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Second Session

Alberta Hansard

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Day 108

The Honourable Nathan M. Cooper, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta The 30th Legislature

Second Session

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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

9 a.m.

Wednesday, June 2, 2021

[The Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

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

Ordres du jour.

Orders of the Day

Government Bills and Orders Second Reading

Bill 67

Skilled Trades and Apprenticeship Education Act

[Adjourned debate June 1: Mr. Schweitzer]

The Speaker: Hon. members, the hon. minister has a few minutes remaining should he choose to use it.

Are there others? The hon. Member for Edmonton-North West.

Mr. Eggen: Well, good morning, Mr. Speaker. Thank you for the opportunity to speak to Bill 67, Skilled Trades and Apprenticeship Education Act. Certainly, I think that, in the broadest sense, this bill is quite promising in regard to talking about apprenticeships, talking about jobs and the economy, and opening up a discussion around postsecondary education here in the province of Alberta.

We know that postsecondary holds a key to economic diversification. It holds a key to ensuring that our considerable young population stays and is gainfully employed in the province of Alberta. It's a way by which we can help to invest in each of the communities in which our 26 colleges and universities and polytechnics reside. It's a way, I believe, as well to offer some hope and optimism for economic recovery here in the province of Alberta.

We know that always a dynamic economy will be evolving and changing over time. This year and this time are no exception, and we have to make sure that we are flexible and responsive to the economic needs of our society and to the interests of our working population and our young population that would be entering the workforce in the coming months and years.

We see with this particular bill, you know, quite a dramatic change in the framework in which we deal with skilled trades and apprenticeship education here in the province of Alberta, and I guess that's the reason that I feel at least reasonably optimistic that if we do execute this framework in a responsible way, then we would be able to have something we could work with.

Now, Mr. Speaker, that being said, you know, there are quite a number of issues and questions that the Official Opposition and indeed building trades and other people involved in postsecondary education have around this bill. Of course, this is a forum by which we can try to answer some of those questions, which I think can be quite constructive. I hope that that's exactly what we'll see happen here in the coming hours and days as we debate Bill 67.

Certainly, we know that it's important to answer these questions. It's not as though we don't already have quite a well-established

skills and apprenticeship training program here in the province of Alberta through our polytechnic institutions like NAIT and SAIT as well as the apprenticeship programs that are set up with the various building trades that we have here in the province of Alberta as well. These trade programs are well established. They are as old as this province, even older in some ways. They are connected to international skilled trades apprenticeship programs, from machinists to boilermakers to electricians to carpenters to plumbers and pipefitters and so forth. It's important to make sure that we're utilizing all of the best practices and experience and skills that each of these established skilled trades apprenticeship programs have built up over the last years and decades, quite frankly, the last century.

We're here, as I said during second reading, to talk about the principle of a bill and to find out some specific details so that we can answer those questions, like I said, that are coming from students and from polytechnics and from the skilled trades around the province. As far as I can see, Mr. Speaker, this bill is repealing the Apprenticeship and Industry Training Act as established and is establishing a new act for training and regulating, for education here in the province. It is an enabling framework. As I said, it has a lot to do with what we put into that vessel that would be created if this bill does get passed. You know, as far as I can tell, it is a less prescriptive and detailed requirement here set in legislation than what we had before. It seems to maintain a degree of transparency and accountability and does clarify authorities assigned with expertise, defining apprenticeships and establishing a governance framework.

Some of the things that I find intriguing, that I will ask now and further during debate, are that I note that this bill is interested in expanding what we could consider to be a trade so that perhaps we are including some technology programming, some technology training, and others. I would be curious to know, you know, where, in what direction, in what way these new trades categories might be going.

Some of the other questions that I have, that my colleagues have as well, are that we want to ensure that we maintain the standards that apprenticeships have within the province of Alberta but also so that they are meshing with standards practised in international trades as well such as, as I said before, the machinists or the boilermakers. They have an interprovincial standard of trade. [interjections] Okay. There you go. Yeah, it's important to listen to this. They have so many trades in Fort McMurray. I think it's a good place to probably listen or at least lower your voice when you're chit-chatting while I'm talking, right? It brings back that old feeling I had as a teacher where I stare at the people, but of course they don't pay attention, so it doesn't matter. Whatever.

Anyway, you know, we have to make sure that we are integrating the trades programs that we have with interprovincial standards and international standards as well. If you don't have those – of course, we don't want to be out of scope, out of sequence with, let's say, the standard of apprenticeship/journeyman programs that happen in Saskatchewan or in Texas and so forth. We have a lot of interaction between our workers moving between those jurisdictions as well, so we've got to make sure we are not out of step with those standards.

Another question, I think, that we all need to look at carefully is to make sure, you know, that the reason we have such high uptake in apprenticeship programs in the province of Alberta and why we have such a high rate of employment is because you have a very close relationship where industry is talking to our polytechnics and getting clear information about how many skilled tradespeople they will perceive to need in the coming months and years – right? – so they set that standard. They set a quota for how many, let's say,

boilermaker positions they have at NAIT or in Edmonton, and then that moves through the system, and more often than not you then have quite high employment rates coming out of the other side.

9:10

Another reason, of course, we have such high uptake with apprenticeship programs is that the programs are integrated with working so that people get paid as they are learning the trade. I think it's absolutely essential that we maintain that expectation and that system to have people go to school and stay in school and earn money while they learn the trade over a two-year or four-year or five-year period. If we in any way compromise or interrupt that somehow, where you have an apprenticeship program without that paid work experience element, then, again, you're compromising a system that works, that attracts people to enrol in a trades program because, you know, they have a family to feed and bills to pay and so forth and are still getting a training dividend at the end and a certificate.

I know that this bill seems to be talking about making sure that these people can get credits in a much broader way for training from a polytechnic or a university or another skill program. Again, I think that this is a promising idea. I know that, you know, working with high school students and having high school programs with the ability to attain credit for a program while you're still in high school was showing a lot of promise over the last few years. I know that as minister I could see in various places around the province people getting, let's say, training as a nursing attendant while still in high school, building up those credits that were then recognized at a college. The kids were already well on their way to getting that certificate and getting that job, that we need.

I know as well, though, that that kind of programming doesn't come cheap. It's not as though you can say: hey, let businesses pick up that other piece of it. A lot of that apprenticeship-style program reaching into high schools really fell away when the economy was experiencing difficulty during the economic downturn from 2013-2014. A lot of those partnerships with high school programs fell away because the business side couldn't perhaps maintain or afford them. My point is this, Mr. Speaker. You don't just put these kinds of programs on paper and say that you're going to expand apprenticeships, that you're going to do all of these things, without putting resources behind them as well, money. It's important to do that because, of course, when you're establishing something new, you have to make sure that people recognize that it is being supported in the broadest possible way.

I couldn't help but notice again that we had two colleges recently getting polytechnic degree granting status here in the province of Alberta, Red Deer College and Grande Prairie College, which people were pretty happy about. They wanted full university, but they got that level of polytechnic. That's fine. Then you turn around and notice that those same two colleges, Red Deer College and Grande Prairie College, were being cut more than almost any other postsecondary institution over the last two years anywhere in Alberta. You have this idea that we're going to start a new program, and then also you're pulling out the rug from under the feet of those same institutions by cutting them by 15 per cent or more in their operating budgets.

My point, Mr. Speaker, of course, is that we are a great purveyor and producer of grand words and schemes and bills – we can talk about these things and the high-minded ideals of postsecondary education – but if we don't put money where the mouth of government is, then all of these things are just words and not substantive. I guess we'll be watching for that as well with Bill 67 to make sure that this is actually being resourced in a reasonable way.

I think that those are some of the broad strokes that I'm looking for.

You know, again, I would suggest to the government, modestly and humbly, that maybe Bill 67 is a good way to turn the corner on commitment to postsecondary education here in the province of Alberta. There is a huge appetite for it, Mr. Speaker, from north to south, east to west, to make an investment in postsecondary. There is a cohort of young people right now that are in grade school – right? – many tens of thousands more than ever before. We can see it. We've built 200 new schools for them. Those schools are all full. Within a few years they will need postsecondary positions. If they don't have those postsecondary positions here in the province of Alberta and if those postsecondary positions in Alberta are unaffordable due to massive tuition increases, then those students will simply leave or not go to school. So those are the decisions and . . .

The Speaker: The thing that I can't help notice this morning is the silky soft sounds of the jackhammer outside.

Mr. Eggen: Yes, Mr. Speaker. You know, they sound kind of like those Tibetan prayer horns or like something is drilling into the side of the Legislature.

The Speaker: That is exactly correct.

Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available if anyone has a brief question or comment for the Member for Edmonton-North West.

Seeing none, are there others wishing to join in the debate? The hon. the Member for Edmonton-West Henday.

Mr. Carson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's an honour to rise this morning to speak to Bill 67, the Skilled Trades and Apprenticeship Education Act. At first glance, as the previous speaker mentioned, I think that we see some opportunities within this legislation. I think that every opportunity we have to talk about the expansion of apprenticeship programs and ensuring that we have adequate spaces and opportunities in training, that we take those opportunities to discuss that. What we see here in the idea that we expand some of these programs to be offered in different ways than we traditionally have is overall, I think, in principle, something that I am relatively supportive of, but there are definitely a lot of questions that I have related to Bill 67, primarily about the administration or changes to administration of courses and programs.

I appreciate, again, the previous member in his role as the minister in education specifically, and when we look at the idea of the registered apprenticeship program being offered through a high school, I think that those are incredible opportunities that we have to get students started on a successful path to a promising career. Now, with that being said, I think that there are a lot of conversations that we need to be having about the future of trades when we talk about expanding opportunities and ensuring that there's work for those students moving forward.

Of course, we've seen over the last two or so years, since this new government has come into power, that, unfortunately, with the promises that they've made to Albertans and to working families in our community, a lot of those promises haven't come to fruition, specifically around jobs and opportunities for those in the trades. I'm hopeful that once we're able to move forward past the pandemic, many of our workers will be able to get back on the job, but the fact is that when I look at my own union, IBEW 424, a large majority of those people are still out of work and are looking for work. So any time we're talking about indenturing new people into those trades, we should also be talking about: are there opportunities for those workers on the other side of that education?

Now, again, we heard some very good points from the previous speaker. The idea that with these changing opportunities for the administration and the administration of the programs that are offered by, well, right now primarily postsecondary institutions but with the changes that we see in Bill 67 potentially by other associations or private organizations, I definitely have questions specific to the idea that we've heard from this government around performance-based funding for postsecondaries. It's no secret that the UCP has talked previously about the idea that postsecondary institutions should be getting funding potentially based on whether people are getting jobs on the other side, so when we talk about expanding the opportunities for other organizations besides postsecondary institutions to offer apprenticeship training, I have to question what that is going to mean for their funding model and the amount of money that they are receiving as institutions if we see a major shift of how these programs are being offered, how they are being administered. I can appreciate the current system that we have. I'm sure there are always opportunities to strengthen the process that's currently in place, and that is what the government is promising through Bill 67, the Skilled Trades and Apprenticeship Education Act.

9:20

Now, when I had the opportunity to go through the beginning process of my apprenticeship, I went to NAIT for the first technical aspect, the first technical training process. I have nothing but great things to say about the programs that they were offering through that process. It was hands-on. I had every opportunity to learn, not only from a textbook but in the classroom, and really it prepared me to move forward with that apprenticeship. Now, what we're seeing through this is potentially a difference in, again, how those programs are going to be administered.

While I had the opportunity to gather, you know, over a thousand hours before I went into NAIT, I know that currently there are some other opportunities, potentially going to school first even, I believe, and then getting some of that hands-on training. I just wonder how this might change if we see organizations other than what we've traditionally seen so far offering some of these courses and how that training might change, so it's definitely something that I will be keeping an eye on as this process moves forward.

Again, when we look at the current system – when I went to school, I paid for the costs up front, as far as I remember, and after successfully finishing the program, I was able to be reimbursed for the funding that I had initially paid. I think that's an important component, that we are doing our best to support students no matter what program they're in. Unfortunately, what we've seen from this government is quite the opposite. We've seen not only in the trades the costs of getting education going up but even more so potentially in our degree-offering programs. These programs have gone up by thousands of dollars per semester even.

Further to that, we've seen the costs of paying those loans back, in terms of the interest on these loans, actually raised because of the decisions of this UCP government, which is incredibly unfortunate and frustrating as we are considering opportunities to diversify our economy, expand our economy, and expand the knowledge that students and the people in our province have. When we talk about keeping people here instead of them leaving, potentially even right out of high school, we need to be considering these costs and also the process of how we are administering these programs.

We've seen even in B.C., as they moved forward on the removal of compulsory trade designations, that completion rates for these programs actually declined, as did the wages for those workers that were completing those programs. So I have to question whether the government has watched these trends, if the government has done

a crossjurisdictional analysis on what they are proposing in this legislation, and if they have, what results they saw of that. Is it the case, as we've seen in B.C., that completion rates are expected to decline, or if not, what is the government doing to combat what we've seen in B.C. and potentially other jurisdictions? I hope that we can get some answers around that.

We also see that a lot of what is being proposed in here or what is not, I suppose, being proposed in here is going to be left up to regulations. I always have to question whether that is the best decision when we are in the House debating this piece of legislation before us, whether we should have the full picture of what is being proposed or not. When we talk about the administration of these programs, the board structure of these programs and some of the decisions that are being left to regulations, it's hard for us to make decisions when we don't have the full picture in front of us. We've seen this again and again from this government, where we are told to trust them, that in principle we should support the bill, but often the body of the legislation or the majority of the decisions that are going to be made are actually left to regulations, and it is, again, very hard for us as legislators to make decisions through that process and based on that process.

We see that this legislation appears to do away with provincial and local committee structures. Also, it waters down the role of the board and the trades it purports to grow. I just question, again, how this is actually going to improve the apprenticeship process and the trade opportunities in our province if those trades don't actually have a seat at the table. Again, this is a piece, as far as I can tell, that is largely going to be left, the board structures, potentially to regulations. So we're expected to agree to potentially these structures without fully understanding or seeing how they are going to be administered.

We see that under the current legislation, just on this point, again, that input and oversight from the employer and employee perspectives is equal throughout the board and provincial and local apprenticeship committees. Again, I question these changes or how the government came to the conclusion that these were the right decisions to make based on what they've seen potentially here; if the board structure wasn't working, why they have proposed to see such a drastic change to those boards. If they feel that it's not working, then we definitely need some answers on that.

Again, when we look at section 2 and the definitions, it discusses the idea of sponsors that can be entities beyond normal employers to provide these apprenticeships, one example, of course, being unions. I believe that we see opportunities for that already taking place, and I think that overall it is a successful process. After all, these are people who understand the trades, understand the apprenticeship program quite thoroughly, I would argue, to some of the highest levels. I can appreciate any opportunity that we have to allow, again, more apprenticeships to be taking place, for more opportunities for education to be taking place that we should definitely be considering and be discussing them.

But, again, I would love clarification on if the process of offering those programs is going to change, if the traditional way of potentially gathering a couple thousand hours and then going to school or potentially going to school on the front end and then gathering a couple thousand hours, if there are going to be even further changes or opportunities from that based on where an apprentice decides to go, whether they go to an institution or potentially go to an entity outside of those traditional organizations.

Mr. Speaker, as you might appreciate, there is a lot to take in from this. I understand that we are primarily looking at this bill in principle and hoping to gather some feedback on that, but there are just so many questions left to be addressed. So I really hope that we hear some more information and clarification from the minister. I

apologize if maybe I've asked some questions that have potentially been addressed, but I'm always happy to be corrected and get further clarification on that.

Through our conversations we have heard concerns that the removal of compulsory designated trades, that we're seeing in this legislation, again, could be moving towards a similar system, as we've seen in B.C., and we are very concerned about the idea that we might see lower completion rates because of that and might see reduced wages in the trades. That's always a concern.

We also see that work-site injuries in B.C. also outpace other jurisdictions. Again, when we are talking about how we are offering these programs, I want reassurances that the safety aspect is not going to be put in jeopardy, that the training around that safety and opportunities to ensure that the education is in line with what we've seen already are going to continue through the process that is being proposed by this bill, Bill 67.

9:30

I look forward to hearing more discussion on this. Again, we're seeing some major changes in how the model is going to work for Albertans in the board structure, in the educational administration of this process, of who is going to be allowed to administer these programs outside of the traditional scope of what we've seen here in Alberta. Mr. Speaker, again, in principle, I'm happy to support anything that talks about increasing apprenticeship opportunities, increasing job opportunities for Albertans, but when we look at the history of this government, again, whether we're talking about trades, whether we're talking about degree programs, this government has put up a lot of hurdles for postsecondary institutions to be able to be successful into the future.

We're seeing entire programs being cut across the province and across all industries, and we are seeing entire administrative boards within the institutions being amalgamated, many times from double digits down to single digits, and that's always concerning when we talk about removing the number of people that are supporting students through these programs, removing opportunities to have those experts at the table.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a) if anyone has a brief question or comment.

Seeing none, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs.

Ms Goehring: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise this morning to speak to Bill 67, Skilled Trades and Apprenticeship Education Act. I can tell you that I'm pretty familiar with the trades. My oldest son is a fourth-generation journeyman insulator, comes from a family of working in oil and gas and the trades, and was successful in getting his education through NAIT right here in Edmonton. I can tell you that it was a really good process for him because the insulators were actually the ones in NAIT that were teaching the trade. When he would do his apprenticeship in the field and then come in and do his schooling at NAIT in the west end, it was people that actually did the work that were teaching that skill that he had to bring out into the field.

When we look at this legislation, there is the potential that the minister can dictate who is responsible for that education, that certification. I'm curious if any of the skilled trades – and I say “skilled” because they are. They're very skilled in what they do. It's very specific work that they do, and my expectation would be that those that are teaching it are trained in it. That's something that simply makes sense. My background is social work. I can't imagine doing my field placement with a social worker and then going to school and learning from an accountant who believes in social

work, who has an interest for whatever reason, was appointed by a minister because perhaps that's their friend but really knows nothing about social work. I would question as a professional under my ethics: what am I learning? Am I truly learning what social work is? I want to learn from someone that has that hands-on experience. All of my professors were social workers.

I take students now from the social work programs that are offered all across the province, whether it's a diploma, a bachelor's, a master's, and they all come from an education that is based in social work. Their professors are social workers because they're learning how to do social work, so to look at this piece of legislation, that says that there could be a certificate requirement that is governed by someone who perhaps is not in that trade, is very concerning. What gives them the expertise and the skill required to educate on a skilled trade? I think that when we look at the different opportunities that this government could have taken to talk to those that are involved in the trades and apprenticeship, I'm curious who they consulted with.

I know when we were in government and I was the military liaison for the province, we worked very closely with the military, specifically the Helmets to HardHats program, that looked at those that were part of the Armed Forces, whether it was regular or reserves, who are skilled in their trade. So whether they're carpenters, whether they're plumbers, they're educated within the military program. This program, called Helmets to HardHats, works with the unions and the skilled trades to ensure that their members can transition from military into civilian life with the same career. We know that that communication was essential. The military wanted to ensure that their members, when they retire, were eligible to continue their trade in their province.

That was something where I'm very proud of the work that we did. We saw many members transition from being an active member to a retired member still working in their profession. It was an area that we discussed quite a bit at Seamless Canada. As the Alberta representative I was able to sit with all the other provinces and territories, with the representative and the military, to talk about what some of the barriers are when our members are moving from province to province, not just for the member but for their spouses and for their children. Education came up because each province has a different standard of education. Trades was one of the top things that came up because each province has different regulations.

So when this piece of legislation was being discussed, was the military or Seamless Canada taken into consideration to talk about ways that we can improve the transition process for our skilled trades workers? They would be a very important voice to be at that table when we talk about: who's giving the training? What are the requirements? Through the Helmets to HardHats program the trades in Alberta were able to look at what the military offered, the training that they received. So on top of being, let's say, a plumber, they also received combat training. They also received first aid training. They have certificate upon certificate that goes above and beyond what the expectation is for the Alberta plumber, so how they worked to make them compatible so the member can easily transition was something that took a lot of work between the provincial government and the military.

So when they were making these changes, were they consulted? It's a transition program that works very well. There are still areas of improvement when it comes to crossjurisdictional qualifications. Are they looking at other provinces to see how they do it? Is this something that another province does? Could this potentially discourage plumbers from wanting to do their education in Alberta? If they're going to go to school in, let's say, Ontario, where they know that they're going to be taught by a plumber, not someone that the minister appointed to give that education, would they

choose Alberta to come to if they're not confident in their education system to be able to do their job?

I think that by saying that anybody could potentially do the education really causes a lot of doubt in how this government feels about our trades. It's taking away that skilled component of it. It's right in the title, skilled trades. To me, that means that someone skilled should be teaching what it means to be in that trade, and as a result you will have a skilled worker at the end of that education. To take it away from those that are currently doing the work, the way that it's set up now, causes a lot of questions.

I know that there's a lot of research that has been done about women in the trades. We see the program Women Building Futures. This is a program that – its whole purpose is to get more women involved in the trades. But we also see a barrier. Women go through the program, they complete their apprenticeship, and there's a disconnect between those that are completing it and those that are actually entering the field. Has that been applied to this piece of legislation? Are we looking at what some of those barriers are? Does this piece of legislation improve outcomes for women? Is there something in here that says that they've talked with the Women Building Futures program to discuss what sort of educational needs perhaps are missing or what sort of employment barriers there are?

9:40

I don't see anything in this. If we're talking about wanting to get Albertans back to work and creating jobs, I see this as a hurdle, Mr. Speaker. I don't see anything in here that talks about women specifically. That has to be a lens that's applied when there are specific programs targeting women with successful outcomes in the trades. We know that these are good-paying jobs, mortgage-paying jobs. There are structures that are set up that will allow Albertans to come out of this with a ticket, but I'm not seeing how this piece of legislation actually accomplishes that.

I am concerned that there are many, many questions that are outstanding. Who was talked to? Who was consulted? I know that when we're looking at education in this province, we've seen what they've done with the curriculum and the outrage from K to 12. We've seen the attacks that they've done on postsecondary, with skyrocketing tuition rates. What's happening with these decisions is that people are leaving the province for their education. I know, talking to people in the trades, that they're not comfortable thinking that someone who is not a skilled tradesman would be training them in their education. It just simply doesn't make sense.

Another question that I have is – I have a student, a child who's in grade 12. He and his friends are, obviously, contemplating what their next steps are, those big-pressure things that are happening for students in grade 12: what am I going to do with the rest of my life? Some of them were fortunate enough to go through programs through high school that actually allowed them to become apprentices, that actually gave them the skills needed to become mechanics or to become electricians. They did it right in high school. They started that journey, knowing that that was going to be their career path.

I'm curious if this registered apprenticeship program will be affected. There's a really wonderful system currently in place that supports our high school students to become apprentices. Is it going to be impacted by this? I know that my son is looking at becoming a plumber, and these are questions that he has. "Like, who am I going to be learning from, Mom? Am I going to be learning from people who actually work in the trade, or am I going to be learning from someone who likes the trade, maybe has some teaching background, which is wonderful, but is it someone that's actually going to be able to give me that hands-on experience education

when I need it?" My son is a hands-on learner. That's where he does his best learning, by actually doing.

That's part of what the apprentice education is. You're in a classroom setting, but you're actually doing the work. You're using the tools. You're getting familiar with them. If you have someone that's never held a wrench teaching you how to access pipe, what does that look like? You can read it in a book, but I can tell you from first-hand experience, Mr. Speaker, that I've tried to do things on my own, some maintenance things around the house, and quickly learned that, after watching a YouTube video, I'm not actually a skilled tradesperson, and I could potentially do more damage to my sink or to my toilet or to whatever it was that I thought I could do.

When we're talking about our future, it's concerning that this government talks about jobs, jobs, jobs. We're not seeing anything in their legislation or in their plan that's actually going to get people back to work. Many people are looking at having to come up with a new career. We have tradespeople all over this province that have been laid off. COVID has impacted so many people, so what are they doing? They're looking at schooling as an opportunity to change their career. They're looking in the trades. They're looking at those jobs that potentially could create a new career path for them.

I've talked in this House at length about the comparison between the film and TV industry and oil and gas. There are so many skills that are transferable between the two industries. Is this something that this government is talking about? Have they talked to the film industry when they talk about their driller or their derrickman that isn't working that can do that work on a film set? How can we get that person into the trade that is an easy transition to them? They have the skills. They don't have the title. They don't have that education or the apprenticeship needed for that, but it makes it an easy transition because they already know how to do that work. When we have people that are so skilled – like gaffers and grips, makeup, hair, props, set directors, all of those things, lights, people that come in and set up a crew; we have heavy machinery operators that come in and set up a set – that same work is being done in oil and gas. Are we looking at ways that those individuals can transfer?

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available. Under Standing Order 29(2)(a)?

Mr. Shepherd: Yes. My colleague from Edmonton-Castle Downs was just cut off midsentence, so I just wanted to see if she had a final thought she'd like to complete.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs.

Ms Goehring: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to my colleague for allowing me a little bit more time to talk about this. I know that this isn't a new concept that's being introduced to this government. On November 18, 2019, specifically, I did a member's statement from an individual who worked both in oil and gas and in the film industry. He was a derrickman who worked on a drilling rig and a prop man for the film *Unforgiven*, that were both here in Alberta. He easily made the connection between the two trades and questioned why this government isn't looking at film and looking at oil and gas, where we saw a decline in employment, and looking at the comparisons and how easily their jobs relate. They're using the same set of skills.

When this government looked at the skilled trades and apprenticeship education, I'm curious if this conversation occurred, if they talked about ways to take an already existing training and offer different training that is comparable to allow more Albertans

to get back to work. They might have been trained in oil and gas, and perhaps if this government had actually supported the film industry, they could be employed in the film industry.

We've had so many people around this province, skilled, hard-working Albertans, that want to be part of the solution. They want to be able to be at the table with government to help get Albertans back to work. The film industry is a prime example of wanting to be part of that discussion, part of that innovation, part of that diversification, and we're looking at skilled trades. This would have been the perfect opportunity to allow for those individuals to have some sort of voice at the table. So when we're talking about who they actually spoke to when it comes to the education and the apprenticeship, are they thinking outside of the box? Are they thinking about individuals in this province that are very skilled in one career that could easily transition into another but there aren't opportunities to do so?

We've seen programs that have been creative in ways of looking at skills that perhaps could be transferable. We see people with multiple tickets because they're on the work site and they see another journeyman doing a trade that perhaps has comparable skills. Is it easy for them to transition into another trade? Do they want to because of the cost now of tuition or perhaps that they're not going to be trained as their colleague was because we don't know where that education is coming from? We don't know who's overseeing it.

9:50

We question who has been talked to. Have the actual professions that are being impacted had a voice at the table? Have they talked to the insulators? Have they talked to the engineers? I know that there are many, many Albertans around this province that are eager to help. They want to be helped. It's concerning that this legislation gives the power to the minister to create apprentice and industry programs and the related credentials. How is the minister skilled as per this title to know all of the different trades that are out there and what makes sense?

We have so many in this province that are saying: we want to help; will you include us at the table? I don't see who they've consulted with. I don't see this when it comes to this piece of legislation. I don't see anything in here that speaks to the work that's already being done. Is that going to be erased? Is there still going to be a relationship with the Helmets to HardHats program? Is there going to be a relationship with Women Building Futures? Are there going to be relationships with the high schools that are currently doing great work supporting students getting into the trades? All of that consultation is so essential because there is work that's already being done.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I thank you, and I will cede my time.

The Speaker: Hon. members? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview on second reading.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise today and speak to Bill 67, the Skilled Trades and Apprenticeship Education Act. I appreciate the comments that my colleagues have made this morning, some great questions that have been asked around this bill. You know, I recognize and we recognize at the outset that acts like this one need to be updated and refreshed from time to time. There are a number of positive things in this bill that I think are worthy of supporting. I do have some questions as far as other parts of it that I'll get into this morning here.

First and foremost, we know that apprenticeships are incredibly important. We know that trades are also equally important. I think

that far too often members on the government side talk about how they feel like the trades are less valued than another, you know, postsecondary degree. We don't feel that way. We feel that they're all equally valuable. We need the trades; we need folks getting university degrees as well. It's not an either/or. I think, really, this is about providing Albertans with as many options as possible to pursue whatever careers that they want to, and we know that we have incredibly skilled trades in our province. In fact, I would argue that here in Alberta our tradespeople are the best in the country, quite frankly.

This legislation, by providing new definitions, opening it up, I think is a positive thing. Again, I have questions around how decisions are going to be made. I know that much of this legislation is a framework, which is enabling legislation, which is not a bad thing for this so that, again, while we open up this piece of legislation and refresh it, if it wasn't enabling legislation, the risk is that in two years from now we need to open it up again.

I can tell you, Mr. Speaker, that when I read articles in papers that talk about the future of work, it's fascinating that in a few years from now there will be jobs that do not exist today because of the pace of technology, the pace of development. That's fascinating. So I think it is important that government look to how they can try to – I don't want to say get ahead of the game – at least keep pace. I mean, part of the challenge is that often legislation lags behind the reality of our situations because they're ever-changing and ever-evolving.

Providing a framework is great. There are always questions and concerns when the bulk of the meat and potatoes is left to regulation, because regulations are all done by orders in council, which is cabinet, behind closed doors. It's not debated in public. There's no opportunity for Albertans to participate. There's no opportunity for oversight from the opposition. That's always a bit of a concern.

Quite frankly, Mr. Speaker, we've been reaching out, and my colleagues have had numerous conversations with folks from the different trades. We heard from my colleague who is a member of IBEW and others that are, you know, trying to get feedback from the trades themselves as far as what their thoughts are on this bill, what they like, what they don't like. And that's important.

You know, the one thing that I want to say is that, yes, this bill is positive in that it's a framework, it's expanding the scope and definition of trades, but I think what Albertans need to remember is that this is another example of the UCP hitting the gas and the brake at the same time. In the past two years they've stripped hundreds of millions of dollars out of our postsecondary system – hundreds of millions of dollars – and in the same breath turn around and say: look at all these great things that we're doing. But you've just taken a ton of money out of the system. I mean, contradictory is the gentle way of framing this. There are some that would frame it as hypocritical, but the point is that it's the opposite of what they should be doing.

We see similar examples where the government loves to talk about when Alberta is able to attract companies and investments into our province, which is positive, you know, especially when we look at examples like Infosys, of companies that are technology companies that come and are very, very clear with Albertans that they are coming here for quality of life and for the talent. Well, Mr. Speaker, let's talk about talent for a minute. Where does that talent come from? It can come from people that are self-taught, for sure. I mean, the definition of talent and the scope of talent has changed. It's not just from traditional universities, colleges, and institutions, but the bulk of talent does come through our postsecondary system. So when the UCP government cuts our postsecondaries, they're actually shrinking the talent pipeline, which will have an adverse

effect, and it will be a disincentive for these companies to locate in Alberta.

You know, on the one hand, saying, “Look, we understand that this is important” – okay. Well, then, as a colleague of mine said: put your money where your mouth is. If it’s important, then make those critical investments and grow the talent pipeline. You have an example here where there are some positive changes being made, but without the funding to go with them, Alberta is falling behind. Shrinking the talent pipeline is the opposite of what we should be doing, especially as the world moves to a more knowledge-based economy. If the government was serious about diversification and not just putting up billboards along highways, then they would make some of these critical investments and recognize that we need to plant the seeds today for these good-news stories, you know, tomorrow and down the road.

10:00

Again, the example of Infosys: that company was courted by the previous government along with our strong partners of Calgary Economic Development and the city of Calgary and others. You know, on the front page of that story, when it broke that Infosys was coming to Calgary, it was very clear that it had taken years to get to that announcement. My point is that, you know, if we want more good-news stories like that, which we do, then we need to make these critical investments, and we need to send the right signals out in the world because everyone is competing, Mr. Speaker. Currently Alberta is still lagging behind other jurisdictions on these critical investments that will turn into good-news stories, jobs, and wins for the province, that, of course, we all want to see.

Mr. Speaker, you know, other questions I’ll get into, but I need to be conscious of my time. I actually would like to move an amendment at this point in time if I may.

The Speaker: Hon. member, if you pass that to the page, we’ll get a copy, and then we’ll proceed once the table has the originals.

Mr. Bilous: Yes.

The Speaker: Hon. members, this will be referred to as amendment REF1.

The hon. member.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I will read this into the record for the benefit of those following online or at home. My colleague the Member for Edmonton-McClung moves that the motion for second reading of Bill 67, Skilled Trades and Apprenticeship Education Act, be amended by deleting all the words after “that” and substituting the following:

Bill 67, Skilled Trades and Apprenticeship Education Act, be not now read a second time but that the subject matter of the bill be referred to the Standing Committee on Alberta’s Economic Future in accordance with Standing Order 74.2.

Now, Mr. Speaker, the purpose of this . . .

The Speaker: I apologize to the member for interrupting. I just wanted to double-check to see if the hon. member was able to provide an electronic copy to the table via e-mail or if perhaps someone from the team could do that during your remarks, as, should there be a recorded division, we’ll also provide this to those who are joining us remotely.

The hon. member.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I absolutely appreciate the reminder. I think my colleague, our whip, is in the process of actioning that request.

Mr. Speaker, if members are, I guess, questioning why we’re bringing forward this referral amendment in light of the fact that we are supportive of elements and aspects of this bill, again, this is only sending it to committee for a few more conversations around some of the content in this bill. As I stated earlier in my comments, a lot of important details are being left to regulation, so we feel as Her Majesty’s Official Opposition that we should take the time to hear from more Albertans to make sure that we get this right.

Now, I hope that the government appreciates that, as much as possible, we should not only hear different perspectives and opinions but try to get legislation right the first time.

I’ve been in this Chamber long enough to either be a part of or to watch governments of all different political stripes have to reintroduce bills or amend bills that they just amended not long ago. I’d be the first to admit that we did that as government. I know that this current government has done that already and that previous governments have done that. You know, the challenge with introducing legislation when you make a mistake or you leave something out or something needs to be amended is that it’s very time consuming. Again, you know, we want to make sure that we get this right the first time so that we’re not unnecessarily taking up time from all members and the offices and folks that support us in this Chamber.

We know that this bill is going to set an important framework for apprenticeships and for skills development in the province, and we know that this bill incorporates many of the recommendations from the Skills for Jobs Task Force. I do want to thank the members that sat on that committee, that worked with industry and with our postsecondaries in order to bring forward a series of recommendations, that we do see many of them reflected in this bill. But I can’t stand here, Mr. Speaker, and definitively tell Albertans and my constituents that all of the recommendations from that task force have been included in this bill. I would like to have the opportunity to confirm with all affected stakeholders that everything that needs to be in here is in this bill, so by sending it to committee – we’re not starting from scratch. We’re not throwing the baby out with the bathwater. What we’re saying is: let’s just slow this down and bring some folks in to ensure that we didn’t miss anything and that we get it right the first time.

You know, it makes me think of a brilliant company out of Calgary, where their acronym is DIRTT. It’s called doing it right the first time. They use a bunch of technology to build and design houses and physical spaces, but they have no waste. They’ve really taken, you know, the Toyota lean system and implemented it. In a traditional construction of a building there are lots of odds and ends, pieces that get thrown out and scraps. This company, DIRTT, ensures that by being precise, they only use what they need. It’s actually a brilliant concept. I encourage members to check out this company. I digress, Mr. Speaker.

I hope that members can support this amendment. Let’s get it right the first time and support Albertans.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available.

Are there others wishing to speak? The hon. Associate Minister of Red Tape Reduction.

Mr. Hunter: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I’ll be quick as I speak about this amendment. This bill is really about being able to provide a parity of esteem for our skilled trades. We know that there are people who can get a trade, that can do very well in this world. As we took a look at the importance of this bill, we recognized that, you know, some go into a university degree. In Alberta, for some strange reason, they seem to have a belief that

that is better than someone going into the trades. This bill is about being able to provide that parity of esteem for those who are in the trades. This is a good thing. I'm not sure exactly what the Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview was talking about when he said: get it right. I thought that the NDP would be one hundred per cent behind this.

In fact, to be clear, Mr. Speaker, the hon. Member for Edmonton-North West, prior to the Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview MLA, got up and talked about how good this bill was and how this had gotten it right and how this was the type of bill that he felt like he would be able to support. Now, I find it interesting that a member from the same caucus over there says one thing and the other says another. This is certainly what we expect from the NDP. They probably needed to get together and talk about what their strategy was going to be, but let's call a spade a spade. What the hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview has done here is that he has said: let's try to stall a good piece of legislation. This is really what this is, a stall tactic that the NDP are using in order to be able to stall a good piece of legislation that will be able to provide the parity of esteem for our tradespeople in Alberta.

10:10

I think it's interesting that the NDP constantly talk about being one for the unions, yet this is one where they're not being one for the unions. So, Mr. Speaker, I would recommend that all members of this House vote this down. Let's get on with the business of this House.

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

On amendment REF1, the hon. Member for Edmonton-City Centre.

Mr. Shepherd: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is laughable that the associate minister would suggest that there is an issue because there are a variety of thoughts amongst our caucus after the circus that we have seen with the governing party in the last few weeks in the midst of a pandemic, risking the lives of Albertans because they are fighting amongst themselves. I'll thank the associate minister for that hearty laugh this morning.

Speaking to the amendment, now, the associate minister also suggested without reference, without any sort of verification, without any actual proof, that members on this side of the House have had some sort of a condescending or elitist attitude towards the trades despite the fact that members of our caucus while we were in government indeed worked in those trades, proudly supported the unions that were part of that work. We, in fact, invested in supporting trades and apprenticeship programs, in training programs in high school, and in many other levels. I would suggest to the associate minister and his colleagues that if they want to debate this bill, let's in fact debate it based on reality and not their insistence on trying to conjure up elitism because they feel that they have to have a culture war rather than actually talking about the benefits of their bill.

That is why we have this amendment in front of us, because indeed there are aspects of this bill that are good and valuable. The intent behind bringing forward this bill we absolutely support. Indeed, this legislation dates back to 1991, so there is good reason for it to be reviewed and updated. The question is: have they gotten it right? To be clear, Mr. Speaker, this is a government that has a track record so far in their two years of existence of breaking systems in the name of efficiency and innovation, claiming that they're going to cut costs but instead often making situations far worse, having to scramble to repair the damage that they have done,

and often then that ends up being at a significant loss for Albertans and indeed often increased costs.

So I think there is good reason to have careful consideration of the bill that is in front of us as they are proposing a significant change to how apprenticeships are operated in the province of Alberta, a significant expansion of how they might go about, and significant changes to the systems that will govern how that goes. That is why we have the amendment in front of us, suggesting that this be referred to a committee, not because we disagree with the principle, not because we disagree with the intent but because we are not convinced that this government has got it right.

Let's just think, Mr. Speaker, about what has happened with our health care system. This government, of course, immediately struck a panel to look into costs in the province with a target painted very clearly on the health care system. It pretty much broadcasted what they were going to come out with, and then the report came out, and indeed they have moved forward. What we have seen with this government insisting on forcing through some of these very changes, even in the midst of a global pandemic, is that it has come at a significant cost to the people of Alberta. We have seen significant pressure on our health care system. Indeed, now we are seeing closures at rural health care sites like Elk Point, which now does not have doctors on Tuesdays or Thursdays in their emergency department for the foreseeable future, or the Galahad care centre this week, because this government did not think through its insistence on pursuing an ideological agenda that disrupted a system.

Now, I'm seeing less ideology here in this legislation. Of course, there's much to be laid out in the regulation, and there's certainly plenty of room for the government to pursue, shall we say, some ill-advised directions based on its imagined idea that there is some sort of elitism amongst Albertans in regard to the trades.

I think also of what this government did with our tech industry, again coming in based on ideology, immediately just razing the earth in terms of supports and incentives for the tech industry in Alberta. Now, in that case they struck the panel afterwards because they already realized, just after having done it, that they had already done incredible damage. My hat is off to the tech industry for having made their voices heard and made sure they got at the table to make recommendations to this government after they again disrupted a system that had been working and functioning, had begun to generate good returns for the province of Alberta. Thank goodness that the resilience and the hard work of folks in the industry and the advocates in Calgary and other areas – the city of Calgary, Platform Calgary, and others who've been doing this work for many years – were able to keep that momentum going until this government finally managed to see the error of its ways and begin to catch up.

That is why we are saying that this bill should be referred to committee, so we have the opportunity to review these concerns, actually talk to some of the stakeholders. Indeed, I would love to see the opportunity for some of these things. I want to make sure it's done right. The tech industry is one that the Minister of Advanced Education has specifically mentioned he would like to see benefit from possible use of apprenticeships. Indeed, he has said that there's no reason why occupations like coding or cybersecurity or ag tech and others cannot be taught through an apprenticeship model.

Indeed, the government's own Innovation Capital Working Group has noted the importance of us training people here in Alberta and retaining those people who get that education and training here in the province of Alberta for our tech industry as an essential component. In that report they talk about working with postsecondary educational institutions and enabling greater output

of technology and innovation graduates as being key to ensuring that Alberta creates the right conditions to support the work they are doing. They talk about how important it is for Alberta's postsecondary institutions to have the ability to increase graduates in technology fields.

Now, Mr. Speaker, of course, our government had invested in creating more postsecondary spaces so that we could get more graduates to fill the jobs that these companies want to fill. Indeed, if we are working on attracting more tech companies – and indeed some of the ones that had been courted by my colleague from Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview, like Infosys, have indeed carried on and begun to establish – we need to continue to generate graduates who have those skills. This is one way we could potentially do it.

But there are real questions about whether the way the government is approaching this and indeed creating a broader new system – the government says that they are bringing this forward to reduce red tape, but they are also creating now a whole new system within government: new committees, new registrar, new other things. If we are setting up this whole new infrastructure, we want to make sure we are doing it right because, again, I do not see that this government has a great track record on that front so far.

10:20

Now, of course, in their report the Innovation Capital Working Group also said that they encourage postsecondary institutions to expand program development in areas of technology and broaden the reach of entrepreneurial thinking in programs more generally. They do in fact talk about internships. They say: "Increase funding of internship opportunities for graduate students and postdoctoral fellows." In this case, they weren't calling for additional; they just said: we would like to see the government invest a bit more. They call for about \$5 million invested into an existing program, Mitacs, a nonprofit that's funded by the federal and provincial governments. Now, of course, we know that this government has not had a very good track record of partnering with the federal government to take advantage of dollars already on the table to benefit Albertans. Unfortunately, we've seen a lot of ideology get in the way. But here's an opportunity right here.

Again, I think this is a good reason why we might want to have the opportunity to take this to a standing committee for discussion by referral. Indeed, the Innovation Capital Working Group, in talking about this need and this area where the minister is saying that he is interested in pursuing internships, talks about it being essential that there is partnership with postsecondary institutions, indeed with this particular program through Mitacs, talking about the need for graduate students and postdoctoral fellows, masters and doctorates, Mr. Speaker, which this government is making it increasingly difficult for young Albertans to afford. Therein lies a good part of this question and another reason why this should go for referral. This government wants to open up all of these opportunities. How are these opportunities going to be accessible to many of the Albertans that have the skill, the talent, the ability but not the funds?

There are increasingly wide numbers of Albertans coming from marginalized communities and, dare I say, racialized communities which are disproportionately missing from areas of technology when this government is allowing skyrocketing tuition rates – not even allowing, Mr. Speaker; they are causing – by the dollars they are cutting from our postsecondary institutions. I have three of them headquartered in my constituency. I have a fourth that has a presence, the University of Alberta, plus virtual campuses, so I hear about this from the staff, and I hear about this from the students. If this government wants to expand opportunities for apprenticeship,

it does not work if they are simultaneously making it too expensive for a large number of Albertans to actually participate. That is another opportunity that we have for discussion on this at a standing committee through referral.

I absolutely respect the trades, Mr. Speaker. My father was an electrician, worked hard to support our family, and I was proud of him for that work. He went through a trade school in Trinidad. Unlike what the Associate Minister of Red Tape Reduction might want to suggest, I don't look down on the trades. They fed my family.

Mr. Hunter: Point of order.

The Speaker: A point of order has been called by the hon. the Associate Minister of Red Tape Reduction.

Point of Order Imputing Motives

Mr. Hunter: Yeah, Mr. Speaker: 23(h), (i), and (j), imputing false motives. The hon. member knows full well that I did not say that, and he needs to apologize and withdraw his remarks.

Mr. Bilous: You said exactly that.

Mr. Hunter: No, I did not.

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

Mr. Sabir: It's not a point of order at all, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Does anyone else have any submissions to be made? I am prepared to rule.

Is this for a submission?

Mr. Shepherd: Yes. Mr. Speaker, I clearly heard the associate minister at various points suggest that the Alberta NDP – I am a member of that caucus – indeed viewed the trades as being less than a postsecondary education, and that is what I was referring to.

The Speaker: I don't have the benefit of the Blues, and I'm not entirely sure what the hon. minister – or I am unable to recall the exact words that the hon. minister used, but I would suggest that this is likely a matter of debate around whether or not people take particular positions on certain issues. I don't find a point of order here.

Having said that, a caution that I also provided yesterday was that when we specifically refer to individuals, in this case the associate minister and what he said or didn't say, and not stick to larger, policy-type issues, this is the spot where we often wind up in the Chamber. So I continually encourage members to speak to the robust nature of legislation as opposed to specific policy positions that individuals might take.

The hon. member.

Debate Continued

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As I was saying, I support the trades. They fed my family. I respected the opportunity that my father had to return to NAIT and get his designation as an electronics technician and the work he then spent the rest of his career working in, repairing equipment at the Royal Alex hospital.

Those are good and noble occupations. We support them. We would support a piece of legislation that is going to make that system better. We just want to make sure that that is, in fact, what this legislation is going to do. Given the amount of ambiguities

here, the amount that is being afforded to the minister to determine himself, the amount that is being left to regulation, we believe we should take the opportunity to bring this to a standing committee and have that full discussion, have that check and balance on something that is going to have significant impact on many, many Albertans, indeed their careers, postsecondary institutions, unions, all of the folks involved in making sure that Albertans can make a good and honest living through the trades. We want to ensure that that system is set up as best as it can possibly be.

That is why I am in support of this amendment. That is why I thank the Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview for bringing it forward, and myself and my colleagues will make no apologies for making this amendment or indeed working to try to ensure this legislation does what it says on the tin. That is our job as the Official Opposition, and that is what we owe to all Albertans who work within these systems and indeed for the young Albertans who aspire or indeed some of the older Albertans who are going to be looking at a change of career as our province faces significant economic transition. That's all the more reason, Mr. Speaker, for us to make sure we get this right. It is my hope that we will be able to work with the government to accomplish that and that we'll respect each other's positions as we do.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a).

Seeing no one, are there others? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadows.

Mr. Deol: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my honour to rise in the House this morning and speak to an amendment to the bill, actually, Bill 67, Skilled Trades and Apprenticeship Education Act.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

The apprenticeship program as well as a part of it, the industry designations, play a very important role in our society, in a way strengthening our economy, supporting individuals. This program is an important part of our education system that provides the mechanism to other provinces to attract and recruit the talent and provide those individuals opportunities to gain the next level of knowledge, skills so that they could not only support themselves, their families but also contribute to our society by providing their skilled knowledge in building infrastructure, specifically our workforce building schools, hospitals, in this case pipelines.

10:30

The importance of this program is very critical to the prosperity of this province. The way it has been working and been very helpful to the individuals, to the way the people who could not, you know, complete their education during their regular schooling – they could also come back to the education system to improve their skills, improve their education. At the same time, they would not have to worry about going to school to upgrade themselves or to choose between how they will run their household, families, worrying about putting food on tables for their children or running mortgages. I have lived examples of many of those people working in skilled trades, how committedly they worked, and this program was there. That not only helped them achieve the goal they wanted to achieve in their life but also helped their employers and the industry to move to the next level.

I also experienced from the industry, by way of feedback, the people who did not get the strong support or did not complete high school education for one or another reason. It was a great challenge for many to, you know, stick around and have the support that they

needed to focus on studies, to complete these grades, complete the apprenticeship programs they were in. It also relates to that a strong and accessible education system is critical for the success of the apprenticeship program we are running.

I also wanted to mention the existence of institutions like SAIT, NAIT, and many more and their continuous growth and competition. You know, their inability to take all those applications coming in: the numbers of people on wait-lists is a prime example of this. The apprenticeship program in a way – the technical education component for our society and how it is serving the very people of our province.

That's the other reason I think it's important we are talking about apprenticeship education in the House, but there are a number of questions around it, and that is why I'm supporting the amendment presented by my colleague. This time we do not need to rush. As much as we appreciate the government's effort, initiative to bring forward this Bill 67, at the same time we believe that the thorough work and proper consultations with people related to the industry are needed.

As far as my concern about the industry designations I know that there have been a number of questions, concerns, including with me, like, holding a few designations. It has been a bit of a challenge for us to be able to use those designations, either staying on, sometimes having monthly fees with related industries, or if you do not stay a part of such an industry or specific institutions, that prohibits you from using the hard-earned achievements, in this case designations. There have been some issues. I know that I've been hearing from the industry that I worked in. That group of people would spend thousands and thousands of dollars to use those designations, with very minimum benefits to expect from it.

There have been issues, but the way the government is deciding the designations, programs that might be eliminated in this case, if this bill passes: that can have also very adverse effects on the lives of Albertans. The very example from our neighbour province next to us, B.C., that legislated the law that removed the requirement of the industry designations, did not really have a one-sided, positive effect for the majority of the people. That also discouraged a lot of people from moving forward to update their knowledge and skills. That is important not for themselves because they can also add to the – I want to say that they can also qualify for higher wages. But also it is compulsory for our society in this technical world – the technology is moving very rapidly and fast paced – that our workforce stays on top of the knowledge that we need to build this society in a way. They're working in construction, a number of other things. Also, you know, that helps our education system and the generations to come.

10:40

What I'm concerned about, one of the issues, is why they're eliminating the industry designations as this is not supporting the province, provincially, and that is discouraging people. That is in no way helping them to prosper in their lives. There are some who say that it's probably hindering or halting their capacity or potential to qualify for high wages, that would help them prosper in their individual lives.

The other thing, as I said, the apprenticeship program: we cannot, you know, single this program out of our whole education system. My colleague from Edmonton-City Centre gave some specific references and highlighted and spoke about those issues from the industry-related experts about how the government actually needs to invest more into these programs. On the contrary, we have seen that even though these programs have been facing our education system specifically – in the concerns I have been hearing from my constituents during door-knocking, that was the prime issue, the

prime issue in my riding, the cuts to the education system, whether it is early children's learning or it is our school system or specifically the postsecondary education. It has been facing historic cuts, at least since the early '90s.

It has to go a long way, if we decide today and realize the importance of investment into the education system, to recover from those cuts the education system has faced, but unfortunately in the time we are going through, under this UCP government, we have seen those consecutive budgets coming with heavy cuts to the education system, the research programs in those institutions as well, a number of staff being laid off as the population is growing. There are more students in the school system, more students in the postsecondary institutions, but those institutions are under stress and pressure. They have to let go of some of the people right now working within the industry, and in reality they actually need more help.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. members, Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available.

Seeing none, any other members wishing to join the debate? The hon. Member for Edmonton-North West.

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I just want to say a few words in regard to my support of this referral motion. As I said from the outset of my remarks with Bill 67, there are lots of promising ideas and direction here. Indeed, it's part of a normal process, I believe, to revisit legislation and to improve it. Certainly, that's especially relevant in regard to postsecondary education because, of course, postsecondary is a reflection of our society changing and the economy developing and diversifying, hopefully, and different skills that people need, not just for working but for their life and their contribution to our province and to our country as well. I think that there's lots of room to make changes.

Indeed, I mean, I think there are lots of reasons to suggest promise here with what the government has brought forward here today. The main questions, though, I think, are fundamental to whether this legislation will actually be successful or not. So taking a pause to look at the following questions in the referral, I think, is probably a prudent thing to do. These are some of the issues that we need to deal with in regard to this bill, in regard to postsecondary and apprenticeship training programs. Number one – I've said it before, and I'll say it again – are we making sure that apprenticeships get the pay that is associated with the work that they're doing? This is fundamental to people participating in apprenticeship programs, in journeyman programs, and so forth. It's how you reach and retain individuals to get the training and get the work experience and get paid for that at the same time. If there's any deviation from that system, then you will have a decrease in participation and a decrease in training and retaining a workforce here in the province of Alberta.

This is connected to this idea within this bill, which, again, shows some promise in regard to expanding what we consider to be an apprenticeship program. When we think of it, we normally think of, you know, perhaps plumbing and pipefitting or electricians or whatever those skilled tradespeople are doing outside the Chamber right now – right? – making that loud noise. They have an established skilled trades program where perhaps those apprentices working up there right now are getting paid for the work. They'll go back to a place like NAIT or SAIT and get some training, and then you have a smooth transition and a valuable learning experience. If you take the pay element out of there, then suddenly the whole balance is shifted.

I just really want to make sure that we have that reassurance that that's not going to happen. Let's say that we move a new

apprenticeship program into something like technology – right? – or, you know, health services of different kinds to make sure that people are not being shortchanged on that apprenticeship program. I think that's absolutely essential, and that's why we need to answer that question in a much more explicit kind of way.

We need as well to make sure that we are ensuring that the standards that exist in a skilled trades program, the standards that cross provincial boundaries and international boundaries, are being respected as well. If we in any way deviate from the standard that is observed, let's say, as a boilermaker as part of the international standard for a boilermaker through all the provinces and territories of this country and also through the United States and even Mexico, then, again, we are putting ourselves in a compromised position and the workers that train through our programs as well.

I know that a lot of skilled trades are a bit reluctant to speak out more explicitly about this, but we're doing that here now, right? That's our job to do as the Official Opposition, that's our job to do as constructive critics of bills: to make sure that they are functioning for the best interests of everybody in Alberta.

Again, a very important detail: that we are maintaining the standards on trades that are set throughout all the provinces and territories and the internationals as well. The trades want reassurance around that.

Another area that trades definitely want reassurance around is the inclusion of training programs that exist in-house, in our trades programs, across this province – lots and lots of skilled trades have invested considerably in training programs and physical facilities that allow for in-house training of electricians, carpenters, plumbers, and pipefitters, insulators, a whole range of skilled trades that you can learn and apprentice through NAIT and SAIT but also using the in-house programs that those skilled trades have built for themselves, as I say, actually physical plants that exist in Edmonton and Calgary and other places around the province – and to make sure that those are being used and valued as an asset to help train apprentices here in the province.

10:50

This legislation shifts a lot of power from established institutions like the apprenticeship training board to a registrar and to the minister's office. Whenever you have a categorical change of power and responsibility – for example, the minister has the power with this change, this bill, to disestablish any program at any time. Now, that's a tremendous concentration of power, Madam Speaker, and, you know, of course, we would presume that people will use those things in the best way possible, but it could also be used in other ways as well. Again, we need to make sure that all of these other issues are dealt with, because this is a categorical change in the framework by which trades are taught and administered as well.

There's a lot of transfer of power from the apprenticeship training board, for example, and, you know, people are nervous about that because, of course, that has been the way that power has been shared and responsibility and wisdom and experience has been shared here in the province for an awful long time, and you want to make sure that that is honoured and respected moving forward as well.

Like my hon. colleague from Edmonton-Castle Downs talked about, you know, people want to make sure that they know that they're being taught at the highest state and level of professionalism in any given trade that they do, be it the insulators, carpenters, electricians – right? – you name it. You want to have that professional standard being recognized and certified right through not just the students but through the teachers and the programs as well.

That brings up another point, of course, which is to make sure that you're setting the curriculum, the word of the day around here, of each of those trade programs to the highest standard and making sure that it conforms to both the highest provincial standard, the national standard, and international as well. The curriculum and the standard of practice of what people need to know in any given trade is evolving all of the time, and if people are putting good money and time and effort to study for those programs to that curriculum standard, you want to make sure that that curriculum is top notch and has oversight that comes from the profession, right? We saw how that can go off the rails here in technicolour over the last few weeks and months in regard to the K to 12 curriculum. You don't want to follow anything that resembles that with a curriculum that is being taught for the trades. Fair play. That seems like common sense to me, and that's what people want as well.

So that's where we're at, Madam Speaker. Like I said, we had some good words to say about the idea of the evolution of our apprenticeship training program and how it integrates with our larger postsecondary education system. We know that it's absolutely essential to invest in postsecondary at this juncture in our history, now more than ever, to diversify our economy, to retain the young population that we have in this province, to make sure that we're sending a sense of hope and optimism for people not just to get a trade and get a job but to start a family, put down roots, build a community here in the province of Alberta. That's what postsecondary can do for us.

You know, quite frankly, this government has sent a lot of mixed messages around postsecondary education over these last two years: three budgets taking \$690 million out of the postsecondary education system from the previous government, which happened to be us, to today. It's resulted in thousands of job losses, lots of programs being dissolved. It's put an existential question on some of the colleges to even exist, quite frankly, and people take notice of that, not just the person who lost their job working in a trade school or a college or university but the public, too. You make choices around where you're going to live, you make choices around where you're going to invest, and you make choices for the best interests of your kids. If things look like they're compromised in terms of postsecondary, that's enough of a reason for people to move, quite frankly, move away – right? – because we do these things for our children, for our next generation.

You know, let's turn the ship around – I think we can – build a strong version of what postsecondary can look like, invest in it, right? You can't just say: well, we're going to build a brand new trades program, and we're going to cut at the same time. Those are two conflicting messages. The message has to be clean and it has to be unified, and thus with this referral I think we can have an honest and authentic way to accomplish those goals.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available.

Seeing none, any other members wishing to speak to amendment REF1?

Seeing none, I will call the question.

[Motion on amendment REF1 lost]

The Deputy Speaker: We're back on the main bill, Bill 67. Are there any other members wishing to join debate in second reading?

Seeing none, I will call the question.

[Motion carried; Bill 67 read a second time]

Government Bills and Orders Committee of the Whole

[Mrs. Pitt in the chair]

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

Bill 62

Red Tape Reduction Implementation Act, 2021

The Chair: This is the first time that this is being debated in Committee of the Whole. Are there any members wishing to join debate? The hon. Associate Minister of Red Tape Reduction.

Mr. Hunter: Thank you, Madam Chair. I'm pleased to rise in the House today to speak once again to Bill 62, the Red Tape Reduction Implementation Act, 2021. I appreciate the discussion we've had so far, and I want to thank all members who took part to speak to this bill in second reading. In a moment I want to take some time to answer questions that were raised by the members opposite, but before I do, I'd like to touch on significant progress we have made as a government so far in terms of reducing red tape.

In 2019 we went straight to work to establish the Associate Ministry of Red Tape Reduction. It was built as a small ministry housed in Treasury Board and Finance that used existing resources to ensure Alberta's government would cut red tape by one-third in order to reduce costs and speed up approvals, freeing job creators to get more Albertans back to work.

I have the great honour of heading up our government's efforts to get government out of the way of our job creators and everyday Albertans. Some of the ways we have done this are by creating an inventory of current regulations and assessing if they are effective. We completed this in our first year.

We're focusing on outcomes instead of process to ensure all regulations are necessary, effective, efficient, and proportional to their intended outcome, and we're developing red tape production plans in all departments to ensure that current and new regulations are free of red tape.

One way we have measured success is through the annual ratings of the Canadian Federation of Independent Business in their red tape report card. As a representative organization of job creators, it's important that we take their feedback seriously. For years Alberta was trailing behind most other provinces, receiving failing grades year after year. It's a pleasure to be able to say, Madam Chair, that in only two short years we've moved Alberta to being a leader in our country. Alberta received an A from the CFIB in its 2021 provincial red tape report card for the first time ever. Within this report the CFIB also recognized Alberta as the most improved province in Canada. The CFIB grades three major areas of regulatory performance: regulatory accountability, regulatory burden, and interprovincial co-operation. Alberta received top marks, 10 out of 10, for regulatory accountability because we established a comprehensive baseline count of regulatory requirements, reporting publicly about the baseline, and we'll be implementing a one in, one out rule once we have achieved our one-third reduction, by 2023.

11:00

Alberta ranked number one in the country for regulatory burden, which focuses on three main areas. The first is the total number of provincial regulatory restrictions in place, which continue to fall as we reduce more and more needless regulatory requirements every day. The second is based on the level of business owners' confidence with their provincial government's commitment to

reducing regulatory red tape. Alberta ranked the highest in the country, but we recognize that there is still more work that we need to do. Finally, the last area relates to ensuring a public feedback mechanism for reporting red tape concerns. Alberta received top marks in this area because of our cut-red-tape website.

Interprovincial co-operation is also a new category and is an important area to cut red tape. Regulatory barriers between jurisdictions add costs, create delays, and limit the flow of people, goods, and services across the country, making it more difficult for businesses to grow. Within this category Alberta again received top marks for having the lowest number of exceptions to the Canadian free trade agreement. I want to give a shout-out to the Premier for his personal work to break down interprovincial barriers.

Reducing red tape is about becoming more efficient, less wasteful, and more common-sense. Back in the day we used to have something called the Alberta advantage. It was why people chose to live here and move here. We must make it easier, as easy as possible, for our economy to recover. I'm very encouraged by the story that the Minister of Jobs, Economy and Innovation has had to share recently. In a recent statement he said that Alberta is a player in the Canadian tech scene. Alberta is home to more than 3,000 technology companies. In 2018 there were 1,200 tech companies. Today there are over 3,000 tech companies, a 150 per cent increase in just two years.

Alberta is growing. It's changing, and our future is optimistic. Our strategy to cut red tape plays a very important role in our storyline. A lot of our work takes place behind the scenes, ensuring that regulations make sense and don't cause unnecessary delays. To date we have already cut over 108,000 regulatory hoops that Albertans had to jump through in the past. Each one of these has been beneficial to cleaning up processes, reducing approval timelines, or simply working to make life better in our province. This is all common sense, Madam Chair. Our goal for this past fiscal year was to cut 12 per cent of the regulatory burden. To date we have exceeded our goal and already have cut over 16 per cent, and this number will continue until we reach the 33 per cent reduction.

Treasury Board and Finance has a significant number of regulations, so reaching a 12 per cent goal wasn't an easy feat. However, they ended up cutting a whopping 21 per cent so far, Madam Chair. The Minister of Finance knows the value and the urgency of red tape reduction. I'm extremely proud of his work and also the work of all of our government as they've worked on this project. The red tape reduction initiative has already saved our job creators nearly half a billion dollars in compliance costs. I'm expecting that number to be even more significant on our annual report, that will be coming out this fall.

Bill 62 represents our next steps toward making Alberta the freest and fastest moving economy in North America. They show our commitment to reducing the regulatory burden on our job creators and innovators. Now, as we work to recover economically, we must continue to create a climate in our province that encourages investment and supports businesses. As you know, the outcome will be more jobs and opportunities for Albertans.

During second reading debate, a question was raised around why we're making changes to prompt payment when Bill 37 hasn't come into effect yet. The proposed change in this bill is to respond to additional items raised in further consultations. Through continued conversations with stakeholders, the Minister of Service Alberta has found even more efficiencies that will outline rules for an adjudication system that is faster and less costly than the courts, which will reduce legal costs involved in payment disputes and introduce more efficient sharing of important project notices.

The Minister of Service Alberta, when he brought forward Bill 37, was backed by the support of, to name a few, the Alberta Construction Association, the Alberta Trade Contractors Coalition, Building Trades of Alberta, Calgary Women in Construction, Electrical Contractors Association of Alberta, Alberta Roofing Contractors Association, Concrete Alberta, Westcor, all of whom were involved in an extensive consultation process. The bill had overwhelming support and interest throughout the construction industry. I find it interesting that the main concern from the members opposite on this item was that we didn't consult enough when, in fact, these changes are due to the incredible work and continued consultation process that the Minister of Service Alberta has engaged in.

Moving on, I want to elaborate on the proposed changes to the Employment Standards Code. Employers are still required to keep up-to-date records. Employers will continue to be required to keep up-to-date records of an employee's daily hours to enable employment standards officers to quickly address any disputes related to payment of earnings or hours of work. If a dispute arises, employment standards officers will be able to access employers' records to address the situation. More flexibility in how often an employee's hours of work must be recorded reduces red tape and the amount of time that employers and employees spend on administrative tasks, allowing them to get to the business at hand. For example, employers will not be required to record an employee's hours every day if an employee works a consistent schedule. This helps small businesses, that, as we all know, are disproportionately affected by red tape.

Before I conclude, I just want to touch on the securities and Business Corporations Act portion of this bill. The proposed amendments will allow securities issuers to reduce the time and cost expended when raising capital, enhance the protection of Alberta investors, and promote the operation of a fair and efficient Alberta capital market. By modernizing the securities regulatory system, we're making life easier for investors to operate in Alberta.

Madam Chair, this bill represents another step forward in our strategy to cut red tape, to make life better in Alberta. As I've said so many times in this House, this is only one small step to that puzzle. Most of Alberta's red tape is found outside of legislation. It's found in statutes, regulations, forms, and policies. We still have a lot of work to do, but I'm happy with how far we've come so far. We will continue to work hard to make sure that Alberta is the freest and fastest moving economy in North America.

The Chair: The hon. Minister of Service Alberta.

Mr. Glubish: Thank you, Madam Chair. I am pleased to rise to weigh in a little bit on the discussion around my colleague's bill on red tape reduction. Specifically, what I was hoping to add to the discussion was to highlight a number of the comments and questions that have come from members of the opposition related to the items in Bill 62 that touch on Service Alberta related legislation.

I'll start by addressing some comments from the Member for Edmonton-Decore. He was asking some questions about the prompt-payment element of that. He was saying, and I may be quoting loosely, about the fact that the original bill, Bill 37, hasn't come into force yet, and now we're seeing changes to it, so he was wondering what the feedback around this was compared to when it was originally introduced. I'm pleased to say that the feedback we've had continues to be very, very positive.

I guess the context that I'd like to offer is that when we brought forward this legislation in the fall of last year, we were very clear to the public and to the opposition and to industry that this is a very

complicated problem that has persisted for many, many years. We wanted to tackle it head-on, working with industry to find the best path forward. We knew that even though we were bringing the legislation forward in the fall, ongoing consultation and collaboration was going to be required to get to developing all of the regulations but also just to make sure that we were sure that by the time this would be proclaimed and actually implemented and put into force, it would be as strong as it possibly could be.

11:10

Well, Madam Chair, the fact is that we've continued to work very closely with industry. We've spent an enormous amount of time with them, and we did learn that there were a couple of clarifications that needed to happen in order to make this even better by the time it would be implemented. I can tell you that there's broad agreement and a high level of support for these amendments among members throughout the construction industry, ranging from project owners to general contractors to subcontractors as well as trade organizations.

Another comment that the Member for Edmonton-Decore brought in is talking about how we were including professionals such as, I believe it would be, engineers and architects, that would be included in the protections of prompt payment. He asked a question about: what about for maintenance? Why were they excluded from this legislation? What I can tell, through you to that member, Madam Chair, is that payment delay issues during maintenance of a project have not been identified to us as a problem requiring intervention. For that reason, this legislation and the amendments we're proposing do not cover that scenario. What we have heard is loud and clear that it is the actual construction of a project where there is a persistent and pervasive problem. We know that invoices are remaining unpaid on average for over 70 days and in extreme cases much longer than that. That is a problem, and that's what this legislation, the original legislation and these amendments, are intended to address.

Another comment that the member made was: is Bill 37 ever going to be proclaimed or granted royal assent? Well, I'm happy to say that, absolutely, that's what's going to happen. The whole point is that I as minister saw that there was a problem that had been existing in the construction industry for many, many years before I was elected. I heard loud and clear from industry that they wanted me to help work with them on solving this problem. That's exactly what I have done; that's exactly what our government has done. As soon as we have completed the regulations in collaboration with industry, we will move forward to the next stage, which would be to proclaim this into force.

The other question he had was: are companies obliged to work under this currently? The answer to that is no. The good news is that we've been working so closely with the construction industry so that they know where we're at in the process and when this will be proclaimed, so they have the time to prepare for when these rules will come into force.

Next I'd like to move to some comments and questions that came from the Member for Edmonton-West Henday. He was addressing something to the effect of: we haven't begun to see if this process was going to work in the first place, yet here we are amending this legislation. He comments on how that's frustrating to him and others, that we are already considering amendments. What I would just reiterate for that member's benefit is, as I've said from the outset, that this is a complicated problem that was unaddressed by the previous government. I have been working very closely with the industry to address this. We have had an unprecedented level of consultation with the industry, and that consultation and collaboration has continued since passing Bill 37. My commitment

has always been that by the time it is proclaimed and put into force, we want this to be the best it could possibly be. I'm continuing to listen to the stakeholders and to the industry and to work with them to find ways to make this better, both through developing the regulations but also through these amendments that are a part of Bill 62. I'm confident that we have significant support from industry for what we're proposing here.

The member also mentioned that he was frustrated that I as minister am not the one handling the consultation process related to this amendment. Again, I would just say: look, I understand that the member isn't involved in the consultation process directly, so maybe he's not aware of exactly to what extent my involvement has been. I would just reiterate that this has been the most extensive consultation between government and the construction industry. The feedback I've been receiving has been extremely positive both in terms of the broader process at large but also in terms of my level of involvement and engagement with the industry, my willingness to speak directly to these folks and to hear from them and to listen and to work with them to find solutions. I'm confident that where we're going to land on this is something folks are going to be very happy with and is ultimately going to address what was a significant problem that was not dealt with before I was elected as an MLA, was not dealt with before the current government was elected in 2019.

Another comment from that member is related to the fact that there are amendments to expand to cover prompt-payment protection for P3s for municipal and postsecondary projects and that that's something that should be considered, but he's not sure why we're in a situation where we're coming back so quickly or so promptly. Again, I would just mention that I have continued to listen to and work with industry. This was an item that they felt would be an improvement and a way to make this better, so we're listening to them. We're going to make amendments related to P3s through this legislation, and then that will be prepared for when this is proclaimed later this year.

I'll move on to some comments from the Member for Edmonton-Meadows, who said that it seems like all these concerns were not taken seriously and that Bill 37 was passed and that, it's his understanding, it's still not proclaimed yet, but that the government has introduced other changes to their own bill, that we discussed in the House not long ago. Again, the same comments to this member that I've outlined already today, Madam Chair: the consultation and collaboration have continued with industry since passing Bill 37, and the amendments that we have before us today in Bill 62 reflect that ongoing collaboration and reflect the support we have from industry to move in this direction.

There was a comment that the Member for Edmonton-Meadows brought up about verbal contracts. I guess I would just say to that that verbal contracts are quite rare and are not recommended, but in those instances where a subcontractor works without a written contract, prompt payment mandates a seven-day timeline for payment for work completed once a general contractor has been paid, which does offer protection.

Then the final comment that I want to address for this member was just related to the trucking industry. I know that they had brought up some questions about that. In fact, they had asked a similar question in the fall, when we had Bill 37 before the House, and at that time I did give an answer, and I'll repeat it for that member. If a truck is rented or hired for use on the project as an on-site vehicle, then that would be covered under this legislation. Trucks that are hired to deliver supplies and products from a third-party supplier are not covered as they're not hired specifically for the construction project itself but for delivery purposes. I hope that that's some helpful clarification.

That is a summary of the clarification I wanted to offer related to the prompt-payment elements of this red tape reduction bill.

I'd now like to just move on to addressing some of the comments from members of the opposition related to the real estate components of this legislation. I know that the Member for Edmonton-West Henday has made some comments that while the original amendments to the Real Estate Act were supported by industry, by industry stakeholders, it's his understanding that he believes that to some extent, with the changes that they have made for the minister to have more power to administer things like bylaws, now we see what he would call a substantial change and potentially even a one-eighty in terms of how the government and the minister are going to allow the Real Estate Council to administer bylaws. I believe that's a loose summary of what the member had mentioned. I'm happy to stand corrected if I've maybe paraphrased that incorrectly.

What I'd like to offer, just for some clarification, is that the amendments in Bill 62 related to the Real Estate Act are absolutely not a one-eighty on the treatment of bylaws. The board of directors of RECA has always had the authority to establish bylaws given their mandate to govern the organization, but the changes before us, Madam Chair, simply clarify and confirm the board's responsibility and authority to establish bylaws, to operationalize the changes that we made back in December.

11:20

These changes that we're proposing are also going to ensure that the board is working with industry through the industry councils in establishing these bylaws to ensure that there's collaboration in consideration of industry needs and priorities while also protecting the organization and protecting the overall governance framework that they are responsible for.

These amendments also will ensure that should issues arise in the future, we have the ability to address the issues. Again, let's not forget that the whole point of why we are here talking about the Real Estate Act and the Real Estate Council of Alberta as a regulator is because the regulator had become extremely dysfunctional, and that was a problem that I inherited as a new minister two years ago. It's a problem that I worked hard with the real estate industry to tackle by essentially, one, firing the original board; two, appointing an administrator in an interim period; three, working with industry to develop a new governance framework with amendments to the Real Estate Act; and, four, working to stand up the new board and industry councils so that they could carry out those governance reforms in practice.

You know, my commitment to Albertans is to ensure that we never find ourselves in a position where we have the same dysfunction that I had inherited in the first place, so the amendments that we have before us right now are just to ensure that we are very clear that we have the tools we need to ensure that that never happens again. I am very hopeful and confident that such powers will not be necessary, but unfortunately, because of the experience in Alberta in the past, we do need to have these tools to ensure that this does not reoccur, and that's to ensure that we can protect Albertans' interests.

Then just one final topic that the Member for Edmonton-West Henday was addressing. He was hearing from some industry stakeholders that this is likely the wrong direction, that this isn't the position we should be taking, and that we should pause these changes. That's related to the overall consultation and relationship with industry stakeholders regarding real estate.

First of all, let me just say that these amendments do not change the authorities and responsibilities of the Real Estate Council of Alberta's board or the industry councils. The important thing here

is that now that we have this new governance model in place, which, I believe, so far has been working quite well, there were some areas that have been identified in the past number of months that are causing some uncertainty or a lack of clarity on how best to move forward. We really just wanted to deal with that now, right away, to provide clear direction and clarity on those elements so that we could preserve the original intent of the amendments from last fall, to ensure that the governance reforms would move forward as desired, as we all agreed when we collaborated with industry in the first place. We want to get to where we said that we were going last fall. We need a little bit more clarity to ensure that everyone is pulling in the same direction and moving in the right direction. That's what these amendments are designed to do.

My commitment to Albertans and to the industry is that where we land once all of this is stood up and all of this has been implemented is going to be exactly what I committed to everyone back in the fall of last year. This is simply a clarification to ensure that we get there in a constructive and productive way.

I'll sum up there, Madam Chair. I hope this has been helpful to the members opposite to just provide some insight and clarification on the comments and questions they've raised about the legislation that falls under Service Alberta that is a part of Bill 62, and I look forward to the continued discussion and debate on this matter.

Thank you.

The Chair: Are there any other members wishing to join the debate on Bill 62? The hon. Member for Edmonton-West Henday.

Mr. Carson: Well, thank you, Madam Chair. It's an honour to rise this morning on Bill 62, the Red Tape Reduction Implementation Act, 2021. I appreciate the opportunity that government members took to rise on this piece of legislation. I guess, again, I thank them for taking those opportunities to hear some clarifying points on specific parts of the legislation, but I just have to point out again that here this morning, even, we've had two separate ministers commenting on the bill, which is completely fine.

But we see the Associate Minister of Red Tape Reduction stand up for 10 minutes and, you know, kind of go on at length with, really, talking points that have very little to do with this bill, about his ability to cut red tape and the support that he has from the CFIB, among other things – again, I can appreciate that he has to come up with talking points and reasons why he deserves to be a minister or why that is a ministry in the first place – and then we have to have a separate minister clarify the details of what's actually in this bill.

My concern, as it continues to be and has been in the past, is that we continue to see bills come forward like Bill 62, Red Tape Reduction Implementation Act, 2021, omnibus bills that touch on several different points across several different ministries, and we're expected to vote on this legislation as a whole, as one piece of legislation. There are certain pieces that we could gladly support in principle or in practice, and there are other pieces within this legislation that are completely out of left field, that I cannot see myself supporting. It makes it very hard to be able to, again, vote on an entire piece of legislation that touches so many different ministries and so many different industry stakeholders and be expected to make one single decision. It's incredibly frustrating.

I also think it's frustrating, again, that we are splitting this legislation between several ministers. Whether it's stakeholders that aren't sure if they're supposed to go and meet with the associate minister of red tape or supposed to meet with the Service Alberta minister on the points that I plan to make here, it's confusing, potentially. I understand that our industry stakeholders are well equipped and understand how this sometimes can happen. The fact is that I still do not have any real confirmation that the Associate

Ministry of Red Tape Reduction should even be a ministry at all. I think that many of the things that we're seeing in here could have potentially been their own legislation, specifically around what we're seeing in the Real Estate Act amendments within here. It's incredibly frustrating, again, Madam Chair.

I appreciate the Minister of Service Alberta talking about some of the points that we raised, though the same point was kind of made over and over again, around our concerns around the prompt-payment legislation. I appreciate that after further consultation more amendments had to be made to that, and I think that I'm relatively supportive of what I'm seeing here. Again, I don't understand why this is being introduced by the associate minister of red tape.

In some instances, specific to what I plan to talk about here further this morning around the amendments to the Real Estate Act, it really seems like an opportunity for the Minister of Service Alberta to potentially hand off some very controversial amendments that they're making to not necessarily have the same criticism and critique. Maybe that's not the case at all. But, again, really, what we're seeing here kind of feels that way, and it feels that way to some stakeholders.

Now, again, I appreciate the changes that we're seeing on prompt payment. I appreciate that it's this government that's bringing it forward, that they finished up those consultations that we began. I believe that stakeholders are supportive of the changes that we're seeing. I know that it was a long time overdue. I appreciate that, so I thank the minister for bringing those forward. But I'm supposed to vote in instances on parts like the prompt-payment amendments, that I potentially support, yet we get amendments thrown in for the Real Estate Act.

Now, on the topic of the Real Estate Act, again I thank the Minister of Service Alberta for making some comments on that and, potentially, some clarification around the ability of the council to make bylaws and that this has been practised in the past, that this is just clarifying points through the legislation and the amendments. But there are bigger concerns, I would argue, that I've heard from stakeholders through my conversations and consultations that were not, as far as I could tell, addressed today and have not been addressed in the past and that are specific to the issue. It was, as far as I remember, mentioned in the KPMG report from 2019, and this amendment is quite contrary to what the KPMG report reflected in that the Real Estate Council should not necessarily be in charge of the education aspect of its stakeholders. That is something that I heard again and again and again, Madam Chair, through the conversations that I had with industry stakeholders. We have not heard any further clarification why with this specific issue we've seen a one-eighty.

11:30

I understand how we got here, Madam Chair. I understand that there was dysfunction within the association and that we've come to this point through measures, that have been taken by this minister, that were necessary. No doubt about it. At the time that those changes came forward, the industry was hesitantly supportive of those changes, and I was supportive of those changes as well, recognizing that there was more consultation that had to come down the road and that the minister committed to those. Yet through further consultation and through that process we've come to what we see here in these changes proposed by the minister, where they would be giving extra power for the Real Estate Council to administer educational resources. Again and again I'm hearing from stakeholders that they don't understand where this came from, that it wasn't necessarily part of the consultation process, or that if it was, they were very concerned with it. This hasn't been the

tradition of that association in the past, and they don't understand how we got here.

With that, I'm going to propose an amendment to Bill 62.

The Chair: Hon. members, this will be known as amendment A1. Hon. member, please proceed.

Mr. Carson: Well, thank you, Madam Chair. This amendment states that myself, the Member for Edmonton-West Henday, is to move that Bill 62, Red Tape Reduction Implementation Act, 2021, be amended by striking out section 7. This amendment takes out all of the changes related to the Real Estate Act in Bill 62. These changes, again, make significant changes to the Real Estate Act given all the controversy over the structuring of the Real Estate Council in the past few years. These changes have been done in consultation. Again, I appreciate that, but I'm not convinced that the consultation process that took place for the changes that we're seeing within Bill 62 are supported by the majority of the stakeholders that are affected by these changes. I have said that I appreciate the comments that have come forward, but I'm very concerned, especially around the changes to the educational aspect and the ability of the Real Estate Council to administer those educational aspects, especially from the conversations that I've heard from organizations that are affected by this legislation and are stakeholders under that council.

Here, again, is my concern, that we have an omnibus piece of legislation, with some changes that we can support, many changes that we can't support, and we're expected to vote on all of it as one piece of legislation. I cannot in good conscience do that without at least proposing this amendment, that I hope the government will support. I believe, from my conversations, that the proposals under this bill regarding the changes under the Real Estate Act are not supported by the majority of stakeholders. I think that this government needs to take more time to have these conversations to ensure that the proposals that they're putting forward are actually supported and are actually in the best interest of all stakeholders within the industry.

A common question that came up again around the educational aspect is: why is this change happening at this time? Is it that there's a need for the Real Estate Council? Is it about finances? Is it about income? Maybe that's not the case, but that is what stakeholders have brought forward. This has not been the process that has taken place in the past, so I really question how we got to this point. Again, as far as I can tell, it's contradictory to what the KPMG report from 2019 indicated when it recommended that the council not be responsible for education. I know that many of the stakeholders within the industry and that work under the council have spent extensive amounts of time within their realm of expertise to address and create these educational platforms and educational programs, so I really question why the minister has put forward the changes that we're seeing here.

I look forward to hearing from the minister about that. Again, I didn't hear, as far as I could tell, in his previous comments, just moments ago, anything around the educational aspect. I appreciate that we need to continue having this conversation and consulting on the changes that must – Madam Chair, I agree that there must be further changes because what's in place right now is not good enough. Again, we commissioned, under our time in government, the KPMG report in 2019. It showed the need for major changes. It showed the dysfunction within the industry and that there was a need to implement very big changes, to put it lightly. We've seen some of that process move forward, but unfortunately what we see in this bill I don't believe is striking the right balance.

I look forward, again, to hearing from the minister on these points. Maybe the associate minister of red tape has some comments that he would like to make about the educational aspect of this since it is under his legislation. We will wait and see.

But with that, I thank all members for the opportunity to put forward this amendment, and I hope to get all of their support.

Thank you.

The Chair: The hon. Minister of Service Alberta.

Mr. Glubish: Thank you, Madam Chair. Happy to rise and provide some comments related to the proposed amendment from the Member for Edmonton-West Henday and more generally just to speak on the topic of the educational component of the Real Estate Council of Alberta and the real estate industry and the regulator and the changes we made back in the fall with the Real Estate Amendment Act, 2020, and then the changes that we're proposing today as a part of the red tape reduction legislation.

First of all, let me be perfectly clear. The Real Estate Council of Alberta will not be the one to administer education. That was the whole point of the amendments we made last fall. We worked very closely with industry. We heard loud and clear that the Real Estate Council of Alberta should not be in the business of delivering educational content, that we could all do better a different way, and I as minister completely agreed with that.

I also acknowledge, you know, that there were a lot of recommendations under the KPMG report, as the member opposite mentioned in his remarks. The changes that we made last fall reflected all of that, and we had buy-in from the industry. Basically, what we had agreed upon was that there would be a two-year transition process whereby the Real Estate Council of Alberta would have to come up with a plan to divest of all of the education function and to find other partners to deliver those educational components. But in practice it's always a little bit more complicated than it is just on paper.

You know, as a part of that whole restructuring of the regulator into a board that oversaw the regulator as a whole but then four separate industry councils, each of which was responsible for the different industries that RECA regulates, it was important that we make sure that each of those individual industry councils has a say in what the curriculum should be, what the criteria should be in terms of licensing and education for the professionals who are seeking to be licensed and regulated to practise in Alberta.

That is what the amendments we made last fall stood up. It was a framework that would facilitate that, and the whole point was that we need to take the time over a two-year process to ensure that those industry councils can do their due diligence, do their homework, consult with the industry members that they represent, and develop the rules and recommendations and the criteria and the curriculum overview of what they believe is necessary to deliver the best possible education programming so that we can all be confident that the professionals practising in these professions in Alberta are qualified to do competent work, they're confident in operating this profession, and they can serve Albertans well.

11:40

That's what we all want, and that's what everyone in industry agreed that we want. We want industry to have a say in what that looks like, and that is exactly what the legislation that we passed in this House last year accomplishes, and that is what the amendments we are talking about today will also facilitate.

But, as I said in my earlier remarks, it became clear, since we passed this legislation last year, that we needed to provide some clarity. That was that there were some folks who had maybe lost sight

of the fact that we talked about a two-year process to deal with this in an orderly fashion so the appropriate amount of due diligence can be conducted and that all of the different industry councils have the time they need to put forward a comprehensive proposal on exactly how this divestment of the education function would happen. It was very important to me to ensure that we do honour, you know, the recommendations of the KPMG report and that we do get to where we need to be, which is to get the education function out of the regulator but to do so in a way that respects the needs and priorities of industry so that we have the appropriate training programs.

The amendments that are in this red tape reduction bill are designed to provide that clarity to say that there will be a two-year process, and as a part of that process the industry councils will do their work. They will bring that up to the board that they report to, who will ensure that there is a comprehensive and consistent and common-sense approach to this, and then they will make that recommendation to me as minister.

There is nothing in these amendments that is giving extra powers to the Real Estate Council of Alberta as it relates to delivering education. I know that's what the Member for Edmonton-West Henday stated in his comments, and I just want to provide clarity that that is not what is happening. I would not let that happen. I don't want that to happen because I know that would be a problem. The whole point here is that we want to ensure we have the best possible transition of the education component in the real estate industry, away from the regulator, as we had discussed with industry in preparation for the original amendments to the Real Estate Act. All we are doing in this bill is providing greater clarity to say: that's exactly what's going to happen, here's how it's going to happen, and here is the time frame over which it's going to happen.

I want to, through you, Madam Chair, assure the members opposite as well as the folks in the industry that they've been talking to that they can count on me to get the job done to ensure that RECA is not the one delivering education. They can count on me to get the job done to make sure that their industry will have a say in what the curriculum should look like so that they can feel confident that they and all of their colleagues who are licensed to practise in their profession will be high quality, competent, and confident in delivering those services to Albertans so that Albertans can feel confident that they are getting good-quality service to a high standard no matter who they deal with. As long as they are licensed to practise in Alberta, they know what they're getting.

That's what we want, Madam Chair. That's what these amendments are going to help us to get to with greater clarity, with greater confidence. I am confident that if all of the folks who have questions about this stick with us, follow this process through to its logical conclusion in accordance with all of the discussion we had in our extensive consultations last year, they will be pleased with the result.

I'll just close by summarizing some of the comments that I've got here in a letter from Robert Homersham, who is the director and president of BOMA Edmonton as well as some of his colleagues from both BOMA as well as the NAIOP Commercial Real Estate Development Association, the Calgary and Edmonton chapters. He says:

As you know, the NAIOP and BOMA have been supportive of the recent amendments to the Real Estate Act and the consequent reorganization of RECA. Our organizations, which represent commercial real estate owners, asset managers, property managers, brokerages, and related industry professionals, are so far pleased with the enhanced level of engagement with our applicable Industry Councils and the RECA Board. We are writing to again voice our support for the most recent proposed

amendments to the Real Estate Act described in Bill 62 [here.] These amendments will help clarify the authority delegated by your Ministry to RECA's Board and Industry Councils to make bylaws and rules.

Madam Chair, we do have support from industry to make these clarifying amendments through Bill 62 to ensure that we get to where we want to be, where we all agreed we wanted to be at the outset, but again, as I said, we have to provide some clarifications so that everyone is on the same page on exactly how we're going to get there. I'm confident that this is necessary and is going to make things better, and I urge all members of this House to support it. I also urge all members to not support the amendment.

Thank you.

The Chair: Just a reminder to table that document at the appropriate time.

Are there any other members wishing to join the debate on amendment A1? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning, followed by the hon. Member for Red Deer-South.

Ms Sweet: Well, thank you, Madam Chair, and thank you to the minister for standing and responding to the amendments. It is always a pleasure when we hear ministers speak to some of the rationales, and I would like to encourage him to encourage his colleagues to continue that practice because I think it actually makes the debate a little bit more fulsome than just having one side always talking.

I do have some questions, though, just in regard to some of the comments that the minister did say, and that is just more around why the requirement of the legislative change, in the sense that I appreciate there are many changes that were just recently made in the last round of legislation that just came through, and I appreciate that the minister is saying that there needs to be more clarity. I guess the question is that there's also an acknowledgement that over the next two years there are going to be some significant reviews being done, some discussions, some planning, different things like that, so why would the government need to legislate this today knowing that there may actually have to be potential changes again once this work is being done around the educational changes?

As we know, you know, the ministry does have the capacity to look at developing clarity in other ways outside of legislation, so when we start seeing bills like this red tape reduction bill, where it just ends up being a whole bunch of different pieces of legislation that are all just kind of thrown together and it's like, well, here's one section out of this legislation and here's one section of this piece of legislation, and it just becomes a big jumble of pieces of amendments on pieces of legislation, the question becomes: why was it needed today? What is it that it couldn't be done outside of the legislative process to ensure that clarity? It could still happen; you know, I'm not going to say that it didn't need to. Obviously, again, the minister is having conversations that I'm not privy to, so he would know why it would be that maybe clarity is required, but, I guess, you know, why did it have to be a legislative change? Why couldn't it be something that was done given the fact that, again, most recently there were already significant changes to the Real Estate Act done, and now again we're seeing more changes, and then we may potentially again see even more changes.

The one thing about looking at legislation and taking your time and consulting with everyone and not rushing to get legislation passed just because it may be a promise or something, a platform or whatever, is that you get to take your time and do it right once, not twice, not three times, not four times. What we've seen – and again I'm not speaking to this specific amendment in the context of the work that the minister is doing – is that there has been a trend, for

sure, that we have seen where health statutes have come back to this Chamber more than once that were just amended six months ago, and now we're coming back and doing another amendment on the very same section that we amended six months ago, and it's because there seems to be a little bit of a rush to get things done and not maybe sober second thought.

Again, I think that what my hon. colleague was and is trying to do with the amendment that's in front of us right now is to say: "Does it need to be done this way? Can it not be, instead of a legislative change, maybe, you know, that something else can be directed or that there can be some rules put in place or different mechanisms that the minister has at his disposal that would clarify this without having to start getting into changing more legislation?" You know, I would hope that the Associate Minister of Red Tape Reduction has picked up on this, that when you start changing one section of an act, you sometimes start impacting other sections of acts that then require more sections to be changed that then require more sections and then all of a sudden you've basically rewritten the whole legislation, but you've had to do it five or six times instead of just one time. That gets really confusing for stakeholders, too, because all of a sudden the rules changed again. I thought the rules were this and the legislation said this, and all of a sudden you get another amendment put into the Chamber and legislation changes again, so the rules change and then the regulations change and everything changes.

11:50

When we see, you know, red tape reduction acts coming in over and over again – and, I mean, we've seen a few of them – the rules consistently keep changing. Although the government will say that it's for the better, when you talk to certain stakeholders that are getting confused by the consistent changes, the question has become: is it? So, you know, I would be interested to hear from the minister, from a process perspective, when we look at the KPMG report and we look at some of the changes that were just made in recent legislation, why this had to be legislated, why certainty couldn't be provided to his stakeholders that would still ensure that they understood that it was going to be a two-year process, that they understood that there was still going to be, you know, looking at the education system in the context of the Real Estate Council, why it had to be legislated this way, and why through this legislation, ultimately, more power is being given to the minister, because that shouldn't be the intent.

What we've seen in many of these red tape amendments is consistently more power being given to ministers and more power being given to cabinet to make decisions. You know, for a government that consistently talks about the need for smaller government, they sure keep giving themselves a lot of power in all these different pieces of amendments or red tape, which I think is very counterintuitive. To the minister. I would be curious: is there not another way to do this without it being legislated? I think that to take that sober second thought, as my colleague is trying to provide an opportunity to do, which is just to strike out the section for now, find a way to not legislate it so that, again, we're not coming back in six months to change it again or maybe in two years after the education component consultations are done, and just provide certainty in a different way, because not everything has to be legislated. If that was the case, we wouldn't have regulations.

I'll just leave it there, and I will be supporting the amendment. Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Chair: The hon. minister.

Mr. Glubish: Thank you, Madam Chair. I'll just be brief in addressing some of the comments from the Member for Edmonton-

Manning. I do find it interesting that, you know, in some earlier comments from the opposition this morning there were comments of: why are you deferring a bunch of stuff to regulations that we would rather see you do in legislation? Then here she's telling me: I don't want you to do this in legislation; you can do it in regulation. There's a little bit of inconsistency there. For me, the question is: "What makes sense for the topic at hand? What makes sense for the circumstances and the context that we find ourselves in?" In some cases it makes more sense to be in legislation, and in some cases it makes more sense to be in regulation. That's why we have two different tools.

In this case, I'm confident that this legislative amendment is necessary to provide greater clarity on what the intent is and what the process will be to ensure that we have the appropriate two-year transition of the education function away from RECA. You know, the member talked about taking the time to do it right once. Well, I would remind the member that they took the time to do nothing on this for four years. This was a problem for a long time before I became minister, and it's a complicated problem. It takes time to get it right – that's for sure – but it also takes a lot of work in co-ordinating a large segment of industry. We have the residential real estate industry; we have the commercial real estate industry; we have the property managers; we have the condo managers; we have the mortgage brokerage industry; there are a lot of different players here that all play a role, that are all regulated by this regulator, and we need to make sure that we're co-ordinated and we're getting this

right. Here's the issue. For us to get this right, we need to make sure that the industry councils . . .

The Chair: Hon. minister, I hesitate to interrupt, but we will now rise and report progress.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo.

Mr. Yao: Thank you, Madam Speaker. The Committee of the Whole has had under consideration a certain bill. The committee reports progress on the following bill: Bill 62. I wish to table copies of an amendment considered by 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. minister.

Mr. Schweitzer: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I move that we adjourn the House until 1:30 p.m.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 11:56 a.m.]

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