



Province of Alberta

The 30th Legislature  
Second Session

# Alberta Hansard

Wednesday evening, May 26, 2021

Day 104

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

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Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville (UC)  
Barnes, Drew, Cypress-Medicine Hat (Ind)  
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Carson, Jonathon, Edmonton-West Henday (NDP)  
Ceci, Joe, Calgary-Buffalo (NDP)  
Copping, Hon. Jason C., Calgary-Varsity (UC)  
Dach, Lorne, Edmonton-McClung (NDP),  
Official Opposition Deputy Whip  
Dang, Thomas, Edmonton-South (NDP),  
Official Opposition Deputy House Leader  
Deol, Jasvir, Edmonton-Meadows (NDP)  
Dreeshen, Hon. Devin, Innisfail-Sylvan Lake (UC)  
Eggen, David, Edmonton-North West (NDP),  
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Ellis, Mike, Calgary-West (UC),  
Government Whip  
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Fir, Tanya, Calgary-Peigan (UC)  
Ganley, Kathleen T., Calgary-Mountain View (NDP)  
Getson, Shane C., Lac Ste. Anne-Parkland (UC)  
Glasgo, Michaela L., Brooks-Medicine Hat (UC)  
Glubish, Hon. Nate, Strathcona-Sherwood Park (UC)  
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Hoffman, Sarah, Edmonton-Glenora (NDP)  
Horner, Nate S., Drumheller-Stettler (UC)  
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Long, Martin M., West Yellowhead (UC)  
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Panda, Hon. Prasad, Calgary-Edgemont (UC)  
Phillips, Shannon, Lethbridge-West (NDP)  
Pon, Hon. Josephine, Calgary-Beddington (UC)  
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Deputy Government House Leader  
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Schmidt, Marlin, Edmonton-Gold Bar (NDP)  
Schow, Joseph R., Cardston-Siksika (UC),  
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Schweitzer, Hon. Doug, QC, Calgary-Elbow (UC),  
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Smith, Mark W., Drayton Valley-Devon (UC)  
Stephan, Jason, Red Deer-South (UC)  
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Turton, Searle, Spruce Grove-Stony Plain (UC)  
van Dijken, Glenn, Athabasca-Barrhead-Westlock (UC)  
Walker, Jordan, Sherwood Park (UC)  
Williams, Dan D.A., Peace River (UC)  
Wilson, Hon. Rick D., Maskwacis-Wetaskiwin (UC)  
Yao, Tany, Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo (UC)  
Yaseen, Muhammad, Calgary-North (UC)

## Party standings:

United Conservative: 60

New Democrat: 24

Independent: 3

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Bilous  
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Reid  
Rosin  
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Sweet  
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Walker

### **Standing Committee on Families and Communities**

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Carson  
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Gotfried  
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### **Standing Committee on Legislative Offices**

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Loyola  
Rosin  
Rutherford  
Shepherd  
Smith  
Sweet  
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### **Special Standing Committee on Members' Services**

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Neudorf  
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Sigurdson, R.J.  
Williams

### **Standing Committee on Private Bills and Private Members' Public Bills**

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Dang  
Getson  
Glasgo  
Irwin  
Nielsen  
Rutherford  
Sigurdson, L.  
Sigurdson, R.J.

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Renaud

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Neudorf  
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Schmidt  
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Walker

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Rowswell  
Schmidt  
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Ganley  
Getson  
Guthrie  
Issik  
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Singh  
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## Legislative Assembly of Alberta

7:30 p.m.

Wednesday, May 26, 2021

### Government Bills and Orders Committee of the Whole

[Mrs. Pitt in the chair]

**The Chair:** Hon. members, I'd like to call the committee back to order.

#### Bill 64 Public Lands Amendment Act, 2021

**The Chair:** We are on amendment A2. Just a reminder: there are 25 minutes remaining in this debate. Are there any members wishing to join debate on amendment A2? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

**Mr. Schmidt:** Thank you, Madam Chair. I'm pleased to rise and share a few comments on the amendment that we're considering here this evening. If I'm correct, the amendment seeks to amend section 5 of Bill 64 by striking the proposed clause (i.1) and substituting the following:

(i.1) fees related to the use or occupation of public lands if that use or occupation is for a period not longer than 24 hours.

Is that correct, Madam Chair?

**The Chair:** Sorry, hon. member. I'm actually having a hard time hearing you. I'm not sure if you're speaking too softly or if the papers are in the microphone's way. What's the question?

**Mr. Schmidt:** I just want to confirm, Madam Chair. You said that we are on amendment A2, and that is the amendment related to section 5, striking proposed clause (i.1) . . .

**The Chair:** Yes. That's correct.

**Mr. Schmidt:** . . . fees related to the use or occupation of public lands less than 24 hours.

**The Chair:** Yes.

**Mr. Schmidt:** Okay. Thank you very much for confirming that.

Madam Chair, I just want to give members of the Legislature a little bit of history on the creation of this amendment. Bill 64 was introduced way back in April, and at that time the minister of the environment had not been fully transparent with the people of Alberta about the nature and the extent of the fees that he was intent on raising or creating in public lands or parks in Alberta. We had some indication in the budget documents that fees were going to increase. We noted, as I said in earlier stages of debate on this bill, that there were approximately \$18 million of fee increases identified in the minister's budget when he introduced it on February 25.

He provided a little bit of information about what was going to cause those fee increases. The budget documents said that there were going to be various increases to campgrounds, and when we pressed him on that in estimates, he refused to provide any more detail. He did say at the time that he was going to implement a random camping fee, which is something that has now become much more clear as to how much those fees are going to be and where those will apply. Then we saw some information in the budget, next to the random camping fee, indicating that there was going to be a fee for OHV use, and that was it.

When we looked at the numbers, Madam Chair, it was clear to us that you can't raise the fees by \$18 million just by fiddling with the existing fees and implementing a random camping fee, that there had to be some other fees on the way. We suspected at the time that the minister was going to introduce some kind of day-use fee. When we suggested that on social media and in the public sphere, the minister mocked us. He said that, oh, we were just people of incredible imagination. How could we come up with these fantastical stories of day-use fees in parks and public lands? And then, lo and behold, about two months later we find out that, in fact, the government is going to introduce day-use fees, starting in Kananaskis but not limited to Kananaskis.

Madam Chair, it's our view in the NDP caucus that these fees are fundamentally unfair. As I said in my comments and as my colleagues have also stated in their comments, it is not fair to ask Albertans to pay for public goods which have been provided to them free of charge at point of service, at point of use ever since they were created while letting – it's not fair to charge them fees for something that they had been getting for free and letting wealthy corporations and the richest citizens of our province off the hook.

In my comments at second reading of this bill I indicated how profitable Alberta corporations were in the first quarter. CNRL posted over a billion dollars in profits. The big four oil companies posted close to \$3 billion in profits in the first quarter of this year. What did the government do? They reduced their taxes so that they actually contribute less to the public good than they did before this government was elected. Then, of course, the government turns around and says, "Oh, my gosh, we don't have enough money to provide these public goods that people really enjoy and count on for a high quality of life; you, the individual user of these services, must now pay a fee to pay for those services," that had been up to that point provided by a relatively progressive tax system.

We in the NDP caucus still believe that that is fair, that those who live and work in Alberta and benefit the most from the economy in the province that we've built should also contribute according to their means. That means that corporations that make a billion dollars every quarter should probably pay a little bit more in taxes, that those who earn over \$400,000 a year should probably pay a little bit more in taxes because they can afford to. The people who cannot afford to pay more are the ones who are being asked to pay more by this legislation.

Not once has a single member of the government caucus stood up and made a coherent argument as to why they believe that individual Albertans who just want to go out to enjoy a day in a park or on public land have to pay a \$15-a-day fee – that's what we know – in Kananaskis. Whatever the fee in the future is going to be, we don't know yet. Not once has a government member stood up and told us why it's fair to ask Albertans to pay that fee while letting the wealthiest, most profitable companies in the province off the hook.

I challenge them to make that argument, Madam Chair, because I think that if they make that argument, they will find that it will be tremendously unpopular with the people of Alberta. Most people don't think that it's fair that a company like CNRL is allowed to make record profits and not contribute their fair share to the running of the province while people who have suffered through 15 months of the worst pandemic and the worst economic recession in a hundred years are asked to pay more. That's not fair. We don't see the government making that argument because they know that it's a losing argument.

Instead, what do we hear? We hear about all of the things that these fees are allegedly going to pay for: "Oh, we're going to get a whole bunch more conservation officers," and "Oh, we're going to get a lot better infrastructure," and "Oh, by the way, we think the

fees will act as a deterrent because – don't you know? – there are way too many people who are visiting public land and it's creating a big mess out on the landscape."

Not one of us here in the NDP caucus disagrees with those things. We need those things. In fact, my friend from Lethbridge-West has a very good track record of investing in those very things that we need to take care of our parks and our public lands. One need only scroll through her Twitter feed today, where she talks about some of the significant multimillion-dollar investments that we made in increased enforcement, better infrastructure, better levels of service in parks and on public lands during her time in office.

7:40

We believe that those things are needed and necessary, but we also believe that they should be paid for differently. That's why we raised income taxes on corporations to 12 per cent from 10 per cent. That was one of the first things that we did when we were elected. That's why we raised income taxes on the highest earning Albertans when we were elected, because we believe that those in Alberta who benefit the most should contribute the most.

One of the frustrating things, Madam Chair: we will not agree on how we should pay for the provision of parks and public lands in this province. We won't see the government caucus members actually make an argument about how they propose to pay for it because, as we know, that will be incredibly unpopular with Albertans. So we will continue to see these bad-faith arguments that they put forward regarding fees and how they're going to support a better provision of public services, but even then this government has failed to do what they said they were going to do.

As I said in my comments at second reading, they've raised fees and introduced new fees to the tune of \$18 million in this budget year according to their budget documents, but they're only turning around and increasing the amount of money that they're spending on public lands management and parks management by \$10 million. Where is the other \$8 million going to go? We have yet to hear a single member of the government caucus stand up and tell us. I certainly asked the minister questions to that effect when we discussed the budget on March 15, and he didn't have any answers. Perhaps the Minister of Finance or any of his colleagues on Executive Council would care to chime in tonight and let us know where the missing \$8 million is from these increased fee revenues.

Not only have we not heard any answers, Madam Chair, about where the money from the increase in fees is going; we actually see the government refusing to be accountable for that money. Earlier in debate on this bill we saw the government vote down an amendment that would require them to be transparent about how these fees were being spent. They don't make a compelling argument about why we should be paying these fees. They refuse to be transparent about where the money collected from the fees is going to go. Those are two significant problems, and there are a whole host of other problems on the way the fees that the minister has so far announced have been collected that make the particular fee structure that the government is proposing incredibly unfair.

I asked the minister today in question period about what was going on with fees in McLean Creek because the metaphorical phone has been ringing off the metaphorical hook in my office. I realize that phones don't have hooks anymore these days, Madam Chair, but if they did, it would be ringing off the hook with people who are extremely upset that they are being asked to pay \$15 a day to take a walk around Upper Kananaskis Lake and enjoy the fresh air while somebody can go take their quad or their pickup truck, bury it right up to the roof in mud, set a camper on fire, and not pay a single dime. [interjection] I hear my friend from St. Albert expressing wonderment at the statement that people are setting

campers on fire. It's well documented that that kind of behaviour goes on quite regularly in McLean Creek, bonfires so big that they can be seen by satellites in space or they could be seen from the drones that the minister wanted to implement, wanted to buy to patrol public lands.

**Mr. Nally:** Point of order.

**The Chair:** The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

#### **Point of Order Inflammatory Language**

**Mr. Nally:** Standing Order 23(h), (i), and (j). Just continuing to use language that is inflammatory. You know, it was funny making a joke about . . . [interjection]

**The Chair:** Order.

**Mr. Nally:** . . . seeing something from the satellite. It was funny to make the comment about the satellite having visibility of the fire. But, you know, making stuff up about drones and casting aspersions like that – now, don't get me wrong. This is the party that loves to peddle in fear and in the politics of personal destruction. But in this case it's not a debatable point. There are no mythical drones, that they're referring to, and I would ask the member to apologize.

**The Chair:** The hon. Member for Edmonton-South.

**Mr. Dang:** Thank you, Madam Chair. I appreciate that the hon. Deputy Government House Leader here is a little bit offended, but I think certainly that this is a matter of debate and certainly that, as he pointed out, many of these issues are under debate on the relevance – sorry; not the relevance but whether this program was to move forward or not. As well, he pointed out that some of this was being used comedically. I think that certainly we've seen tonight that all of these things are aspects of the bill that we do need to enter and debate in fulsome, so I believe that this is simply a matter of debate and not a point of order.

**The Chair:** Hon. members, I would tend to agree that this is a matter of debate. I'd just caution all members to stick to the points of the bill, in this case the amendment A2.

Hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar, please proceed.

#### **Debate Continued**

**Mr. Schmidt:** Thank you, Madam Chair. The point that I was making was that there is an extreme amount of very destructive activity that goes on quite regularly in McLean Creek. Under the fee structure that the government has proposed, people are not yet going to be asked to pay any kind of fee to go in and partake in those activities. That has struck the vast majority of Albertans, who are expecting to pay the fee to go and enjoy other areas of Kananaskis Country, as extremely unfair.

Because it's so unfair and because there are so many problems with how this money is going to be accounted for and because it's extremely unfair to set up a user-fee system instead of paying for public services through a progressive tax system, I think the only solution to all of these problems, Madam Chair, is to just strike the use of a day fee altogether. That's what this amendment is supposed to do.

Now, I could well anticipate that perhaps the minister of environment or his colleagues in the government caucus could stand up and say: "Well, it's only a \$15-a-day fee. It's only a \$90-a-year fee. It's perfectly affordable, right? It only applies to a small

area of the province. What's the big deal?" Well, there are a couple of big deals, Madam Chair.

First of all, I dispute the fact that this is something that average Albertans can afford. As I said in my comments in second reading on this bill, the government holds up as its defence a survey that purports to show that a slim majority of Albertans are in favour of paying the user fee. But, in fact, if you dig into the details of the survey, we find out that it's mostly old, mostly men, and mostly high-income people who are in favour of paying the fee. So what the government actually did was asked a bunch of people who are best positioned to be able to afford the fee if they can afford the fee and, sure enough, the answer was yes. Mind-blowing stuff.

They didn't seek to ask that many people who are earning minimum wage whether or not they can afford to pay the fee. As my friend from St. Albert said in her comments earlier in debate on this bill, they certainly didn't ask people who are living on income supports or income support for the severely handicapped if they can afford to pay the fee. We don't think that the average Albertan can afford to pay this fee, and they shouldn't be asked to do that.

What's even more problematic, Madam Chair, is that we don't know where the fees will stop. Right now it's a \$15-a-day fee to go and enjoy the fresh air in Kananaskis Country, but what's next? It could apply on any piece of public land in the province.

7:50

I remember last summer my partner and I went out to enjoy a hike up Folding Mountain, which is just west of Hinton. It's an incredibly challenging hike for an old guy like me who doesn't move his legs very much, but we made it to the top, and it was a very lovely hike. At the end of the hike, of course, there's the lovely Folding Mountain brewery and restaurant, which in non-COVID times I look forward to visiting. The trail was relatively well maintained, pretty clearly marked, and all of that was a hundred per cent free. But what's it going to cost . . .

**The Chair:** Are there any other members wishing to join debate? There are three minutes remaining. The hon. Member for Lethbridge-West.

**Ms Phillips:** Well, let me use my time, then, Madam Chair, and thank you for the opportunity, to read from some letters that I have received from constituents. You know, the government purports that they have this survey, some sort of Doodle poll from their friends. I have heard from my constituents.

"Please table my letter. I'm camped at Lundbreck Falls, and I can't believe that our wild spaces could be in jeopardy. This is an opportunity to be out in nature and learn from it." That's from Patricia Hales.

One from Shelley Hoover. "I'm strongly against the UCP's proposed changes. Yes, you may table my letter in the House if it assists in the fight. Albertans have to have access to outdoor spaces and natural areas."

Rick Sparvier: "Yes, you can table this letter. Be sure to mention we do not support user fees also."

Allan Martin: "Absolutely, table this letter. Anything I can do to save our parks."

"Thank you, Shannon. Please forward my letter," from Darcie Fleming. "I think it's appalling what is taking place. Soon there'll be no places for those to enjoy the Alberta outdoors unless you have a pocket full of money."

That's what I've heard from my constituents, Madam Chair, and from constituents across Alberta.

With my time remaining, I'm going to read from a Baptist faith leader that I heard from recently. He has talked about how he has seen many, many tough effects of the government's treatment of front-line workers, "having a government that would rather fight with them than empower them in their work." But then he goes on to say: "[My members] are finding the place where they can worship or reflect under attack due to the removal of environmental protections of the eastern slopes of the Rocky Mountains."

Madam Chair, this is the type of correspondence that I receive in my office from citizens across the city and across southern Alberta. People do not want to see these kinds of radical user-fee changes introduced into our parks and protected areas system. They do want to see thoughtful investments. They do want to see better investments in things like trails and staging areas for various recreational activities of various kinds. They want to see better wayfinding and so on for various motorized and nonmotorized winter and summer activities. They want to see investment in Kananaskis after the explosion of activity in Kananaskis. They don't want to see, essentially, what this government has done, which has been to either slow down or in many cases cut many of the investments that were planned under the South Saskatchewan regional plan implementation project.

You know, the value of public land – you can see it if you drive west from Chain Lakes on highway 533. On the north you'll see the Kananaskis public land. To the south you'll see the Blades ranch. Mac Blades is the guy suing the government over the coal policy. It is used recreationally; it's grazing area. It's also Kananaskis public land up to the north.

**The Chair:** Hon. member, I hesitate to interrupt, but pursuant to Government Motion 81 I must now call the questions.

[Motion on amendment A2 lost]

[The remaining clauses of Bill 64 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

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

**Hon. Members:** Agreed.

**The Chair:** Any opposed? Carried.

The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

**Mr. Nally:** Madam Chair, I move that the committee rise and report.

[Motion carried]

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

**The Deputy Speaker:** The hon. Member for Athabasca-Barrhead-Westlock.

**Mr. van Dijken:** Madam Speaker, the Committee of the Whole has had under consideration a certain bill. The committee reports the following bill: Bill 64. I wish to table copies of all amendments considered by the Committee of the Whole on this date for the official records of the Assembly.

**The Deputy Speaker:** Does the Assembly concur in the report? All those in favour, please say aye.

**Hon. Members:** Aye.

**The Deputy Speaker:** Any opposed, please say no. So carried.

## Government Bills and Orders

### Third Reading

#### Bill 64

#### Public Lands Amendment Act, 2021

**The Deputy Speaker:** The hon. Government House Leader.

**Mr. Jason Nixon:** Well, thank you, Madam Speaker. It's a pleasure to be here tonight to move third reading of Bill 64, the Public Lands Amendment Act, 2021.

It's been interesting to listen to the debate in this Chamber over the last few days about this important piece of legislation. I do appreciate the support of the House along the way to get it to third reading, and I do hope that it will enjoy the support of the Chamber to pass third reading, hopefully, later tonight because it's urgent that we get this in place in the province. I do want to comment on a few things that I heard from the Official Opposition along the way when it came to the debate.

It was shocking for me today to listen to the Official Opposition environment critic double down on the NDP's position on attacking people who choose to random camp or enjoy ATVs or off-highway vehicles appropriately in this province, doubling down on defending his former government's position of attacking the communities that I represent and their way of life, designing plans when they were in government, that he has admitted in this Chamber that he supported, to shut down their backyard without even talking to them and in no way ever apologizing to this Chamber for the fact that when they did that, they didn't even bother to talk to the four First Nation communities that call that place home. He didn't care about the Big Horn Nation, he didn't care about the O'Chiese, he didn't care about the Sunchild, he didn't care about the Smallboys . . .

**Mr. Dang:** Point of order.

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

#### Point of Order

#### Allegations against a Member

**Mr. Dang:** Thank you, Madam Speaker. Under 23(h), (i), and (j). I think that the Minister of Environment and Parks here is obviously making direct allegations against a member, the environment critic here in the NDP caucus, and I think that the hon. minister should refrain from making such direct allegations and withdraw and apologize.

**The Deputy Speaker:** The hon. Government House Leader.

**Mr. Jason Nixon:** It's a matter of debate, clearly, Madam Speaker. But you know what? If it makes the hon. member, having that pointed out, feel offended, I will apologize for pointing it out like that. Instead, I will point out that his actions and his government's actions clearly showed that they did not care about those First Nation communities.

**The Deputy Speaker:** I would agree that this is probably a matter of debate; however, perhaps a bit off topic from the matter which is at hand, which is actually the moving of third reading. So I will ask the minister to stay on topic and proceed with his remarks.

#### Debate Continued

**Mr. Jason Nixon:** Well, thank you for clarifying that it is a matter of debate. I do appreciate that clarity.

But, Madam Speaker, this actually is very relevant to this piece of legislation because this legislation was brought in and was a campaign platform as a direct reaction to the action of the NDP government of the day and their attack on the communities that choose to random camp and use off-highway vehicles inside the eastern slopes. So we came up with a plan. Again, the reason that I think this is so important is that the NDP have sat inside this Chamber, acting during this debate like they were trying to protect access to the eastern slopes, when the legacy of their government was to shut the access to the eastern slopes. They did it in the Castle, they did it in the Porcupine and the Livingstone, and they tried to do it in Clearwater county, Brazeau county, Ponoka county, and Mountain View county. They failed because this government stopped them, something that we're very, very proud of.

**8:00**

Now, when they did that, we had to come up with a plan, though, because we wanted to recognize that there were certain situations that were taking place west of Rocky Mountain House, for example, west of Sundre, where those communities were going to need help, places that I call home, where a hundred thousand people go camping on a long weekend, those people who the member, in question period, made fun of today, Madam Speaker, in the way that they choose to recreate. Shame on him for that. But we had to come up with a plan to be able to address that.

Now, unlike the NDP, we actually took some time to go talk to people that random camp. Maybe they've been random camping. The NDP think there are reservations for random camping. I don't even think they know what it is. But we spent some time talking to those organizations that represent those groups as well as talking to those groups. We attended the town halls that were associated with the Big Horn plan that the NDP brought forward. Not one NDP MLA went to one of those town halls, but I went to all of them. We had conversations with the community.

We recognized that three things needed to be dealt with in the eastern slopes, a place that I've called home my entire adult life. So these do not surprise me. First was that there needed to be increased enforcement inside that area. I did notice today that the NDP tried to claim on social media that they increased enforcement when they were in government. They did not. They did no such thing. But this government did just recently: 20 new armed conservation officers, 50 new front-line employees that work inside the eastern slopes helping to protect that beautiful area. That's real action. They didn't do that. And we heard – that was clear. That was one thing that needed to happen

The second thing that needed to happen was from the municipalities, all of which – I listed them the other night; I won't have time tonight – were against the NDP's plan. It was a lot of them. Guess what. It was all of them in the area. Not one supported the NDP's plan. That's shocking. I've never seen that. But what those municipalities said is: we actually need help because we co-manage these areas with you.

Rocky Mountain House, the community that I have the privilege of representing, just over 200 years old, a beautiful place inside this province, has almost 100,000 people, Madam Speaker, that camp outside of it on the May long weekend sometimes. It puts a tremendous burden, of course, on the hospital system, on the volunteer search and rescue crews that work out of Rocky – one of the best in the world is the volunteer search and rescue crew out of Rocky Mountain House – a tremendous burden on the municipal fire department and other parts of that jurisdiction. They said: "We need some help on this. We don't want to stop people from recreating in our backyard. We want them to come and enjoy David Thompson country in that case, one of the most beautiful places in



the world, and we want them to continue to enjoy it the way that they have for generations, but we need some help to be able to do that.”

Third, we heard from our partners, the nonprofit organizations, the volunteer organizations that help us maintain quad trips, put in bridges, that work to be able to maintain that landscape. Now, the NDP have made clear the last two years that they don't like our partners. They don't like partnerships. I think they want to unionize the entire parks system. I don't know where they're going with it. They don't respect the nonprofits that help take care of our area. That's their position. I disagree with them. I think that the Friends of Kananaskis, the Friends of Fish Creek, and many others are invaluable to the work that we do. And those organizations said: hey, we need some stability, to know the government can't do what the NDP have been trying to do, which is to take away all the infrastructure we've already built, and, secondly, some revenue source to be able to help maintain these.

So together, after that consultation, we came up with an idea that it would be a \$30 random camping pass and a fee associated with ATVs, with all of the money going back through dedicated revenue to deal with those three things, which is exactly what will take place when this bill is done. That's a sharp contrast from the Official Opposition, who, when they were in government, were just going to ban everybody from our backyard. They were even going to ban us who live there from our own backyard and the place that we enjoy. Shame on them for that. We stopped it.

Now, on dedicated revenue the Official Opposition has spent a lot of time misleading Albertans when it comes to dedicated revenue. The hon. Minister of Finance will verify that we have a dedicated revenue system within this province, and when something is dedicated revenue, same way as camping fees, which have been in place under the NDP government, they have to go back . . .

**Mr. Toews:** Fishing licences.

**Mr. Jason Nixon:** Fishing and hunting licences are a great example. Thank you, hon. member.

That revenue has to go back to be used where it was collected to be able to maintain, in this case, public lands and to do its job. That has to be verified through the budget process, has to be reported on through the budget process, and, ultimately, be subject to audit through the budget process. Now, the NDP tried to make it sound like that's not a process. Well, it's the same process they used, and it's the same process that we use for other environmental situations, fishing licences being an excellent example of where the money goes. That's the plan: bring that forward, move forward. We can save the eastern slopes from the NDP destroying them.

The other thing that we heard today is that this was done in secret. Now, that, of course, is something that you would expect to hear from the NDP, a party who got elected and didn't even bother to tell anybody that they were going to bring in the largest tax increase in the history of the province the moment they arrived there with their job-killing carbon tax. We didn't do that. Right there, clear in our platform, word for word, it says: we will bring in this fee so that we don't have to do what the NDP did, and we'll invest in those three areas that I said that we would invest in.

Further to that, it's in the mandate letter that I got from the Premier of Alberta when I was the minister. It is clearly established that that's what will take place. We've also polled on it. We've also done surveys with users that go out and random camp. I don't think the NDP have ever talked to anybody that random camped, but if they did, they would find out that random campers and ATV users

very much support this as long as it's being invested back inside the area that they care about.

Now, the NDP have tried also to make this about Kananaskis and the provincial parks at Kananaskis. Now, that's disappointing because yet again it shows that the NDP don't read legislation. They think that they're debating about the Provincial Parks Act. The Provincial Parks Act is not on the table here. The Provincial Parks Act already gives the minister the ability to do fees, has for a long time. They did it when they had an environment minister. The government before them did it as well. Camping fees are done underneath the Provincial Parks Act, for example. It already exists. Take some time to read about it. This is about public lands. You probably wouldn't open up by talking about campground reservations and would understand that's not how random camping works if you would take some time to actually read that. That's actually underneath the Provincial Parks Act, which is not before this Chamber.

But because it's been brought up so much, I'm happy to talk about the Kananaskis conservation pass. The Kananaskis conservation pass was brought in for a similar reason, to be able to maintain the most beautiful park that we have in this province, one of the most important areas in the province to be conserved, also the area where the park system has the most services out of any campground, to be able to make sure that it can exist. This is why it's supported by the Lougheed family, who was the lead to get us Kananaskis. It's supported because they know that's the only credible way that we can make sure that it's maintained.

The alternative to doing that, to creating a reasonable fee structure, which is widely supported by Kananaskis users, to put that in, is what the NDP did in that case. In that case what they did was, one, they diverted all the money from the rest of Alberta's camping system and parks system and sent it to pay for Kananaskis. In my constituency and yours, Madam Speaker, as our parks began to deteriorate and didn't have the resources, that's because the NDP chose to divert all those resources into Kananaskis. They couldn't maintain Kananaskis even with that, but they let the rest of the system fall apart.

The second thing they did was that they abandoned those communities. There's a municipal district of Kananaskis. I appoint the municipal district of Kananaskis, Madam Speaker, and they do important work for that MD where people live. Check this out. The Minister of Finance would be interested in this. Fifty per cent of the municipal district of Kananaskis's budget goes to emergency services, of which 99 per cent of the calls are for people that don't live in the municipal district of Kananaskis. Why? Because the NDP abandoned them. Search and rescue inside Kananaskis has more calls than every mountain park in Alberta and B.C. combined.

One million visitors more than Banff go to Kananaskis. And what's Banff got? Anybody know? Well, they have a fee to be able to make sure they have the services. That's correct. I don't see the hon. members across the way outside of Banff picketing against the fee to be able to make sure that that important park can be conserved.

That's what they did; they abandoned that community, abandoned the search and rescue professionals, abandoned the officers, abandoned the Alberta Environment and Parks employees, and let Kananaskis be devastated in some cases. This will change it. This will make sure that people can enjoy it now and for generations, and the proper services will be in place.

[The Speaker in the chair]

I will close with this. You heard it from the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar the other day in this very place, speaking to

this bill. He said that he believes that we should increase taxes on job creators and make them pay for people's camping experience. Shame on him. You know, we already pay. Even with the Kananaskis conservation fee the Alberta taxpayer will pay for 50 per cent of people's camping experience. Fifty per cent. When you go camping, the Alberta taxpayer is already paying for 50 per cent of your experience.

That's good. We have to keep care of lots of conservation issues, animal issues. I get it. But the reality is that Albertans are very comfortable with paying a modest fee to be able to go and do it. Does the hon. member want next that the government bring forward legislation to make it so that you can go to Calaway Park for free? Maybe you should pay for my kids to be able to go to the zoo. It is a ridiculous argument from a party who has no other plan to be able to protect the eastern slopes. Their focus has always been on naming things and cutting ribbons and ignoring the very user groups that use the location.

**8:10**

I actually will close with this. Albertans can rest assured that, one, we will keep our promises when it comes to the eastern slopes. Two, they can be happy that we did not follow the NDP lead, that we kept the promise to stop the NDP from blocking them from their very own backyard. Shame on them for that.

Rocky Mountain House and Sundre and those communities that were abused by the government of the day who lied – who lied – and said that there were criminal investigations into my constituents, that my constituents were so dangerous that they couldn't even come to the town halls. Then the RCMP came out and said that that's not true. There were no investigations, nothing along those lines. That's how much disdain they have for the communities that I represent and the communities that use the eastern slopes.

Today and throughout the debate you've heard it again. They only want certain groups to be able to have access to their backyard. The Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar in question period today: brutal things he said about people that use ATVs, terrible accusations about them destroying the environment and that all ATV users are somehow bad and should not be allowed to be able to access the backcountry . . .

**An Hon. Member:** Apparently they burn campers.

**Mr. Jason Nixon:** Wow. Burn campers: I didn't hear him say that, but that's shocking if somebody would say that.

. . . and that people that random camp – and they said it – have to be taken from the random camping areas that have been used for generations and brought to special government designated areas that are approved by the government, and they can't use any other area that they've accessed. This is how you see problems like that inside the Castle provincial park, the wildland provincial park, where guys can't even get to their elk after they harvest them no more because they shut down all access, and by the time they get back to get the other half of their elk, the grizzly bears have already eaten it. It's because they don't have a clue of what takes place in the eastern slopes.

But the point is that they have a disdain for people. The hundred thousand people camped west of my community this past long weekend: the NDP don't like them. They made it clear. Their main goal and the reason that they object to this legislation is because this legislation paves the way to create sustainable funding for those groups to be able to recreate the way that they like, protect the environment, and to be able to keep it going and make sure that future generations will be able to do the same thing. They don't

want that to happen. They've admitted it over and over in this Chamber. That's why they're against it, against it over and over. Well, people aren't going to have to worry about this no more because this is going to be fixed after tonight, when we pass this legislation, Mr. Speaker. There's going to be a sustainable spot and the NDP's grand secret plan to ban everybody from the eastern slopes will finally come to an end and a promise will be kept.

There's actually one more thing I do want to bring up now that I think about it. It's been unfortunate to watch the NDP misrepresent another serious fact. They've stood in this Chamber over and over throughout this debate – and I want you to think about this, Mr. Speaker, because this is quite shocking. They stood inside this Chamber while debating a bill that is clearly about public lands and clearly about bringing in fees on public lands and then have stood up and talked about a fee inside a provincial park, which is not part of the bill, and then had the nerve to imply, while debating this bill, that random campers, who they don't like, and ATVers, who they don't like and they want banned from the area, don't have to pay a fee.

It's crazy that the Official Opposition, that a member of the Legislature, would have the nerve to stand up while debating the very bill that will bring in a fee for random campers and ATV users and say: they don't have to pay a fee, but the people in Kananaskis are the only ones who have to pay a fee. Well, Mr. Speaker, with our system all areas will pay a modest fee when they go and recreate, and we'll be able to make sure that it's protected.

Mr. Speaker, with that said, I want to just say one other thing because I have a few minutes left. When I announced the Kananaskis conservation pass, there was a garbage truck driving by, and it stopped and watched. He came out, the driver, and watched the press conference. I thought at first it was just because of the noise from the truck, that he was trying to be courteous – he probably was – and he listened to the press conference. The next day I heard from my staff that Mr. Chad Workun had e-mailed to say, "Hey, I want to thank the minister and I want to thank the government for finally taking action" and pointing out where the Official Opposition had failed when they were governing and finally taking action for it.

I will close with what he said.

As a citizen that works out in Kananaskis, Banff, Canmore, all the way up in to Sheep River to Longview, every day all day I see what goes on. I've seen helicopter rescues, [I've seen] emergencies . . . [I've seen] the damage that people do on the land, and it makes me upset. People criticize . . . fees but maybe they might show more respect for the land and realize what this fee actually is going towards.

Mr. Speaker, to Chad and to others who care about Kananaskis, the government is here to actually stand with Kananaskis. We won't do what the former government did and abandon our most beautiful park. We'll make sure that it's here now and here for future generations and that it'll be a sustainable system. For sure, our friends that choose to random camp and enjoy the eastern slopes in another way: we will always stand against the NDP's efforts to shut you out of your own backyard. You have our word on that, Mr. Speaker, and when we pass this legislation tonight, that will pave the way to make sure that that can continue to happen.

**The Speaker:** Hon. members, are there others wishing to join in the debate? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

**Mr. Schmidt:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise and offer a few comments on Bill 64 at third reading. It's extremely exhausting to listen to the speech that the minister of the environment just made because he continues to build straw man arguments, falsely represent the things that we say, create alternate

histories, I guess, of our management of the park system, and at the end of all of that, he then asks Albertans to believe him, to trust him that the eastern slopes are in good hands because he's now in charge.

How will any Albertan who just listened to that 15-minute tirade, with not one shred of truth in it, come away thinking, "Yes, that is a man that I believe will do what he says and has the best interests of me and my family and the eastern slopes at heart"? There isn't one, Mr. Speaker, who actually thinks that the minister of the environment or any of his colleagues in the government caucus have one shred of credibility left when they say that they're intent on preserving our natural legacy, our natural heritage for current and future generations of Albertans. One need only drive down any street in any community in this province and see the lawns decorated with Defend Alberta Parks signs from one end of the street to the other or see lawns decorated with Protect Alberta Water or Say No to Coal. If you can name an environmental issue, this minister has single-handedly upset hundreds of thousands of Albertans. He no longer has the trust of the people of Alberta when he says what they are going to do.

I don't want to spend a whole lot of time dismantling all of the things that were wrong in what he said because I don't have the time given to me by the standing orders to do that, Mr. Speaker, but I do want to address one issue that really stuck out to me where the minister was very, very wrong. He said that the fees that are going to be collected after this bill is implemented are going to dedicated revenue. He looked over at his friend the Minister of Finance and asked him to vouch for him when he said that that was true. I certainly hope to hear the Minister of Finance offer his thoughts on whether or not this bill creates a dedicated revenue fund for the protection of parks and public lands, as the minister said, because the Minister of Finance wouldn't be able to stand up and truthfully say that the minister of environment was right because he was wrong.

This bill does not create a dedicated revenue fund. Don't take my word for it, Mr. Speaker; take the department of the environment's lawyers' words for it. When we were provided a technical briefing on this bill, we had the opportunity to sit down with the department's lawyers and ask some questions about this bill, and we put that question to them specifically. We said, "Is there anything in this bill that creates a dedicated revenue fund like the minister of environment continues to say will happen?" and his lawyer was quite clear, which is uncharacteristic for lawyers. Anybody who is not a lawyer will know that you can ask a lawyer any question, and the answer will be always: it depends. But not in this case. In this case the department's lawyer was quite clear that there is no mechanism in this legislation that creates a dedicated revenue fund for the fees that are going to be collected in parks and public lands. In fact, he went on to say that it was theoretically possible to create such a dedicated revenue fund but that the legal instruments were quite complicated and that the government wasn't interested in pursuing the use of those legal instruments in this case.

8:20

That is one clear example where the minister of the environment has said something that is absolutely provably wrong. I am sure that departmental lawyers in the department of the environment are pulling their hair out when they hear the minister stand up and say these things because those department lawyers know that what the minister said is not true. Again, I'm always open to being shown the error of my ways, and I challenge the Minister of Finance or anybody else on Executive Council to stand up and explain to us how this legislation creates the dedicated revenue fund that the minister said was being created by this legislation.

Mr. Speaker, as I said, that's one of 15 minutes of factual misrepresentations that the minister made in his comments on this bill. Because I don't have time to get into all of them, I would like to propose the following amendment.

**The Speaker:** Please proceed. If you just want to ensure that I get a copy, we'll get the table a copy, and then I'll ask you to proceed, hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Hon. members, this amendment will be referred to as amendment RA1.

The Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar has 12 minutes and 53 seconds remaining.

**Mr. Schmidt:** Sorry, Mr. Speaker. How many minutes do I have?

**The Speaker:** Twelve minutes and 53 seconds.

**Mr. Schmidt:** Twelve minutes and 53 seconds. Well, how fortunate for all members in the Chamber that I have so much time remaining.

**Mr. van Dijken:** You don't have to use it all.

**Mr. Schmidt:** I hate to disappoint the Member for Athabasca-Barrhead-Westlock, but I will use it all.

I move that the motion for third reading of Bill 64, Public Lands Amendment Act, 2021, be amended by deleting all of the words after "that" and substituting the following:

Bill 64, Public Lands Amendment Act, 2021, be not now read a third time because the Assembly is of the view that, if the bill is enacted, the fees proposed to be charged by the government for the use of public land would unfairly burden families who recreationally use those lands.

As I said, Mr. Speaker, there are a whole host of terrible arguments that the minister of the environment and his colleagues in the government caucus are making to support the creation of these fees on public lands. I mentioned already the factual misrepresentations that he made when he said that this money was going to be used as dedicated revenue. It is not. Not only that, the minister also claimed that we apparently have clear line of sight as to where the money is going to go if we just look at the budget, but as I've raised time and again and all of my colleagues have as well, we don't have clear line of sight. It was apparent to me that – well, maybe it wasn't apparent. I don't know. The minister said that he was listening to debate although, given the other things he said, I don't believe that either. I don't believe that he listened to a minute more of debate than he had to.

He said that it was wrong that all of this money wasn't going to be reinvested into protecting parks and public lands, that all we had to do was look at the budget. I've repeatedly raised the issue of the fees being raised by \$18 million but the increases in spending on protecting public lands and parks only being increased by \$10 million. Asking the question as to where the other \$8 million dollars has gone: crickets. The minister didn't address that question at all. He was too busy making bad-faith arguments, mischaracterizing my colleagues here in the NDP opposition, and misrepresenting our record on defending parks and public spaces in the province of Alberta. That is an important question that we have yet to hear an answer for, and that's one of the reasons that we don't think that this bill should now be read a third time.

We also didn't hear a compelling argument about why users should be asked to pay the fee. The minister in his comments talked about the concerns that he's heard from his constituents about the damage that is going on in the landscape because of the increased use and frequency of camping and other recreational activities that

happen on public lands. He alleges that he consulted with a bunch of user groups and municipalities although, given his track record on telling the truth, I don't even believe that to be true. He said that when he conducted those conversations, everybody came up with the idea of having a user fee. What he didn't say and what has never been clearly articulated by the government is the question he asked when he went to talk to them. That's the important thing. The way you phrase a question determines the way that people will answer it. As we've said before, the way the government has been phrasing the question is: should users pay more to use parks and public lands, or should they lose their access to parks and public lands? Of course, when you ask the question that way, people are going to trip over themselves running for their wallets to get the money that they need to pay the fees that the government wants to charge them on public lands.

We saw that with the implementation of cross-country ski fees in Kananaskis Country this past winter. The minister of the environment went down to Kananaskis and said, "Hello. Nice cross-country ski trails you got here. Be a shame if something happened to them. For the low, low price of" – I don't even remember what the fee was – "you can keep your trails." Of course, when he phrased the question that way, cross-country skiers were more than happy to. But when we propose paying for public goods through a progressive taxation system, the government repeatedly attempts to make ridiculous arguments against that. We heard the minister say how damaging that would be for our job creators if CNRL were asked to pay a few extra dollars on the \$1.3 billion that they earned in this first quarter. I believe the minister is sincere in his belief that a company like CNRL shouldn't pay anything. Not only did he lower their taxes; he lets them off the hook when it comes to paying surface leases, lets them walk from their oil and gas liabilities, asks them to pay less for mine financial security, unpaid property taxes all across the province. These guys have a pretty good ride.

8:30

Not so for the poor, beleaguered working Albertan who has just been trying to get by these past 15 months. If they were lucky enough to have a job, they probably saw their wages reduced. If they weren't that lucky, they joined the hundreds of thousands of people that are now unemployed who weren't unemployed before this government got elected.

But the minister stands up and says: well, would you ask CNRL to pay for my kids to go to the zoo? What a ridiculous question, Mr. Speaker. It reminds me of that *Saturday Night Live* skit where Jeff Goldblum was being interviewed by Will Ferrell acting as Harry Caray. Will Ferrell said: Jeff, would you eat the moon if it were made of ribs? That's the level of ridiculousness that that question that the minister posed reaches. Nobody is asking CNRL to pay to visit a private amusement park. Those are not public goods. But parks and public lands are. It's even in the phrase, their name: public lands, things that are available to the public, paid for from the public purse. We think that those with the deepest pockets should contribute more to the public purse.

That's why we think that it's appropriate that the members of this Chamber vote in favour of this amendment, so that we can have that honest conversation with Albertans. I'm happy to walk into any town hall in anybody's constituency and talk to the people there about how CNRL should pay more for the provision of public services and how people in that town hall shouldn't be asked to pay that.

The minister likes to thump his chest and challenge us to go into his constituency of Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre and talk to the people there. If he wants to debate whether or not CNRL

should be asked to pay a little bit more so that the people who live in his constituency don't have to pay money to use a park or public land that was provided to them for free, I would happily. I would even drive with the minister in the same vehicle, if public health restrictions allowed it, to go and have that debate. I'm sure the drive back with him would be a pretty quiet one, and I enjoy the minister most when he's quiet, Mr. Speaker. They know that that's a losing argument, and that's why they don't want to make it.

We also want to talk to Albertans about what the full extent of the fees that this government intends to impose are going to be. The minister made up stories about my opinions on off-highway vehicle users earlier in his comments. What he didn't say is that in his own budget he is promising to implement a fee, but we don't yet know how much that's going to be or who is going to be asked to pay for it or where. We also don't know what other fees the minister has in mind. It's a day-use fee now in Kananaskis. It's a random camping fee now in the eastern slopes. What's it going to be next year? What fees are the government members going to put in their budget in the spring of 2023 that they hope to run an election on? My advice to them is that they should be up front with Albertans and release the full details now. Don't wait. That's why we shouldn't pass this piece of legislation, because we don't know yet what we're buying into. The minister and his colleagues on Executive Council have repeatedly failed to answer that question: what is the full extent of the fees that the people of Alberta are going to have to pay?

Mr. Speaker, in summary, there are a whole host of problems with the concept of charging people user fees to access public lands as well as the structure of the fees that the minister has created. For those reasons, because these problems are so deep and will require so much work to solve, I don't think that it's prudent that we pass this piece of legislation at this time. Give the minister the opportunity to go back, do his homework, and we can consider it then.

I urge all members to vote in favour of this amendment.

**The Speaker:** Hon. members, on amendment RA1, are there others? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

**Ms Sigurdson:** Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to join the debate on RA1, which, of course, is substituting that Bill 64, Public Lands Amendment Act, 2021, be not now read a third time because the Assembly is of the view that if the bill is enacted, the fees proposed to be charged by the government for the use of public land would unfairly burden families who recreationally use those lands.

I'd like to speak very much in favour of this amendment. You know, earlier in debate on this same bill I discussed how odd, really, is the timing of this government. It is a very difficult time in Alberta. Albertans normally are able to travel and have freedom of access to many things, and of course that is not true at all in Alberta currently because we are following the orders of the chief medical officer of health. Certainly, we here in the NDP caucus are. We know that some members of the UCP caucus have not followed those same orders, but the vast majority of Albertans have. Therefore, they are staying home. They're staying home in Alberta, and we want to encourage that. We want to make sure that Albertans have access to our public lands, so it's kind of – I don't know – just sort of mind-boggling to me, Mr. Speaker, that this would be the time when we are going to impose a fee on users of public lands when, actually, you're sort of kicking someone when they're down. It's a pretty tough time for Albertans.

I have a quote here from the Minister of Environment and Parks that he shared in estimates earlier this year. He says, "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." So it's really a free-for-all. Like, we're going to do, you know, whatever the minister decides, and he's made it very clear in formal estimates. This is a quote from his remarks, and it's captured by *Hansard*.

So just very cavalierly, when Albertans are, you know, experiencing record-high job losses, all sorts of chaos in their lives because of closures of businesses, school closures, all these things, the Minister of Environment and Parks thinks it's the time to impose user fees on Alberta families. That's why I'm speaking in favour of this amendment, because I think that it's not the time to be doing that. It's really – it makes no sense, no sense at all. It's not fair to Albertans. It's not fair to Alberta families. Certainly, we know that so many Albertans are suffering.

**8:40**

For example, we know that our long-term unemployment rate – so it's not like people have money in spades right now. Many have lost their jobs, and the long-term unemployment rate, which is when you've been out of work for more than a year, is at record-high levels. It's the highest in the country, at 3 per cent, and the chief economist at the Business Council of Alberta says that this is a huge red flag, says that this is astronomically high, the largest in the country, not just because of the pandemic but also uncertainty in the energy sector, which really this UCP government hasn't done anything to really make any better while they've been in office here despite their protestations throughout the campaign to get themselves elected. There's been no magic. They haven't been able to create jobs. In fact, they've lost jobs. One of the first things they did was that 50,000 jobs, even before the pandemic, were lost.

These are Albertans who have lost their jobs because of factors that are far beyond their own abilities to control. We can't individually control a pandemic. We can't individually control what's happened in the oil and gas sector. So, of course, it's incumbent on governments to do their best to take care of their citizens and make sure that they are protected and that they are supported. Sadly, this government doesn't understand that. You know, let's just kick someone when they're down. Let's just impose these fees and, hey, we're not even going to put a limit on what those fees are. Very cavalierly, the minister himself says: it depends; I might just want to put more fees when I so choose.

Just to echo some of the comments that the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar made previous to me, you know, sitting in this Chamber, it is disturbing to hear a lot of the rhetoric from that member and how he likes to tell us what we think, what we do. That has nothing to do based in reality and is full of untruths. It's insulting. I mean, he should be embarrassed, really. It's quite disturbing. When he was talking, it reminded me of another bombastic expression that the UCP used when we were in government. One of them was that we were actually going to outlaw 4-H. This was just ridiculous, but they happily, that member in particular, went around to communities and said: oh, yeah, the NDP is going to cancel 4-H. It was ridiculous. We had no intention of doing that. It's very – I don't know – far away from the truth from which he speaks, and it's disturbing. It's disrespectful of this Assembly, and I take umbrage with it. I think it's not okay that members speak that way.

Certainly, he doesn't have any idea about my personal recreational interests. You know, I grew up in rural Alberta in the north. I mean, I certainly have spent time random camping many times on public lands. He knows nothing of that, he doesn't choose to know it, and he likes to characterize me and all members of the NDP opposition as something that we're not. I just would like to have that on record here today because it's insulting and untrue.

It's beyond the affront to myself personally, really, the affront to Albertans that this minister is putting forward by, as I said, having

these unlimited fees. Who knows what exactly he's going to propose or implement at a time when Albertans are already in a pretty tough spot, as I talked about before? You know, the long-term unemployment rate is the highest it's ever been since, actually, stats started to be kept on that back in 1982. We know that in Edmonton in April our unemployment was 10.5 per cent and Calgary's was 9.3 per cent, and Alberta has the highest unemployment in the country, superseded only by Newfoundland and Labrador. So we're hurting here in this province, and imposing user fees that seem to be without limit is not a good decision.

There are good decisions that could be made by this government, but unfortunately, because of some previous bad decisions like the \$4.7 billion corporate handout, billions lost on the pipeline that President Biden said that he would quash, those kinds of decisions, just throwing money away that we knew would not be supporting Albertans – I mean, it was very clear. President Biden in his campaign to be President talked very explicitly about quashing the pipeline, the KXL. Regardless, it was just, you know, irrational thinking, really, on the part of the Premier to still invest in that pipeline, billions of dollars. We don't really know how much. We're told \$1.3 billion, but there are also loan guarantees of approximately \$6 billion, so what's it really going to be about?

We know that during the pandemic some Albertans have been hurt more profoundly, I suppose, than others, and we know that more women, for example, have lost jobs because of that. You know, I know that for myself as a single mom, certainly when I was younger, camping was one of the things that I could do with my kids, certainly not with an RV – I could never afford that – but I could go in a tent, and we could have lots of fun. I think that a lot of people who are on very tight budgets are really going to be negatively impacted by this.

We know that, you know, the minister says that it's not very much, that it's going for a good cause, all this stuff. We know from previous research in other jurisdictions in North America that when fees are imposed, people don't go. So they don't have that opportunity to get connected to nature, which we know is extremely healthy for all of us. It's therapeutic; it's nourishing to be in the mountains, in forests. It's wonderful for everyone, for our children, just to really take pleasure in our surroundings. Putting a fee on that does deter people from doing that.

The Alberta Wilderness Association spoke about their concerns about these fees. Despite the minister's assertion that additional staff will be hired, Ian Urquhart, the Alberta Wilderness Association director, believes that this is a "cash grab that will deter Albertans from visiting Kananaskis and shift the visitation pressure to provincial parks outside of [Kananaskis Country] that don't charge a ... fee." So it could put a burden also on a specific area of the province. He refers to Washington state, where they put in a fee. It was just a \$10 fee, so it wasn't that much, but after the fee was introduced state-wide, visitation fell by 7 million visits per year from prepass levels. People do, you know, take pause and are concerned about going out, certainly people who are on low income, who could really probably benefit the best from our beautiful public lands. The director goes on to say that "the evidence suggests that vehicle fees deter people from visiting parks. And by not applying this bad idea to all provincial parks, the Kananaskis fee will likely shift visitation pressures to other parks in the region." I mean, certainly this is someone who is an authority on the parks in Alberta, and certainly he is not supportive of the fees.

You know, I really ask the members of the government caucus to look at this amendment and really give it some thought about: how can we really help Albertans in this time, in this very difficult time here in our province, when so many have lost jobs, when people are having much less disposable income, and we know certain groups

are more disadvantaged than others like women and oftentimes single moms?

8:50

We should be encouraging this travel within our province, and that is one of the things that we proposed as the Official Opposition. We proposed a travel pass, and this is something the government should really think about. We encourage Albertans to travel within the province. It would be a one-time rebate of 20 per cent off travel costs up to \$1,000, and it could be put towards accommodation, food, drinks, museums, recreation. You know, certainly, it would be the ultimate stay-cation, and it would encourage people, instead of having these fees imposed by this bill that deter people from wanting to go out to these areas.

Before COVID we know that Albertans spent \$7 billion outside of Alberta on their vacations. What if we could have helped them spend that right here in the province, help all those small businesses that really need the support after, you know, 15 months, more really, of this COVID shutdown and all the challenges? Their businesses haven't been able to thrive due to very important health restrictions so that we all can be safe and healthy and that we stop the spread of COVID-19. There's been a cost, of course, but if the government could be visionary and think about ways of bringing money back into Alberta and supporting small business . . .

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

**Member Irwin:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. There were a lot of really powerful comments in my colleague from Edmonton-Riverview's remarks, and one of the things that really struck me was just her example of, you know, for her as a younger single mother years ago camping was one of the few activities that was accessible to her and to her family. We've heard it multiple times, at least on our side of the Legislature; we've yet to hear from too many government members on this at all, which is unfortunate because we've asked a lot of really important questions. My colleague from Edmonton-Gold Bar has raised a number of really pertinent points, and to date all we've really heard is a bit of a rant from the environment minister.

I mean, I would love to hear from some other government members who might be able to talk about some of the points we've raised, including the point made by my colleague that, you know, this is an example of this government continually making life harder for Albertans, for the very people we are sent here to serve. You know, they might say that these are minor fees – right? – and that they're not a burden on Albertans. Well, that's easy for politicians with a lot of privilege to say. Talk to that single parent. My colleague has been there. I know others in our caucus have been there, too, struggling to make ends meet, and to take away something that's just so important to so many Albertans and sort of levels the playing field is quite disheartening.

I think it's also important to just mention here that we're hopefully coming out of a global pandemic here, and, you know, being outdoors has been something that's been so, so helpful to a lot of Albertans. Listen, I can tell you personally that mental health wise had I not had walks outdoors throughout the last year, that's been my – listen, full disclosure here. I haven't had much of a social life – not going to lie – but the one aspect of a social life that I have had is getting outdoors with a friend for a walk. I'm not going out of town because I've obviously been avoiding nonessential travel, but strolling over to Dawson park in my riding and petting all the good dogs, right?

Again, bringing this back to the bill, it's about being outdoors and it's about experiencing that and it's about something that's free and accessible, right? Again, Dawson park doesn't apply when we're talking about Bill 64, but for me it's been a lifesaver. It's been the one thing that I can do easily. I can access it with no cost, and a whole lot of other families I've seen in parks throughout – well, mostly I try to stay within Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood when I go to parks – a lot of families. It's similar for camping and for random camping and for folks accessing our provincial parks.

I thank my colleague from Edmonton-Riverview for bringing up that point. I also know that my colleague from St. Albert had mentioned just the accessibility piece as well, from another perspective. I mean, we can tie this back to the Premier's comments when it came to the deindexing of AISH. What did he say? What did he say in this House? "It's not that onerous," right? It's not that onerous. Try living on – what is it? – \$1,588. [interjection] Yeah. Just under \$1,600 a month. Try living on that. My colleague from St. Albert did, and she admits full well that it was next to impossible, and she very much clarified at the beginning of that exercise that she has a whole heck of a lot of privilege and she has a whole heck of a lot of supports in place that many people on AISH don't, right?

I just see it as a pattern from this government, a continued pattern of adding burdens to Albertans unnecessarily and denying them the opportunities that they deserve. Thank you.

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

Is there anyone wishing to join the debate on amendment RA1? Seeing none, I am prepared to call the question.

[The voice vote indicated that the motion on amendment RA1 lost]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 8:57 p.m.]

[Fifteen minutes having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

[The Speaker in the chair]

For the motion:

Dang	Pancholi	Schmidt
Irwin	Phillips	Sigurdson, L.
Nielsen	Renaud	

Against the motion:

Aheer	Nally	Singh
Allard	Neudorf	Smith
Amery	Nicolaides	Stephan
Copping	Nixon, Jason	Toews
Dreeshen	Nixon, Jeremy	Toor
Fir	Panda	Turton
Hanson	Rehn	van Dijken
Horner	Savage	Walker
Issik	Schow	Williams
Jones	Schulz	Yao
Long	Sigurdson, R.J.	Yaseen
Lovely		

Totals:	For – 8	Against – 34
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[Motion on amendment RA1 lost]

**The Speaker:** The hon. the Associate Minister of Natural Gas and Electricity.

**Mr. Nally:** Mr. Speaker, I move to adjourn debate.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

**Government Motions**

**Time Allocation on Bill 64**

82. Mr. Nally on behalf of 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 third reading, at which time every question necessary for the disposal of the bill at this stage shall be put forthwith.

**The Speaker:** Hon. members, pursuant to Standing Order 21(1) the Official Opposition may have up to five minutes to debate Government Motion 82. Is there anyone wishing to use that time? The hon. Member for Edmonton-South.

**Mr. Dang:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I think that this motion, Government Motion 82, is one of the least democratic things we have seen in this Chamber. It is very clear that this government, instead of coming in here and doing the work that was required, instead of coming in here and debating the bills of importance, ran away and took a three-week COVID vacation. Only a year ago this Premier actually said and applauded how during the world wars the House of Commons in the United Kingdom continued to sit. Yet here we are today because this government refused to come here and do their jobs, refused to come here and sit in this place and debate urgent and pressing legislation like paid sick leave, that would have protected Albertans, ran away and hid across this province.

Now today this government has decided that this bill, Bill 64, something which makes access to our backyard for every single Albertan, access to every single Albertan’s public lands harder, more difficult, and less equitable – it is now deciding to ram through this legislation and allowing only a single hour to remain in debate in third reading here, Mr. Speaker. It is simply shocking, the hypocrisy and antidemocratic nature of the pattern that this government is taking forward.

9:20

Mr. Speaker, it’s very clear to me, very clear to Albertans and members of this place that this measure was simply unnecessary. If this government had decided to show up, if this government had decided to do what was necessary, if this government had done what every single essential worker across this province did for the last three weeks, which was show up to work, then we wouldn’t be in this situation. Instead, we’d be able to give Bill 64 the debate it deserves. Instead, we’d be able to give Bill 64 the proper engagement that it deserves and discuss issues like why equity of access to our public lands is so important, discuss issues like why the funds that are being raised through this do not adequately cover off the funds that are being cut to public parks, right?

When we’re talking about these issues, there is so much in detail that we haven’t been able to discuss. There is so much in terms of impacts on Albertans that we haven’t been able to discuss. There is so much that we haven’t seen in terms of: why does this government continue to make it less affordable and harder for Albertans to access the public lands that they have the right to access and instead decide to sell off lands to coal companies, instead decide to try and delist and deregulate Alberta parks? Why does this government continue to take these measures?

Mr. Speaker, these are all things that we could have had the proper time to debate. These are all things that we could have had the proper opportunity to debate in this place. We had three weeks of this government deciding to hide and run away from accountability and

instead focus a full day on their internal leadership troubles instead of focusing on the issues that mattered to Albertans such as “Why don’t we have paid sick leave?” and such as “Why in this bill is it becoming more and more difficult for Albertans to access our public lands in the middle of a pandemic, when being indoors is one of the most dangerous things you can do?”

It is absolutely shocking to me that in just a few short hours after we came back to this place, this government was able to introduce a virtual mobile voting measure, and they were able to introduce a bunch of different measures in terms of these time allocation measures to shut down debate and shut down democracy in this place, Mr. Speaker, but for three weeks this government was able to ignore Albertans’ cries, was able to ignore the need to work, was able to ignore all the requirements in terms of accountability to Albertans.

Mr. Speaker, it simply is hypocritical. It simply does not make sense. It shows again and again that this government is not committed to Albertans. Instead, they were worried about looking inside their own caucus. Instead, they were worried about fending off a leadership race. Instead, they’re worried about fending off challenges to the Premier’s seat instead of focusing on the issues that matter and spending the three weeks we could have been working on this bill and working on this legislation – not needing to bring in these draconian measures where we have now shut down democracy in this Chamber.

It is simply shocking that this government, again, would bring us back, decide to immediately shut down debate, and not allow us to have the fulsome discussion when they were spending three weeks having full-day caucus meetings talking about their own leadership. It really shows you their priorities. It really shows you who this government is fighting for. Mr. Speaker, let me assure you that Albertans are able to tell that this government is not on their side. This government does not have their back, and this government is not focused on what is in their best interests during this global pandemic.

Thank you.

[The voice vote indicated that Government Motion 82 carried]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 9:23 p.m.]

[Fifteen minutes having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

[The Speaker in the chair]

For the motion:

Aheer	Lovely	Singh
Allard	Nally	Smith
Amery	Neudorf	Stephan
Dreeshen	Nicolaides	Toews
Fir	Nixon, Jeremy	Toor
Gotfried	Panda	Turton
Hanson	Rehn	van Dijken
Horner	Savage	Walker
Issik	Schow	Williams
Jones	Schulz	Yao
Long	Sigurdson, R.J.	Yaseen

9:40

Against the motion:

Dang	Pancholi	Schmidt
Nielsen	Renaud	Sigurdson, L.

Totals: For – 33 Against – 6

[Government Motion 82 carried]

## Government Bills and Orders

### Third Reading

#### Bill 64

#### Public Lands Amendment Act, 2021

(continued)

**The Speaker:** Hon. members, are there any others wishing to join in the debate? The hon. Member for Edmonton-South.

**Mr. Dang:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's profoundly disappointing that this government has decided to use time allocation and invoke this measure that ends debate, effectively, and does not allow Albertans to have the fulsome discussion required for this bill. We know that this bill is extraordinarily inequitable. We know that it's something that is extraordinarily unfair. We know that one of the biggest concerns raised by stakeholders and Albertans is that the delivery of this bill and the implementation of this bill have been lacklustre, and perhaps calling it lacklustre is being generous to this government.

Mr. Speaker, we know that, for example, low-income Albertans who rushed to book campsites in K Country, in Kananaskis, during this pandemic, because, obviously, nobody is able to travel outside of the province or outside of the country if you are following the rules – we know that in those cases those low-income Albertans booked not knowing that this government would be slapping an additional fee on their reservations, that this government would be actually taking more money out of their pockets. They made those reservations in good faith. It's profoundly disappointing that this Minister of Finance, this government have decided that they need to take more money out of the pockets of Albertans and give them less, that they need to charge Albertans more and give them less.

Mr. Speaker, the government has said time and time again: oh, we're going to be redirecting these funds into conservation; we're going to be redirecting these funds into sustainability. But what this government is really doing is that they're covering off the cost of their massive corporate giveaways and charging Albertans more to use their own backyard.

Mr. Speaker, with that, I think it's very important that we don't move forward with this bill. I think it's very important that we have the opportunity to discuss this properly, and I'd like to move an amendment to that effect.

**The Speaker:** If you just pass that through the page, as soon as I have my copy and the table has theirs, I'll ask you to proceed.

Hon. members, this will be referred to as amendment HA1.

The Member for Edmonton-South has 12 minutes and 57 seconds remaining.

**Mr. Dang:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Should I read this in?

**The Speaker:** Yes.

**Mr. Dang:** Sure. I would move that the motion for third reading of Bill 64, Public Lands Amendment Act, 2021, be amended by deleting all of the words after "that" and substituting the following: "Bill 64, Public Lands Amendment Act, 2021, be not now read a third time but that it be read a third time this day six months hence."

Mr. Speaker, as I was already saying, it is profoundly disappointing that this government has decided to take more money away from Albertans, to go in and pick their pockets and use sneaky day-use fees and sneaky vehicle access fees and sneaky backcountry camping fees and provide them fewer services. It's something that they did in bad faith, right? We know that Albertans went out and made reservations before these changes were brought

in. We know that Albertans went out and made reservations and paid up front, in some cases with nonrefundable fees, for campsites in K Country without knowing that this conservation pass was going to be charged on them, without knowing that this \$90 fee was going to be charged on them. It doesn't make any sense that this government, knowing full well they were going to be bringing this legislation forward, knowing full well they were wanting to charge Albertans, were not up front with Albertans, were not up front with the people who were trying to make reservations.

I think it makes total sense that instead of implementing this now, instead of bringing in these draconian measures now, instead of bringing in this really inequitable fee right now, what we should do is that we should wait six months and re-evaluate this then. As we know, Mr. Speaker, we're in the middle of a global pandemic. Alberta has been hit particularly hard. We have some of the worst case rates in all of North America during the COVID-19 pandemic, particularly in this third wave, and Albertans have been trying desperately to get outdoors, to experience more of our province, and travel where they can legally within this province.

And unlike some Albertans who have chosen to break the rules, the ones who are staying here and acting in good faith are now being punished by this government. The people who are acting in good faith and saying, "We're going to book a campground in K Country" are now being punished by this government. They are being brought an additional fee without having been consulted properly, without having proper engagement, without understanding that there was going to be a sudden fee added on with no notice. Mr. Speaker, it becomes very clear that this government either did not consider these impacts or did not care about these impacts or simply were not interested in protecting those vulnerable Albertans who had these implications. It really is disappointing. It really is, I think, a problem that this government needs to fix.

It's a problem that we in this Chamber have an opportunity to fix right here, by simply bringing in this amendment, by simply saying that we're going to read this bill six months hence. Six months. Then we would have the opportunity – and, again, this government has the opportunity to at least debate these issues, right? The government has the opportunity to at least talk about these issues and say why they chose to pick on vulnerable Albertans, say why they chose people who acted in good faith and made reservations. But instead of doing that, the government decided they were going to shut down debate. The government decided they were going to limit the amount of debate and ram through this bill without any concern for those who are most adversely impacted. It simply is one of the most disappointing things we've seen, and I think it's very insensitive. I think it's callous. I think it's something that simply does not make sense when we're looking at trying to encourage Albertans to go outside, stay safe, and enjoy their summer, Mr. Speaker. I think it's something that this government needs to do a better job on, right?

9:50

We see time and time again this government, instead of being focused on what's in the best interests of Albertans, instead of being focused on what Albertans actually need to be able to get through this pandemic, including accessing our great outdoors – Mr. Speaker, we see this government time and time again taking a three-week COVID holiday, spending an entire day focusing on the leadership of their Premier, focusing on whether there's going to be a leadership challenge to the Premier, whether this caucus was in full rebellion instead of focusing on issues like why we couldn't spend three weeks properly fleshing out the details in this bill, why we couldn't spend three weeks properly having amendments for this bill.



Now we come back, and one of the first things the government does is that they bring in closure, they bring in time allocation, they stop the debate on this bill, and they stop the opportunity for us to continue bringing in debate on this bill. Mr. Speaker, it's something that I think is tone deaf, right? I think it's tone deaf because we see time and time again that Albertans throughout the last summer in particular and this summer again – we're seeing again that people are trying to get outside.

Just last weekend, over the long weekend, Mr. Speaker, I myself went random camping in the Willmore wilderness park, just by Grande Cache, north of Jasper here. I didn't have to pay a fee. But if I go, I suppose, in a week, after this legislation is passed, which I presume that the government is now going to ram through tonight using their un- and antidemocratic means of shutting down debate – next week will of course be June 1 – I will have to pay a \$30 fee to camp in Willmore wilderness park.

Mr. Speaker, the people that I saw when I went on my hike, the people that were out there were people that were trying to stay safe and trying to find something to do on a long weekend where they might have in the past gone to a patio with their friends, might have in the past gone and seen their family. They can't right now. We know that's the reality. They chose to do something responsible, they chose to do something safe, and they chose to do something that was good for their physical activity, that was a good, healthy physical activity.

Instead of rewarding that, this government in bad faith is trying to punish these same Albertans. This government in bad faith is trying to punish these people who are simply trying to enjoy the public lands that every Albertan has the right to enjoy, the public lands that every single Albertan owns. Mr. Speaker, it's profoundly disappointing that we see these fees brought in in bad faith. It's profoundly disappointing that we see the system brought in that punishes those Albertans who acted in good faith, punishes Albertans who may be in the most vulnerable situations, and really does not take any of those concerns into consideration.

Mr. Speaker, it really does show again and again what the priorities of this government are. The priorities of this government are not ensuring – not ensuring – that Albertans have safe and healthy recreation activities and recreational opportunities during this pandemic. The priorities of this government do not appear to be ensuring that we have parks that are accessible for Albertans, do not appear to be for Calgarians to be able to enjoy the outdoors. Instead, it seems that the priority of this government is on themselves, is on their leadership, is on their Premier and whether the Premier should remain their Premier.

That's the most disappointing thing. When we could have been spending the three weeks talking about and bringing amendments in, this government ran and hid. This Premier hid from the public, hid from accountability. Instead of coming in and doing the work that Albertans expect us to do, doing the work that Albertans expected essential workers and front-line workers to do every single day, they hid and held full-day caucus meetings about whether this Premier should retain his leadership. That's the priority of this government.

It really does not make any sense. Again, it seems like in a situation where we have one of the largest economic recessions in Alberta's history, where we have one of the highest unemployment rates in Alberta's history, where the Finance minister has received, I think, five or maybe even six credit downgrades at this point, instead of focusing on things that make accessing the outdoors more affordable and allow Albertans to have recreation in their backyards, this government is trying to make it more expensive. This government is trying to go into Albertans' pockets and pick their pockets, and this government is trying to go in and make life

harder for those Albertans who are just trying to get by and just trying to use the recreation activities that have been used by generations of Albertans – right? – for decades and decades and decades.

Mr. Speaker, we see time and time again that it just doesn't make any sense. It just doesn't make any sense. You can see – if you walk down any street in Edmonton and Calgary, I'm sure in many areas of rural Alberta as well, you're going to see signs. You're going to see lawn signs. This is something that should be obvious, because we're all here and not out campaigning right now, but there is no election, so it is very unusual that outside of an election cycle people would be taking lawn signs to protest what this government is bringing forward, that people would actually be willing to put signs on their lawns or proactively request signs on their lawns to protest some of these changes the government is bringing in.

But instead of listening and heeding that warning, heeding that advice from Albertans, listening to the people on the ground, listening to the people who elect us and send us to this place in a democratic fashion, Mr. Speaker, instead of doing any of that, this government has said that they're going to come in, they're going to shut down debate, they're going to ram through this legislation, they're going to make life harder, make life more expensive, make it more difficult to access the public lands, make it more difficult to access Alberta parks, make it more difficult for Calgarians to go out and enjoy the outdoors, and indeed they're going to charge them more and give Albertans less.

It simply does not make any sense. It simply is a pattern of behaviour from this Premier, from this government, from this Finance minister to charge more and give less. Mr. Speaker, news flash: I think the reality is, it turns out, that the majority of Albertans are not the deep pockets and friends and donors of this government, and that's why this government does not appear to be looking out for them. This government is not fighting on their behalf. This government is not ensuring that they are protected. This government is not standing up for their right to go outside.

Mr. Speaker, at a time when household budgets are already being hammered, at a time when household budgets are already strained, at a time when this government has let utility fees skyrocket, insurance skyrocket, and so much more, now this government needs to come in and add another fee right at the beginning of our second pandemic summer, right as Albertans have gone out and already made reservations in Kananaskis Country, in K Country, right as Albertans have already gone and made reservations in good faith. The bad-faith policy of this government, the bad-faith implementation of this government does not make sense, and I think the majority of Albertans understand that it doesn't make sense.

Instead of being reasonable, instead of taking a step back and listening to Albertans, this government has decided they need to shut down debate. This government has decided they need to ram through this legislation, that they need to be very antidemocratic about this policy. It is profoundly disappointing that we continue to see these draconian measures brought in by this government. It's profoundly disappointing that instead of working on behalf of Albertans, instead of coming here and getting these changes right, getting this legislation right, this government decided to take a three-week vacation, spend a full day debating whether the Premier should continue to be the Premier, whether their internal leadership struggles should be resolved or not, and instead of focusing on the issues that matter, this government looked inside.

Mr. Speaker, I encourage them to look outside. I encourage them to walk down the streets of any metropolitan area and, I'm sure, in rural areas as well. I encourage this government to actually get outdoors, talk to Albertans, understand the impacts that they're having, understand that they're negatively impacting families,

understand that they're taking Albertans' recreation opportunities away and making life harder every single day for families across this entire province.

I think that this amendment, that we not read it now but six months hence, is something that is going to be essential as we move forward. Thank you.

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

Seeing none, is there anyone else wishing to speak to the amendment? On amendment HA1, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

**Mr. Schmidt:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to offer a few comments on the amendment that is before the House for consideration, but before I do, I want to thank my friend from Edmonton-South for bringing forward this amendment and for his thoughtful comments in support of the amendment.

**10:00**

I just want to say that I can't think of a member better suited to debating legislation under time allocation than my friend from Edmonton-South. There is no other member, I think, save for perhaps my friend from Edmonton-Whitemud, who can make as many points as necessary on any piece of legislation given any time constraint, and I thank my friend for his ability to do that. Not that I hope the government takes me up on my suggestion, but I would bet money that if the government caucus brought in closure saying that the time remaining on debate at third reading was only three and a half minutes, my friend from Edmonton-South could probably make the same number of points as he did in his 15-minute speech. He is that skilled a speaker. But I know, Mr. Speaker, that at some point I'm going to ramble on too much and you're going to bring me back to the amendment, so I'll just pre-empt that now and make some comments related to the amendment.

As my friend from Edmonton-South said, by passing this amendment, we would give the government an opportunity to reconsider its position on the imposition of fees on the use of public lands and perhaps come back to the Chamber in six months' time with a better thought out plan. Poorly thought out plans are no new thing for this government or this minister in particular, Mr. Speaker. We only need to think back to late February 2020, when the minister released his poorly thought out optimizing Alberta parks plan, that set off a firestorm of opposition all across the province from traditionally Conservative supporters, I would imagine, people concerned with the minister's plan to sell off or close down hundreds of parks in Alberta. Given enough time and sustained political opposition to his plan, the minister sort of backed away from that the day before he and all of his colleagues took off for tropical holidays for Christmas. Wisely, we haven't heard anything since.

Now, I am certain, as my colleagues here in the Official Opposition are, that there is more yet to be said on the matter of privatizing and closing down Alberta's parks. In fact, in discussion of the minister's budget estimates on March 15 I asked the minister to provide us a list of the supposed partners that his department has found to operate all of the parks that he was going to sell off or close down. It's now 10 weeks later, and I'm still waiting for the list, Mr. Speaker. I suspect that I'll probably be waiting quite a bit longer. I will say here that no such list exists, that the minister was making it up, and I challenge him to prove me wrong. I look forward to receiving that letter outlining who has taken over the partnerships of all of the parks that were on the optimizing Alberta parks list as

soon as possible. The minister knows where to get in touch with me. In fact, I sent him a letter. It has my return address on it. He just needs to read it, copy down what I put at the top of the page. It's just that easy.

But that's not the only ill-thought-out plan that the government has oh so reluctantly backed away from. On the Friday before the May long weekend last year the Minister of Energy quietly announced that she was rescinding the 1976 Lougheed coal policy, which at the time didn't generate as much controversy because people who pay attention to these things were more focused on the minister of environment's plan to close down and sell off hundreds of parks.

But once the minister tried to back away from that plan in December, then all of the eyes of the people who are concerned about what's going on with Alberta's environment turned to this issue of coal mining in the eastern slopes, and that quickly set off another firestorm of opposition and controversy in, again, traditionally supportive communities, communities that are supportive of this government. It took sustained opposition again for the government to back away from that plan.

In January the minister made a tepid attempt to pacify the people who were upset by cancelling leases that were granted in the month of December, but that wasn't good enough for people who were upset about this plan. Then in early February my colleagues and I convened a meeting of the Public Accounts Committee to invite the Department of Energy and Alberta Energy Regulator officials to come and present to us about what's going on with coal mining in the eastern slopes. Now, the backbenchers of the government caucus dutifully did their job and shut down the meeting before it was even started. The minister – good Lord, if he's ever minister, Mr. Speaker, this province would be in a sorry state of affairs. The Member for Livingstone-Macleod moved to adjourn the meeting as the very first item on the agenda of that meeting. Well, my colleagues and I were quite successful at embarrassing the government for that little stunt, and to his credit I think the member himself was embarrassed, because shortly after that he mysteriously left the committee along with most of the other members who voted in favour of adjourning the meeting before it even got started.

That was the second step back. Then a few weeks later the minister announces this sham of a consultation on coal mining that's currently being conducted. People saw through that quite quickly because the minister says that they can talk about coal mining, but they can't talk about land-use planning or water allocations or impacts on environmental quality, you know, the things that people are actually concerned about when they are concerned about coal mining. I'm convinced that with the sustained political pressure that this province is putting against the minister's plan to strip-mine the eastern slopes for coal, eventually the government will back away from that plan and pretend that they never had that plan at all in the first place. They'll probably accuse us of just fearmongering, spreading fear and smear, as they like to do, rewriting history, I suppose, that this was just a fiction that we created.

My point is this, that the minister and this government have repeatedly demonstrated that they bring out plans before they're fully formed, and then they face opposition, and then they back away from it somewhat. Well, we're giving them an opportunity to back away from this poorly thought out plan to impose fees on public land and come at it again in six months, when they've had more time to consider what should be done, if anything, with respect to fees.

**10:10**

Now, there are a couple of important things that I would like to see included in the discussion around how we can better protect and

enhance access to public lands in this province, and the first is education. Now, when this issue of fees was first brought up, I heard time and again from people who had concerns about the fees that were being imposed, that there wasn't going to be enough done to educate people who were going into Kananaskis or other areas of public land. There wasn't going to be enough done to educate them on how to behave properly in the wilderness: how to avoid negative interactions with wildlife, how to limit their impact on the landscape, things like how to properly go to the bathroom when there isn't a toilet available.

I think that it would be a good idea for all members of this Chamber to vote in favour of this amendment and in six months' time come back to us and say: "You know what? We realize that we need to do a better job of educating people before they go out into the wilderness so that they don't have a significant impact and a negative impact on the land while they're out there. This is the plan that we have to educate people before they go out there and create these problems in the first place." Maybe they'll find that by investing in education up front, they won't need to charge the fee that they claim they need to, that perhaps the amount of damage that would be caused would be severely lessened, and we wouldn't need to charge people \$90 a year to wander around and enjoy the fresh air in Kananaskis Country.

The other issue that I think the government needs to take the time to consider is access for people who face barriers to using our public lands. My friend from Edmonton-St. Albert – I've just merged the two municipalities. You're welcome, Edmonton and St. Albert. My friend from St. Albert has talked at length and will probably talk again tonight if she's given the opportunity about improving access to public lands for people with disabilities and people who are on income support.

One other community that I know my friend from St. Albert is concerned about, as am I, is the francophone community, not just in Alberta but francophone Canadians from all across the country. I've heard time and again from francophone Canadians in my riding their concerns about the lack of access to information in French in Alberta's parks and public lands. If you go to a park, you would be hard pressed to find any signs, any maps, any kind of information whatsoever available in French. Now, I was proud when we were in government to be the first government in Alberta history to implement a French policy. Alberta has one of the largest and the fastest growing francophone population of any province in the country. It only makes sense that people who use that as their language for daily living have access to government services in that language. This government continues to fail to provide francophone Albertans with access to that information.

More importantly than that, we are closing ourselves off to the opportunity that presents itself with inviting tourists who speak French as a first language from Quebec, New Brunswick, Franco-Ontarians, much of sub-Saharan Africa, and even the nation of France. That's hundreds of millions of people who could potentially be spending their time and money in Alberta's beautiful provincial parks but who might choose not to because they can't access the information and services that they need to fully enjoy their time there in the language of their choice.

I would like the government to consider that as well, and that's why I think we should vote in favour of this amendment. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**The Speaker:** Hon. members, Standing Order 29(2)(a). Under 29(2)(a) the hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

**Member Irwin:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's an honour again to rise under 29(2)(a) to speak a little bit more to Bill 64, and I just

have a couple of comments on my fantastic colleague from Edmonton-Gold Bar's remarks. You know, just as I noted earlier, my fantastic colleague from Edmonton-Riverview had touched on the accessibility piece, and so, too, had our colleague from St. Albert and, I think, actually, a number of my colleagues who have spoken to this bill. That's one topic that I want to touch on a little bit.

I remark that I believe many of my colleagues have spoken to this bill multiple times, yet we've still not – unless I missed it, but I really don't think we've heard much at all from government members on this, other than the minister. You know, I look around this Chamber, and I can't imagine that many of these MLAs have not heard from their constituents. Perhaps not. Perhaps they haven't been bombarded specifically on Bill 64, but I'm quite certain they've been bombarded on the broader issues of parks and the environment and lack of consultation. I can say that with a fair amount of certainty because many of the e-mails we get come to all the MLAs or we see multiple MLAs being CCed.

I guess I question, on a bill like this of such importance, where we've tried on multiple occasions to amend it, unsuccessfully so far – I mean, I'm always the optimist, hopeful that perhaps we'll be successful on this amendment – I'm confused as to why, you know, if these government members are supportive of this piece of legislation, why aren't they sharing those thoughts? Why aren't they here speaking on behalf of their constituents if they're hearing positive feedback? I just . . .

**The Speaker:** I might provide some caution. Implying that someone may or may not be in the Assembly would be not in keeping with the conventions of the Assembly. Of course, members have all sorts of reasons to be in the Assembly or not be, so we wouldn't want to imply that they are or they aren't.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

**Member Irwin:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My sincere apologies. I certainly did not mean to refer to the presence or absence of members. I was speaking to the fact that I've not heard from any of the members on this specific piece of legislation, and I don't think it's in contravention of the standing orders to note that, of course, there are always members in the Chamber. It's intriguing to me that we're not hearing from government members.

We've seen a theme multiple times from this government around a lack of consultation, you know, an inability to outline exactly who it is they've heard from on multiple pieces of legislation, and this is certainly one that we can say the same about. Again, I'm happy to be wrong, but without hearing anything contrary, I can only assume this is the case. And I just want to again point out, as I noted earlier, because this is a really critical piece, beyond a pattern of a lack of consultation from this government, this bill is again an example of this government continuing to nickel and dime Albertans at a time when so many Albertans are struggling.

We've all heard the stories of folks who, whether they're in business or whether they're working in private industry, whatever it might be, a lot of folks are struggling right now. A lot of folks are struggling to make ends meet. And when I talk to my constituents in Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood and I ask them their concerns – and I do. I call them. I can't knock on doors these days because of COVID concerns, so I call them, and I ask them, you know: what's top of mind for you? One of the common answers is just that times are tough, right? They're talking about times being tough economically and also mentally, and this Bill 64 is an example of a hit for Albertans in both of those capacities. You might argue: well, how could this bill possibly have an impact on folks' economic and mental health?

10:20

**The Speaker:** Hon. members, are there others wishing to join in the debate? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Whitemud.

**Ms Pancholi:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise in third reading of Bill 64, Public Lands Amendment Act, 2021, and in particular to speak in support of the amendment brought forward by my colleague the Member for Edmonton-South to essentially put off third reading of this bill for six months. I think there have been numerous reasons as to why that should be the case, and I'd be pleased to go through them a bit tonight.

Certainly, I think we have to begin with the fact that there have been representations made by the minister sponsoring this bill, the Minister of Environment and Parks, about the contents of this bill that are simply not accurate and, in fact, are quite misleading. I believe that it is important for Albertans to understand what's truly in this bill because if they were to listen to the comments made in this Assembly by the Minister of Environment and Parks, they would have a misunderstanding of what's actually in this bill.

If I may, Mr. Speaker, I'd like to actually quote the minister from his comments made yesterday in this Assembly, in second reading on this bill, in which he talks about what he indicates is the content of the bill, and in fact he's repeated these comments this evening, tonight in this Assembly. This is a quote from *Hansard*, and it's from yesterday evening by the Minister of Environment and Parks. It says:

What it does [Bill 64] is . . . 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 . . . it makes sure that we can keep those areas open for Albertans.

Then he goes on, Mr. Speaker, to say:

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.

This is from the Minister of Environment and Parks, who is the sponsor of Bill 64, claiming two things, one, that there is a dedicated revenue fund created by Bill 64 and, second, alleging that the members of the opposition have not read the bill.

Now, as I've already indicated, as I've had the opportunity to speak on this bill a number of times, I actually have read the bill, and I know that many of the members of the opposition, all the members of the opposition, have. It's not a long bill, Mr. Speaker. It's actually only a few pages long and eight sections long, and four of those eight sections are really just cleanup sections to amend and move things around. The only substantive section in the bill is section 5, which basically creates the authority for the Minister of Environment and Parks, by order, to prescribe or provide for "fees relating to the use or occupation of public land, including the carrying on of activities on public land."

That's it, Mr. Speaker. That is the bill. That's pretty much the entirety of what Bill 64 says, yet if you were to listen and to take at face value – as Albertans believe they should be able to trust the words of a minister of the Crown when he speaks in this House and claims that the bill creates a dedicated revenue fund. But it does not. As I just indicated, really the only substantive matter in this bill, the only substantive section, is to create the authority and the power for the minister to prescribe fees by order. There is no dedicated revenue fund in this bill.

I would be interested to hear from the Minister of Finance as to whether he's been somehow instructed through another piece of legislation, another policy instrument to create a dedicated revenue fund for the fees that will be collected for use on public land, just

to begin with the random camping fees that we've heard about, but we actually have not heard those assurances. They're certainly not part of the bill.

There's certainly, actually, no indication at all that the fees that will be collected for the use of public lands will be set aside in a dedicated revenue fund, and I think it's deeply concerning, Mr. Speaker, that we have a minister of the Crown standing in this Legislative Assembly and making what I assume to be in his knowledge false statements. I'm concerned because he is the minister; he has sponsored this bill. Presumably, although I'm starting to wonder, he has read the bill which he has sponsored, so he knows full well that there is nothing in this bill which creates a dedicated revenue fund.

If the assurances coming from the minister about a dedicated revenue fund are intended to gain the support of Albertans for this bill, well, there is the fundamental problem that Albertans have certainly with Bill 64 but more generally with this government because this is a repeated pattern of behaviour by this government of making statements and assurances that are not true and then misleading Albertans and then breaking that trust.

We saw that, Mr. Speaker, on this very file with respect to assurances that the government made about parks not being sold off. I mean, there was absolute outrage in this Assembly that they were not disposing or selling off or closing parks. I mean, as a member of this Assembly I stood here and listened to them claim over and over again that that's not what they were doing even though there were clear documents, clear communications by staff in that ministry claiming that that's precisely what they were doing. Of course, eventually that outrage had to peter out by the government because they got called out for making statements that were untrue, and therefore they had to reverse course.

I want to echo the comments made by my colleagues that I saw those Defend Alberta Parks signs up all over my riding, all over many ridings. I travelled down to Calgary at one point and saw them there. They're everywhere, and they are still there, Mr. Speaker. Even though the government has backed down for the time being on that decision, they're still there. They're still up. I haven't seen a single one in my community taken down. The reason is that Albertans still don't trust this government, particularly when it comes to parks, particularly when it comes to their outdoor spaces and to our public lands, to our eastern slopes.

They do not trust this government, and it's no wonder, Mr. Speaker, when we have statements like the minister of environment's statements today and yesterday in this Assembly claiming that this bill does something that it does not. That's important because they claim that the purpose of charging these fees for use of public lands is for conservation purposes, is to make up for some of the damage that has been done in these lands, but we actually have very clear evidence as well from the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar when he talked about his discussion and questions that he asked of the minister in estimates about the revenue that will be coming in. I believe it was \$18 million that will be coming in as a result of these fees as well as the Kananaskis conservation pass, yet we do not see the same increase in this budget for conservation purposes. So where is that money going? It is not going to a dedicated revenue fund. That much is a fact. That is not part of this bill, and no member of this Assembly has been able to stand up other than the Minister of Environment and Parks to say that that's true, that there is a such a dedicated fund. It's breaking that trust all over again.

I'd like to speak a little bit more, too, about even the first time I had an opportunity to speak in second reading of Bill 64. This was about a few weeks ago, maybe a month ago now, considering we had that three-week break for the government members while all

other Albertans were continuing to work. At that time all that was on the table for Albertans to consider with respect to Bill 64 was that there was going to be this random camping fee. That's what we heard. That's what this is about, apparently, this, according to them, small, not onerous random camping fee.

Even since then, Mr. Speaker, even since the first opportunity I had to speak on this bill, we've seen the Kananaskis Country conservation pass brought in, and we know that this government needs Bill 64 to pass in order to be able to charge those fees in Kananaskis Country despite the fact that, again, shockingly, the Minister of Environment and Parks, who should be very familiar with Kananaskis Country and what it includes, seemed to be outraged that we were talking about the Kananaskis conservation pass in this Assembly. He claimed that was parkland and the pass was only for parkland, and this isn't about the parks act. However, he should be aware as the Minister of Environment and Parks, of course, that Kananaskis Country includes public lands where, absolutely, these fees would apply. In fact, the government website is very clear that in order for the Kananaskis conservation pass to come into effect, Bill 64 needs to pass in this Assembly. So that's another fee that's been added on since even the time, four weeks ago, when this bill was in second reading in this Assembly.

Now, of course, I looked at that again, looked at that map of Kananaskis Country, with its unusual boundaries. It's quite remarkable, Mr. Speaker. If you haven't taken a look at a map of Kananaskis Country and where this conservation pass will apply, it's really remarkable to see how absolutely distinctly carved out McLean Creek is. It absolutely does not jibe with the rest of the boundaries. It's very clearly delineated as excluded from the conservation pass. Of course, we've raised in this House our concerns about – that's an area where absolutely conservation is an issue, where there's significant environmental damage as a result of OHV use in that area. If any area needs it, it should be that area. Yet it's carved out. We've heard from the Minister of Environment and Parks: oh, there's another fee coming. We'll just trust him that that's actually the case, of course, a hard thing to do, Mr. Speaker, given how we've already identified a number of inaccurate statements by that minister. He's saying to trust him. There's another fee coming for OHV users.

**10:30**

I mean, that actually speaks to the concern I had right from the beginning with Bill 64, which is that it's very clear that this is an unlimited cheque that the government has given itself to be able to charge fees, as many fees – we have no idea how much they'll be. We have no idea what their use will be. In the past month we've already seen new fees being announced by this government. We don't know where that money will go. We don't have any assurances that that money is actually going to go to conservation, and it continues to hold Albertans – to hold the bag and pay the price for this government's mismanagement. They're saying that there are fees that need to be charged because it costs money to preserve these public lands, your public lands. Why are they charging average Albertans for this, Mr. Speaker? Because they've given away billions of dollars that should be used by this government to manage public lands. They're putting that cost onto average Albertans. They're blaming them for their failure to manage the public purse. They've given away billions of dollars for nothing in return. Now who has to pay the price? Average Albertans. That has been a repeated pattern by this government over and over again.

Mr. Speaker, I absolutely stand in support of my colleague's motion to put this bill over for six months so that those Albertans who booked in good faith, managed to get a site in Kananaskis for

this summer – I tried; I wasn't able. It was quite busy. They managed to get a site in Kananaskis for this summer. They should not have to now pay additional fees, which they were not planning for, which they were not told about.

This government is ramming through debate on this bill in this House for the sole reason because they want to be able to charge Albertans as soon as possible. That is what they want to do. That is why they're pushing forward. That's why they've cut off debate in this Assembly. They didn't want to go back to work for three weeks when everybody else in Alberta was working. Front-line workers are on the front lines every day, but this government didn't want to be in this Assembly and do their job. Instead, they come now, and they rush this bill through. They cut off democracy, cut off debate because they need to charge Albertans money. That is exactly what this bill is about, and that is why I cannot stand in support of this bill.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Seeing none, is there anyone else wishing to join in the debate? The Member for St. Albert has risen.

**Ms Renaud:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise and speak to the amendment by my colleague from Edmonton-South to put off third reading of this particular bill. You know, I just want to take a few minutes. Unfortunately, we don't have much time because once again this government has chosen to just limit the time that we have to actually participate in democratic debate about pieces of legislation on behalf of the tens of thousands of people we represent. Unfortunately, this government has a bit of a track record of not wanting to hear what we have to say and certainly not even considering some of the really thoughtful amendments that we're able to put forward.

In any event, as I said the last time I spoke to this bill, it's unfortunate that, actually, the preamble of this bill is probably – there's most information actually in the preamble. There's hardly anything in this piece of legislation, but what this government wants is: just trust us; we'll get it done in regulation. You know, in the two short – it feels like a lifetime – years that the United Conservative Party has formed government, what we have learned very, very quickly, right off the bat, is that they are not trustworthy. They don't do what they say again and again and again. In my opinion, sometimes it feels like there is an attempt to mislead what's being done. Of course, we are concerned when the minister of environment and some of his colleagues have told us: "Don't worry. We're going to get that done. We're going to take care of it." I don't buy it. There is no track record of that happening.

Once again we have a piece of legislation, and we don't actually know the extent of the difficulties it will cause or the harm or the confusion that it will cause. We certainly have some fear. We've asked a lot of questions. But what we hear in this place from the government when we ask appropriate questions is silence, or you'll get the minister of environment standing up and spewing all kinds of weird conspiracy theory type comments and things that are just so factually incorrect. It takes about five minutes to just google something. You just understand that he's making things up once again.

What my concerns are specifically about this bill – and some of my colleagues have touched on it – is, number one, the lack of transparency. You know, one of the members, somebody, stood up the other day and started to say that we don't support the things that the government anticipates the funding will cover or will support. Of course we do. That's the most ridiculous statement ever. Do we

support upgrading infrastructure? Of course. Improved education? Of course. Conservation? Yes. We're actually leaders in conservation. Maybe think back to the four years that we were government, and think back to the opposition that we felt any time we tried to make moves or tried to increase conservation efforts. Of course we support that. Enforcement? Yes. We're incredibly worried at the nickel and diming that is going on in all areas of enforcement right across the province. Of course we support more enforcement in this area. Public safety? Of course. Improving the environment and waste management? Of course. So to hear an environment minister stand up and accuse us of not wanting these things is just beyond ridiculous.

What we want is transparency. If you're going to collect these fees from people, show us where it's going. Don't hide it in general revenue and just say: trust us; we'll get it done. We have seen how this government operates. There is no faith. Albertans don't have a lot of faith. They want proof. They want to know where they can go to find the information that they need, to know that when they pay these fees, they know and they feel certain that that is paying for all of the things that this bill in the preamble says that it will do. Albertans do not trust this government. Not at all.

My other concern is – you know, I saw what I think was a press release or a press conference where the government was talking about this piece of legislation and what it's going to do. It seemed like an afterthought. "Oh, and AISH recipients: yeah, yeah, they'll be exempt, too." Well, that wasn't really well thought out, because then I mentioned the other day: well, what about income support? There are 60,000 people on income support. They make about half of what AISH recipients do. What about other low-income individuals? What is the process? No answer. No comment. But earlier today in question period we hear the minister of the environment say something about income support recipients. So it seems like they just say whatever. Why not commit to: what is the plan? Who will be exempt? How is it going to work? What will enforcement look like? How can people be certain they will be exempt? There is just no information, and "trust us" does not cut it. Not one bit.

It's unfortunate that this government has chosen to limit debate, not answer questions. Lack of consultation is just the norm for this government. This is just one more example of their complete failure to actually consult broadly, not just the obvious groups but to consult broadly. If you want to get it right, if you want to make sure that people have access, if you want to make sure that you are giving the exclusions to the correct people, you have to consult. Once again this government has failed.

Let me give you an example. If you truly wanted to make Alberta parks accessible and as barrier free as possible for Albertans, there is a group that has been around, I think, since probably the '80s, the Premier's Council on the Status of Persons with Disabilities. There's legislation. That is literally their job, to give information to government, to give advice on these very issues. And I'm willing to bet that this government didn't take five minutes to contact anybody that sits on that committee when there are government members that are sitting at that very table. It's a shameful example of lack of consultation, the fact that you have members sitting in that group and you still got it wrong. That shows the level of your consultation.

With that, I will be supporting this amendment because I think there are far too many questions. I have no faith in this government. There is no transparency. Just one more example of a government failure.

Thank you.

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

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

10:40

**Mr. Nielsen:** Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the opportunity this evening to add some brief – well, I guess it will probably be very brief comments on Bill 64, because, of course, we are on time allocation with that and the amendment that we have before us, suggesting that we hold up here for six months.

It's interesting here that we find ourselves yet again under time allocation on yet another bill. As you know, Mr. Speaker, all of the members of the government bench, all of the members of the government caucus that served in the 29th Legislature lost their minds any time the topic of time allocation came up, even thinking about it, let alone actually enacting it. Yet now, in the short time of two years, we've seen the UCP government bring in time allocation. I mean, they're dishing out these motions like a poker dealer dishes out cards in Las Vegas. That's how many times we're seeing this happen, and in this case it's simply an excuse to be able to hand out more fees to Albertans, more tolls to Albertans, making life more difficult. You know, it almost sounds like a potato chip commercial. You can't have just one. You've got to start adding all kinds of them.

By waiting that six-month period and getting a chance to reach back out to Albertans to find out what kind of a hardship this is going to add to them – I very clearly stated earlier on in debate of this bill, Mr. Speaker, that the lives of Albertans have not gotten better under this UCP government. We've seen legislation that has come through that has made their utility bills higher, which means they're paying more. We've seen legislation come through this building and be passed that has raised their prices of insurance. That means they're paying more. We've seen their child care fees going up, their school fees, their school loans going up. It's costing Albertans more, and you want to charge more to them.

**The Speaker:** Hon. member, I hesitate to interrupt, but pursuant to Government Motion 82 the time allotted for this debate has now elapsed.

[Motion on amendment HA1 lost]

**The Speaker:** Hon. members, I am required to put to the Assembly all necessary questions to dispose of third reading of government Bill 64, Public Lands Amendment Act, 2021, as proposed by the hon. the Minister of Environment and Parks.

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

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 10:43 p.m.]

[Fifteen minutes having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

[The Speaker in the chair]

For the motion:

Aheer	Nally	Savage
Allard	Neudorf	Schow
Copping	Nicolaides	Schulz
Dreeshen	Nixon, Jason	Sigurdson, R.J.
Fir	Nixon, Jeremy	Smith
Guthrie	Panda	Toews
Hanson	Pitt	Toor
Horner	Rehn	van Dijken

Issik	Reid	Williams
Jones	Rosin	Yao
Long	Rowswell	Yaseen
Lovely	Rutherford	

11:00

Against the motion:

Dang	Pancholi	Schmidt
Irwin	Phillips	Sigurdson, L.
Nielsen	Renaud	

Totals: For – 35 Against – 8

[Motion carried; Bill 64 read a third time]

## Government Bills and Orders

### Committee of the Whole

(continued)

[Mrs. Pitt in the chair]

**The Chair:** Hon. members, I would like to call the Committee of the Whole to order.

### Bill 56

#### Local Measures Statutes Amendment Act, 2021

**The Chair:** We are on amendment A1. Are there any members wishing to join debate? The hon. Member for Edmonton-South.

**Mr. Dang:** Thank you, Madam Chair. Just with your indulgence, I'm wondering if you could perhaps read the amendment into the record since we're just starting off.

**The Chair:** Perhaps we could provide you with a copy of the amendment. That would be best.

If someone could get the hon. member a copy of amendment A1 on Bill 56 as moved by the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo. We will take a moment and then proceed with debate.

The hon. Member for St. Albert. Please go ahead.

**Ms Renaud:** Thank you, Madam Chair. It's my pleasure to rise and speak to the amendment for Bill 56, Local Measures Statutes Amendment Act, 2021. I mean, this isn't my first time speaking to this piece of legislation, but I would like to reiterate a couple of points that I think are important to begin with, why I think it is so important to really stop and give ourselves time to rethink this.

There is a lot of potential damage that will be done if this piece of legislation goes through. I think that we can all agree, well, probably on this side, that this government is indeed finding every way possible to increase costs on Albertans. We just finished a debate that was cut short, obviously, by this government, talking about increased fees to use some of the public lands in K Country. But this particular piece is egregious, in my opinion, because it is taking aim at municipalities that are struggling, and they're struggling after two years of really targeted attacks. By "attacks" I mean downloading costs to municipalities. They have come out and been very clear that they don't support these changes. These changes are going to create incredible hardships in many areas, and still this government chooses not to listen, instead sticks to their talking points, talking about, you know, making life better for Albertans. Well, they are not.

I would like to focus my comments a little bit on the community that I represent, which is St. Albert, and to specifically share with the government members that are listening some of the things, some of the specific harm that will come to the community of St. Albert

because of this piece of legislation, specifically because of this piece of legislation. I hope my colleague the associate minister of natural gas and the MLA for Morinville-St. Albert will agree that some of the harm that I'm going to describe – and this harm was described by the director of finance for the city of St. Albert. Her name is Diane McMordie. I'm going to highlight some of the concerns she had that she's shared with the mayor and some of the councillors. I hope he will join me in opposing this legislation because it will inflict long-term damage on the community of St. Albert, not to mention the other municipalities right across the province.

This is from St. Albert Today on April 14, and this is a direct quote. "Provincial decisions to cut down municipal funding while increasing education taxes and city responsibilities over the next few years is leaving the City of St. Albert in a state of uncertainty for the future." Now, I'm going to explain what that uncertainty is and why that uncertainty will cause long-term damage and increase pressure on the citizens of St. Albert. What the director of finance for the city of St. Albert said is – and here's just one example – "The city's current assets are valued at [about] \$700 million." She said, "St. Albert would need to [contribute] . . . \$32 million per year to support those assets in the future." Now, St. Albert collects only \$12 million in taxes. You know, I could make a joke about this government's position on equalization, but I will not. Now, what she said further was that what St. Albert would need to do is increase taxes on the citizens of St. Albert by 1.5 per cent over 20 years to close the gap that this piece of legislation is introducing. That's 20 years. That's a 1.5 per cent tax increase over 20 years just for this, just for what this piece of legislation is doing. So when the government members stand up and say, "No, no; this is going to make life better; this is going to increase this and increase that program, and we're doing this for recovery, COVID recovery," it is not. This is causing long-term damage.

11:10

Yes, the province did indeed actually increase MSI funding because they front-loaded. The municipal sustainability initiative funding: what they did was increase the funding in the first year, and then it drops in subsequent years. Once again it is another UCP shell game: no, no; look at us; we're giving so much more money and so much more support to municipalities. Sure, for one year. For one year. I'm sorry. After what we have been through in the last two years, specifically in the last 15 months, I do believe that recovery is going to take a heck of a lot longer than one year. Certainly, downloading some funding in year 1 is going to help. What about year 2? What about year 3? What about year 4? Well, I think this government probably only thinks in election cycles, so they're probably not too concerned about that, but you should be.

Diane McMordie, who is the director of finance for the city of St. Albert – just to give you some perspective, the average over the last four years in terms of MSI funding was just over \$15 million for repair and maintenance, so that's repair and maintenance projects and growth. Now, over the next five years, because of the changes being made, the average is \$11 million. Now, I know math is difficult sometimes for government members, but there is a big difference when you average these amounts: \$15 million is what they were receiving; now \$11 million average is what they will receive going forward. That is less. That is far less.

Now, the problem is that this doesn't allow them to plan. Of course, the city of St. Albert has long had a goal to change up the mix of taxes that they collect. They rely very heavily on residential taxes, so of course they wanted to really focus on expanding business taxes. Now, that required a lot of investment and a lot of work. One of the things – I've said this numerous times – that the

NDP government got done was to actually get a contract signed so that twinning of Ray Gibbon Drive would happen, because we knew that road was very important. It was more than a road; it was a corridor, and it was going to open up activity.

Sure enough, as soon as that happened, activity started, investment started to come into the city of St. Albert. We knew that. Increasing the schools, increasing quality of life: that means museums, that means parks, that means rec centres, that means pools, that means all of these things, that means infrastructure. All of these things require investment. If you are going to attract investment to your city, you're going to have to attract them for more than just: this is a good deal; we can build a plant here and do this. It's about quality of life.

So all of these decisions now that the city of St. Albert is forced to make are to change and cut and reduce their plans for capital investment, to look at their maintenance, all of these things because the UCP is reducing the amount of funding that the city of St. Albert and other municipalities right across the province are getting. But, again, they won't ever tell you that. They'll tell you that they're doing this because it's a positive thing. It is not.

You know, there are so many other things that have changed in the last little while: education taxes frozen this year and the next; planned changes to the disaster recovery program that may make municipalities responsible for up to 10 per cent of costs for natural disasters. Now, we certainly heard the government spin: well, you know, that's just normal; that's just to be expected. They don't ever take into consideration the big picture. They have cut funding for just about everything. They won't ever say that it's cut, because it's really a shell game with them: no, no, we're increasing this because we're doing this; we renamed it; we have a panel; we consulted; we're doing this. No. The bottom line is that you have increased the hardship of municipalities of every size right across the province.

St. Albert is no exception. There have been huge cuts to affordable housing projects. Now, you might not think the city of St. Albert, that is sort of maybe sometimes painted with the brush that it's a wealthier community that doesn't need this kind of project – well, certainly, it does have wealthier areas within the boundaries, but there are many St. Albertans that are struggling, and there are many St. Albertans, including many, many, many, many seniors, that need affordable housing. This government chose to reduce that, to increase that hardship at the same time that they chose to, really, essentially, freeze funding for FCSS, which is family and community support services, money that goes to municipalities – they also contribute to this fund – that funds all kinds of programs that are community supports, human services, social services within municipalities. All of these things are happening at the same time and then in a pandemic. Bad decisions after bad decisions after poor decisions after incredibly bad decisions.

You know, here's another thing the city of St. Albert is concerned about. Now, I know that government members are more concerned about their election promises or whatever, how they're going to invigorate their base, not thinking about the pressure and the cost about a referendum on a municipal ballot, another cost. Public-sector wage spending cuts – if you think that hasn't impacted municipalities, you're mistaken – and \$25,000 in charges for RCMP DNA analysis: all of these things are just nickel and diming communities that are already stretched too thin. They're already struggling, and this is going to force them to increase property taxes. This is going to force them to stop projects. This is going to force them to defer maintenance, and we all know the long-term costs of continuously deferring maintenance. That is the municipal side of this.

You know, you all like to talk about – well, you don't talk about it, but you do endorse it – trickle-down economics. This is trickle-down pain. You have a municipality that will struggle, and I'll admit that there are some rural municipalities that will struggle far more than St. Albert will with these changes.

There are pressures on families. These families cannot take more increases. We don't want them to move away. We don't want them to have to sell their home and get something less expensive or have to rent something. We don't want them leaving. We want them coming. We want investment. But already the pressure on families – we know that we've got staggering unemployment. We've got increasing utility fees, school fees, transportation fees, insurance. We have a government that has no vision about increasing affordable, accessible, high-quality child care for families when they're screaming for it. This government just turns their back and says, like: no, no, it's good; it's about choice. I'm sorry. It is not.

This government is choosing not to hear from municipalities. They have been very clear about what they're not okay with and what they need. They need the taxes paid. Companies are being given a holiday from paying taxes that are owed. They need stable funding. They don't need a shell game where you load one year and then cut them for the next two. They need honesty, transparency. They need funding to allow them to do what they need to do without passing on all the costs to their citizens, but this piece of legislation just does not do that, which is why I support this amendment. You know, if this government had any ability to reflect on the poor decisions that they continuously make, they would stop, have a second thought, think about this, think about the long-term damages to all of our communities, and take the time to make the necessary changes.

Thank you, Madam Chair. Those are my comments for tonight.

**The Chair:** Are any other members wishing to speak to amendment A1? The hon. Member for Lethbridge-West.

**Ms Phillips:** Thank you, Madam Chair. It's a pleasure to rise to speak to this amendment. What it would provide the Legislature the opportunity to do is to review the effect of this legislation after a certain period of time. In other words, it would perform that most central of legislative duties, which is accountability and follow-up, in effect having a look at how the legislation that is proposed by a government is actually helping or, in this case, we would argue, very likely to be hindering the ultimate outcomes that the government professes they want to see. In this case we are talking about municipal stabilization initiative funds, in fact, the changes to the MSI formula, which in many cases go towards capital investment projects for municipalities and fund much of the infrastructure that goes to quality of life.

**11:20**

This is the stuff that people see. You know, the fact is that not everything we do, either at this level of government or the municipal level of government, certainly not the federal government, is stuff that makes an immediate appearance right in front of us and says to us: this is a level of government providing a service that has an effect on your quality of life. But MSI projects are the very definition of close to community. These are recreational infrastructure investments. These are certainly roads and the kinds of infrastructure we see every day so that we can get to work, so that we can live in a community where things are well maintained and where accessibility, whether it's by vehicle or other means, is well maintained. Certainly, our recreational infrastructure is a part that is very, very significant.



This is what people will see, and they will see it, I think, in the most stark ways in the smaller communities first and in the most stark fashion, in my view, just knowing the way that those funds are disbursed to those municipalities and then how quickly those municipalities turn them around and make them into projects. They have already, in many cases, studied, done engineering front-end work, other planning, and made other investments in preparation for the stable, predictable MSI funding that they have essentially had.

There have been some changes, a few changes over the past decade. Certainly, MSI came about just after the 2008 period because municipalities had had it up to here, metaphorically, you know, with the sort of push-and-pull, roller-coaster ride of the boom years, and they prevailed on then Premier Stelmach to regularize those payments, to stop making them so one-off and so unpredictable. Lo and behold, MSI was born, and it has been rolled over in various forms since that time.

Now, what we see here is a significant reduction to MSI, but we see with it some other major changes to public policy that will in fact ultimately have an effect on what kind of infrastructure and services people can access in their communities. Like I said, this will be felt most quickly, I think, and with the most obviousness by people in smaller communities. I'm speaking here of the parallel processes of changes to police funding, changes to grants in place of taxes, and changes to the fine revenue sharing by the province.

All of those changes add up to a very large change in the material financial position of municipalities, so much so that, for example, in Vulcan they have decided on the amount of capital contribution for their new pool. It was a difficult conversation for council to have when Vulcan county is facing numerous financial challenges. Here's what the reeve had to say: all municipalities are feeling the squeeze at the moment; we are cutting everything; recreation funding is one area where council has decided to make cuts.

Now, if there's anything that everyone knows, it is that local infrastructure was exactly what people needed during the pandemic. To be clear, in the context of an economy that is not recovering, where job growth is not happening as it is in the rest of the country, which is the situation in which we find ourselves right now in Alberta, that local infrastructure is going to be just as important as families are staying closer to home, and they need that affordable recreation.

In places like Cochrane, for example, we had a town councillor say: I feel our recreation infrastructure has fallen behind and is something we really need to focus upon. What they said is that for future town infrastructure there will be a huge impact from the 25 per cent cut in municipal sustainability initiative funding from the provincial government. The quote from this particular councillor, Tara McFadden, was: we can have all the dreams we want, but they don't get realized unless we can find the money to make them happen.

They will not be finding that financial support from the province because the province chose instead to give away \$4.7 billion to already-profitable corporations that are posting eye-popping quarterly profits, not even annual profits but quarterly profits, that make the corporate tax cut almost pale in comparison. The fact of the matter is that our friends in Cochrane will have less recreational infrastructure, there are difficult decisions around how to build the pool in Vulcan, and so on and so forth.

You know, I think what's really important are the voices, too, of municipal leaders, and the reason why we might want to consider this amendment is because certainly municipal leaders do not support this initiative at all. They are not amused in any way, shape, or form and have said so publicly. So revisit this decision in a way that is thoughtful, that, in fact, engages with the people of another

level of government, another order of government, that engages with them in a good-faith way to really, truly understand the actions that we take in this Chamber and their effect on ordinary people's lives, their tax base, their tax levels. Most certainly, their property taxes are going up, so to the UCP MLAs in this Chamber: have fun explaining that to your constituents.

I have a fairly easy way to answer those questions. When people say to me, "Why did my property taxes go up?" I say, "Well, they gave away \$4.7 billion and cut the funding to municipalities, and now you're paying more." I guess other folks are going to say other things, but the fact of the matter is that that is exactly why people's property taxes are going up.

You know, if we are going to do this – obviously, we're calling time allocation on all sorts of things. We're absolutely not interested in any real, I think, thoughtful engagement with the public policy before us. But if we're going to do that, then let's at least reassemble a committee of the Legislature to review the effects of this policy. Once again, this may speak to – and this is the opposition providing the government an opportunity to somewhat rehabilitate the narrative and the reputation and certainly the public confidence that they have lost, in particular over the last year, where they have now developed a reputation for not being terribly interested in talking to anybody at all about almost anything and simply just shouting people out of the room, shouting Barry Morishita, the president of the AUMA, out of the room, who has said, quote: a lot of unintended consequences here from this MSI adventure, and that means a lot fewer people working in Alberta over the next three years; some projects are going to be laid aside; some infrastructure maintenance is going to go undone.

Again, too, we will see, then, what kinds of projects are waylaid, what kinds of things are delayed, what kinds of jobs could have been created. This, you know, might be an interesting opportunity for folks who are having to face those very same voters who just got a massive property tax hike and find some ways to both rehabilitate the effect on people's pocketbooks but also the lack of job creation and job growth. We have another quote here from the mayor of Calgary: on the one hand they want us to build stuff and create jobs – well, you know, that is, in fact, one of the reasons why we were all sent here – but on the other hand they want to take away the money we need to build stuff and create jobs.

On top of this, really, you know, when it comes to the city of Calgary, you have some of the fine revenue problems that I spoke of. You have some of the grants in place of taxes reductions as well having an effect on the bottom line for the city of Calgary. You have the sort of serial game playing around the green line's 20,000 construction jobs, good-paying jobs. For example, in Edmonton with the valley line LRT, we see very good-paying jobs for tradespeople, in particular electricians. These are unionized workers who are making a good salary with a good pension and, you know, are working locally so can be home at night with their children and build their families.

### 11:30

This is the kind of work that is important. It is the kind of work that we were sent here to support and the kinds of working conditions for tradespeople that, I believe, honour the hard work that tradespeople put in in terms of an honest day's work.

Now, the city of Calgary is facing those things – the green line, the other business – but the other piece that they have to grapple with is a property tax shift due to a lack of attention to investment attraction in technology, in agriculture diversification and some of the value-added and services that could come from that a number of other ways. The province has labelled, in the last almost 24 months, or about 24 months anyway, diversification to be a luxury,

and as a result, you know, we haven't attracted new investment. We haven't created new jobs – 50,000 jobs lost even before the pandemic – so we have empty office towers in Calgary, and we have some crosscutting messages coming from the UCP. On one day the Finance minister says: oh, it's not my problem; that's Calgary's problem. He's, of course, not a Calgary minister. The next day a Calgary minister rides to the rescue and says: oh, yeah, yeah, I'll have a meeting or something.

You know, the fact of the matter is that it is more than just a double or a triple whammy; it's just Calgary getting hit on all sides, and there are some simple and thoughtful things that we could do. One of them is to ultimately reject this proposal to reduce their MSI to invest in capital, but if that simple and common-sense approach to the matter of provincial and municipal relationships is not available to the government, given its logic, then I think the best thing to do would be to follow up to see if what we are doing is actually working for Alberta's largest city and, in fact, a city that remains the economic driver of this province.

You know, for that reason, I think it's very, very important to have this amendment at least in place such that we can be a little bit more thoughtful rather than the sort of scorched earth approach that we've taken that apparently, embedded within it, shows a deep sense of hubris, of taking people in smaller towns and smaller communities in particular absolutely for granted and believing themselves, on the part of the government, as sort of an aesthetic, to be separate and apart from the people that they were elected to serve, which is, of course, ridiculous. That is a ridiculous way to approach this job, and the voters notice, and they are absolutely noticing.

Now, what's been happening, too, is that some smaller places – like, I think I read recently that the village of Hythe was just kind of looking at: well, if these MSI cuts come, I guess we're disestablishing; we are no longer viable as a municipality. Certainly, the village of Hythe is not represented by anyone in the Official Opposition caucus, so I am going to assume that they are within one of the UCP MLAs' ridings. This sort of collective shrug of: "Oh, well, I guess municipalities aren't viable anymore. I guess these towns and villages and places where people congregate, where people access services, where they, you know, go to school, where they have recreation – yeah, I guess we're just not going to bother anymore." Like, why would any MLA just sort of take that with a shrug? One would think that they would instead want to say: "Okay. If we're going to do this and we're going to bring in these cuts, then at least let's take another pass at this before the election because I'm going to have to have something to tell people, because they're not happy." Instead, we're just sort of going: oh, well, I'm sure it will all be fine.

You know, the president of the Rural Municipalities of Alberta and reeve of Ponoka county, Paul McLauchlin, is quite certain that everything is absolutely not fine. The messages and these interventions within the media are something that I would think that the governing caucus MLAs would want to heed because there's a conspicuous lack of validators of any sort for this legislation. No one is standing up and going: yeah, please, cut both my capital funding but also my police funding, my grants in lieu of taxes, and also my fine revenue; yeah, that sounds great. Absolutely no one stood up to the podium with the minister. There has been absolutely no outpouring of public support of any kind, well, I mean, broadly for the government – let's be clear – but also on this particular initiative.

Like, one of the things that Paul McLauchlin of the RMA says is that, you know, we need this MSI funding because we've got this tremendous size of machinery. Tremendous volumes are being moved out of Alberta agriculture onto our roads, and our road

design needs to keep up with this tremendous growth. Well, you don't need to be a brain genius to agree with that statement. You've got big trucks; they are on roads that are subject to a tremendous amount of weathering in particular. There's a large road network in Alberta, in particular in rural Alberta, and they need to be able to maintain it. If they can't, people can't get their product to market. That's a problem. That is why we have an extensive road network, Madam Chair, in the first place. In rural Alberta, in fact, in many ways it's better maintained and more extensive than in other prairie provinces.

And here's another quote from Mr. McLauchlin of the rural municipalities: in some municipalities unpaid tax amounts are so high that service levels are being reduced, municipal staff are being laid off, and serious discussions are occurring about whether the municipalities can continue to function. This raises and surfaces yet another issue of municipal funding sustainability and viability, Madam Chair, another reason why we may want to revisit the consequences of this legislation, and that is the fact that this Municipal Affairs minister has done absolutely nothing to help these rural municipalities go after some of these unpaid taxes.

There are simple changes that could be made within the MGA that, so far, the ministry has declined to make. They should make those changes because the fact of the matter is that on the one hand we've given away \$4.7 billion and we made a big deal about it, but on the other hand there are hundreds of millions of dollars that still go unpaid. It's just yet another, basically, giveaway to people who can pay. You know, not all of them, for sure, because there have been some tough times, and we've heard this from a number of different municipalities. Al Kemmere has talked about this, too, and when he was president of the RMA, he said: "Look, maybe not all of these companies, because we've had, in particular, a prolonged period of very low natural gas prices, but many of them can, and they're just not. We don't have the legislative tools to go after those funds."

One would think that if you've got a situation where you're reducing MSI, grants in lieu of taxes, police funding, fine revenue, and some other reductions to things like water and waste-water programs – because there has been a bit of a shell game with that, with the Alberta community resilience program and a few others. That's the flood mitigation and other climate adaptation funding that municipalities also use. One would think that the very least the government could do, because it's not even their money, is just amend the act so that municipalities can collect the taxes that they are owed, but they can't even be bothered to lift a finger to do that. That is, again, why we should pass this amendment.

**The Chair:** Are there any other members wishing to join debate on amendment A1? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore.

**Mr. Nielsen:** Well, thanks, Madam Chair. Happy to rise this evening here to provide some additional comments around Bill 56 and, of course, more specifically to amendment A1. You know, without reading the entire amendment again here, broadly speaking, it talks about putting in a mechanism to review the effects that this bill will bring forward to municipalities and to Albertans in general and see what those results have been. Now, I would suggest that this would be a very, very common-sense amendment to accept because we've seen the decisions that have taken place over the course of the last couple of years that have not worked out for Albertans.

**11:40**

We've seen the decision, as my friend from Lethbridge-West had mentioned, about the big corporate giveaway that didn't create jobs.

We didn't see big corporations, you know, moving into Alberta. I guess they must not be making very smart decisions around that. We've also seen decisions around, shall we say, betting a lot of money on a pipeline in hopes that an election will go in a certain way. That decision didn't work out very well. We've seen the decision spending tens of millions of dollars on a war room that can't get logos right and apparently now can't seem to even generate a report.

Then there are further decisions that we'd seen that I think impress on the fact that by accepting amendment A1 and reviewing the progress after a year of how Bill 56 has affected people, maybe then we won't see things like other decisions where legislation allowed electricity rates to go higher. My constituents in Edmonton-Decore are paying more. You know, perhaps we could have reviewed decisions around insurance which were supposed to help Albertans. It was supposed to be able to make it better for them. At the end of the day, all my constituents saw was their insurance rates going up. We've seen decisions where child care costs have gone up. That hasn't helped my constituents in Edmonton-Decore. It means they're now paying more to get quality child care, assuming they can get it at all, because some have had to make decisions to not. We've seen decisions that have been made that have increased postsecondary education, not only through their tuition going up but also their student loans going up. That's costing people more money.

It's too bad we didn't have an amendment like A1 to propose reviewing these things after a short little while, but here's our chance now with Bill 56. What's being proposed in here is, quite honestly, hamstringing municipalities even further than what's already been done. The reason I say that is because I've seen decisions now being made here in the city of Edmonton directly affecting my constituents in Edmonton-Decore and actually even more broadly in north Edmonton just around transit service because city council is now having to try to find ways to save the money that they're no longer getting. The city is still growing, there are still services that have to be provided, and they have to find some way to fund that. But it's gotten to the point now where the only way is that, I mean, they're going to have to either impose more fees – we've already seen the government doing that this evening by imposing more fees to go to public lands – or property taxes are going to have to go up.

Right now bus service in north Edmonton has been cut back. There used to be bus service going straight down the middle of Edmonton-Decore, down 82nd Street. That's finished. I've actually received correspondence from constituents saying: now I'm going to have to travel three or four blocks just to get to a bus stop to catch a bus. Now, that might not seem like much, but what happens if you have mobility challenges? All of a sudden those three or four blocks might as well be 300 or 400 miles. Everybody knows – and I'm certainly not blaming the city of Edmonton for this – that during the winter when we get significant snowfalls, some of the sidewalks don't get plowed that quickly. I get it. Homeowners, you know, are only looking after their section of the sidewalk. There are way more homeowners to be able to shovel that snow than there are city workers to get out there to move that, but when you have mobility challenges like, say, for instance, a wheelchair, and you're trying to get to that bus stop, all of a sudden not only does it become an obstacle to have a sidewalk that's not cleared, but it actually becomes an impassable obstacle. Now those people are stuck at home because we've decided to underfund our municipalities, so they're trying to make it up in other areas.

If we at least add this amendment to review the progress a year later, at the very least if it's not working out, then potentially we have the chance to pull it back, to stop it. Is it not enough that people

are paying more for their utilities? Is it not enough that they're paying more for their insurance or their child care or their school fees or their property taxes or their camping fees?

Then that leads me to the next part of the added fee around 911. The last thing somebody ever wants to be is in a position having to dial 911. You're either dialing it because somebody is in big trouble, or you yourself are in big trouble. Again, you know, based on the examples here of a family of four with cellphones, well, it's only an additional \$25, but remember, that's \$25 on top of the \$30 for camping, because this family in Edmonton-Decore that's either unemployed or underemployed has to go to public lands to camp because that happens to be the cheaper option. At least they still get to enjoy things as a family, but now they're paying for that, paying for 911. Depending on where you live, you might end up paying a toll on the road to get to that area on top of the extra amount for utilities, on top of the extra amount for insurance, on top of the extra amount for child care, on top of the extra amount for school fees, on top of the amount for postsecondary education, on top of the amount they're paying on their income tax.

At what point do you just kind of take a step back and say: "Okay; maybe we're asking a little bit too much here?" You have to give Albertans an opportunity to weigh in. I mean, that was the whole thing around referendums – was it not? – Madam Chair, to give Albertans a chance to weigh in on things. Why didn't we give them a chance to weigh in on paying these fees to go camp? Why didn't we give them a chance maybe to weigh in on fees for 911 or their insurance going up or their child care fees going up?

It would be, quite frankly, I think, almost irresponsible of this House to not accept this, because the amendment doesn't, you know, try to kick it to committee so hopefully it would die or shut it down so it never happens. This is just saying: let's review the progress that has happened over the last year. There's no reason why you can't accept that. If indeed Bill 56 is all that and a bag of chips like you're saying it is and it's going to help municipalities operate better and it's going to make the lives of Albertans better, then you should have no problem, because this review will happen, and it'll pass with flying colours, and you'll be able to tell me to take my seat and shut up. I'd actually be okay with that, but right now what I'm seeing is that it's not going to benefit Albertans. It's going to make their lives harder. It's going to make their lives more expensive. I'm already seeing the results.

**11:50**

I'm sure my colleagues, I'm sure all of you have been reached out to by your constituents, saying: my utility bill has gone up significantly, my insurance. I think about that one constituent that reached out to me showing that his condo insurance had gone up by 46 per cent; his car insurance had gone up by 57 per cent I think it was or 58 per cent. You know, now we're going to say: "Well, now your 911 fee is going to probably go up here as well. Likely your property taxes are going up because we're going to make it a lot harder for municipalities to be able to deliver the services that their constituents expect." Why not review how that progress has gone over the past year? Amendment A1, I think, can cover that, will give us an opportunity to see what the effects are on Albertans.

As I said, it's getting very, very difficult for the residents of Edmonton-Decore. They can't even get proper bus service because those things have had to get scaled back, let alone, you know, their neighbourhoods being upkept, sidewalks getting shovelled, roads getting sanded. This is not helping them. At least promise them that you'll review what's gone on in the past year. Give the municipalities the opportunity to be able to weigh in and honestly take the feedback. I think that, at the end of day, municipalities just

want to work with you. They just want to make sure that all of their residents are looked after with all their needs, including things like good bus service. I can tell you right now that the challenge is getting greater in Edmonton-Decore. It's getting greater in north Edmonton, and there's a better way to do it.

If we do this, we will have an opportunity now to look at the program and find out if that indeed has worked as it's being sold. Saddling Albertans with a \$41 million bill for 911 upgrades, especially, like I said, after the \$4.7 billion corporate handout that didn't create jobs, the billion plus on a pipeline that didn't pan out, \$30 million that can't even get a report – I mean, I could go even farther and say that you're spending 10 and a half million dollars on a red tape reduction ministry for something that all of the ministries could have done anyway. Why saddle Albertans with these things when you can at the very least promise to review the decision?

My hope is, Madam Chair, that members will very, very seriously consider amendment A1 and will allow things to be reviewed. Currently, right now, I can't see myself accepting Bill 56 as is proposed, but maybe we might have a chance to look at things in a different light if we at least have some kind of guarantee that we'll look at things a little bit later if not right away, before it's actually happened, because once it's actually happened, you've already created the hardship. So, in a way, all we'd be doing is trying to make up for the mistake that was made and the hardship that was already created for Albertans, but at least there'd be a point where it could stop if it indeed was going wrong. I believe the fancy words were always the "unintended consequences." And I hope there aren't any, but if there are, at least then let's mitigate those unintended consequences as much as we can, and we can review this in a year.

I look forward to the rest of the debate. Hopefully, we'll hear a little bit more from the other side about this amendment and how at the end of the day this is about making the lives of Albertans better. Let's indeed make them better or at least promise to try to make it

better should this thing happen to go sideways and it doesn't work out for them.

**The Chair:** Any members wishing to join debate on amendment A1?

[Motion on amendment A1 lost]

**The Chair:** We are back on the main bill, Bill 56, in Committee of the Whole. Any members wishing to join debate?

**Mr. Nally:** Madam Chair, I move that the committee rise and report progress.

[Motion carried]

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

**Ms Issik:** Madam Speaker, the Committee of the Whole has had under consideration a certain bill. The committee reports progress on the following bill: Bill 56. I wish to table copies of all amendments considered by the Committee of the Whole on this date for the official records of the Assembly.

**The Deputy Speaker:** Does the Assembly concur in the report? All those in favour, please say aye.

**Hon. Members:** Aye.

**The Deputy Speaker:** Any opposed, please say no. Carried.  
The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

**Mr. Nally:** Thank you, Madam Speaker. I see by the clock on the wall that it's late. We made some good progress tonight, so I think we should pat ourselves on the back and call it a night. I move that the Assembly be adjourned until 1:30 p.m., Thursday, May 27, 2021.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 11:58 p.m.]





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