger than what the UCP calls it, so we should know, straight from the horse's mouth, what those impacts to their infrastructure investments and local economies are.

That's what this amendment does, Mr. Chair. It begins a comprehensive review of these amendments made in this section and looks at the financial stability and the viability of municipalities in Alberta. We have heard, as a result of the difficulties many municipalities are having, that they may have to essentially hand in the keys. We don't want that to happen. A certain number do it every year. Small hamlets join with other counties or stop existing and become absorbed by counties. That's the kind of thing that happens, but we don't want that to happen in larger numbers. Albertans have the right to be represented in ways that they choose through their counties, hamlets, small summer villages, and many, many will be struggling to be viable in the future as a result of this Bill 56.

10:20

The second part of this, of course, is that in completing the review, representatives who are experiencing the impact of these cuts should be consulted. They weren't consulted in any way, shape, or form. In fact, if they are looking at the platform for the UCP government, they were anticipating that the Local Government Fiscal Framework Act would be coming into place in 2022-2023, as was promised in the platform and other pronouncements by this government, but that's been changed unilaterally by the government, out three years. So we should know what the representatives of municipalities who are impacted by these changes believe is taking place in their local seats, and as legislators it would be good for us to understand what that impact is.

Lastly, the information should be tabled before this Legislature within six months so that the government can have the feedback it needs to positively address the changes that are necessary in their upcoming budget for 2022-2023, far before the 2024-25 fiscal year, as identified here, and will be negatively felt by municipalities across this province.

Those are my submissions, Mr. Chair, with regard to the amendment before us. I would put that forward.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

We are on amendment A1. A friendly reminder to refer to movers of amendments by their constituency and not by name.

I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung has risen.

Mr. Dach: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. A pleasure to rise this evening on the amendment to Bill 56, Local Measures Statutes

Amendment Act, 2021, to ensure that a review of the measures being contemplated under Bill 56 actually receive the full scrutiny and examination of Albertans, the public, and this House in detail after, indeed, it's been in place for a year. Within six months of beginning the review, the report should be brought forward so that the amendments to this act, the act itself can be properly scrutinized.

The government is fully aware of the depth of the financial difficulties that municipalities in this province, Mr. Chair, are undergoing right now. Notwithstanding that, they still have chosen, at a time when we're in the middle of a public health emergency, a pandemic, that the government seems to think is over, at a time that's still stressing this province in many, many ways – one of the ways, of course, is the financial stress that's put on our municipalities right across the province, from the largest right down to the smallest, the villages and municipal districts.

This review contemplated by the amendment brought forward by the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo is one small means, Mr. Chair, one measure by which we can at least take a look at and find a means of measuring the effect, the cumulative effects, financially that municipalities in this province are suffering right now. Even without the downloads that this government is contemplating to foist upon municipalities, they themselves have increased costs and huge burdens placed upon them which are extraordinary as a result of the pandemic that we're all going through right now. Inadequate supports from the provincial government for municipalities: to say that they have been inadequate is an understatement. In fact, what this particular government has done in the midst of a pandemic is the opposite of support for municipalities. They further downloaded costs and are seeing municipalities as an available victim to download costs to and therefore take some pressure off their own budget, causing the municipalities to suffer even worse than they already might have.

Now, you would have thought, Mr. Chair, that in the midst of a global pandemic and extraordinary financial pressures on all levels of government, the larger level of government would be doing things that would be embraceive, that would feel like support to the lower level of government, and I'm speaking about the province, in this case, supporting municipalities through an extremely difficult time. Yet the opposite is what we see. An embrace is not a stranglehold, it's not a chokehold, but that's indeed the type of embrace that municipalities in this province are feeling from this provincial government. It's a stranglehold, it's a chokehold, and it's an opportunistic grab at what the government sees as a victim that is available to them which has no recourse.

Now, indeed, the risk the provincial government is taking is that, as the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo has alluded to, ultimately the municipalities may fail. Some of them may absolutely have to apply for dissolution. It begs the question, Mr. Chair: is this potentially a goal, a desired goal, of the government? Do they wish to see the dissolution of a number of smaller municipalities so that they are consolidated into the larger county and thus are more controllable perhaps or perhaps have more central organizations that the provincial government finds more easy to deal with?

The difficulties that are sometimes found with smaller municipalities in their relationships with the provincial government may be more entangling to deal with on a yearly basis, where you have a multitude of local political issues and personalities to deal with. Perhaps it is a goal of the government to consolidate some of these municipalities into the larger county, to allow them to fail, in fact to encourage or to hurry up that failure by starving them of the funds required, through measures such as Bill 56. That's why an amendment being proposed to have a review over the next year of exactly the outcomes caused by the reductions in funding to municipalities is necessary, Mr. Chair. It needs to be part of the

public nomenclature here to Albertans. Albertans need to be aware of exactly what pain this legislation is causing.

A village that I come from went through a dissolution, Mr. Chair, as I've documented and spoken about in this House before. The village of Thorhild no longer exists. It's part of the county, and that happened as a result of funding issues. Of course, that little town, that little village, is part of a larger community, which may be more manageable in the eyes of the provincial government, but it certainly is a very, very sad thing to see happen, when a small community dissolves and no longer exists and becomes governed by the larger county entity.

If that indeed is a desired outcome of the government, they seem well on their way to achieving it in the minds of many of the urban municipality associations and the communities themselves across this province, who have spoken quite eloquently about the cuts that they are suffering. At a time when the provincial government should be looking towards embracing and supporting and sustaining municipalities, it's become financial enemy number one, where municipalities are ducking for cover when the province comes running because they know the province isn't looking to give them a hand up; it's looking to take their wallet from their back pocket. That is not exactly the feeling that I want municipal governments and citizens of small communities and the lower levels of government, the municipal levels of government, in this province to think of.

The government of Alberta should not be looking to the municipal governments as their financial salvation. Starving the lower municipalities of funding now, during a crisis period, comes back to haunt you, Mr. Chair, and it will haunt this province for decades to come by following this very short-sighted policy. I think the requirement that this amendment brings forward to have the oversight and review of all of the resulting damage that's caused by the cuts to municipal financing that Bill 56 brings forward is something that will be shocking to Albertans but absolutely necessary for them to see a clear picture in a consolidated way, in an organized fashion, that they can refer to and realize that municipalities are under siege.

10:30

I know for a fact, even in the area of, say, transportation, for example – I was speaking with members of the Canadian Urban Transportation Association this morning as a matter of fact. Of course, there's a program of federal and provincial funding across the country with different expiry dates. Well, guess what, Mr. Chair? The joint funding for Alberta ran out on March 31. There's a gap, of course, that they're looking to have filled, and it's going to be on the municipalities to fill that gap themselves by – well, they don't quite know how yet. That's just one area where it's a very large hole in the municipalities' funding envelope that is not being filled at a time of a pandemic for that, where the ridership is increasing in public transportation. They're providing 80 per cent to 100 per cent of the former service levels, yet there's no funding left to cover the increased cost of serving that ridership, and the increased revenue isn't there yet to cover off the shortfall.

So there's a big concern there just on the issue of transportation, Mr. Chair, that shortfalls in funding as a result, in particular now because of pandemic expenditures, are not being met by higher orders of government. The provincial government is particularly at fault repeatedly here in Alberta for turning to the municipal governments and putting the squeeze on them to make their books look better and to avoid expending money themselves to tide over municipalities during an extremely difficult time. It's pretty heartless. We're not talking about individual councillors here who are looking after their own interest. We're talking about

communities right across this province of every size that the provincial government is saying: "Too bad, so sad. You're on your own. If there's a shortfall, you've got your own options. You cut services. You lay people off. It's not on us."

Well, guess what, Mr. Chair? It is on the provincial government. They have a responsibility to be the support network during times where there is a crisis and financial stress that municipalities have a very difficult time enduring. Albertans have a right to know right across the province what the damage is as a result of the policies expressed in Bill 56, and the way to do that is to have this review start right away once this measure is passed, if it does, so that Albertans have a history from day one to the end of year 1 of the implementations of this Bill 56 and the measures that this government has decided are prudent to take and how they actually hurt not only the municipalities, but it's the people behind the elected representatives in each of these municipalities who have to tell individual citizens that the service, whether it be public transit or whether it be roadways, isn't going to be available or that this infrastructure project isn't going to happen or that you're not going to find recreational facilities built. You're not going to end up seeing a certain function of the municipality continue. It's going to be on hold.

A lot of times, Mr. Chair, you can't put these things just on deck for a year or two, as we've seen with the pandemic causing pauses on a lot of things. What happens is that without proper supports beyond the one or two years that we've been looking to have to anticipate suffering through this pandemic, without those supports, things collapse. That could include municipalities, as I've alluded to. If the government gets up and says, "No, indeed we don't want that to happen; municipalities are important to us, and we don't want them to be dissolved into a larger county, if they're rural municipalities; we don't want a financial collapse of smaller municipalities," then indeed they should stand up to the responsibilities and fulfill the responsibilities by providing a warm embrace.

That means money, Mr. Chair. That means funding financially the shortfalls that the municipalities find themselves in during a time of pandemic rather than a stranglehold, rather than seeing the municipalities as a source of funding, as a source to paper over their own financial difficulties. They have to stand up as a government. A 33 per cent cut, estimated, by municipalities over 10 years is what the UCP has gifted municipalities in this province. Now, that is not something that invites a lot of confidence in terms of what folks in this province can look forward to from their provincial government. That hurts. It causes difficulty for Alberta families, and people don't look toward a provincial government to make life more difficult for them. They look for help when there's a problem.

They look to the government to actually say: "Okay. We're going to make sure that we together look after each other, and sometimes that means spending money as the larger order of government to assist the smaller one." That is something that this Bill 56 totally disregards. It's a download of responsibility, and it's an off-loading onto municipalities which can ill afford to take on that burden, Mr. Chair.

It is, I would say, irresponsible of the provincial government to do this, yet the government likes to look upon themselves and herald themselves as the champion of rural Alberta. They have an opportunity every day to suggest that they have a business plan that is better than anybody else's, yet if you take a look at the actual effect of the financing that the municipalities are forced to suffer under, some of the cuts that this government has foisted upon them, it is very plain to me and to the municipal leaders who've definitely expounded on it to say that they're risking the failure of some of these municipalities. They're making life really, really difficult, and

it can be extremely difficult to recover from if you end up having such a hole in municipal financing which creates an infrastructure deficit that is more expensive to repair down the road, which creates a loss of services and perhaps ends up becoming a loss of actual residents, people who leave your community as a result of that, closures of certain services, recreation facilities, infrastructure problems, increased local taxes. The list goes on, Mr. Chair.

At a certain point municipalities fail, and it's a responsibility that's borne by this provincial government, Mr. Chair, to recognize that, to take into account the potential damage that they're doing when they're bringing forward legislation, and the amendment that I speak of this evening is one which will ensure that the government takes that responsibility seriously by forcing a review legislatively to be done of the effects and damage caused by Bill 56 over the course of the year as it unfolds. That report must also be brought forward within six months of the end of that first year.

10:40

I don't know if any of the folks in this Legislature who have been themselves councillors or reeves privately or in their innermost thoughts are saying the things to themselves that the current municipal councillors and reeves are saying, but if they are, it behooves them to speak up and say things. Now, we've had lots of things that have become public from UCP caucus meetings lately, live streams and so forth. Maybe somebody might see fit to live stream commentary on the municipal financing measures that the government is bringing forward. That would be an interesting discussion to hear about. I wouldn't mind hearing that because we certainly are not hearing anybody on the other side, in the government caucus, stand up for Alberta municipalities, whether it's policing costs going up, whether it's MSI being cut, whether it's taxation abilities being threatened. Their revenue sources are being cut, their ability to raise funds is being threatened, and the provincial government supports are being minimized as well.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any members looking to join debate on amendment A1 for Bill 56? I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford has risen.

Mr. Feehan: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I appreciate the opportunity to address this bill again in this House and to clearly support this amendment for a review in one year's time of the consequences of this particular bill. I think that is something that has been clearly identified by municipal leaders in the community who have identified that there are certainly going to be consequences here and that having an established review would be very important. I note, for example, that Barry Morishita, the president of the AUMA, is quoted as saying: a lot of unintended consequences here, and that means a lot less people working in Alberta over the next three years. End quote. I think that kind of comment coming in the middle of this pandemic should give one a pause.

We, unfortunately, are seeing a pattern here, and we're seeing a pattern in this government's really unprecedented attack on small towns and rural municipalities in this province at a time when people are already experiencing the highest unemployment, due to this government's policies, that we have seen in many, many years and are experiencing many other difficulties due to this government's failure to handle COVID appropriately. This fits into the much larger pattern of concern here about the consequences of this government's actions on these municipalities.

If it was one thing, you might say: okay, well, you know, this government thinks something is important enough that some kind of an assault on municipalities will be sustainable for the

municipalities, and we'll get past that because we're gaining some benefit somewhere. You can see sometimes that a provincial government needs to make decisions that are received with unhappiness by people in the community, but what we're seeing here with this government is not a one-off, "Well, we're prepared to see a little bit of negative in order to gain a lot of positive," but a repeated driving of negative agendas that have serious consequences in the municipalities in this province.

I know that because I, along with many other MLAs, stood out in front of this Legislature with mayors and reeves from across this province, having conversations while they protested, with signs demonstrating each of the communities from which they came, about the consequences of the actions of this government on their communities and how concerned they are that this will be so devastating not because one bad thing has happened but because there is a relentless pursuit of assault toward municipal governments and communities in the province of Alberta.

I mean, just to list off a few that come to mind quickly, the increase in the number of RCMP without any compensation by the provincial government, therefore putting the burden of increased RCMP on each of the municipalities, who have no new resources to pay for those RCMP. Certainly, they would have liked to have had more RCMP, but they were expecting the provincial government to stand up with them and to ensure that the resources to employ those RCMP were available.

Then we see this provincial government come in and declare a tax holiday for some of the major taxpayers in many rural municipalities and tell them that they don't have to even pay their municipal taxes for a period of time and with no backfill for the municipalities in all of this, just, "Our friends want a tax break, so we're going to give it to them" and "Too bad, so sad" to the municipal governments. That has to be absorbed by people who don't have the resources to go into debt, don't have the resources to tax their own people more in order to be able to compensate for the loss of taxes.

Another one is the loss of linear assessment that's going on, the money that many of these municipalities count on from the industries that move through their communities. Now they're being told that they're not going to receive that kind of money. Not only are we increasing the burden, the costs, the deficits that are there, but we're decreasing the revenues at the same time. I mean, any simple calculation of economics would tell you that that's going to lead to some very serious changes in terms of the budgets in these rural municipalities. The leaders of these rural municipalities are telling us that this is going to be devastating.

We know that this government has made other decisions that have been attacking these municipalities. For example, they have decided not to pay grants in lieu of municipal taxes for provincial buildings, again taking money away from the local governments. We've also seen them make changes in terms of services to many of these communities so that the things that the communities need to continue to be vibrant and great places for people to move to and to raise their families and to be productive, contributing citizens in the province of Alberta are all being taken away.

We see an assault on health care in these small communities. We see attacks on the doctors, so much so that doctors across the province, almost on a daily basis, certainly on a weekly basis, are being reported in the papers as leaving small rural communities because of the outrageous behaviour of this provincial government. Sometimes communities have spent five or six years working to get a doctor to come into their community, and now they're losing them because of the outrageous changes in billing practices, particularly destructive to rural physicians. As a result, we now have physicians leaving this province in numbers like we have never seen before.

Of course, there's also the loss of the 911 local response, centralizing this kind of a service, so that the people who are answering the phone don't know the community about which they're speaking, where they're supposed to send the emergency services. This has been challenged and debated and rejected by municipalities across this province.

We're seeing mayors and reeves come from across the province together to tell this government that their behaviour has serious consequences. What they're doing is not only disrupting the budgets of these municipalities but actually undermining the viability of these municipalities. They're not only making it impossible for the governments to provide the services necessary because they no longer have the money to pay for the services that are there, but they're also taking away other services and making it more difficult for people to come into their communities and to live there and to provide for their families and to help build the community.

10:50

Now, in this bill, on top of all of those mechanisms of destruction that we see from this provincial government, I see that they are working toward a massive loss of MSI money, somewhere in the neighbourhood, for many of them, of 36 per cent cuts, and the consequence of this won't be felt for a little while because of the way that it is structured. At first municipalities won't always know that that is coming down the road, but in three years' time they will have experienced a significant loss of provincial support.

Here we have a government that has consistently, time and time again, acted in a way which is going to undermine many of these communities, and in fact there is a serious danger that we will see a dramatic decline in small-town governance structures across the province of Alberta as a consequence of the totality of these actions being taken by the provincial government. And perhaps that's their intention. I don't know. Perhaps they do wish to see small towns disappear and be absorbed into larger communities so that they can pay less money. But the consequence is going to be that the people who live in those communities, who have a reasonable expectation that they will have available to them the same kinds of services that are available in other larger centres, will no longer actually experience those kinds of services. There will literally be a division of the haves and the have-nots in this province, with the smaller towns and rural communities being the ones to suffer the consequence of these kinds of actions. It's very disturbing.

You know, when I was talking to some of those mayors and reeves, they were telling me that some of them will have to increase their taxes, their municipal taxes, to make up for all these government actions in the neighbourhood of 200 per cent in one year. That's outrageous. Normally people in communities are upset when the amount of the tax increase even surpasses inflation. If inflation is at 3 per cent and you put in a tax increase of 4, they're saying that government is growing, that it's doing terrible things, taking our money away. In this case, the reeves and mayors are telling me that it's more like 200 per cent. How can a municipality expect to be vibrant if that's what this government is doing? I'm very concerned.

It's not as if this government doesn't have some choices here. Certainly, it's been a difficult year – we all appreciate that – but there have been some very clear choices this government has made. When we look at things like the Allan inquiry, for example, that has failed to really produce any result for the province of Alberta. They still haven't put out their report. After two years of existence they have nothing to show for what they've done, yet they have been given increased monies to do, well, apparently nothing yet. Perhaps we'll see one day what it is that they're doing. But right now what

we can say is that they have failed to do their job, yet they're being rewarded.

Or we look at the war room, for example, that's receiving huge amounts of money, \$30 million a year, to apparently attack children's cartoons and to spend money without proper supervision by this Legislature. I mean, if you took that amount of money and instead of spending it on these ridiculous causes, on these ideological pursuits that have demonstrated no actual product for the people of Alberta, that have not actually done something to lift up the province or to lift up the citizens of this province, and you distributed that money to the municipalities, you would be able to save many of them in this time of crisis. Why isn't the government making choices to do that kind of thing? You know, why do they constantly feel like it's okay to take away from municipalities and take away from citizens?

This attack on the municipalities is coupled, of course, with attacks on individuals. It's happening all the time. We see that with the increase in taxation through the deindexing of our personal income tax. That has a consequence for every citizen who earns an income in the province of Alberta. We see that in terms of the deindexing of AISH and the alterations in AISH in terms of dates of payments received. While you're stressing the communities, you're also stressing the individuals within the communities, and all of them have also been stressed by the huge economic mistakes made by this government. Investments in a pipeline: they were told by the person who had the authority to do so that it was going to be cancelled, and they invested in it anyways, losing billions of dollars for this province, which, again, could have saved all of these municipalities from this destructive legislation and the consequences of undermining their vitality.

You know, I think this is just a huge concern. We can see the consequences of this type of thinking in the numbers. We can see that this government has received credit downgrade after credit downgrade over and over and over again. We can see that they govern at a time when the unemployment rate is the highest it's been for many, many generations in this province. We can see that there are incredible numbers of businesses which have had to make the terrible decision during these awful COVID times to shut their doors permanently, and people have been laid off. If we hadn't been rescued by the federal government, the circumstances would even be worse. If the federal government hadn't created CERB, which has been, really, buoying up many of the individuals in this province, because the province didn't do anything for us – it's the federal dollars that have actually helped to save these people's lives.

These are the kinds of reasons why we are concerned that there is an overall pattern here. Each individual piece may be argued by this government as having some benefit for some reason. Most of the time I disagree with them. The cumulative effect of these kinds of irresponsible financial decisions on the vitality of municipal governments is of great concern to this province and to its citizens. One way to assure them that you are paying attention to the consequence for them is to establish a mechanism for review and, in establishing that mechanism of review, to set out a process by which an act of this nature will be brought back to a committee of the Legislature for review in terms of its implications and the outcomes of the decisions that are inherent in the act and to provide an opportunity for the suggestion that perhaps this should be stopped or changed in some way based on the evidence.

Right now it's just speculation. Every time I ask the government about the terrible numbers that are demonstrated in terms of their economic decisions, they always say: oh, but we have an economist who speculates that if we do something like give away \$4.7 billion to corporations, we will gain X number of jobs. Always speculation, not actual facts, always future

guesswork. We want them to start making decisions on the actual facts, that are readily available. After putting in a \$4.7 billion corporate tax break, they lost 50,000 jobs in this province, and it's gone down since that time even more.

11:00

Their economic decisions have been devastating for many families in this province, and this bill is a continuation of that overall pattern. Therefore, it's important that we take the time to review the actual outcomes that are elicited by this kind of legislation and not just depend on speculations by friends of ours who happen to be economists at some university, who are predicting: we think something will happen. Let's go away from, "We think, probably, maybe something is likely to happen" to actual recorded statistics that demonstrate that this government has been very bad on fiscal policy, has been the government that has guided us through the worst economic situation we have seen in this province for generations, that has failed to respond appropriately to COVID, resulting in us having the worst record of response to COVID in the country and the second worst in North America.

You know, these are the kinds of things that we need to take seriously and that we need to use to guide this government moving forward. The damage they have done to this point has been extensive, and it is really incumbent upon us to ensure that we do something about bringing this damage to a stop and ensuring that it does not get bigger and more serious as time moves on, which it will unless something happens at this point.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

I see the hon. Member for Cardston-Siksika has risen.

Mr. Schow: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Always a pleasure to rise in this Chamber and do the job that the constituents of Cardston-Siksika elected me to do, which is to represent them and respond to some of the things that I hear from members opposite. I'll do that briefly as I know that we'd like to get on to other matters.

First things first. For the Member for Edmonton-Rutherford to go on and start cherry-picking information that suits his narrative is a bit disingenuous. You know, to start alluding to the fact that we're losing physicians: Mr. Chair, physician retention in rural Alberta, particularly as a rural Alberta MLA, is nothing new. We understand this. It's a lifelong problem that we've always had. It's difficult to attract and retain physicians, so to suggest that this is a new problem caused by the current government, led by the hon. Premier, is just factually inaccurate. I don't understand why the Member for Edmonton-Rutherford, who was not so long ago this evening, while discussing Bill 64, corrected on a number of issues, not the least of which was his poor, frankly, lack of consultation with First Nations, despite that being his job . . . [interjection] All that to say – and I hear that member heckling. The reality is that the truth hurts, Mr. Chair. The truth hurts.

Moving on, again, talking about rural physicians because that member addressed it, about how we've lost so many physicians: that's right. Alberta lost 47 doctors between June and September last year, but we gained 250. Again, facts hurt. The truth hurts, Mr. Chair. [interjections] I'm not shocked that the member opposite – and, of course, the chorus of heckles begins again as I rise and I speak because they can't handle it. But this is not an issue that is new to Alberta in terms of attracting physicians. I know that the hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake-St. Paul's son is a physician and, I have no doubt, does an excellent job there. I can tell you that I don't want to put words in his mouth, but I suspect that he would talk about the difficulty of retaining physicians in rural Alberta as well.

Then let's talk a little bit about unemployment levels. There is the pandemic that is happening right now, so it's no surprise that we are seeing unemployment numbers rise. Even in times of relative plenty, we'll call them, under the previous government, we saw hordes of unemployed people lining up looking for work under a government that just didn't appreciate or support small businesses, the job creators. But we are seeing, as I have referenced many times in this Chamber, that Alberta will lead the country in economic recovery. So while members opposite go and say all kinds of false things about our government and our tax cuts for corporations, they are in fact attracting jobs to this province. They are attracting job creators to this province.

I'm not quite sure why the members opposite have such a problem with this idea of attracting new business. Businesses understand very well. They understand very well, Mr. Chair, that when times are difficult, you have to make difficult decisions. You can't pull revenue out of a hat. It just doesn't happen. You can't keep going to the well, like the members opposite would suggest. You can't just keep, you know, jacking up your union dues so you can keep running ads that might continue to spread falsehoods about a current government of the day. But I will say this. Money has to come from somewhere, or – or – you have to make difficult decisions.

It's no secret that there is less money going around right now as a result of the world-wide pandemic that we are currently facing. So when members opposite say that municipalities are going to have to find other ways to generate this revenue, that's their only suggestion. "Let's go back to the well. Let's take more." There's a town in my constituency, and one of the mottos is: before we can give, we must first take. That is the reality. There are other options, and that is to make the tough decisions. Make the tough decisions. Our government has to make the tough decisions, decisions the members opposite failed to make and in times that some would say, relative to today, were prosperous. They underwent six credit downgrades. [interjections] Count them out. Six credit downgrades. Again the chorus of heckles from that side because it pains them so much to hear how poor of a job they did when things were actually relatively pretty good or could have been good. They drove investment away.

Now, Mr. Chair, I appreciate the latitude that you have granted me on this conversation. I know we are dealing with Bill 56, Local Measures Statutes Amendment Act, 2021. But the Member for Edmonton-Rutherford went on this incredible tangent that was – I mean, I took notes – difficult to follow. I admit that it was very difficult to follow because it was all over the map when they were talking about rural physicians, talking about corporate tax cuts, talking about unemployment rates, talking about everything under the sun except for this bill. But here's the reality. We are. [interjection]

Again, that member just can't help himself. It's so difficult to just sit there and listen while others are speaking. I and other members on this side, unless you haven't noticed, have achieved what I believe to be a level of decorum that is worthy of this Chamber. We have made a concerted effort to raise the bar, raise the level of decorum in this Chamber. It's no shock that – I bet that if you did a study, Mr. Chair, go back and look at all the number of points of order called in this Chamber, I suspect the balance would be tipped heavily in their favour. But again I digress.

The point I'm getting at here, Mr. Chair – and I know I'm taking up more time than I had initially intended. But the final thing I will reference in the Member for Edmonton-Rutherford's comments was about us using information from some economist from some university. Some economist from some university. I suspect he's referring to Jack Mintz, and that some university is the University

of Calgary. I don't know if he's necessarily trying to sow division, or maybe he's trying to suggest that that economist's credentials aren't worthy of being referenced in this Chamber or being referenced by some of the studies done by this government. But that member is clearly picking and choosing what works for his narrative . . . [interjection] – yeah, that's right, when they were in government picking winners and losers – when as Conservatives we believe in a basic principle of creating an equal opportunity, not equal outcome.

With that, I will conclude my remarks, and I will also move to adjourn debate on Bill 56.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

For clarity, we will be adjourning debate or at least voting on that, and progress will be reported on the bill when the committee rises.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

11:10

Bill 57
Metis Settlements Amendment Act, 2021

The Deputy Chair: Are there any questions, comments, or amendments to be offered at this time? I see the hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View caught my eye first.

Ms Ganley: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. What an opportune moment to rise on this particular bill, a bill on which there is complete rejection by the Métis settlements actually governed by the bill, on which the government claimed that there was consultation but there wasn't, and right after listening to a long, rambling digression that – I don't know – might have once glanced passingly at a fact though certainly never approached it, in which one of the allegations made was a lack of consultation. Well, I don't know that anything has ever been so soundly rejected by the group of people that it affects as this particular bill. The Métis settlements and members of the Métis settlements have been clear that they were not consulted, they do not feel the consultation was adequate, and they do not like the changes. This is being unilaterally imposed upon them.

Since we are on the topic and have had a very wide range of latitude, especially with the last speaker, it's probably worth, you know, pointing out that one of the other things presently being rejected by the majority of folks is the UCP's curriculum. In fact, just today – I believe it was still today; it's rather late – we saw indigenous leaders coming out, indigenous leaders who were quoted by the government as being in favour, saying that, essentially, they feel that they were used, that they were given portions of the curriculum to look at that were not representative, that their words were taken out of context. One even went so far as to suggest that he felt like the, quote, unquote, token Indian. I mean, that really speaks to this government's record on consultation in a way that nothing else could. So we're seeing that with the curriculum at the same time that we're seeing this act come forward, again without consultation and over the objections of the people impacted by it.

I mean, that's really the thing that, in some ways, defines this government most, their just complete unwillingness to engage with people or reality, for that matter. You know, they don't talk to people; they talk at them. They repeat the same talking points over and over again no matter how senseless or pointless, no matter what the counterargument is. That is just fundamentally disrespectful on a level that I think is really, really troubling. Not that many Albertans will necessarily be aware of the impacts that this act is having, but to Albertans more generally, if there are still any watching at this time, I would say: I mean, this is just this government being this government, being unwilling to listen and

just sort of charging ahead, and when people say that this is wrong for us or to listen to us or that we'd like to talk to you, them responding with just, "We're right," and then a series of assertions, most of them, again, having, at best, once glanced at a fact while passing by . . .

The Deputy Chair: I hesitate to interrupt the hon. member. I just feel like it's probably prudent – obviously, during Committee of the Whole we have a lot of opportunities to speak. However, I think that putting myself in your shoes, I would want to be interrupted in this case. Just for the benefit of every member here, we are actually on amendment A1, which was a government amendment. I don't think it impacts what has been said or what could be said in the future and all that kind of stuff with regard to the swath of discussion; however, I just figured that it would probably be prudent to do that at this time and just remind all members that we are on an amendment, and it's A1. So if the hon. member could please continue.

Ms Ganley: Mr. Chair, I very much appreciate that interruption. I suspect, it being a government amendment, that similar things can be said about it as are being said about the bill.

In any case, to continue with respect to the bill, you know, I think certainly we've heard loudly and clearly from the Métis Settlements General Council and from individuals living on the Métis settlements that they object to pretty much every aspect of this bill. You know, I think it's worth sort of going over what was said initially by this government about this bill because it was, like many bills in this Chamber, sort of paraded in with this: everyone is deeply delighted about this; we've talked to everyone, and everybody is happy. I mean, it's become kind of trite to say this in this House, but in this case it's just completely accurate. Nothing could be further from the truth. Everyone is not delighted.

It's probably worth reading into the record the amendment which we are dealing with, which has been described as A1. It is that the bill be amended as follows. Sections 5 and 6 are struck out, and the following is substituted:

(5) Section 10(6) is amended by striking out "3 councillors" and substituting "the number of councillors that constitute a quorum."

That is obviously a comparatively minor change to the bill, and that comparatively minor change to the bill does not, in my view, change the substance.

It's interesting, you know, being on an amendment. It's probably worth noting that the government could have amended any number of things about this bill, and it didn't choose to do so. This is, I think, a moment in time where we're having some incredibly important conversations about privilege and about systemic racism and about the sort of impacts that occur over time when a group of people is discriminated against and is not treated as full and equal members of society, because over time the impacts of that are shown in virtually every aspect of life. They show up in the level of education attained. They show up in health outcomes significantly. They show up significantly in health outcomes. You can actually sometimes measure a person's likelihood of dying or what age they will die at. I think that's incredibly troubling. They show up in terms of not just population health and education but economics and basically every aspect of life.

11:20

One of the most interesting things, I think, that I ever heard was at a human rights event, and it was actually a study that was done about intergenerational trauma and gene methylation, which suggested that that actually impacts the way in which an

individual's genes express. We're finding more and more out about this. But I digress somewhat. The point is that we are at a time in history where we're having some incredibly important conversations about this. The fact that this government has chosen this moment in history to be completely disrespectful, to completely disregard the rights of the Métis people in this province is, I think, incredibly troubling to me.

That being said, obviously I am strongly against this particular bill. I don't think that the amendment which is before us changes anything in particular substance. With that, I would urge members to vote against this bill.

Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member, especially also for those housekeeping aspects as they arose.

I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford has risen on amendment A1.

Mr. Feehan: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I appreciate the opportunity to address this bill. It gives me a chance to again reiterate what this government has heard before but has refused to acknowledge, and that is that the totality of this bill is completely and utterly rejected by the people it will affect. End of sentence. Everything I say after this is simply a footnote to that reality.

You know, we've sat here tonight listening to members of the government side fabricate fantastic ideas about our time in government and make statements about things that were said by people on this side of the House that were, in fact, not said. I wish there was an English word that would describe when you say things that are not validated by facts that I could use in this House, because I certainly would be using it.

This is an incredible moment in history, where we have a whole group of people who are vulnerable to the actions of this government coming forward as a totality, completely, across all eight settlements, saying that this bill is not only wrong-headed but a direct assault on their integrity as a people. I mean, how much more offensive can you get than that at a time when we're supposed to be talking about reconciliation?

I know that the government has decided to bring forward an amendment or two. This particular amendment makes a change that most people here would say is innocuous, but I would say that it's even more wrong-headed because they're actually setting up a situation where – this group of people have made a decision about how they would like to govern themselves. There was some self-determination here by the Métis people, and they decided that they would have equality and balance between the settlements and that in each settlement they would have five members that would all come together from each of the eight settlements and constitute a body of 40 people who would make decisions on behalf of all the Métis settlements around this province in equal proportion, that each settlement would have one voice.

Now, I addressed this previously in this House, but what this amendment is actually doing is that it's creating a circumstance where the government will facilitate an unequal circumstance where some settlements could potentially have only three members and other settlements could have five members at the general council. Now, of course, the minister tried to address this, but what the minister said to this House was that when they arrive at the general council, they still only have one vote per settlement. I agree. They also have one vote per settlement, but if anybody spends time with indigenous communities, they would understand that decisions are not made simply on the basis of majority rule all the time. It isn't just a matter of everybody has got one vote; therefore, they're equal.

The process is incredibly important to indigenous governance, and the process is that everybody who comes to the table has a right and a responsibility to speak to the issues at hand. In the discussion the truth will come out and will be evaluated and consulted on by everyone so that they can jointly make a decision, which means that if you have three people from one settlement and five from another, you have a disproportion in terms of the speaking time and the input from one community over the other. All five of those people have a right to speak to whatever it is that's in front of the council, and all three have a right to speak. It means that those communities which have five councillors will literally have more opportunity to influence the ultimate decision.

Now, I know that, in the end, they all get one vote for one settlement, but it isn't that simple because of the nature of indigenous governance. The nature of indigenous government is the consultation of as many people as necessary to have a fulsome conversation and the attempt to achieve some consensus and have a decision that reflects best upon the vast majority of, if not all, peoples. That's what they want. It's not simply winning because you got more votes. They know that could happen. They see it happen in this Legislature, but they don't necessarily think that that's resulted in good things for our province. Instead, they want to have a situation where they have equality at the table and everyone's voice is heard, and from that, a decision is made. Of course, it has to come down to a vote because we've imposed a certain system on them that requires a vote for certain bills to pass within their governance.

This amendment doesn't make any change to what's devastating about this bill, that it undermines the indigenous, Métis desire for self-governance and self-determination. Now, I know the minister said: I've gone and talked to people a number of times and so on. But as I've explained previously in the House, the very people he's saying that they have consulted with are saying that it was an inadequate and inappropriate consultation and that most of the 19 meetings, or whatever number it is he refers to, were occasions where he tried to convince somebody about his point of view rather than actually listened to people from the community or actually took questions and tried to respond or gave the community a chance to make decisions in response to what it was that he was suggesting.

They did ask for the opportunity to get together with their communities, as they have since the establishment of the settlements, and talk to their community members, to do an internal consultation, their own government consulting with their own people about these things. Because of COVID, that became impossible, and this minister just said: too bad; you couldn't do it, so you don't get to do it. I mean, that's really an atrocious response to a very difficult circumstance for these settlement communities. It's really unbelievable that that's the response: well, bad things happened to you, and I guess that's just going to be my excuse to proceed in the way I want to.

You know, I was talking to the president of the Metis Settlements General Council not that long ago again. Of course, they're very upset about this, so I hear from them a lot. He said: look, if this government is so convinced that these changes are good and that the community will want them if they understand them fully, why don't they actually put it to some kind of a referendum in the communities? Why don't you actually give them a chance to come and vote on: do we accept the changes that are in this bill? They put that on the table. They're not afraid to have the conversation with their own people. They're more than happy to have the conversation, and because of the nature of their governance, they

will abide by their people. They will listen to their people, and they will respond if their people tell them, “Yes, this is good,” or “No, this is bad” because that’s what they do.

11:30

I mean, goodness knows, on a Métis settlement you know every single person who lives on that settlement, and you live next door to almost all of them, which means that your accountability is extremely high. So they are accountable. They do want to hear from the people, what they have to say, and the Metis Settlements General Council is offering the opportunity for this minister to do exactly that, to follow the requests of the nations to conduct internal consultation with their own people to respond to the suggestions from this minister. I certainly wish that this government would consider doing it.

It was very disappointing that, because they got so much backlash, they finally decided to do a little one-hour online town hall, in which they only answered the questions that they had decided to answer ahead of time, and they didn’t take questions from most of the people who represent the Métis settlements. I mean, it was just seen as an appalling lack of actual relationship with the community that let people even matter. They thought they were finally going to have their chance to voice their concerns, to ask a question and maybe receive an answer that would help to, you know, enlighten them on why this will be good for the community or something of that nature, and instead they got an hour-long talking point. It was very, very frustrating for the community.

If there’s a silver lining that comes from this, it’s almost the very first time that all eight settlements actually agreed to do exactly the same thing, so in a funny way this minister has started to unify the eight settlements of the Metis Settlements General Council. Of course, he’s unifying them in opposition to this minister, in opposition to this government, in opposition to this act.

The consequence for this community is going to be very high. They’re not simply losing a program or something of that nature. They’re losing their right to self-governance because it’s being imposed by another government, and they’re very concerned about that. This is a group of people who have been the most neglected and the most overrun in this province. For years Métis people lived in extreme poverty in this province and have only just been able to start to make that transition into new communities and so on. It is so nascent at this point that if the knife is driven into it now, the danger is that it will die. The danger is that 10 years from now we’ll be talking about those things we used to have called Métis settlements that no longer exist. You can say that I am, you know, scaremongering or something of that nature, but I can tell you that that is what the Métis people are telling me they believe. It’s not my words. It’s not my description. It is the description of the Métis people about where they believe they are going.

They believe that this government is trying to turn them into municipalities like every other municipality and that they will simply disappear, even if they have a separate Metis Settlements Act, that they’ll ultimately just become municipalities in terms of their actual governance. They see that as a betrayal of who they are as a people. They see that as a betrayal of the work that they have done to be recognized as indigenous people under section 35 of the Constitution, something they spent 80 years trying to achieve and that this government is trying to undermine in one act.

You know, I continue to tell this government that this is very much a concern, and these small, little amendments, like the one we’re speaking to right now, which in and of itself I think is wrong-headed – I think that this will not do. If there’s any bill I’ve ever seen that needs to stop in this House, that needs to be taken off the table and brought back to the community – you know, we listened to this really

strange diatribe from the minister two hours ago about our lack of consultation, which I’m not going to relitigate because it was all science fiction, and I’m not going to waste time on that now.

You know, to say those kinds of things, to be that accusatory in the House and then to, moments later, walk in with a bill like this, that has angered essentially a hundred per cent of the community, is just appalling. But this government is getting used to having 99 per cent of the community against them, whether it’s education or health care. Why not Métis settlements? They don’t seem to be in any way put off by the fact that the very people that they are supposed to work with, that they’re supposed to be in partnership with have all told us consistently, across professions, across geographies, that this government is not a partner, is not working with the community to develop the future in a positive way.

You know, I stand here in the House again, looking at the things that they have put into place here, and I can say that I see that this government does not at all understand the implications of where they’re going here. They have some fantasy that somehow these communities will somehow tomorrow turn into municipalities and be able to tax their citizens and be able to pay for their services. It tells me that they know nothing about the level of income in these communities and the nature of the historical relationship between the Métis communities and the settler communities in this province.

It’s really time for them – well, I would say to go back to school, but given their new curriculum, that would be a big mistake. They certainly wouldn’t learn anything about indigenous people from that curriculum. Instead, I really think that it’s time for this government to make a very serious decision about their response to the calls to action of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, the United Nations declaration on the rights of indigenous peoples, and even some of the calls for justice from the murdered and missing indigenous women and girls commission. All of these documents are gifts to this government to guide them as to how they can interact with indigenous peoples in a way that is respectful and productive and helpful. They really don’t have to work that hard. They do have to pick up a document and read it. They do have to go to the people who wrote those documents and the people who live those documents and say: help us understand the implications here and how those will be lived out.

I know we did that. We had some wonderful outcomes as a result of that. We are the first province that ever put money towards water to reserves. Why did that happen? Because we read those documents, and we talked to the communities. We created an indigenous climate leadership program that was used by every First Nation in this province and all eight Métis settlements as well as, of course, the Métis Nation of Alberta and the Rupertsland Institute. All used that money to help uplift their people, to help make life better, because we took the documents seriously, we went back to the community, and we sought their guidance and wisdom and created programs that turned out to have extremely positive effects.

But I’m not seeing that here, and it isn’t me. You can take my judgment as being opposition for the sake of opposition because that’s where I sit in the House, but you can’t say that about the Métis people, because it’s the Métis people themselves that have come forward time and time again since this bill was introduced and said that this is wrong-headed, that it is unacceptable, and that it must stop now.

They have made it very clear. It’s not an issue of: let’s talk about this a little bit more and maybe make a few small amendments and make a few small changes as we go along the way. It’s: stop it, take it out of the House, come back to the people, and allow us to have full consultations with our own citizens and to describe in our own way how we will self-govern and how we will use an indigenous governance method to move our communities along and not be

subject to the provincial government telling us how we must be and how we must express our needs. What they're simply seeking is a partnership, and they're not getting it. It's just a sad, sad moment in the history of the province of Alberta, and I certainly would like to see this brought to a change and that the Métis people of this province be given an opportunity to do what it is that they need to do.

Thank you.

11:40

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

I see the hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake-St. Paul has risen.

Mr. Hanson: Thank you very much, Chair. I will try and stick as close to the amendment as the opposition member just did, and I'd like to talk about engagement. For four years as shadow critic in opposition I heard very clearly, as did the minister at the time, the Member for Edmonton-Rutherford, comments from Métis people that the act needed to be reviewed. It was 30 years old. There were some big concerns about the long-term agreement coming due in 2023 and what was going to happen then. This is why this is so critical at this time. I'm very surprised that the Member for Edmonton-Rutherford didn't deal with it when he was the minister for four years.

When I talk about engagement, my engagement was not only with the president, Herb Lehr, who I've known for a while. I've worked with his family; I've worked with members of his community up there. I've got a lot of respect for Mr. Lehr. He's a very passionate man. I heard him speak at the '60s scoop presentation in St. Paul, talking about his upbringing and living in foster homes and the ordeals that he and his family went through.

You know, as I speak about the '60s scoop, I'll remind the Member for Edmonton-Rutherford that while he was minister, Adam North Peigan and his wife tried to communicate with him for a year and a half and finally got frustrated and came to me as an opposition member, and I introduced Mr. Adam North Peigan to the member, the minister at the time, as well as 22 of his members and forced the minister at the time to meet with these folks and deal with it, and that resulted in the '60s scoop apology that came from the government at the time, about a year later. But it was only because they were frustrated with him not even taking their calls.

Now, he talks about engagement, and, you know, it is frustrating for me to sit here and listen to him tonight. That's why I'm getting up to speak on this. I didn't just consult with Mr. Lehr, very well respected, the president of the . . .

An Hon. Member: MSGC.

Mr. Hanson: . . . MSGC – there you go; thank you – nor the councils. I met with councils, and I talked to them, and I've got some notes from them and some of the recommendations that they brought forward. I met with a lot of the good people that live out there on the settlements. I met with them in their homes, was treated very well, was treated to moose meat and blueberries and ice cream for dessert. It was delicious, all locally sourced, and they're very proud of the way that they live.

I met with folks around campfires on multiple occasions. I had one meeting where we had representatives from, I believe, all eight of the settlements. We sat around and had a great chat, and one of the things that came up constantly was the MSA, the act. You know, they've been waiting for a long time to get this thing fixed. They're very frustrated with a lot of aspects of it. It was totally ignored by the member when he had four years to deal with it, and he just left it there. Now we're dealing with it, and he's up in arms and can't

even stick to a simple amendment that's in place, so I feel free that I can speak without having to stick to that amendment as well.

I asked people to send me some notes, to go through the act and find what it is you like about it or don't like about it, so I've got a few things I'll read to you here. One of them sent me an overview. He says that the Métis settlements were formed in the 1930s, and as a result of a Queen's Bench litigation settlement, the Metis Settlements Act 1990 was created. The now over \$400 million given to the control of the MSGC has not resulted in hoped-for jobs and self-sustainability of the people on the Métis settlements. Four hundred million dollars. They're very concerned about where the money went and how it didn't stick around to help them.

Another frustration: 1.25 million acres of basically organic land. They're the second-largest landowner, next to the government of Alberta, in this province, organic land. Why are they struggling? Those are the questions I heard consistently at the houses and around the campfires. What's happening? We can't continue down this road. He makes a note here: government welfare, money for nothing and uncontrolled is not the Métis ethos. That's not what they want. These are the people, not the councillors, that live on the settlements. This is a message I got from them.

You know, one of the other things that was brought up is the audits. Currently the annual audits are not value-for-money audits and ought to be. At meetings the company hired to do the audit admits that he merely transferred the money figures based on what the administration told him the numbers were. It should be an actual audit to make it valuable for the Métis on the settlements.

Another note regarding a report of councillor remuneration and expenses. It ought to be the same as with MLAs. He says that, you know, I can go online and find out how you spent your money and what you did and your mileage and all that. He says that I can't do the same thing for my councillors.

They're very concerned about transparency, and these are the things that they've asked us to do, and it's being dealt with here in this act.

Another note from another one. The government of Alberta responsible. The MSGC is the – I guess I covered that – second-largest landowner in Alberta only after the GOA; in the negotiations with the Alberta government over \$400 million has additionally been given to the control of the MSGC and the settlements; what happened to all that money? This is from another person very concerned about these numbers.

These folks have been dealing with this for a long time. It's been very frustrating for them. We're the only province in Canada that has settlements, and they're, again, constantly shocked that they're not doing better as societies.

Again, I'll touch on some things from the councillors and their concerns with some of the things. One other note on here: Bill 57 is supported by the majority of settlement members; good on Minister Wilson and the UCP. That's from a member that lives on a settlement. I don't know who the Member for Edmonton-Rutherford is talking to but certainly not these folks.

Consultation. Another one was brought up because everybody is always saying that, well, there's no engagement, no consultation. Another fellow wrote here: consultation; there has been considerable consultation with the MSGC and the government of Alberta, for which the government has paid a lot of money, including mileage and per diem since 1914; the false allegations come from many who want and desire the status quo; the fact of the matter is that there has been ongoing consultation with the MSGC settlements and the government of Alberta; in fact, in the words of the MSGC itself, there were – and I actually have a Facebook post as well. I could probably table that tomorrow if you like, but it basically says this:

The [Joint Accountability Review Committee] JARC was comprised of representatives from the Government of Alberta and the Metis Settlements General Council. The JARC Report is the result of months of meetings during which the accountability, enforcement and public interest provisions of the Act and related legislation, including General Council Policies, were carefully considered.

That's dated December 14, 2020.

So the idea that our minister was not engaging and the message that we're getting from that Member for Edmonton-Rutherford is absolutely ridiculous and unfounded.

Further notes from members, some of their concerns and, you know, relevant concerns, and I heard this all the time that I was in as the shadow critic as well, nothing new: residency of councillors; there ought to be a requirement that owning land on a settlement is not the same as living there. I think that's fairly reasonable. I could own land in St. Paul, but I can't run to be mayor. I have to live there, right? So they're not asking for anything different.

The chairman's office, one of their concerns was – and I believe there was an amendment talked about in dealing with that – holding the chair office for only one year. It says that on one hand having the chair change yearly is seemingly not allowing one to learn the job. There is provision for removal of the chairman, and that has happened before in one case, where the chairman was removed. They would like it extended to three years. Provisions in the act actually allow that

a settlement chair may be removed from the office of settlement chair by a vote at a special meeting of the settlement council called to consider the matter in which

- (a) in the case of a council consisting of three members, two councillors vote in favour of removing the settlement chair,
- (b) and in the case of a council consisting of four or five members, at least three councillors vote in favour of removing the chair.

11:50

So they've already got that provision. They're not concerned that the chair is going to be there for three years and there's no way to get rid of them. It's already in the act. They've addressed that on their own. These are folks that live on the settlements. They're happy with that, and they'd like to see it reverted back to the three years.

The essential services bylaw. As stated above, the Métis ethos is not government handouts. This bylaw would force settlements which after 30 years have not managed themselves to become self-sufficient. These are folks that live on the ground, that understand the implications, that it's not going to be easy – change is never easy – but they're willing to try to get out from under the long-term agreement, which is going to disappear in two years. They're aware of that, and they want to be prepared.

A couple of other things: removal of the MSGC policies binding settlements. This is good because the needs of the different settlements have not been considered, the eastern settlements versus those of the north; for example, Paddle Prairie. If the settlements want to form joint groups, like, for example, the tribal chiefs of Beaver Lake, Cold Lake, Frog Lake, Heart Lake, Whitefish, and Kehewin First Nations, which denotes on their site their vision statement – this is something that these folks want their councils to work together for, to get some of these joint communities together and address some of this stuff. All thoughtful, very thoughtful, coming not from council, not from their president, but from the people that this is actually going to affect.

I'll go on to some of the things that I heard from the councillors. Before I do that, one of the other concerns – it should be very clear to the Member for Edmonton-Rutherford as well – is that people

have to understand that on Métis settlements you can own property on the settlement, you can build a house on the settlement, but the biggest problem is that you can't access any cash based on that equity. I've visited some very nice properties, and I'll tell you what. If you were standing on that deck anywhere else in the province, that would be a million-dollar home, but it's absolutely worth zero to the financial institutions because of where it's located.

That was one of the things that came up when our Premier was first elected, when we were still in opposition, and he immediately had engagement sessions with the Métis settlements and with First Nations groups as well. One of the big things that came up from that was the access to capital and the inability – living on a Métis settlement, you could have the greatest idea in the world for a business, but you couldn't go and access the cash to get that thing off the ground. That's where the IOC came in, from those engagements. The Premier at the time heard that very clearly, that access to capital was holding not only First Nations back but also the Métis settlements. So that was very important that we got that through, and I'm very proud of the part that we had in that.

Council concerns. Number one was that they said we need to recognize the uniqueness of the settlements. They can't really be compared to a local municipality. They take care of their own. One of the chairs said: you know, where in any municipality would you have the municipality go and take care of funeral arrangements for a family because they didn't have the money? This is something that they do. They treat everybody on the community as part of the family, and that's one of the things that they say. You have to recognize that, yes, you know, they have a council and they have bylaws and taxation, but they're not really a municipality. We do have to recognize that.

One of the things that they were concerned about this bill is that it doesn't deal with section 75, which needs to be addressed to stop dual membership. It's one of the big concerns. I know that the Member for Edmonton-Rutherford heard that very clearly, too; did nothing about it in the four years he was there. They were promised by a previous Premier that this would happen, so they were a little concerned that it isn't addressed in this one and hoping that they see some changes come down the road.

The other big concern was that, you know, they said: we can make bylaws but there's no way to enforce them or collect from members who simply can't afford to pay. They gave me some examples of housing arrangements that were made 10, 15 years ago, where the individuals also had to put up a portion of that housing project, and then they got money from the settlement as well as the government. They said that sometimes they're still on the hook for that portion of the money because the people just can't afford to pay it back, and there's really no recourse for them to go and collect it. That's one of the things that they say. You know, you can make bylaws, but if you can't enforce them, then it's kind of pointless.

One thing that they also made very abundantly clear to me at more than one council is that the president of the MSGC does not speak for them. So if you're listening only to one person, you're not getting the full story. You need to get out from under the dome, as they say, go sit around the campfires, like I did, go sit at the kitchen tables, like I did, and get the true word.

One of the last ones that they were concerned with – that one is kind of not relevant to it. But this other one, the amendment of six settlements to agree to the use of the future fund rather than all eight: the concern there was that the only way you could get all eight settlements to agree to that is if they were going to dissolve the fund and split it equally, and they don't want to see that happen. They want to see that future fund stay there and be utilized for projects going forward.

I guess that's a little bit off the amendment, but as a member of the government I know that the intentions of the minister are good, and I would ask everyone to support amendment A1.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member. I know you mentioned that you would table at the appropriate time the document that you were referring to, so thank you for that.

Are there any members wishing to speak to amendment A1?

[Motion on amendment A1 carried]

The Deputy Chair: Moving back to the main bill, Bill 57, Metis Settlements Amendment Act, 2021, are there any members wishing to speak? I see the hon. Associate Minister of Natural Gas and Electricity has risen.

Mr. Nally: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I move that we adjourn debate.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

The Deputy Chair: I see the hon. Associate Minister of Natural Gas and Electricity.

Mr. Nally: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Now I'd like to move that the committee rise and report progress on bills 64, 56, and 57.

[Motion carried]

[Mr. Milliken in the chair]

The Acting Speaker: I see the hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake-St. Paul has risen.

Mr. Hanson: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The Committee of the Whole has had under consideration certain bills. The committee reports progress on the following bills: Bill 64, Bill 56, and Bill 57. I wish to table copies of all amendments considered by the Committee of the Whole on this date for the official records of the Assembly.

12:00

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

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

Hon. Members: Aye.

The Acting Speaker: Any opposed, please say no.

That is carried and so ordered.

I see the Deputy Government House Leader has risen.

Mr. Nally: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I know there are many hon. members that would like to stay longer, work a little bit later into the night, but I think we've made some good progress. I move that the Assembly be adjourned until 9 a.m. on May 26, 2021.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 12:01 a.m. on Wednesday]

Table of Contents

Government Motions	
Time Allocation on Bill 64.....	4863
Division.....	4864
Government Bills and Orders	
Second Reading	
Bill 64 Public Lands Amendment Act, 2021.....	4864
Division.....	4871
Committee of the Whole	
Bill 64 Public Lands Amendment Act, 2021.....	4871
Bill 56 Local Measures Statutes Amendment Act, 2021.....	4877
Bill 57 Metis Settlements Amendment Act, 2021.....	4883

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