



Province of Alberta

The 30th Legislature
Second Session

Alberta Hansard

Thursday morning, June 10, 2021

Day 113

The Honourable Nathan M. Cooper, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta
The 30th Legislature
Second Session

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United Conservative: 60

New Democrat: 24

Independent: 3

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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

9 a.m.

Thursday, June 10, 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 70 COVID-19 Related Measures Act

[Adjourned debate June 9: Mrs. Savage]

The Speaker: Hon. members, second reading of Bill 70. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

Member Loyola: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. When it comes to Bill 70, the COVID-19 Related Measures Act, I understand that we're in a predicament here. We're completely aware of what the situation is, but when it comes to the decision of this government of presenting this particular bill before us at this time, we're asking ourselves: why is the general public being the one that is being treated so unfairly? The reality is that with this bill, grieving families, people who have lost their loved ones throughout this pandemic – I'll remind the House that with this bill, the government has actually made it retroactive to March 2020 so that continuing care facilities aren't going to be held liable for negligence. They've upped the ante to gross negligence. This means that in situations where people have died where action could have been taken to save them, now their grieving families are going to be left without just recourse.

Now, don't get me wrong. I understand what the government is doing here. Part of the problem is the fact that insurance companies refuse to cover these continuing care facilities because of contagions. This is the situation. To some extent, I understand the issue that owners and managers of continuing care facilities have, but let's not forget – let's not forget – that thousands of dollars have been given out to these continuing care facilities. In some cases – I can't say how many exactly – these continuing care facilities have decided to just pocket those profits rather than put the money into hiring more staff or actually implementing the absolutely essential, necessary changes that could have made their continuing care facilities a safer place for the residents.

This is what's the real issue here, and it pains me that the government has decided to move in a direction that leaves grieving families – let's not forget. We've gone through more than a year of this global pandemic. Many, many, many families have been impacted by the whole situation. I'm speaking specifically about people who have loved ones in these continuing care facilities. We've heard story after story after story of how better care, better implementation of services could have occurred in terms of making

the facilities safer. I want to remind this House that over 1,000, actually over 1,250, residents in continuing care have tragically died due to COVID-19, and many of these deaths were preventable.

I know that here in this Legislature we can't personally control what's happening inside of these continuing care facilities, but this bill basically just takes all responsibility from the owners and the managers of those continuing care facilities and says: "Hey, don't worry about it. It's okay. We got your back." Why? Well, first of all, the root of the problem is that insurance companies don't even want to do their part. They're happy to collect the dollars, but they're unwilling to support continuing care facilities. I get that. The other side of this is that so many of these continuing care facilities have actually pocketed the profits without actually implementing the real and necessary changes that are required to actually save lives within those facilities. Essentially, this bill is just a gift to the lobbyists and the profitable owners of these private continuing care facilities.

I'll remind the House, Mr. Speaker, that this is something that we on this side of the House have been battling for decades – decades – trying to draw attention to conservatives that when it comes to the care, in most cases, seniors of our community, of our society, of Alberta, who have given so much to this province, now find themselves in these continuing care facilities. In many circumstances profit is being put before their quality of life. Like I said, this is something that we've been trying to draw awareness to for decades because it's not fair.

I don't know if members on the other side of this House have heard of the atrocious conditions that some of these individuals have had to live through. It's completely undignified – completely undignified – that an individual would have to lay in their own filth for hours because there's not enough staff to get to them to make sure that they're being taken care of in the appropriate way. Why? Because profit is coming before the quality of life of this particular individual. This is a shame. People who are in need of our care especially do not deserve to be treated this way. They absolutely do not deserve to be treated this way, and I can tell you, Mr. Speaker, through you to all the members of this House, that we need to restore balance here because the system the way that it currently exists is completely unfair.

9:10

Then, with this particular bill, you're basically just giving the owners of continuing care facilities a free ride, saying: "No. We're not going to hold you responsible for negligence that involved the death of someone's loved one in a continuing care facility. Don't worry about it. We know the insurance companies don't want to cover it, and we're going to give you a free pass." I just can't understand why they're doing this if they know that it is completely unfair.

Now, I get their argument. Their argument is, like: well, if we don't do this, then these facilities are going to go under because of the potential legal ramifications that this is going to have on the continuing care facilities. Well, then the profits that they pocketed should have been put towards making sure that better care was being implemented within the continuing care facility. That would have been just. That would have been the right way to approach the situation. Here once again, instead of standing up for Albertans, this United Conservative Party government has decided to stand on the side of the continuing care facilities, private ownership instead of Albertans.

Now, I'm not saying that continuing care facilities in the current scenario and the current economic climate don't deserve to be heard, but surely it should be more fair. Surely, it should be more fair. Albertans deserve better than what they're getting through this

bill. Especially the people who are in care, the families who had people in care who have now passed away deserve better from this government, deserve better from this Legislature, deserve better when it comes to the political decisions that are being made before us.

I just don't understand. I just don't understand how this government can't present something that's more fair. We know for a fact that there are so many private companies that took government subsidies and directed that money towards expanding their profits instead of improving the care. We know this from people who work inside of these continuing care facilities. I can't tell you the number of e-mails that I've received from people who actually work inside of these continuing care facilities saying: "We're understaffed. We don't have enough people to actually take care of the people who are inside of the facility." Then when you look at how much profit has been made by these continuing care facilities, you've got to ask yourself: is this really fair?

It's not fair. It's not fair. It's absolutely unfair that the quality of life of these individuals within these continuing care facilities is not being dealt with adequately. We've been hearing that, like I said, from constituents that actually work inside of these continuing care facilities. I've got a number of even text messages, because I've connected with somebody who works in a continuing care facility in Edmonton-Ellerslie, telling me consistently that they're understaffed, that better policy could be implemented within the continuing care facility to actually make sure that the residents could be better taken care of.

It's sad that we're living in this moment, and I honestly wish that members from the other side of the House could respond specifically to what I'm bringing up at this moment. I want to hear what your answers are. I want to hear what you have to say to the families of those that are grieving at this moment. [A timer sounded]

The Speaker: I might just remind the member, as sensitive as the topic might be, that he might suggest, "Mr. Speaker, I would like to hear what they would have to say" as opposed to not speaking through the chair, which isn't necessarily all that parliamentary.

Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available if anyone has a brief question or comment. The hon. the Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and I want to thank the Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie for beginning debate for us this morning on Bill 70, this important piece of legislation. As I listened to my colleague's remarks, it was clear to me that he was really thinking about and trying to speak on behalf of impacted families and loved ones who will be negatively impacted by Bill 70 and the changes that it's bringing forward. Given the passion that I know he has for this subject, I noted that the buzzer did cut him off, and I wondered if he had completed his final thought because I think he was left in the middle there. I wanted to ask him to conclude.

The Speaker: I would be more than happy to have him conclude. Just for the Opposition House Leader's sake, I wasn't providing any comment on his passion or otherwise, just the way that the passion ought to be expressed here in the Assembly.

Member Loyola: Indeed, Mr. Speaker, I do have passion that I'll direct through you to the other members of this House.

The Speaker: That's why I'm here.

Member Loyola: You know, thank you for allowing me to continue. I really appreciate the Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods

giving me this opportunity. The UCP claims that this bill is meant to support continuing care, but if the UCP really wanted to support continuing care due to the pandemic, they would have been the ones that would have provided the substantial financial support to make sure that the protections were in place for the residents and staff. That's what the workers inside that were communicating to me were saying. They would have created a plan to make sure that more staff were hired, but this UCP government didn't do that. They didn't do that. They would have brought in paid sick leave legislation, and this perhaps would have prevented many of those 1,250-plus deaths that occurred here in the province of Alberta.

I ask myself and I wonder, Mr. Speaker, through you to the rest of the members, what kinds of e-mails they were getting from workers within continuing care facilities. Did they listen to those? Did they provide an opportunity for people to consult on this particular piece of legislation, or did they just listen to the lobbyists, and that was it? That's what I would like to know, because you have to be balanced in your representation. You have to be balanced in your representation of the communities all around Alberta.

I get it. You're trying to do something to help out these continuing care facilities. But it is without a doubt – without a doubt – that this UCP government could have done more, and they're going to have to wear that. They're going to have to wear it because, as I said before, Mr. Speaker, they could have done a lot more to provide financial support to make sure that residents and staff at the continuing care facilities could have been protected. There could have been a plan to hire more staff for these continuing care facilities, and they could have implemented paid sick leave. That would have done at least something to prevent so many deaths that happened within these continuing care facilities.

9:20

I really want the members on the other side to please think about what I'm saying. Please respond to it. At the bare minimum, respond to it. I get it. You get key messages, and those key messages are the ones that you state in the House, but I'm asking you: please respond to my inquiries and what you're hearing from your own constituents when it comes to this particular issue. I can only hope that you will do the correct thing.

The Speaker: I'm sure you can only hope that they will do the correct thing as well.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much. Sometimes on a Thursday morning there's a desire for a little bit more coffee and a few more reminders. We appreciate the reminder about speaking through the chair because sometimes all members of this place – of course, we're hoping to engage, through our speaking opportunities and debate, with you, Mr. Speaker, with members of the government, including those who are not in the government cabinet, as well as with all Albertans.

What I will say with regard to Bill 70: at this point in the pandemic I think that when I speak with many of my constituents and other stakeholders, they typically talk about things that the government could be doing to make life better for them and their families. When it comes to COVID-related measures, which, of course, is the bill we're considering here at the moment, Bill 70, COVID-19 Related Measures Act, many people have spoken to me about long-term care and assisted living, designated and otherwise, and what they have learned and what we have learned as a society, Mr. Speaker, as it relates to the type of care, the lack of risk mitigation that many people felt and saw, and there is a significant desire to have COVID-related measures in place and the learnings

that we acquired during the last year and a half to make life better for those who live in long-term care, assisted living, and the like.

When folks talk to me about this, they often say: this is a real opportunity for us to examine the models that we have in place and determine if they do actually meet the needs of Albertans or not as we move forward. I remember talking to one woman – oh, I think it was last summer; it was probably this time last year – who said that after many years of watching her mother deteriorate, they had one final Christmas together with her mom still living independently and then decided it was time that her mom move into somewhere with more supportive care. It was late January, early February that I think the move actually took place. Then the woman went on to tell me how devastated she was because she hadn't been able to see her mom in many months at that point because of the need to lock down the sites from visitors, because, of course, the consequences were deadly for many people who lived in long-term care and assisted living if they acquired COVID-19. We've seen, with more than 2,000 Albertans dying with COVID and the majority of those living in long-term care and assisted living, indeed how deadly those consequences were.

It was this woman's hope that the government will put more measures in place around making sure that staff could be dedicated to one specific facility, that you could work in one facility, make enough money to pay your bills, have a secure quality of life, and not need to move from small contract to small contract in multiple facilities, of course, increasing the risk for everyone and every one of those facilities by doing that. We were all told to cohort, to have smaller, reduced mixed groupings. That, of course, wasn't the case, and really it took many, many months for this government to even acknowledge that that should be the case, that we should be reducing the mixing, but the government didn't ever put enough support in place to make that possible, especially not possible long term.

The government could have also acted to make sure that other places where there were deadly consequences, including those working in meat-packing plants, people working shoulder to shoulder – and we saw deaths among workers in these facilities. Those could have been some of the better COVID-related measures that we would be considering today, putting checks and balances in place to reduce risk and increase the probability of success and for a full life for every Albertan.

Instead, the government has brought forward a bill, making a private member within their own caucus, to be clear, sponsor that bill, that really protects one side of the equation, focuses on the employer, and of course all of us are here to stand up for workers and for citizens as well.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I'd like to take this moment to move an amendment, and then I'd be happy to speak to it upon your call.

The Speaker: Thank you. If you could please pass it to the page, and then once I have the copy and we have it all ready to roll, I'll ask you to proceed.

Hon. members, the amendment will be referred to as REF1.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

Ms Hoffman: May I ask for a time check, Mr. Speaker?

The Speaker: Nine minutes and one second.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much. Let me read the amendment and then speak to the rationale. I move that the motion for second reading of Bill 70, COVID-19 Related Measures Act, be amended by deleting all of the words after "that" and substituting the following:

Bill 70, COVID-19 Related Measures Act, be not now read a second time but that the subject matter of the bill be referred to the Standing Committee on Families and Communities in accordance with Standing Order 74.2.

Let me explain a little bit about the rationale for this specific committee to start with. When I began my remarks just, you know, five minutes ago, I talked about the things that people are saying when they approach me to talk about learnings that they've experienced during COVID and things that they hope the government and all members of this Assembly are focused on as we move forward, and I mentioned that one of the biggest ones is long-term care and assisted living. I know that some of my colleagues have talked about smaller, more familylike environments, and I want to assure them that not only has COVID highlighted the importance for this opportunity, but so has extensive academic research around geriatric care, specifically as it relates to dementia care in western societies, and some of the things that we've learned there around quality of life.

I remember talking to a woman whose husband had moved into an assisted living dementia facility, SL 4-D, I believe it was, and he struggled every day because, of course, he was in an unfamiliar environment and his memory was failing him significantly. That was the reason why he needed more care. Every day when he walked into the general cafeteria area or dining area, he faced significant anxiety trying to figure out what to do when he got there and where he was supposed to sit. We all know people who – literacy is one of the things that often fades with dementia, so he couldn't read his name. He couldn't figure out where he was supposed to sit, and there were dozens upon dozens of tables and chairs.

9:30

But his family researched, and so did the facility, and one of the things that one of the nursing assistants said was, "What are some of the things that he'd be familiar with?" His wife started talking about things that they had around the home. The assistant said: "Let's go back further in time. Do you have things that would have been in his home or workplace 40 or 50 years ago?" The wife said: "We still have his old typewriter from his office. He was a banker." They were able to bring in the typewriter and put it at his spot in the dining room. They also added the coffee mug that he drank from regularly when he was at work, and the facility got the newspaper every day and put the newspaper in his spot because that's what his office at the bank would look like when he came in 50 years earlier. Of course, it took a little while, but once he recognized his typewriter and his mug and his paper, he knew where to go and where to sit.

When you're in large environments, it's incredibly difficult to get to know each of your residents and personalize the care to that degree. Fortunately, he had a wife who was there advocating very strongly and an amazing care team, but not everyone has that. By creating smaller environments where we can get to know each other better and find ways to engage with one another in a more living environment – because these are supposed to be places where you live, where you live and you fulfill your desires and the opportunities that the world has present for you.

But, of course, we're talking about this not just from a care and living perspective; we're also talking about this from a health and safety perspective. The work of the Standing Committee on Families and Communities I think lends itself very well to being able to examine the deep and lasting impacts that so many dying in our society has had on all of us but also to reflect upon the experiences there and what led to such horrific outcomes for so many Albertans dying in a really painful and miserable way, what led to the spread in such a significant way, particularly at work sites

in long-term care facilities and assisted living facilities, and what we can do to make sure to bring a bill forward to this House that actually has measures that will address COVID, not just address liabilities that owners and operators and private facilities face when somebody has perished and the family wants some recourse, not just protect owners and operators from their liabilities but actually work to make sure that if we do – forbid – encounter a fourth wave in the fall or any point in the future, or if we experience a different form of deadly spread from a different illness at some point in the future, we are prepared and we have harnessed this opportunity to do the best we could to prevent the types of deadly consequences that we've seen for so many.

This really is an opportunity as well to look at the terrible consequences of COVID in schools and in our communities. We know that every student in Alberta has been sent home at least three times during this experience, and many have been sent home even more often, and several students and staff and, consequently, their family members have contracted COVID-19. This is something that the government and all members of this House, including private members – I hope all private members – I think care very deeply about and want to ensure that there isn't a repeat of this again in the fall or in subsequent waves of this or other, again, potentially deadly viruses.

Taking the time to actually examine where we failed, where we failed children, where we failed seniors, where we failed society, and to come up with measures that will protect and support life for all of these segments that I've identified today – and perhaps the members of this Committee on Families and Communities would have additional recommendations for folks to meet with and gather feedback from. I think that that would be very beneficial to this House.

I understand that the minister has brought forward a bill that is focused on protecting private providers at this point. I also understand this bill has the ability to expand that to other types of employment situations in society through regulation. I think that a lot of people are concerned about what that might mean for them as individuals: individual workers, individual patrons, individual patients, or individual customers. I think it would be beneficial – the government has already taken over a year to come up with this bill. I think taking a little bit of time through committee for the members of the Assembly to be able to engage in being propositional and proposing a number of ways to make life better for the constituents that, I'm sure, approach each and every one of you, as I'm sure that I'm not alone, in their desire to have the government learn something and to have the members of this Assembly in general learn something and act in a way to protect lives, to protect the livelihoods of those who have been negatively impacted by COVID-19 rather than prioritizing one-half of that arrangement, that being the private owner-operator.

Again, I think the Committee on Families and Communities is very capable. I think that they have a number of members from all representative groups in this House, and I think that they could do work to make this bill better.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Now, hon. minister, would you like to be on the main bill or Standing Order 29(2)(a)? Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available. The hon. the Minister of Culture, Multiculturalism and Status of Women.

Mrs. Aheer: Thank you so much, Mr. Speaker. I just wanted to thank my colleagues across the way for a really great discussion on this. There are just a few things that I wanted to address.

First of all, I want to thank Dr. Deena Hinshaw, who has been at the head of this. I know when we talk about our continuing care, the work that she did initially, when we first started down this path, to help get that work started was nothing short of heroic. I'm very grateful to her for the work that she did, especially in making sure that folks were only working at one facility, for example. I know that we got to a fairly good point where that was happening.

I wanted to say that there were a few things that were brought up. In regard to the amendment, thank you so much for bringing this amendment forward. The only thing I would suggest to the member is that I'm not sure if the amendment is addressing exactly what it is that you're looking to accomplish, because the entirety around this is that if you consider – I think the member was talking earlier about the preventable deaths, and that's what we're talking about. What would be very helpful, I think, to all of us is to know and understand if there's evidence that any of the members have with respect to this, because I just wanted to be clear: this doesn't change anybody's ability to be able to litigate on this at all.

I know that the members have been speaking about that the bill is retroactive and that those lawsuits would not be able to continue. I just want to clarify for anyone who's listening that that's not the case, that absolutely those lawsuits can go through and should if those things have occurred.

If I could just be very clear. If anybody in this House has a particular issue, knows of a family, knows that something is going on – one of the members had made a fairly strong accusation that dollars had been pocketed and not used towards the good of our seniors. It's a very strong accusation. If that's the case and if that is indeed true, if you could help us to understand what that looks like so that we can help mitigate any of those situations, that would be really helpful.

I really appreciate the discussion. I think it's important to have in here. But it's one thing to talk about it at large, broadly. If there are serious concerns and those families have had that happen and there's proof that continuing care organizations have actually done this, I think we have a responsibility to get to the bottom of that. If there's evidence – talking about it in here is one thing – if you could please provide us with that information. It's imperative for all of us who have the privilege of sitting here to make sure that that is followed up on and that it's not just something that's, you know, leveraged as a talking point in this space, in *Hansard* that never actually gets followed up on. That's significantly different from a civil lawsuit. Then to follow up by saying that more money should have been provided in order to have more workers there, yet if that money had been provided in the way that the member is suggesting – that money was provided, but then it's pocketed – I think that completely takes away from the entire discussion if the assumption is that the continuing care, based on what the opposition is putting forward, had done such terrible things.

9:40

If they're pocketing the money that government has given them in order to not do the services and thereby the accusation is that more people died as a result of that behaviour, that is gross negligence. So if you have the evidence, if you have this information, I beg you to please provide that to us and that it's not just an accusation that's being used in here and leveraged.

I don't believe that the amendment does anything to help what that member had brought forward. I don't believe that the amendment does anything to help with the lawsuits that families will need to bring forward had there been negligence.

There's a truly important piece here to both sides of this discussion. Many of these care facilities are genuinely beautiful human beings. If you've had the opportunity to visit – we visit our

seniors' areas all the time. Alberta has a very robust and beautiful system between private and public. These folks that work in these facilities are tremendous, tremendous human beings, and let's always remember that when we're having these discussions and we're throwing around accusations.

Thank you so much.

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

Are there others wishing to join in the debate? I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford is on his feet.

Mr. Feehan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the opportunity to speak to this important amendment. Having addressed the main motion just the other night, I think this amendment is a clear follow-up from the comments that I made at that time. As a result, I will briefly reflect on the suggestions I made the other night.

I think the point here in this particular amendment is that we have been through a very significant experience in this country and this province, of course, around the world with COVID-19. It has been a very negative and devastating experience for literally thousands of individuals and thousands of families. As a result, it's very important that we work hard to get this right and to learn the lessons that we need to learn from this experience just as much as we possibly can so that we can reduce the trauma that's being experienced right now by families and, furthermore, set ourselves up to reduce future incidents of trauma either in subsequent waves of this particular pandemic or, perhaps, in the next pandemic, that is assuredly coming somewhere down the road in our future, hopefully, please, not too soon.

I guess I just want to kind of go back a little bit, because I did speak the other day, in speaking to the main, about my discouragement that of all the things that the government could have done in terms of responding to this very difficult crisis, they picked a very specific and narrow line of action. And it is very discouraging.

We know that crises tend to reveal the flaws in your system, and that's true in most situations. You think you've got everything fine, but then when the pressure is on, when the valve is wide open and things are really flowing, then the cracks become obvious because of, you know, the leakage that happens. We certainly have seen that. The very first thing that we saw in this crisis was the severe impact on our elderly. There isn't a person in this House who wasn't concerned about that. To watch our elderly be assaulted by this virus was just devastating. The number of lives lost rose very quickly. The consequence in residences for elderly people was dramatically high, not only death – of course, that is the most dramatic – but also, you know, serious levels of illness and, ultimately, devastating consequences in terms of social impacts, many elders who have been 15 to 18 months without even seeing a single family member. Of course, for some, that is greatly concerning because it induces such loneliness and such isolation, but for others it's actually devastating because of their cognitive impairment issues that are going on. It actually induces high levels of anxiety and fear not to have the reassuring family members around.

We're in this situation where we've had this terrible circumstance occur. We've seen the cracks begin to appear, and the first thing we find is that it's our elderly who are the most vulnerable. But this bill does not address that. This bill does not address anything to do with the experience of those elderly members, the vulnerability of those elderly people in our society to either contracting the disease or to have to suffer through the consequences of this type of event happening in society and the subsequent isolation and loss of

structure in their lives. You know, given that we've seen that crack, I would hope that this bill would have been there to patch the crack or, better yet, to replace the section of pipe where the crack has been found, but the bill doesn't do that.

We also have learned that it exposed a high amount of vulnerability for the people who are most in attendance to our elderly citizens, and that is the personal care workers. The cracks that it exposed in that particular system were with regard to the nature of employment, the fact that a high number of people employed in this industry have to work in multiple institutions in order to put together enough of a job in order to, you know, meet their own personal and their family needs. They do not have the kind of stable, permanent, full-time employment with appropriate protection plans and sick benefits and other kinds of benefits – health and well-being benefits and pension plans – that would allow them to be secure and be safe while they provide this absolutely critical, essential service to all Albertans through the care of our elders. We've seen that the system is broken the way it is, that it allows the people that we should be most revering and honouring – that is, our elders – to be taken care of by people who are given the least amount of supports and stability and structure in order to be able to do that.

You would think that the government would use a COVID-19 Related Measures Act to identify those flaws, to fix those flaws. In fact, when I spoke the other day, I spoke about over a dozen ways in which they could have addressed these types of flaws. I spoke about the ways they could have actually supplied more resources for residents and more care to ensure that residents stayed safe. I spoke about how they could have provided supports for families and how they could have supported families in taking care of their elderly members through this difficult time. I spoke about how they could take care of staff and how they could take care of medical personnel who are putting themselves on the front line and are endangered and are revealing the flaws in the system that we have developed in our society. I spoke about the fact that they could have developed a special inquiry that would have tried to learn about those cracks, that would have gone out there to investigate where the cracks are and then come back in and been able to create a bill that would actually address those cracks. And I spoke about the fact that we have learned that we are far too reliant on other people's resources in order to address these issues, whether in regard to PPE or vaccines themselves, and that we should be developing something in those areas.

9:50

These are all areas where significant cracks have appeared in the system. They've been highlighted by the stress, the pressure being put on by this horrific pandemic that we're experiencing, yet the government has failed to respond to any of those cracks. That's why we have the amendment.

The amendment is a chance to go back and to look for the cracks, to identify where the pressure has shown the faults in the system. Where are the flaws that we need to address, and if we address those flaws, how can we better take care of those people who deserve our support and our full attention and our ultimate care such as our elders? That's what this amendment does. It gives us a chance to go back, to look at that, and to say: how can we work with residents to make them safer? How can we work with families to make them safer? How can we work with staff and medical personnel to make them safer? How can we design the systems in our society to ensure the greatest amount of safety for the greatest number of people in the society? That's what this

amendment does. It gives you an opportunity to step up, to step up and address those issues.

You know, it's not like I'm giving general, vague suggestions here. I listed over a dozen very specific suggestions in my last speech, readily available in *Hansard*, and I'm more than prepared to appear in committee to talk through those issues again. We can bring in experts to talk through each of those issues, one by one, until we get a great depth of understanding and a good, strenuous response. That's what we're asking for with this amendment, to take this COVID crisis seriously and to respond to it appropriately.

Unfortunately, what the government has chosen to do is, amongst all those vulnerabilities I've talked about affecting so many people, not to address the needs of any of the people – not the residents, not the families, not the staff, not the medical personnel, and not the society at large – but, rather, to address the financial needs of a particular set of corporations. It's frustrating. As I said when I spoke to the main bill, it's not that I don't want to support the institutions. I certainly would have welcomed a bill that included some supports for institutions that are now facing some more increased difficulties. They are part of the system, too. I want them to be better.

I do see that there may be a flaw exposed there in terms of their situation, but it can't be a flaw that takes away the rights of individuals to have their day in court. As soon as you do that, you're not fixing a flaw on behalf of the institutions; you are denying the rights of individuals to the courses of action which they would normally expect to have available to them and in our democratic society are normally available to everyone.

Now, I understand that this government is concerned that the institutions could fail if there is a, you know, significant financial burden on them, and they could have addressed that. They could have said, as they do with car insurance for all of the ministers' cars – well, the insurance companies were charging too much, so the government said that we're not going to use private insurance anymore, so whenever a minister gets into a car accident, the government of Alberta will act as the insurer. It's done right now here in this House. Every minister across there has a ministerial car, and the backup, the insurance, is provided by the government; it is not provided by a private insurance company. So we know that it can be done. We know that it has been done for the benefit of these ministers, so why could it not also be done for the benefit of these institutions and for citizens?

Why can't the government step up and become the part-time insurer or the temporary insurer of these institutions while they go through the process of allowing people the chance to go to court and to have their day in court? It wouldn't even have to be a long-term issue, just during the pandemic, a solution that would be focused on ensuring that nobody lost their rights. At a time when we are experiencing such trauma as a result of this pandemic, it's terrible to then pile onto that the loss of your rights as a citizen of the province, and that's essentially what this government has done.

I certainly would encourage the government to take the time – I offered more than a dozen solutions during my addressing the main bill, and here I've offered yet another one, this one. Obviously, there are ideas available, many ideas that are available, and referring to committee would allow us to actually explore those ideas and pursue those ideas and to bring to the province of Alberta a more fulsome, thoughtful response.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I would like to move to adjourn debate.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Government Bills and Orders

Third Reading

Bill 62

Red Tape Reduction Implementation Act, 2021

Ms Sweet moved that the motion for third reading of Bill 62, Red Tape Reduction Implementation Act, 2021, be amended by deleting all of the words after “that” and substituting the following:

Bill 62, Red Tape Reduction Implementation Act, 2021, be not now read a third time but that it be recommitted to the Committee of the Whole for the purpose of reconsideration of section 1.

[Debate adjourned on the amendment June 9]

The Speaker: Is there anyone that would like to join in the debate? The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

Member Ceci: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, for the opportunity to address Bill 62 this morning. The opportunity to talk a little bit about aspects of this bill in third reading is what I'm here for. I have addressed it in second reading. The opportunity to move amendments is something that the loyal opposition has also done. I think I want to go back to some things that I saw in the bill that I really wasn't sure fit the whole definition of red tape, in particular the Securities Act changes that are here. I was asking the associate minister about these things. It starts on page 14.

When I was sitting in the chair as Finance minister, of course I would hear from the Alberta Securities Commission about ways they wanted to improve the function of the commission, the things they needed. Certainly, appointments to the board, executive appointments were discussed beforehand, those kinds of things as well as, you know, how to ensure that securities was on a level playing field across the country. There was a desire from Ontario and some other provinces to have a single securities system in the country. My engagement with the ASC was regular, and I was able to work closely with their leadership on all sorts of things for the betterment of capital investment and corporations and securities in this province.

[Mr. Sigurdson in the chair]

For the life of me, I can't understand how what's on page 14 and goes for several pages fits into the whole area of red tape reduction implementation. I pointed these things out to the associate minister when that person was here and I was talking to this bill. For instance, on page 15, number 5, which speaks to section 57.1, is amended, and it changes – the entire change is adding two commas, Mr. Speaker, and that's in this bill that talks about red tape reduction. Adding two commas doesn't seem to be anything. It's not removing any clauses; it is adding commas.

10:00

With regard to the next page, on 19 they're changing – the request of the minister is to put in an “of” instead of a “for,” so instead of f-o-r to change that to o-f. It doesn't change the meaning of anything that I'm reading before me from the old statute to the new changes. Then this one next is (c) – it's on the same page – “in clause (d) by striking out ‘amounts paid’ and substituting ‘payments made.’” I pointed out that I don't see either of those phrases in the old statutes, so I'm not sure what that references, but it doesn't seem like red tape reduction.

[The Speaker in the chair]

Again, number 7, going down on the same page: they're putting in a comma after the word “company.” I'm not sure that that's red

tape. Well, it's not red tape reduction, but it's there. Again, on page 18: adding two commas in a bill that's about red tape reduction. Again, on page 20: the addition of i-n-g on the word "work," so it reads "working." Instead of "work conditions," it reads "working conditions." How is this red tape reduction? Flipping over on the next page, there is a comma inserted after the number 211.0961. Previously there was no comma; now there's a comma. How is that red tape reduction?

On and on and on in the securities section that's there. Perhaps someone can explain to me what that is all about. I know that when the associate minister talked, I think he said that there are 630,000 – is it 630,000? – regulations, and his goal is to reduce that by a third. He brings forward a bill which he claims is part of that initiative, and when I looked at a section that I'm particularly interested in, there is nothing in the examples that I've brought forward that speaks to red tape reduction.

It really has people on this side questioning what the value of parts of that bill are and if they wouldn't be better served in a miscellaneous statutes amendment act, which is before this House. You know, how did the decision get made? Who made the decision to bring forward a bill that obviously doesn't have the reduction of policies or regulations in it that I've pointed out instead of putting them in the place where they should be, which is miscellaneous statutes?

Those housekeeping measures that I pointed out, Mr. Speaker, could have been made, obviously, in a different amendment act, and that would make a lot more sense to this person on this side. The miscellaneous statutes were a regular part of the work that we brought forward when we were in government, work with my colleagues who were in cabinet. They'd say: "You know, we've looked at the statutes. We want to change them in this degree." It's not worthy of an entire bill being brought forward. It's not a major policy throw. It just cleans up some things that are important, and I, on behalf of them, or another minister would present that to this Legislature and get it passed. Typically with miscellaneous statutes everybody would kind of say: "You know, sign off on it. Yeah. It's nothing big."

What I've presented seems to fall in that category, but it's in a bill specifically to give the government – not the government. It's to give Albertans the perception that something bigger is going on than what I've been able to find myself in the time that I've been able to study the bill. There are nine acts – and I talked about one of them – across six ministries that this bill amends. I think we have posed a number of questions on this side. A number of amendments have been brought forward on this side, and unfortunately they have not been supported.

Mr. Speaker, when we look to the whole issue of red tape reduction, I guess I want to recognize that I think we need to be as efficient and effective in the delivery of services to Albertans and persons in this province as we can possibly be. I don't think that that's a partisan divide. I think everyone around this table wants Albertans, corporations to be as successful as they can be. But then it starts to divide a little bit about how you go about doing that.

I think that there's a long tradition of effective public service in Canada for sure, in Alberta for sure, and in our municipalities, that public servants have chosen to be public servants. You know, if the only thing they're interested in is remuneration, the highest remuneration possible for the work they want to do, they wouldn't be in the public service. We know that there's a discount, I guess you would say, from private-sector work to public-sector work. When I was in the public sector in Calgary, both working as a staff member and then an elected official, we used to as a staff member think that working for the city of Calgary was a pretty good . . .

The Speaker: I hesitate to interrupt. However – and perhaps I wasn't clear enough when we called Bill 62 – before the Assembly at present is amendment REC1, which is a recommittal amendment. That amendment specifically deals with recommitting section 1 of the legislation to Committee of the Whole. Section 1 is specifically to do with the Alberta Utilities Commission Act. While I provide very broad latitude with respect to sending bills to committee more generally and all of the reasons why a bill might go to committee, a recommittal amendment is much more specific with respect to section 1 of the legislation. I say that as a caution to the member but also for the rest of the discussion here this morning with respect to ensuring that our comments are at least remotely relevant to the amendment before the Assembly.

The hon. member.

Member Ceci: Sorry, Mr. Speaker. When I got up, I thought we were in third reading, and I didn't hear the further instruction.

The Speaker: Yeah. I also accept some responsibility for not being clear when we called third reading. We are in third reading, but it's on an amendment to recommit this piece of legislation back to Committee of the Whole. It's mildly technical. I don't think it's the end of the world, but I just thought it was also a good opportunity to remind the Assembly what was before the Assembly.

10:10

Member Ceci: I, too, think it would be a good idea to recommit this section back to Committee of the Whole, Mr. Speaker, for the reasons that you've – well, I will elaborate on some of the reasons that I think it would be a good thing to do that, to have further discussion in Committee of the Whole. Not unlike the previous bill that was before us, we have presented a motion to refer it to the Standing Committee on Families and Communities for the purpose of hearing further from individuals who have been directly impacted from the – in that case, it's the COVID-19 situation, long-term care; in this case, it would be people, as we all are affected by energy, the use of energy and the need for it in our personal lives as well as beyond our personal lives.

Committee of the Whole would give the opportunity for us to do significantly more work to reach out to stakeholders, to have more germane information and questions of the hon. ministers who are involved and have made decisions that have affected our Alberta Utilities Commission. Mr. Speaker, there have been significant changes since this side was government to the new approaches that are obviously present from the government side. I will continue to support my colleagues in the recommittal motion. I believe that that's in the best interest of Albertans and look forward to further discussion from my colleagues on this issue.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Dach: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Under 29(2)(a), on the referral to recommit Bill 62 to COW, I have a specific interest in particular in some of the measures with respect to the real estate industry, the Real Estate Council that, curiously, find themselves embedded in this piece of legislation, the Red Tape Reduction Implementation Act, 2021. Like many of the measures that we find this ministry, red tape, involving themselves in, it begs the question as to why they aren't really being dealt with by the ministers for the various departments that are the subject of changes in legislation.

I have the same question, Mr. Speaker, with respect to real estate matters being treated in this piece of legislation, and that's the

reason why I think that we should be looking to recommit this bill back to committee, so that more questions can be asked of not only the minister of red tape reduction, but also I'd certainly have some questions for the Minister of Service Alberta as to why, indeed, his ministry isn't the one that's responsible for bringing forward these very substantial changes to the operation of the real estate industry in Alberta. That said, I know that there's a whole bunch of changes that were brought in. The KPMG report from 2019 made it clear that the responsibility for education would not be with the Real Estate Council, but changes outlined in this bill seem to run counter to that. Still a lot of unanswered questions.

I think that this is just one example, with respect to changes being contemplated to the real estate industry, under this legislation, but many others within this Bill 62 also lead one to wonder, generally, why they were under the auspices of the minister of red tape and why we do not see the ministries themselves taking care of these so-called red tape issues, that we have a new minister of red tape created to track down and hunt and create legislation on his own. It in its entirety – the ministry, I'm talking about, Mr. Speaker – is something whose necessity I still scratch my head about because indeed this process of identifying pieces of legislation within a department or ministry which need to be changed or altered for whatever reason if they are described as so-called red tape: this is an ongoing process of government at every level. The fact that the ministers responsible for their own ministries have had to subject themselves to an alternate minister poking into their ministry to dig out so-called red tape examples is, I suggest, an admission of failure of the system that we have in place, where ministers responsible for their own ministry should be overseeing that.

Now, that argument is one that we can have perhaps in Committee of the Whole when we do hopefully pass this amendment and have the recommittal to Committee of the Whole take place so that we can have the ministers themselves perhaps explain why indeed they feel it's better that the amendments that the associate minister of red tape wishes to see happen to their ministries take place under his auspices and would not have been better situated under the responsibility of the ministers responsible for the exact subject matter such as this Minister of Service Alberta under the Real Estate Act.

Indeed, I think that it would be entirely appropriate for us to recommit this piece of legislation, Bill 62, to Committee of the Whole because there's a whole raft of questions that still remain for ministers that should be addressed, and I think the public would be very interested to hear directly from ministers as to why they felt that their responsibility for their particular subject area would be better served under this act.

Statement by the Speaker

Relevance

The Speaker: Hon. members, for clarity's sake – and that does conclude the time allotted for Standing Order 29(2)(a) – before the Assembly this morning is amendment REC1, recommittal amendment 1. This is a rarely used procedure. In fact, in the last couple of years I think we've probably only had two, possibly three amendments for recommittal, not that that's good, bad, or indifferent.

But just in terms of context for debate, I think it's important that the Assembly understands that we deal with recommitments slightly different. If the amendment had been to recommit the entire bill to Committee of the Whole, members would have a very wide swath on what they should or should not be focusing their comments on, but in this context the amendment is seeking recommittal of section

1. The amendment is quite specific to the legislation, so we should endeavour to have our comments predominantly around that. For the benefit of members, of course, all members will know that section 1 is on the Alberta Securities Commission, so I don't believe that it would impact every other area in the legislation.

Some Hon. Members: Utilities.

The Speaker: Oh, sorry. Correction: Utilities Commission, not Securities Commission. Utilities, securities; potayto, potato.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

Debate Continued

Member Loyola: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, for your interjection, for getting us on the path of discussing what it is that we have before us in terms of this recommittal amendment.

Of course, to do you a favour, Mr. Speaker, and to avoid confusion, how about I just read it into the record one more time so that we all know what we're talking about here? The Member for Edmonton-Manning did so move that the motion for third reading of Bill 62, Red Tape Reduction Implementation Act, 2021, be amended by deleting all of the words after "that" and substituting the following: "Bill 62, Red Tape Reduction Implementation Act, 2021, be not now read a third time but that it be recommitted to the Committee of the Whole for the purpose of reconsideration of section 1," which, of course, has to do with the Alberta Utilities Commission.

10:20

The interesting thing is that the Member for Edmonton-Manning, I do so believe, got up in this House and was talking about how this particular process was actually going to be affecting, impacting those in rural Alberta. That was her main impetus behind her argument and the reason for submitting this particular recommittal amendment and for us to seriously consider sending this back to Committee of the Whole, because we don't believe that enough time has been spent on really analyzing what impact this is going to have on, specifically, rural populations here in the province of Alberta.

I'll just state that it has to do with the creation of mandated timelines and time limits on approval processes. My particular concern is that the bill, the way that it stands right now, would change and, specifically in section 75, give cabinet the authority to set timelines on projects and make related regulations. Of course, as we've seen and I've argued in this House, so many times, Mr. Speaker, to all the members of this House that even I'm starting to feel like I sound like a broken record . . .

An Hon. Member: Hear, hear.

Member Loyola: Granted, I understand that the members on the other side feel that I'm a broken record.

But even so, it is absolutely, essentially required that I state it again. What do we see happening here? Once again – once again – we see this UCP government centralizing the decision-making process within cabinet specifically, in this case, but putting more and more decision-making power into the hands of ministers specifically. Yet again – yet again – here we go, another opportunity for this UCP government to centralize decision-making power within their cabinet.

We don't know what regulations are going to come forward. It specifically has to do with timelines, so it's important that we refer this back, because we haven't had sufficient debate specifically about the timelines and how they are going to – what affects the

decisions that are going to be made. The regulations: we don't know them. We don't know – this is actually putting so much power in the hands of cabinet when it should be a shared responsibility with the Alberta Utilities Commission when it comes to the impact that it's going to have specifically on rural Albertans.

You know, this UCP government, Mr. Speaker, likes to claim that they're the voice of rural Alberta, that they have the best interests of rural Albertans at hand, but time and time again they've demonstrated that this is not, in fact, true. Well, number one, because, I mean – and I've spoken to people in different parts of Alberta because I get e-mails from all around the province. Many times I get e-mails from people, constituents of the members across the way. I don't know what the impetus is behind them contacting me, but often in their e-mails they say: my own MLA is not listening to what I have to say. They feel that they need to go and contact other MLAs because they feel that they're not being listened to by their own MLA, this coming from a rural constituent. Here we are, the UCP claiming to be the voice of rural Alberta. They're here to save rural Alberta and stand up for them, yet the truth is that we're getting constituents from their ridings contacting us saying that they feel that they're not being listened to.

Now, the real fear is that, through regulation, this would give time for the minister to actually go back and take the Alberta Utilities Commission out of the legislation until – let me rephrase this. By sending this particular section of the proposed piece of legislation back to Committee of the Whole, this would give us the opportunity to then talk about how the Alberta Utilities Commission can be pulled out of the legislation until the Real Property Rights Committee has the time to do the work surrounding this particular issue and how it's going to be impacting rural Albertans. Please do not let my words fall on deaf ears. This is a real concern, a real issue that we've been hearing from rural Albertans. This is a real concern when it comes to property rights, and this is one of the reasons specifically why the Member for Edmonton-Manning actually presented this here amendment in the House, so that we could seriously take this under consideration.

Now, you know, I'm getting blank stares from the other side of the room. I can probably tell that this amendment is probably just going to be voted down. But let me tell you – let me get it on the record. Let me get it on the record, Mr. Speaker. I'm getting nods from the other side: "Yeah. We're going to vote this down. We're going to vote this down. We're going to vote it down. We don't want to listen to rural Albertans. We don't want to reanalyze the potential impacts that this piece of legislation is going to have on property rights. We don't want to reanalyze what the potential complications are that we're going to be introducing by actually passing this piece of legislation, how it's going to affect rural Albertans." That's what they're saying when they're nodding: yeah; we're not going to vote for this here amendment.

That's what they're saying, that they don't want to listen, and this wouldn't be the first time. This would not be the first time that this UCP government along with their independent members, that supposedly state that they represent their rural constituencies, is coming into this House and, in fact, not truly listening to the concerns of rural constituents around Alberta.

Like I've mentioned many times before, Mr. Speaker, the real concern is that too much decision-making power is being centralized within the cabinet, in the hands of ministers. In my particular opinion, in my humble opinion, this is not the way that we do things here in Alberta. It's really concerning that a government that likes to pretend that they're the defenders of freedom is actually putting more power in the hands of fewer individuals, and I want all Albertans to realize what it is that this UCP government is doing. They're actually taking power out of the

hands of other Albertans, taking power and agency away from the agencies, boards, and commissions of the province of Alberta. They're taking those opportunities away, those opportunities to actually participate in democratic decision-making, and they're putting them in the hands of ministers and, in this particular piece of legislation, in the hands of cabinet only. This is a warning to all Albertans – a warning – and I would hope that they would hear this warning.

10:30

This sets us on a very dangerous path because when you take away the decision-making power and you centralize it, what indeed are you doing? You're giving the opportunity for people who only have one perspective to then be making the decisions on matters that are actually impacting all Albertans.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I will wrap up my comments on this particular amendment. Thank you very much.

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

Seeing none, on the amendment are there others? I am prepared to call the question.

[Motion on amendment REC1 lost]

The Speaker: Hon. members, we are at third reading. Are there others wishing to speak?

Seeing none, I am prepared to call the question on Bill 62 at third reading.

[Motion carried; Bill 62 read a third time]

Bill 67

Skilled Trades and Apprenticeship Education Act

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Advanced Education.

Mr. Nicolaidis: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As members of the Assembly know, Alberta's government is committed to strengthening trades and promoting apprenticeship education, and we're doing this because we believe that a trade certificate has every bit as much value, merit, and worth as an academic degree. During the 2019 campaign we committed to expanding apprenticeship learning, and we've been doing this through a number of different measures. We're investing \$6 million annually in Careers: the Next Generation to quadruple the number of high school students who participate in trades programming. As well, we've provided \$10 million to Women Building Futures to help more women find careers in the trades. We've also established a Trades Hall of Fame and created a new scholarship to recognize excellence in the trades.

We also commissioned the Skills for Jobs Task Force in 2019, and we asked them to look at modernizing and improving Alberta's trades and apprenticeship system. I want to thank the co-chairs, former NAIT president Dr. Glenn Feltham and current SAIT president Dr. David Ross, as well as all other members of the task force for their incredible work.

The panel made a series of recommendations, of course, and we're happy to implement those recommendations. As part of their report the task force, Mr. Speaker, recommended that we draft new legislation to update Alberta's apprenticeship framework. More specifically, they said, "New legislation needs to be principles-based, nimble, and flexible." With this expert advice, of course, we've drafted and created the legislation that is before the Assembly.

The proposed legislation will modernize apprenticeship education and skilled trades in Alberta to help ensure that Alberta's workforce is skilled, competitive, and equipped to deal with not just the challenges of today but also the challenges of the future. If passed, the legislation will replace the current Apprenticeship and Industry Training Act, which has been in place since 1991. It served us well since that time, but the time has come for us to make some changes and modernize it, and, Mr. Speaker, I am confident that this new bill will create a stronger trades and apprenticeship education system in Alberta.

I'd like to talk very briefly about some of the critical elements that the bill will establish. Firstly, it will open the door to giving trades certification formal academic recognition. Currently a completed apprenticeship certificate does not, in the vast majority of instances, ladder into other programs, so a journeyman often receives little to no academic recognition. The task force commented on this. They noted very specifically that "for those who achieve certification, the current Journeyman Certificate is not recognized as a post-secondary credential and has limited and unstandardized credit recognition." Ultimately, this limits the ability of our incredible trades professionals to pursue further education and training work to shift into new careers. The changes in the act will address this issue and make Alberta a leader amongst other provinces in creating more opportunities for trades professionals.

Secondly, the bill also provides the foundation that's needed for the government of Alberta to develop new apprenticeships. Currently the AIT Act specifies that apprenticeship programs are only provided to trades, so this limits how we can expand apprenticeship offerings. As we prepare for the postpandemic economic recovery, we must take every possible step to help re-skill and upskill Albertans. Should the legislation be passed, the government will begin a comprehensive effort to expand apprenticeships and create new apprenticeships in new careers. There's no reason, Mr. Speaker, why occupations such as, for example, coding, graphic design, cyber security, marketing, and many more cannot be taught through an apprenticeship model. Again, in this regard I'm confident that Alberta will lead Canada in creating new and modern apprenticeships.

Of course, the task force commented on this specifically under recommendation 4.1. They said that we must "significantly expand apprenticeship education to professions where it best meets the needs of learners and industry." The task force further recommended that the government explore apprenticeship programs in industrial trades; information technology; engineering; services, including social care, restaurant services; and business, recognizing that many business disciplines are learned through apprenticeship models, including banking, insurance, marketing, and finance.

Lastly, Bill 67 will modernize governance of our trades. We've talked about this at length through the debate thus far, but the task force noted on a number of occasions that the governance framework of our trades and apprenticeship system needs updating. We're doing precisely that through this legislation.

As well, Mr. Speaker, the new bill will also help our efforts in terms of reducing red tape. Currently the AIT Act contributes to 12,000 cumulative pieces of regulations, forms, applications, and other documents. By starting fresh, with a new act, we can clean up some of that unnecessary red tape.

I'll close here. Mr. Speaker, in summary, I am confident that this new bill will make Alberta a national and international leader in trades and apprenticeship education. In closing, I'd just like to provide a very quick summary of next steps. As we've discussed throughout the debate thus far, should the legislation be passed,

we'll begin an extensive consultation effort to develop the new regulations and to develop the governance framework. We'll be reaching out to postsecondary institutions, employers, employees, other important stakeholders to get their perspective in terms of next steps, and we'll be doing that immediately, throughout the rest of the spring and summer.

Just before I close, I would like to take a quick moment to thank the incredible, hard-working staff within the Ministry of Advanced Education and once again to thank all of the members of the Skills for Jobs Task Force as well as the United Conservative trades caucus for all of their input, guidance, and hard work in developing this legislation.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I would like to move third reading of Bill 67.

10:40

The Speaker: Hon. members, Bill 67 at third reading is before the Assembly. Anyone wishing to speak? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford has risen.

Mr. Feehan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate having an opportunity to address this bill. It's an interesting one for me because it's been a time of a little bit of learning for myself, which I always celebrate, in, you know, an area that I wouldn't claim expertise. I certainly know that we are in changing times, and the nature of work has a tendency to change with the times, and that which is done at one part in our history is not done in the next. We've seen that time and time again with occupations that have risen to prominence and have slowly faded away to be replaced by new occupations, sometimes containing similar skill sets to previous ones but usually creating a new cluster of skill sets that address new problems and sometimes even creating whole new job sets that were never even imagined before.

We certainly live in a time of dramatic, swift change. Jobs that were largely available in my youth are often now not available, and jobs that were not imagined in my youth are now predominant. Obviously, in the area of technology and the Internet and so on we would see that the most, but that is equally true in the area of trades. The complexity of the work done by the trades now is, I think, quite a bit higher than it was at one time in history, and as a result we really are depending on our tradespeople to have a good, strong sense of what skill set is necessary to accomplish any particular piece of work.

We also have, I think, a higher set of expectations about the way in which that work is done. Obviously, over the last, you know, century we have focused a lot in our society on safety in work settings, and we expect people to do things in a manner which is going to be safe, not only once the work has been completed for the people using the objects or the buildings in question but for the workers themselves as they go through the process of conducting their work.

Given all of that – the changing expectations, the demands that work itself be always performed at a high level of personal safety, and the nature of the work itself changing – it is good that we have before us a bill that begins to do that, but we're left with a bit of a problem.

I want to express my appreciation for the minister, who has been trying to address our questions as we go along in this House. It's very helpful in terms of my understanding. Even the minister had admitted yesterday that they themselves couldn't tell you what the specific changes would be in particular trades, and that's fine. I don't expect the minister to be prescient. I do think that we have to sometimes set legislation that is, as this is, sort of enabling of people who are involved to deal with change as change occurs and not try

to predict ahead of time what that change may be. You know, I think I support the minister on that aspect of this particular bill. You want to establish a set of practices and procedures that are helping the people who are involved in the profession to be ready to address the changes as they become relevant and not try to guess ahead of time what all those changes might be. I think we can get ourselves into big trouble when we do that, so I certainly support that.

But here we are left with a problem, then. How do you establish an enabling legislation that ensures that the right people are in the right place at the right time to make the kinds of decisions that will be good for economic growth, that will be good for worker benefits like credentialing and good, of course, for worker safety? That leads me to some of the things that I am a little concerned about with the legislation because the answers to those questions either do not exist or perhaps even cannot exist. We're left with the question of not what decisions will be made but who will be making those decisions. If we look at it and say, "Well, we don't know what they're going to have to decide, but we want to make sure that the place where those decisions are being made are being staffed by people who actually are the best people to make those kind of decisions," that's what I think this legislation should be focusing on, and my concern is that I don't see the balance in that that I would like to see.

I mean, I certainly welcome some of the things I think are going to happen, the establishment of new trades and the recognition of the significance of the work of new skill sets. Individuals who bring complex skill sets to the work should have their work recognized as not only important in terms of the work that's being done but in order to provide a credential to those individuals so that they can market their skills in a way that's recognizable by others who perhaps are less knowledgeable of the trades such as myself. I certainly know that when I don't understand a piece of work, I look to the professional designations to tell me: is this the right person I should be asking to do this kind of work? I welcome the fact that there will be new trades recognized that will, you know, be to some degree self-governing and therefore self-evaluating and, hopefully, will provide a standard that can assure those of us who are naive as to the work that's being done in the profession, like myself, that somebody understands the work and understands what is good work, what is safe work.

My question is – because I can't know all those details, and the minister admitted yesterday that they could not possibly know those details either. We want to ask the question about: how do we ensure that the right people are at the table? That brings us to the establishment of some of the areas that are covered in this legislation such as the question of training. Who's doing the training, and who has the right to take on that piece of work and establish what pieces of knowledge are necessary in a particular area? Who's doing the accreditation of those training institutions? Who decides that they indeed have the expertise to provide training that is appropriate to the tasks at hand? What committees are being established? I know there are committees established and referred to in the legislation in a number of places that will be responsible for looking at: who is the appropriate group in order to be able to provide an apprenticeship opportunity? Do they have the wherewithal to understand this new job area and to provide the kind of resources to mentor and to support people learning the trade?

Of course, the minister has just moments ago in the House talked about the idea that many of the trades do not have the privilege of academic credentialing associated with the trade and that that would be a good thing for them to be able to have. I certainly think I support that. We want people to get full recognition for the work they put in. Again, the question is: who makes the decision as to

whether or not the learning that's taken place in the previous trade is appropriate to the credentialing in other areas? It's vague.

10:50

I mean, you can take the extremes to just prove the point. Say, you know, someone has been a carpenter; does make them a structural engineer, or does that give them some credits toward that? I'm not suggesting that that's an example the minister would use, but by picking a wide gap, I'm trying to identify that gaps indeed exist. I think it's important that we spend time with this legislation and the situation, looking at the answers to these kinds of questions. Who is making those decisions? Who gets to decide who's in the right place?

Have we got a balance in this legislation between the people who do the job every day – that is, the employees, the skilled tradespeople – and the employers, who understand the work that needs to happen, understand where things are going, often have a pretty good view into the future of the needs or the demands that are going to be coming up? And balance those two with the academic aspect of all of this work; that is, people who are providing the supervision on-site, the practical mentorship of the apprenticeships, and, of course, the wholly academic work that is done in institutions such as NAIT or SAIT or other institutions in the province. I just leave my reading of this bill with concerns about all of that, whether or not that balance is there between the trades, the employees, the employers, the mentorship, and the academics. Are all of these people at the right tables that they need to be at in order to ensure that we are moving in the right direction?

I mean, I guess I offer some tentative support to the bill in that I certainly would like to see trades progressing, new trades arising, and credentialing being offered in a supportive way to allow as much flexibility as possible for people who are learning within the trades to be able to shift and manoeuvre with the changing times, whether it's within that trade or from that trade to another trade or even from the trades to nontrade professions, other academic settings.

Given that we are in this place, with this sort of generalized enabling legislation, I guess I can only, at best, express some of my concerns and suggest that we on the opposition side will be working closely with members of the trades to examine the decisions that come forward that are largely governed by regulation here at this point, to question whether or not those balances that I've spoken to have indeed been appropriately addressed and that we don't end up in this terrible situation where people are put on committees or boards that are simply friends of the government and are being rewarded for, you know, their relationships and their supports on the political end but that people are there because they truly have the right skill set, people not like me, who actually would know what the right decision would be in any particular situation.

I guess that's what we'll be watching for as we watch to see this legislation progress and particularly watch to see how the regulations are played out and the filling of the boards, the filling of the committees, and the designation of who does the training along the way, including the practical supervision mentorship of the apprenticeships. If that moves in a way that is apparently satisfactory, you know, we certainly will offer support to this government based on the information we receive from the trades themselves and the concerns that they have.

I know that they have said that they're willing to move along with this legislation if it does go in the right direction. They're not taking an oppositional stance or some kind of, you know, rigid position right from the beginning. They're certainly willing to work with the minister on this particular bill and the outcomes of the bill, and as such we will be supporting them as we have on this side of the

House supported tradespeople, really, throughout our history as a party and will continue to do that into the future.

At this time I'd like to thank the minister for the dialogue that we've been able to have over the last little while and encourage the minister to continue to have that dialogue so that we don't find ourselves in a place of coming back saying: well, you promised one thing and we ended up with another, and now we're in a deeply oppositional place. For the betterment of the trades in the province of Alberta I certainly would like to see us working toward a more successful future and not a conflictual one. I don't think society moves ahead best through conflict but, rather, through commitment. If the minister is prepared to be committed to a process that allows a full, positive commitment of the trades and, of course, the opposition side of the House, then we would be there for it as well.

Thank you very much.

The Speaker: Hon. members, are there others? The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-North.

Member Ceci: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, for the opportunity to address in third reading this bill. I was in the House yesterday afternoon when we had the opportunity to have a back and forth between the minister and our critic for this area. It was very instructive, and I appreciate, just as my colleague for Edmonton-Rutherford just said – it's useful and helpful when legislators have the opportunity to talk to each other and to get an understanding of what everybody is thinking and why they're taking the action they're taking.

I won't address this very long, Mr. Speaker, in third but to say a couple of things that I've been thinking about this bill. One of them has to do with the composition, that I was able to speak to in Committee of the Whole, the amendment that the opposition brought up with regard to the composition of a board and to ensure that the representation on the board continues to have designated or compulsory trades representatives on the board, both on the employer and the employee side, and on and on and on. There was a rather long amendment that was brought forward. Through the listening, the discussion that took place between the two aforementioned individuals, we learned that rather than those appointments happening through an order in council, they'll be appointed by the minister, so no OIC. And one of the reasons for that was brought up as, you know, getting rid of some red tape.

I just want to kind of reflect on when the NDP was in government, from '15 to '19. Obviously, lots of OICs. It never seemed to be problematic or an issue that would bog down the work of government. It didn't hold up big policy decisions that I can recall. It was a matter of course. Members of cabinet worked weekly, sometimes more often than that, together, certainly had subcommittees of cabinet that would hear recommendations of ministers who were bringing forward new appointees or persons they wanted to appoint to various boards. There were hundreds of them, obviously. So to talk about it as red tape reduction just doesn't kind of, you know, fly in the face of my experience, I guess.

11:00

I do want to also kind of talk about the importance of updating legislation. I agree that 30-year-old legislation needs to be examined. We looked at many pieces of legislation and wanted to make them relevant – I think the word the minister used is “nimble” – listening to the people who have been involved in this area and the need to be able to adapt quickly to an evolving situation with regard to trades in this province and education and apprenticeships. That all seems, on its surface, fine. I agree with it entirely. But as I

said in my debate yesterday, the feedback that members of the loyal opposition are getting is, you know: “Are all things the same? Are we going to be losing any of the good things that we have had in the AIT previously, for the last 30 years, and are they going to be there in the new act once it is proclaimed?” I think the answer is: we hope so. The hope is because a great deal of what's left here, that we've not been able to get clear answers on, are things that will be left to regulation, will be dealt with after this act is long passed and behind us. So when things are brought up from this side with regard to questions, asking the minister to tell us more about this, that, and the other thing that we hear from folks in Alberta who have direct involvement with the previous act and are looking at the current one before us, those are some of the reasons why the significant number of questions have been posed to the minister and asked and answered and discussions have taken place.

I think one other thing I'd like to reflect on is: certainly, I grew up in a household where father was involved in the trades. Not self-taught; I mean, he came up through the construction industry. He never was certified. He never had seals of any kind. But he was successful. His partners, my uncles, were successful. They were in business together for probably 30 years, but my father was longer in the business than that.

I have an appreciation, I guess, is what I'm saying, for the skilled work that tradespeople do. Like my colleague from Edmonton-Rutherford, I'm really interested in the further, in some ways, legitimization of that whole kind of approach to life, where you work in the trades and you are eligible for credentialism in some way that, if you choose, can use that in other sectors of education for furthering, you know, the God-given talents you want to further. I have no issue with that. I think that's a good thing for people. I think that's a good thing for growth in this whole area of apprenticeship and giving that, I guess, legitimacy at some level. If that's an outcome of this new act, good on the minister, good on the people who advised him. I just don't know if it's similar in Germany, in Taiwan, in the U.K., and in other places that the report talks to or has investigated, researched. I'd be interested, and perhaps I need to do my own further work to find out if that kind of academic credential is a part of the systems in those other places. That's a good move, in my estimation.

It's good that we all, on both sides of the House, want to do as much as we can to ensure that apprenticeship and trades are as healthy and robust as they can possibly be for Alberta and that Albertans can take those skills and travel elsewhere and improve their lives, improve the situation in other places.

I know, as my colleague was saying, that many trades are having difficulties right now, not only because of COVID and the economy but the aging out of many older people who have been involved in the trades for their lifetimes, are looking at retiring. That's necessary; we need to get new blood always, and we have to make it as positive an experience for young people to see themselves across the occupational landscape as possible.

Probably for many in this House, you know, their parents didn't have educations, and they were in trades, like my own father, and they wanted their children to go on to what they saw as professional experiences like doctor, lawyer, pharmacist, dentist, and they didn't push trades necessarily. If we can change that with Albertans and with parents in this province so they understand that there is an important role for tradespeople across our society and that those are valued and appreciated, then I think that we all will have done some good work here on Bill 67.

I'm really pleased to hear the breadth of people who are on the committee and know that their interest is in a skilled Alberta workforce. I think that's as it should be. We need that to take place in this province.

Without much further ado, Mr. Speaker, I'll take my seat. Thank you.

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

The hon. Member for Calgary-North.

Mr. Yaseen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is an honour to rise today to speak to Bill 67, Skilled Trades and Apprenticeship Education Act, proposed by my colleague the Minister of Advanced Education. I would like to thank the minister, his staff, and the department for the work they put in to help modernize apprenticeship education and skilled trades.

11:10

This new act will replace the 30-year-old Apprenticeship and Industry Training Act, otherwise known as AIT, with legislation that supports a modern, flexible, and efficient system. The AIT Act is overly complex and intertwines apprenticeship education and skilled trades so closely that amending it was impossible. Creating a new act allows us to ensure that the system is flexible, responsible, and equipped to deal with challenges today and into the future. The new act enables Albertans to be more flexible and to quickly respond to the challenges today and into the future.

Mr. Speaker, our government ran on a specific mandate to reduce red tape and improve efficiencies as well. Employers and industry workers will see reduced red tape through the proposed act. The current AIT Act contributes close to 12,000 red tape items, which will be eliminated through the proposed legislation.

Skilled trades workers and nontrade professionals deserve a governance model that is easy to understand. This piece of legislation creates a clear framework for nontrade professionals as they will have greater flexibility to leverage apprenticeship programming without being required to become a designated trade. By legislatively separating apprenticeship education from skilled trade professions, the government will have the flexibility to provide apprenticeship programs where they can have the best outcomes. The new act allows the government to designate a trade where it makes sense and not just for the purpose of providing an apprenticeship education program. If this House chooses to pass this renewed act, it will expand apprenticeships into new careers. For example, occupations such as coding, graphic design, cybersecurity, ag tech, and others could be taught through an apprenticeship model. Mr. Speaker, according to BuildForce Canada projections Alberta's construction and maintenance industry will need to hire almost 65,000 workers over the coming decade to meet growth expectations and replace an estimated 41,500 workers expected to retire.

This act will benefit the industry, employers, and employees as it expands opportunities, creates flexibility, and promotes the value of education, whether that be through apprenticeship or postsecondary. Making this system more flexible will attract students to pursue a career through skilled trades. Unfortunately, we have seen a drop in the number of registered apprentices from 70,000 to about 45,000. Over the past six years it decreased by more than 35 per cent, mostly in relation to Alberta's prolonged economic downturn. Approximately 7,800 new apprentices were registered in 2020, a decrease from the 11,600 new apprentices who began the program in 2019.

We have many skilled and motivated young adults here in Alberta. I'm proud that scholarships totalling \$1 million were awarded by the Ministry of Advanced Education so that apprentices can continue to succeed in their studies. I would like also to note that this act also aligns with the goals of the 2030 building skills for

jobs strategy, which builds a common vision and direction for postsecondary education in the province.

Thank you, Minister, for your dedication to ensuring that apprentices in this province are supported. I look forward to supporting Bill 67, Skilled Trades and Apprenticeship Education Act, and I hope that members of this House will join me.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Seeing none, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to all members. I think we've had a really good tone set on Bill 67, Skilled Trades and Apprenticeship Education Act, debate. I specifically appreciated the opportunity that we had to engage in back and forth with the Minister of Advanced Education in particular, and I know some other members engaged in debate on earlier stages. I think that this is a piece of legislation that certainly will have significant impacts on those who are considering careers in the trades, and it's certainly the job of the Official Opposition and, I would assert, private members as well to be able to probe into some of that and gather as much insight as possible from the folks responsible for drafting the legislation and bringing it forward to this House.

Of course, the folks who draft the legislation are thinking through the consequences for the legislation today, but it's also a responsibility to think through the impacts of the legislation in future governments with people who are drafting regulations, because this really is such a significant amount of responsibility being removed from this place into regulation and also moved into other agencies, boards, and commissions actually making decisions that were once left for ourselves and for the minister and cabinet in other regards.

I have to say that my natural response, I think, when we see this much delegation of authority is to want to ensure that there are appropriate parameters put in place to prevent wrongdoing either now or into the future. That hasn't been totally addressed, unfortunately, because, of course, the people who are currently making these decisions or assertions in this place may or may not be the people who are making the decisions in, you know, two weeks, two months, or two years. There are a number of questions that we have raised, and we've had some answers about the intention of the current minister, but we certainly still carry a lot of those concerns as we move forward.

I'd like to take this opportunity to talk about a few areas in the trades that I think most of us encounter on a relatively regular basis, maybe more regular when it's non-COVID times than when it is COVID times. Specifically, I'll speak a little bit to hairdressing. I know that one of the government caucus members that regularly talks about trades has talked about her experience as a hairdresser and as a salon owner-operator. I appreciate that expertise that she brings to her discussions, that lived experience that she brings to her discussions with this Assembly and, hopefully, with her colleagues as they draft these types of things.

Probably like all of you, when I have the opportunity to sit in a chair, I chit-chat with the stylist who I'm spending time with. We've had discussions that flowed from youth activists bringing forward ideas around curriculum changes, specifically curriculum for CTS as it relates to hairdressing. One of the big gaps that a number of these students have pointed out to me is the lack of content in the curriculum around hair for folks who are racialized, particularly black hair. Really, the curriculum in K to 12 – and my

stylist has confirmed that the curriculum for this specific trade in Alberta is silent on black hair. A lot of people have different hair texture and different needs, therefore, from their trained, skilled professional, their skilled tradesperson who's working with them, and that really creates an environment in school where you're only learning, really, about one technique, one hair type, one method. Again, it's an example of how a number of folks feel othered.

11:20

When we speak to things like black history, black accomplishments, and the inclusion of more diverse perspectives and experiences in the curriculum, often people naturally gravitate towards social studies, and I can tell that the minister or somebody under the minister's authority has tried to find and, you know, pick some pieces of black history to incorporate into the current draft. Whether that was done in a way that was inclusive, that ensures that the folks who are being sort of memorialized with their names, even though it's not their legal names, being included in this draft, that's one way of expanding content. Most of the people who I've spoken to who have a connection to Amber Valley have said that they'd like for the conversation to be much more open in talking about black settlers in general and compelling students to research who some of the black settlers were who homesteaded here in Alberta and had a variety of different professions and different ways they engaged and served the public rather than cherry-picking a few people's names and specific dates. I appreciate that.

Another area is by having the experiences and including contemporary experiences in other curriculum areas like CTS, which relate to the trades, of course, as there are some dual-credit options that, I think, have served students well in terms of job preparedness, but I think we could continue to do better in terms of curriculum development for the K to 12 piece but also as it relates to the dual-credit piece or the trade certificate that one gets. For example, this piece around knowing how to work with black hair and how to style black hair, cut black hair and how it is a different skill set and a different talent, I think, is something that would serve us well to ensure was incorporated into content that people will receive, whether they're in high school or whether they're doing their apprenticeship or whether they're getting their final ticket as it relates to this profession.

That's just one little area inspired by one short conversation with a stylist, that was, prior to that, initiated by some lovely high school students who were reflecting on the lack of inclusive content when it comes to hairdressing as a specific trade, that we work to expose students to those foundational principles if they register for it in high school. I really appreciate and want to thank them for bringing that forward and for recommending that this be an area of consideration for this government. So I would appreciate it if there is an opportunity to hear back from the minister or a designate as it relates to content and the need to have inclusive content in a variety of different subject areas, including the trades that specifically relate to hairdressing.

There are other trades, too, that have a dual-credit component or did at one point, that I think we've significantly deteriorated over the last two years. Specifically, I want to speak to the training for health care aides in terms of dual credit and the opportunity to garner expertise in how to be a care provider, specifically in communities outside of Edmonton and Calgary. There are a number of communities – Barrhead, I believe, was one – that until recently had an opportunity for dual credit so that high school students could get that hands-on experience working in long-term care, assisted living facilities, or lodges and have the opportunity to increase the expertise of those students but also the number of people that would be employable to help serve their communities.

The thing that some of these students and staff and family members have highlighted for me about their appreciation of having this program in place, prior to the deep cuts that were imposed by this government, is that a lot of the time they were working with their family members or neighbours, people that they knew in the community, and they were able to get a skill set, line themselves up for employment, and stay in their local community, serving one another. But, of course, when that opportunity is taken away through significant cuts to education that resulted in the termination of a lot of these programs, specifically the dual-credit programs in outlying communities, what happens is that a student who was interested in pursuing this as a career pathway will have to wait until they're done high school and then will typically have to leave their community.

As somebody who grew up in rural Alberta, I can tell you that once you've moved away, it's harder to come back, right? Once you've moved away from anywhere, the probability of going back is diminished significantly because regularly, especially during those young adult years, we're forming new relationships, we're discovering new things and opportunities about ourselves, and we're putting down roots where we live.

My Sunday school teacher used to say: bloom where you're planted. My mom lifted it and also said it often. When we fail to nurture people who are in communities throughout our province to actually be able to bloom where they're planted, if we fail to give them, you know, the sunshine and the water that they need to be successful seeds and serving their local community, we eliminate the opportunity for them to live that career pathway in their local community.

We also really hurt rural communities or, I will say, non Edmonton and Calgary communities because a lot of times when students move away, they do move to Edmonton and Calgary, sometimes to other larger cities in the province as well. But, again, the probability of going back once you've moved away to take that certificate or get that training is significantly diminished.

If we've learned a number of things over this last year and a half, I hope that one of them is the need to have adequate staffing in long-term care and assisted living facilities, the need to have – the research is very clear that when people have ongoing, continuous relationships with people, their sense of the care that they're receiving is a higher sense of appreciation. They have a greater sense of confidence that the care they're getting is supporting them. So by failing to make this a priority, the government really is hurting rural communities, and they're hurting folks who are interested in pursuing those trades as well, Mr. Speaker. Those are a couple of what people often refer to as, like, pink-collar trades, I guess, that I think we really could also focus on.

My ultimate message is that I believe this bill takes a lot of things out of the proper checks and balances and moves them to other areas, and for the government to say, "Just trust us; we'll get this right" is challenging, especially given a number of areas where they have told us that in the past and then have failed to follow through on their commitments. Maybe the bill should be titled *Just Trust Us*. I don't think it instills a ton of confidence because I think it leaves a lot of questions about the impacts of the implementation, and I appreciate that the minister has said what his intent is, but, again, who knows who will be the minister in 20 years, two years, two weeks? Like, things change. Things change in politics, and I think it's important that we make sure that we're creating legislation that doesn't require us to trust in whoever might be responsible for fulfilling the intentions of the act.

So those are my remarks as they relate to Bill 67 at this point. I really hope that some of these comments have an impact on how people vote as well as how people consider the implementation,

should the decision be made that this will go forward. Ultimately, principles without funding are fruitless, right? We can't bloom if we're not actually given the resources to be able to fulfill these requirements. With that, I'll seed the remainder of my time, pun intended.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. Nicolaides: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Thank you to the Member for Edmonton-Glenora for her comments. I just wanted to get up to offer some insights because I know she asked some questions and made some comments on certain elements. I'll just maybe go in reverse order, going with the most recent.

I think the member commented that maybe the bill would be better termed Just Trust Us, given her perception of how the bill is structured. I would say that I think a better title is Trust the Experts because what the bill does in many areas, in areas like curriculum, competencies, standards, outcomes, all of that – a lot of that responsibility lies with the ministry currently, and under the new bill that responsibility will shift to the new board. Of course, the board is comprised of representatives of the trades. Who better to determine and make decisions about outcomes, competencies than individuals from the trades themselves rather than government? Rather than perhaps Just Trust Us, I think a better title could be Trust the Board and Trust the Professionals because that's what's occurring with the new legislation.

11:30

Furthermore, the member also had some questions about curriculum and who decides curriculum and competencies and standards and: how is that defined and developed? Again, we're strengthening that process through the legislation. Right now the ministry and government have a degree of approval of those standards, and we're, as I mentioned, shifting that to the boards. I know the member made some very specific references about, well – she mentioned, like, hairstyling – how do we update the standards or the competencies? That's up to the board and to industry. It's up to the industry and those professionals to evaluate their trade and to monitor their trade and the skills that are required and to make recommendations to the board about how the standards or competencies of a particular trade should be changed to reflect new practices or emerging technology or emerging applications. It's fundamentally up to the trades, employers, and the board to make the decision about what standards and competencies they believe are appropriate, that students should demonstrate.

Then with respect to the curriculum the board and industry determine the competencies, and the postsecondary institutions develop the curriculum. I think it's the right structure because the industry, employers, those professionals know what skills are needed to work in a particular trade, so they will make those determinations. They're going to say: "These are the skills that we need for a cook, a hairdresser, or a welder. These are the skills that we need to see them develop, that we need to see them demonstrate." Then a postsecondary institution, who, of course, has expertise in teaching and in curriculum development, will work to develop the curriculum and ensure that those outcomes are demonstrated.

That's the way it currently works, but through the legislation we are finding ways to make that even stronger by giving more authority to the board to determine competencies without government having to be involved, giving more authority to the postsecondary institutions to determine curriculum. We're

clarifying those roles, which, again, was a particular, a very specific recommendation of the task force. They said that we need to be a lot clearer about who's doing what because the board has some activities, the ministry does, postsecondary institutions do. In the current AIT Act it's not really clear. The task force, the expert panel said very specifically that we do need to clarify who's doing what. We have done that in this legislation, saying that the board, which is representative of the trades, will have more clarity and authority about determining the standards and the competencies. The postsecondary institutions will have more authority and clarity around developing the curriculum, again, so that every key stakeholder in this system has greater clarity over their roles.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Hon. members, are there others? The hon. the Opposition House Leader.

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise on Bill 67 at third reading. I've had the opportunity to speak about this bill at second and at Committee of the Whole. I'd just like to briefly with my comments speak to Bill 67 and my support for the skilled trades, support for apprenticeship education, support for the overall goals of increasing awareness of the value of skilled trades careers and strengthening enrolment in apprenticeship programs, changing student and public perceptions so apprenticeship education is seen to be as valuable as a university degree, and expanding the apprenticeship model. However, Bill 67 is enabling legislation that defers so much to regulation, and through Committee of the Whole we heard clearly from the minister that while Bill 67 is removing compulsory trades, there is guaranteed grandfathering for current compulsory trades, leading to a number of stakeholders being very concerned.

As well, there is no guarantee that the current industry-driven provincial apprenticeship committees and local apprenticeship committees will be reconstituted under Bill 67, and although the minister has stressed the necessity for this system to be industry driven, with the change to these committees and no guarantee for what that will look like, that's extremely concerning.

This bill is a consolidation of power to the minister and to the board the minister appoints. The minister has given himself more flexibility to appoint whoever he likes in whichever configuration he likes to the board. This is a consolidation of power, and it's a deferral of decisions to regulations, making me certain that I do not support Bill 67 in its current form. Although we do share the same goals in many respects as this minister, I do not trust this UCP government to consult widely with all impacted stakeholders. I do not trust this UCP government to make all of these decisions behind closed doors through regulations after the fact.

Again, while I support many aspects of Bill 67, I will be voting against it in third reading, and I would encourage all of my hon. colleagues to do the same. With that, Mr. Speaker, I move that we adjourn debate.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Bill 56

Local Measures Statutes Amendment Act, 2021

[Debate adjourned June 8]

The Speaker: The Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

Member Ceci: Thank you very much. On Bill 56, Your Worship – sorry. Well, "Your Worship" doesn't sound like a bad thing to talk about for local measures as this bill is intended, of course, for

municipalities, counties, and other local governments around the province. “Your Worship” is often used as the term for the lead elected person in that local government.

[Mr. Smith in the chair]

Bill 56, Local Measures Statutes Amendment Act, 2021. It’s been a long time since this bill has been before us. I can’t think of the number of days, but here it is. There certainly is a lot going on with regard to local elections around this province in that we’re coming up to – October 18, 2021, will be local elections throughout Alberta, the 360 entities that call themselves local governments. It is a busy time. Certainly, in my city lots of people are starting to reach out, talk to citizens in different ways, reach out to me, ask me what my experience was like and what advice I would have for them. It is a pleasure to see all of the people who want to represent in our city the 14 – they’re called wards – wards and the mayor’s race.

This bill will significantly affect those new councils, council members, when they get to the table in October, Mr. Speaker. It does three things. It extends the municipal sustainability initiative. It delays the replacement program, which is a local government fiscal framework. That’s all one thing that it does, and it’s not a good thing for municipalities, I can tell you. It will mean that they count less.

11:40

They are going to be able to see a delay of a program that was promised and planned for initially under the NDP government, between 2015 and 2019, to take place in 2021. That, under the UCP government, is now going to be delayed until 2024-2025. Mr. Speaker, that is a significant three-year delay to that program, and it will be problematic for local governments in that it will mean less ability to help Alberta climb out of this, post-COVID, the recession that we’re in. That’s not a good thing, obviously, for local governments.

[The Speaker in the chair]

The second thing that this bill does that’s not very good for local governments is that it will reduce the amount of money that is going to the municipal sustainability initiative, and that amount is significant. If you look at the 10-year average of that program, it is a 36 per cent reduction to that program. That’s hundreds and hundreds and hundreds of millions of dollars, and we know that those dollars mean less of everything for municipalities. The kind of feedback that all legislators here have probably got is that it means that the municipalities have to cut services and programs. It means that municipalities very likely have to look at their local ratepayers, taxpayers for potential increases to sustain themselves around those infrastructure needs that they have in local communities. It means people and companies – many of them are private companies – and their employees will have less work as a result of this reduction of MSI monies and pushing it out to 2024-2025.

The last thing that this bill does is around the 911 program. There is federal legislation that requires 911 delivery agencies across the province to come up to standards that are being set federally. It’s not being done by the government of Alberta. It is a federal requirement, and municipalities have to address it. It was part of an AUMA resolution that talked about how to pay for that with an increase to service charges for people who have cellphones and municipalities stepping up to also pay for a portion of that, but it could have been something that the Alberta government assisted, in a transitional way, municipalities with in this province. But that’s not the way that this government does things.

These costs – essentially, the provincial government stood back and said: “Don’t look at us. Don’t look at us to help out in even a transitional way.” In large part, that’s because this government has made many bad bets that have not helped this province out. You just have to look to KXL as an example of that, Mr. Speaker. Minimally, we know \$1.3 billion has essentially gone down the drain and not been of any service to Albertans or this province. This government is hamstrung with not being able to do the kinds of things that potentially our government would have done, to say, “Look, we’ll find a way to make this easier for you, municipalities.” At the same time as this, the government is cutting MSI drastically and pushing out the agreement for the local government fiscal framework until 2024-25. Municipalities are having to pick up all sorts of additional costs like unpaid property taxes, that are affecting our rural municipalities to a great extent from some oil and gas companies. The estimate of how much that is: it’s getting up to a third of a billion dollars, Mr. Speaker, of taxes that haven’t been paid and companies who have walked away from their obligations to do that.

Those are some of the parts of this bill that is before us, Mr. Speaker, and I want to generally say that municipalities in this province for months and months and months have been expressing the need for stable finances, predictable finances. What they get are hits to their ability to collect monies and hits to the promises that have been made for grant funding to municipalities.

They also – and it’s a little tangential – get a great deal of direction from this government to broaden out the local government experience. You know, it’s often repeated – I see it on websites for AUMA and RMA, and it’s almost, like, in flashing letters there: keep local elections local. It is tangential.

But there are different bills before us – I think one of them is called the local initiatives act – and the equalization question. While those aren’t directly related to the Local Measures Statutes Amendment Act, 2021, they purport to have the same negative effect on local governments in that local governments have to deal with so much more now. They used to be able to focus on the things that were in their wheelhouses and do a great job on all of that stuff. Now, to take a word that was used several times earlier, they have to be really nimble at all of the cuts and changes that are coming their way, and they have to figure out from the feedback of their local ratepayers, taxpayers, citizens: “What can we do without? Because we have to; we don’t have the same resources we did in the past.”

Another question that gets asked is: why do we have to do that? Whether it’s a local initiative, an equalization question on a local ballot, or a Senate election, like, why doesn’t the province take those things on under its own responsibility and do them in 2023 or hold a different set of elections? Now, people might say, “Well, that’s not really cost efficient” and all of that sort of thing. But we’re mixing things so drastically for municipalities. They have to be nimble, they have to understand what their roles are, and then they have to take on responsibilities that they weren’t set up to do.

Mr. Speaker, the feedback on this bill is pretty universally negative with regard to the fiscal parts of it. It doesn’t make life easier for them. We know that there are big things like the green line in Calgary, a \$1.5 billion investment from the province that was made under the NDP government, that has been delayed repeatedly under this government. We know that the hiring of 20,000 people in that project alone would be a significant boon for employment numbers and reduce unemployment in this province. Again, it’s the kind of thing where this government has left itself really hamstrung in terms of having the fiscal resources to be able to go forward with things that would be beneficial for not only Calgarians and people looking for work but, you know, the environment as well.

11:50

I just want to talk a little bit more about the local government fiscal framework, that is being pushed back. I'm just not sure anyone at the local government level should necessarily put a lot of stock in this item being moved to 2024-2025, past the next election. You know, if this government were serious about its relationship with local governments throughout the province, if it were serious about committing to something that it ran on and almost immediately changed and then has changed again, it would do it within its own term, Mr. Speaker. That's where the rubber hits the road in terms of being able to control things, and that's what many people have said: don't tell me what your values are; if you value local governments and believe that they're more than just a farm team for higher orders of government, then put it in your budget. But it's not in the budget. It's pushed off to a future government's budget to be dealt with. It's not an insubstantial amount of money.

I think municipalities are not being treated fairly with this bill. The government has left itself with too little money coming in and expenditures that have been wasteful, and that's why municipalities are suffering with this government and with this act before them.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Seeing none, is there anyone else wishing to speak to the bill? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

Member Loyola: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I believe that the Member for Calgary-Buffalo has made a number of important points. I'd like to reiterate what I had stressed earlier on in debate but on another bill, and that is the fact that this UCP government continues to claim that they're the voice of rural Alberta, and here we see yet another example where they really don't have the best interests of rural municipalities at heart across this province. What we're seeing, in fact, is them putting more responsibility on these local municipalities, leaving them without any funding, really, and these municipalities having to make sure that the citizens of those municipalities continue to get the same level of service, but they're getting less funding and support from the provincial government to do so. Essentially, that's the bottom line here when it comes to the argument.

I can only hope – I can only hope – that our citizens across Alberta living in these rural municipalities are paying attention, I'll say, to this truth, this reality that we have before us. The truth is that this government is finding every possible way to increase costs on these citizens and Albertans in general. Here we find increasing provincial park fees, deindexing the income tax system, and property taxes. This bill continues to double down on the UCP's failed strategy. As I was stating, this legislation implements hundreds of millions of dollars in cuts to municipalities, which

inevitably will lead to increased property taxes, cuts to services, and will actually threaten the viability of municipalities. The bill also contains a surprise tax increase on cellphone bills for 911 service, and the bill forces municipalities to pay for \$41 million in 911 upgrades with absolutely no supports from the province.

We're seeing a pattern here, whether it's taking more of the decision-making power out of the hands of other Albertans and putting that power in the hands of cabinet and ministers specifically, and then also reduced funding supports to rural municipalities. I can only hope that this truth continues to get out to the great majority of Albertans so that they know exactly what this government is doing, right? They claim to be the voice of rural Alberta and that they're doing their best to actually help Alberta's economy get through the other side of this pandemic, but in decision after decision after decision that they make, after every proposed piece of legislation that comes through this House, which inevitably they just vote through because they have this majority, accepting absolutely no amendments from this side of the House even though we warned them and we're trying to do our best to represent our constituents on this side of the House, they continue to demonstrate their very narrow focus on their own ideological perspective and that indeed they're making decisions that are not in favour of all Albertans and in this particular case, with this piece of proposed legislation that we have before us, rural Alberta municipalities, Mr. Speaker.

I know that I'll be doing my level best to get this information out to as many people as possible so that they can know the reality of the decisions being made here in this House, because that's what Albertans deserve. They deserve transparency. They deserve to know what's actually happening inside of this House, because, at the end of the day, Mr. Speaker, as I've argued in this House before, this is what Albertans deserve. They deserve representatives that are not only ideologically attached to the party that they represent, but they're also doing their best to represent all of their constituents and not just some of them.

It is along that vein that I can definitely assert that I will not be voting in favour of Bill 56, the Local Measures Statutes Amendment Act, 2021, for all of these reasons, Mr. Speaker. With that, I will reserve further comment.

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

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I just wanted to take a moment to echo my colleague in his insightful comments.

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

[The Assembly adjourned at 12 p.m.]

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