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The 30th Legislature
Second Session

Alberta Hansard

Wednesday morning, October 27, 2021

Day 119

The Honourable Nathan M. Cooper, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta The 30th Legislature

Second Session

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Independent: 2

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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

9 a.m.

Wednesday, October 27, 2021

[Mr. Milliken in the chair]

Prayers

The Acting Speaker: Lord, the God of righteousness and truth, grant to our Queen and 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 ideals but, laying aside all private interests and prejudices, keep in mind their responsibility to seek to improve the condition of all. Please be seated.

Orders of the Day

Government Bills and Orders Second Reading

Bill 73

Infrastructure Accountability Act

[Adjourned debate October 26: Ms Lovely]

The Acting Speaker: Are there any members looking to join debate? I see the hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View has risen.

Ms Ganley: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I am pleased to rise and speak to this act. Now, I think the first thing I'll say is that this act doesn't visibly do anything bad. It just also doesn't visibly do anything good. It sort of leads me to wonder what we are doing here. The minister, as he spoke about this, pointed out that the media had said that one of their criticisms was: what is the point of this legislation? And I could not agree with the media more on this point.

Let us run through the bill because it is very short. It has definitions, as typically a bill has, at the beginning. It has the roles of the minister, a role of responsible minister. What's worth pointing out is that this is the process now. Now, I know the minister said that, but I think it bears repeating because were this act doing anything – yeah. I mean, I don't know what the process is under this current government. I'm not inside that circle. I can only believe the minister that this is the current process now. I can definitely tell you that this was the process when we were in government. And it was a process that, to the best of my understanding, we had mostly inherited from the previous government. It seems like this has been the process for quite a while, which makes me wonder why we need to change it.

Now, the stated reason for changing it is so that it's in legislation and it's clear and that governments are held to things. The thing is that in order to hold a government to something, in order to hold anyone to something using legislation, that legislation needs to be very clear and very specific. And that, I would say, is the crux of the issue with this legislation, that it is not clear and specific.

When you are doing something utilizing the scientific method, one of the first things you have to do is operationally define your terms because if you don't have an operational definition of your terms, you don't understand what it is you are measuring for. This works pretty much the same in legislation, and it's not just legislation. In programming, for instance, if you don't have a clear definition of your terms, your program is almost certain to crash because you don't know what you're trying to get it to do. Legislation works a lot like that.

Let's not speak in generalities but speak specifically to what this says. Section 4 deals with the criteria for capital planning. It talks about when evaluating submissions what you should consider: "whether the project or program is expected to decrease risks to the health and safety or security of Albertans." I mean, that sounds like a laudable goal, doesn't it? I wouldn't disagree with that as a goal. The problem is: what does it mean, right? When you operationally define the term, what exactly does it mean? This is a thing that we see in law. We see it in science. We would see it in writing a program. If you look at the term and you think, "Okay; five different people reading this sentence could have a different interpretation of what is meant by the sentence," that becomes a problem. That is one of the first issues.

In clause (b) we talk about "the extent to which the project or program aligns with the government's strategic objectives." I mean, that could be just about anything. Then it goes on. It does try to define it, the strategic objectives as defined "in the government's strategic and business plans." Now, as someone who's written a government business plan before, I have to say that they are of varying quality, shall we say. These things come with the budget every year. I've read them on the government side. I've read them on the opposition side. Sometimes it's clear what they mean. Most of the time not so much. So we've defined it to a set of things, which themselves are not super-well defined, but let's assume that that's fine. Then it says, "and other government priorities," and there's no requirement for those other government priorities to be published anywhere, so that can literally mean anything. That's the concern here. This basically says – like, one of the criteria is basically anything the government decides at that particular moment in time.

The next one is "the extent to which the project or program is expected to result in positive economic impacts, including direct or indirect job creation and economic development and activity." Again, a very good thing on its face, but you have to consider who's defining the term, and in this case the people who are defining the term are a government whose job-creation plan has thus far sort of failed, right?

Now, certainly we're seeing a rebound from the pandemic right now. We're seeing oil prices come back up. We saw the Premier congratulate the Energy minister for her good work because the international price of oil has come back up, which sort of suggests a misunderstanding of how world markets work, to put it politely. But yeah. I mean, certainly prices are coming back up. There is some increased activity. That is good. But we have to keep in mind that this government's actual jobs plan was to give money away to corporations, and most of those corporations took the money and ran. So again, laudable objective, but how are you going to define how you're measuring it?

The next one is "the extent to which the project or program is expected to result in the improved delivery of programs and services." Again, any five people looking at that sentence could come up with various different definitions. Now, I mean, all of these things are good. Criteria in legislation are often vague, so this isn't different because legislation needs to be left with a certain amount of flexibility. But my point here is that the stated . . . [interjection] I see my friend is rising.

Mr. Neudorf: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I do appreciate the member opposite raising these concerns. My question to her, if she wouldn't mind discussing the point a little further, is: could there be too many descriptors, to the point where the qualification becomes so restrictive that jobs cannot qualify and therefore don't proceed just because their particular criteria weren't foreseen in legislation? I do understand the desire to more fully round that out, but to what extent? Where do you cross the line and go too far, where then jobs

cannot proceed? If she would be willing to possibly discuss that point, I'd be interested in her thoughts.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Ms Ganley: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for the intervention. He's absolutely right. It is difficult in legislation to do that. It's difficult to use legislation to sort of pinpoint very specific, operationalized definitions when you're talking about a broad set of criteria, which is precisely why I wonder as to why it is we're putting this in legislation in the first place. I'm all for transparency. I think it's incredibly important to have a transparent process, but this legislation is supposed to hold the government to a transparent process, which is occurring already, but the sort of broadness of the criteria don't really hold anyone to anything.

So again I would say that these are all laudable objectives. I understand why they need to be sort of broad if they're going to be put into legislation, but the broadness of the criteria, the necessary, in my view, broadness of the criteria, sort of belies the point of the legislation. Again, it isn't necessarily anything bad. It's just it doesn't really do much.

They also include the full life cycle cost – I mean, now, that's obviously going to be a relevant consideration – enhanced resiliency of the community, which again, sort of broad there; enhancing the resiliency of current infrastructure; protecting community members from natural disasters; core infrastructure for remote communities; cultural heritage; improving social and environmental circumstances of the community. I mean, again, these are things that are all very good things. They're just all very broad things. So I don't actually think – this legislation has come into the House. I think the government, at least when we were in government, was fairly transparent that these were the criteria being used to evaluate these sorts of projects, so I'm not sure that the legislation adds anything because these were the criteria – people knew they were the criteria – so the legislation is not communicating those criteria anew, and it's not really sufficiently specific to pin anyone to anything. That's my primary concern with this.

9:10

The other thing that I find interesting is that there's going to be a strategic capital plan. There's supposed to be a 20-year strategic plan. Now, I think this is good, to do advance planning, but I also think there's a certain danger of predicting too far into the future, shall we say. Certainly, we saw, not this government, not ours, before that even, a government that came in and put in some huge transmission wires, which are costing Albertans an enormous amount of money, and they turned out not to be particularly necessary. That was because they had sort of predicted something really far into the future that didn't actually come to fruition at any point. It was also because sort of political folks chose to intervene in a process in which they ought not to have intervened. But the point is that these things can change over time. [interjection] I see my friend is rising again.

Mr. Neudorf: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Thank you, Member. On that note, I do take that point. I think that's a valid point. There are other things which would be much more needed and more easily predictable; for instance, schools and their timeline. Coming from a construction background, that predictability and having that transparency of a list going out 20 years would be very effective. The construction industry in particular would love to be able to see that proposed timeline, that proposed planning in terms of eventual projects. I think it would actually be a beneficial tool

for any government in power so that they could see on a more linear scale. Instead of having a huge number of projects in any given year or set of years, that could be spread out over time for the ability of the market to respond to it. Though I do take your point, if you wouldn't mind maybe speaking to that.

Thank you, Member.

The Acting Speaker: Hon. member, it's now six minutes and 50 seconds.

Ms Ganley: Thank you very much, and thank you again. That's actually an excellent point, and I think that's absolutely right. It's useful for industry to be able to sort of see those things and plan and anticipate because one of the interesting things I learned while in government with respect to projects is that there's a lot of sort of prework that goes into things, right? You can't just decide to build something and have the government go in and build it because they don't have the people. You have to hire the people and onboard the people and train the people, and there's a whole bunch of stuff.

Now, I mean, obviously, the area in which I was most familiar with this was cannabis because there was sort of some discussion of whether we wanted to retail things at government. The population of Alberta didn't want to do that, which turned out, I think, fairly well because it actually would have been very, very challenging to get that spooled up in a government that didn't retail anything in the amount of time that we were provided by the federal government. So that's a really valid point.

I think one of the concerns I have is that if we're doing planning 20 years out and we're putting these things out, if other people are sort of making their plans on this basis and then it changes, potentially rather than sending no signal, we're now sending a bad signal, which I think is potentially even worse. I mean, certainly, some will say, you know, I mean, the market can respond as it responds – right? – but those are people whose lives are impacted, so I always think it's better to do the best job we can. You're right. I think this provision is possibly a mixed blessing. I feel like I could use a little bit more information on how to do that. So yeah. That's several comments.

There's also this deputy minister capital committee that is outlined here. I understand that that was a process that existed previously although it's being codified here. Again, it's not particularly specific. It just suggests that the committee can determine its own rules. It suggests that, you know, the minister can appoint whomever they want to the committee. There's no particular requirement for anyone to be on it.

What I would say about this legislation is that in general it is sort of outlining the things which are already in play, which is, I guess, fine. I just feel that, like, at this moment in time, in this historical sort of context, when we're facing a bunch of stuff at once – we're recovering from a COVID-19 pandemic. We're seeing sort of the rise of oil prices for the first time in quite a while, which is going to provide a real opportunity, right? There's sort of more money coming into the province than there has been. This may be the last of these cycles. You know, we could be working to use some of that capital flowing into the province to move to renewables so that we could attract more capital that is looking for those projects, but instead we're doing this.

You know, we have a health care system that's facing enormous strain. We have health care workers that may never recover from what they've been through as a result of this government's failure to act. That's a big concern, and it leads me to my last concern with this bill, which is to say that in this bill it talks about foresight and it talks about having objectives to plan into the future. The challenge I have with that is: who's doing the planning? I mean,

this is a government that first claimed there was no predicting the fourth wave. Now they're claiming they knew all along, which is, I actually think, worse. Their ability to predict into the future what experts and parents and doctors and literally everyone was saying was happening in two weeks seemed to be substantively lacking. Your plan is only as good as your inputs, and my concern is that in this case the inputs aren't going to be very good.

In particular, my concern is around the sort of looseness of the criteria. Now, I don't think the media will actually let the government off the hook. I don't think the media is going to say: "Okay. Well, now it's in legislation. We're going to stop trying to hold you to account for whether or not these are necessary projects or whether the criteria are right." I think they're still going to pursue them. The objective of this seems to be saying, like, "Oh, look, everything is fine now," but this doesn't necessarily make everything fine because it doesn't really change anything in terms of what the state of play is.

My primary concern with this bill is, again, not that it necessarily does anything bad but that it doesn't do anything particularly at all and that we could all sort of be using our time otherwise. For instance, we could be examining the response of the government to the fourth wave. I mean, private members' committees that examine government decisions that went badly are not uncommon. Those committees still bear a majority of UCP representatives, and I bet their private members have some questions, too – I certainly would – because the response was so inadequate, and I can't imagine that the folks sitting over there feel any differently than I do about that level of response. I suspect that they are hearing from their constituents, because I know that I am certainly hearing from mine, about what happened and how this could have gone so wrong.

I think there is an important humility in taking the time to look back at past decisions, to accept that an error was made, and to re-examine that and say that we're going to do better in the future. I think that would be an excellent use of this Assembly's time. I'm not sure I think that this bill is such an excellent use of this Assembly's time. But, again, it doesn't do anything particularly negative. It doesn't have any obvious bad impact. I just think that with our time here, paid as we are to govern for the people of Alberta, we could be doing some significantly better things.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any members wishing to join debate? I see the hon. Member for Grande Prairie.

9:20

Mrs. Allard: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is a privilege to rise this morning to speak to Bill 73, the Infrastructure Accountability Act. If passed, this act would inform how capital infrastructure projects become prioritized and create transparency for Albertans regarding the process. The process outlined, including the criteria for consideration, will provide long-term guidance to the government's infrastructure decisions and ensure that infrastructure projects are regulated according to long-term considerations and planning.

I personally like this idea because one of the things that I have seen as a tendency in government, pretty much for any government – I think it's a natural tendency – is that your long-term strategic planning starts to closely align with your short-term election cycle. I don't think it's an intention. I think it's just a reality that happens in governments. I like this bill and the intention behind it because I like the idea of thinking through a long-term, 20-year plan that would go through multiple administrations and, hopefully, elevate some of the considerations and the prioritizations of critical infrastructure.

I was interested last night to sit in the House. I was actually planning to speak last night, but there were so many speakers to this bill that I didn't get an opportunity, which is fine. I'm surprised, for such a short bill, how much conversation it has created amongst our colleagues, but I think that's a good thing. I really do. It was fascinating for me to listen last night, and personally I think it underscores the reason that we need a bill like this. Clearly, there are a variety of perspectives as to why you would prioritize certain projects, what infrastructure projects are important, and I think it can't be too prescriptive. To the point of the member opposite, I can understand that sometimes we think: well, it needs to be a little bit more clear. But if we make it too clear, we tie our own hands, and we can't actually be nimble to a changing economy or a changing reality.

I wanted to take an opportunity, actually, to thank the minister for bringing this bill forward and to thank his department. I had the opportunity multiple times through member policy committees and through different task force activities that I was involved in to meet with his department about this bill and about the plans for this bill. I can tell you that there was a great deal of work done in the department, and I wanted to thank those people for their thoughtfulness, for their dedication and their efforts.

I know that it's hard. I mean, clearly, the amount of debate we've had on such a small bill indicates that, you know, there's a lot of opinion about it. There's a lot to consider when you're thinking about the billions of dollars that governments are spending and where they can go and where they're best going to serve the interests of the public. I just wanted to take time to thank the department. [interjection] I see my colleague has risen to intervene already.

Mr. Neudorf: Thank you. This is a topic that is of particular interest to me. I do have a very specific background in construction, so that is the perspective I bring when we discuss this bill, about that predictability, long-term planning for the private construction sector. I would ask the member if she wouldn't mind sharing for her constituents what a bill like this could mean, where they could see when a hospital or a road or an interchange or something of that nature would come to them, how she thinks her constituents would respond to that, that ability for them to see what the government is planning and hold their government to account, actually, for promises made or plans put in place.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mrs. Allard: Well, thank you, and through you, Mr. Speaker, thank you to my colleague from Lethbridge-East. Certainly, I'd be happy to comment. I can use the Grande Prairie hospital as an example of an infrastructure project that – and I don't want to get into too many details; it's certainly before my time – probably didn't go the best and wasn't planned out as well as it could have been. I think a bill like this would support a better process, would support a better return on investment to Albertans for their tax dollars. I think that's a very relevant example in my riding.

I can think of another example. When I was campaigning, I heard about two things night after night. I door-knocked for over six months, and every night I would hear about the Grande Prairie hospital, and I would hear about highway 40, the twinning of highway 40, how critical it was, how critical it was for safety, how critical it was for the future of our oil and gas industry in my neck of the woods, and, quite frankly, how critical it was for our province, the economic health and vitality of our entire province.

I believe that a bill like this would give us a little bit more framework and context, even in the campaign phase, to talk about: well, there's some legislation that provides a framework, provides

guidance. Regardless of which government gets in, it's a tool to help those in government decide and prioritize effectively on behalf of Albertans. So I really appreciate the intention, and I think it's very relevant to constituents. Highway 40 is an example. My colleague from Grande Prairie-Wapiti and I, before we were elected, would talk a lot about not only the priority for our region, but in the event that we were elected, we wanted the priority for the province to be considered.

I think another one of the pitfalls in government – and I've seen it first-hand – is that, you know, I'm a loudmouth when it comes to my constituents and what I think helps them. I want to advocate for my constituency, but I don't want to advocate for my constituency so loudly that a priority that would serve Albertans better is overlooked. I think that's a problem, and I think this bill helps to address that problem, helps us, helps any government to sort through what would be in the best interests of the province first and then, obviously, considering each constituency second. They don't always have to be mutually exclusive, but I appreciate the question because I think it really speaks to the heart and the intent of the bill.

I can tell you that in my short time as Municipal Affairs minister I had a lot of engagement with municipalities. There were 338 municipalities when I was sworn in, and I met with over 300 of them within I think it was three weeks, 20 days, something like that, so there was a lot of engagement, a lot of criss-crossing the province. What did we talk about? We talked about: "How are we going to spend infrastructure dollars? Where are they going to go? Why does this bridge matter more than that guy's road? Why does this hospital need to go here? Why does this town or city need schools more than this one?" It was a conversation at every town hall, at every meeting, and I appreciated it. I mean, that's, I believe, one of the first and foremost priorities of a local elected representative, to prioritize their budgets and to be accountable to their citizens.

It's a big topic, and I appreciate that this is not as prescriptive as maybe some members opposite would like, but I also believe that it has to be nimble to give those elected leaders some ability to adapt to contextual changes in the environment, in the landscape. We certainly had that conversation multiple times when I was in the ministry. They will tell you that pretty much everywhere I went, I had this line that started to become famous. It was just something I've always said in business, but I certainly said it to municipalities everywhere I went, and that was that revenue, in my experience, covers a multitude of sins. When times are good – right? – you don't have to worry as much because there's lots of money to go around, and you can do lots of things in your business and maybe as a government. When times are tougher, it's not the same. The value, the benefit of that is that when the revenue dries up, all those problems show up, and it gives you an opportunity to correct course.

I would argue that this is a time where, as we look at economic indicators and we look at Alberta leading in GDP and Alberta poised to lead for, I would argue, the next decade and, hopefully, longer, Mr. Speaker – I hope that Alberta will lead all of North America and, quite frankly, the world – as we're poised to boom again, I think that now more than ever it makes this legislation more critical. It's easy to govern with lots of money, but it's also easy to be very wasteful with that money, not that I'm saying that anybody intentionally was, but that's the point. This brings you back to a plumb line. This brings you back to a process and a framework to vet your decision-making and to prioritize what would really be in the best interest of Albertans. I see the minister is smiling at me through his mask.

I'll just hit a few points here. I think the key thing is transparency and accountability. I think it's a credible practice for any government

to aspire to those goals. I believe that Bill 73 will help to ensure that both of those standards are upheld regardless of who is governing. Again, it's a framework to provide a clear process and forward-thinking strategic investment in economic decisions that are in the best interests of all Albertans. [interjection] I thought I was getting an intervention. Oh, I am getting an intervention. I see the member opposite.

Ms Ganley: Thank you very much. I actually agree with the member on a number of points she's made. I think many of them have been very good, particularly the point that revenue covers a multitude of sins, having come into government immediately after revenues sort of plummeted through the floor.

Yeah. I mean, I agree that this is sort of a laudable objective. I guess what I would ask the member opposite in this case is – one of the bases on which this is supposed to be prioritized is on the basis of what's in the strategic and business plan or other government priorities, so I would ask the member what she thinks stops any government from simply doing whatever they want and then saying: oh, the other government priorities are X, Y, and Z.

9:30

Mrs. Allard: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker, and through you thank you to the member opposite. I appreciate the question. I actually thought about that a lot, especially as I was listening last evening to debate in this House, and I think it's a very good point. I'm amazed. At – what time is it? – 9:30 we've had multiple comments back and forth about what great points the opposite side is making. I think we're having a very good morning in the Assembly today. I'll take that for a Wednesday morning at 9:30, but it is a good point.

I would argue that I believe the election cycle itself is the accountability measure there. What I will say about that is that with respect to this legislation in particular it's my understanding that this was a platform commitment that we made, and I think it's imperative, it's incumbent on any government that is elected, that has the pleasure to serve in the position of government that you keep your commitments from your platform to the best of your ability. Obviously, there is a lot of challenge. [interjection] I see another intervention. Wow. I'm popular this morning, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Panda: Thank you. Through you, Mr. Speaker, I just wanted to ask the member – I just wanted to remind her that the previous NDP government, outgoing government, set the capital plan spending, averaging \$6.4 billion per year. The UCP: on our campaign platform we actually committed that we'll spend at a minimum that level. I remember you as Municipal Affairs minister advocating accelerating capital maintenance renewal during the pandemic because you wanted to get people working through that downturn. If you want to remind the member opposite that our government, in fact, kept that promise and, in fact, added more money to the capital plan during the economic downturn. If you want to talk about that, how we created jobs and kept people working.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you.

The hon. member, now with almost seven minutes.

Mrs. Allard: Seven minutes. Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Yeah: 6:47.

Mrs. Allard: Perfect. Well, I thank everyone for their enthusiastic interest in my comments this morning. I don't know that I've ever been this popular in this Assembly, so this is great. I'm happy to speak.

I'm just going to finish my answer to the hon. member opposite first. I did see her nodding. I think that, you know, the election cycle is part of that accountability that's built in, and I would hope that governments would stick to the platform that they campaigned on to the best of their ability. I know that's not always the case, but I would hope that that would be, and I would hope that this bill would be part of that accountability, that your strategic plan would align with what you promised voters when they voted you in. Obviously, they have the opportunity to decide whether, in fact, you did do that at the next election. It's not perfect, but I do think that that's part of the built-in accountability.

With respect to the comments from the Minister of Infrastructure in his intervention, I would agree. I think that, you know, one of the commitments we made was to not be reactive with respect to infrastructure. In fact, we did – I guess we'll thank them for setting that example – build on their infrastructure plan when we got into government. But I would also say that – one of the things I talked about earlier with respect to the criteria: there are six defined criteria in this piece of legislation. But again I'll make the comment that it has to provide some flexibility. There has to be some ability to adjust course given the contextual changes.

Obviously, in this administration we've had a couple of significant events that have happened, a world oil crash unlike anything I've seen in my lifetime and a pandemic, which I also have not experienced until this last couple of years. That really changes the game, and when you talk about my short time in Municipal Affairs, like I said at the beginning of my speech, I did spend a lot of time looking at infrastructure budgets and looking at applications for funding and pulling funding forward partly because of the context, the reality that we're dealing with, the stimulus that we needed to apply to the situation to assist Albertans, to create jobs, and to keep people going through the pandemic. It was really critical, and that's why I like the flexibility. Even though there is a framework here, I like the flexibility in this bill that allows a government to adjust course and pivot as needed.

I would argue that it is important to look at the overall context, and I think that's what the minister has tried to do and, certainly, his department. We ask this question, right? We asked this question of them multiple times in engagements, and one of the things that they talked about was all of the data that has gone into the criteria that were established in this bill, data around demographics, data around movement across the province, growth metrics for certain municipalities or certain regions. There was a lot of information that was considered and continues to be reviewed that will go into the decision-making for these capital plans.

I also wanted to talk for a minute about the capital committee. I think that's another layer of governance, another check and balance, if you will, to oversee and advise on the capital plan. I think that to have a strategic plan and then to overlay a 20-year capital plan really gives anyone in that position an aspirational view. You know, you look at the macro before you go into the micro of each project, and I think that's really important.

I think I've hit most of my points. It's a very interesting experience to have interventions in the middle of your speech. It's a little bit different, but I'm enjoying it this morning.

Overall, I'm very pleased to support Bill 73. I'm very grateful that once again we are keeping a platform commitment, and I want to thank the minister and his department for their work on that.

I also just wanted to touch on one other thing – I think it came up last night – you know, who did we talk to, or what did we look at? This accountability act is a response to feedback and input from Albertans. Between June and August 2020 the government conducted surveys to inquire into the nature of infrastructure planning that was currently happening at that time in the province.

The surveys received over 3,000 submissions, including 56 written submissions. These submissions included input from multiple sectors, including energy and health care, school boards, municipalities, construction community, and community and rec sectors as well, and overall there was widespread support for the idea behind this bill and also for the criteria that were delineated in the bill.

I just again want to thank those that were involved. I know firsthand that it's a lot of work to consult so broadly. I think, you know, going forward, we want to tool up Alberta to be the very best. We want to maximize the Alberta advantage, and I think this bill is one way that we can do that, to provide any future government – hopefully, it will be us, but we'll see – the necessary tools to serve Albertans the very best, to invest the wisest, and to be the best stewards of the resources that we're given, including the financial resources.

I'll go back to that, revenue covering a multitude of sins. I think the good news – I said this a lot as minister as well – is that inherent in challenge is opportunity. In the challenge of these days there's an opportunity for leaders to emerge. In the challenge of these days there's an opportunity for processes like this to come forward to really hold governments to a higher accountability for themselves and for their constituents, so I'm very grateful and thankful to the minister and his team.

I will take my seat. As I say, I'm happy to support Bill 73. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

We are on second reading of Bill 73. I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadows has risen.

Mr. Deol: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise in the House and use the opportunity to speak to Bill 73, Infrastructure Accountability Act, on behalf of my constituents. It is important for two reasons to speak to this bill, to speak on behalf of Albertans as well as the very issue, that I have spoken to in this House many times, that is also part of my riding as well.

This bill proposes as its intentions to increase transparency around infrastructure planning and spending. As all the opposition members, my colleagues, have echoed many times, we always welcome any time there is effort, initiative to increase the transparency and accountabilities around things that we debate and we discuss on behalf of Albertans, our people, that put their trust in us to serve their best interests.

9:40

Many of the members already highlighted a number of those issues. I'm just finding a little bit, you know, of struggle, like, where to start with it. When we're looking at this bill, reading the key word "transparency" around the infrastructure planning that this bill intends to bring in and the government pattern, the decision-making in the last two and a half years since... [An electronic device sounded] Sorry about that. Transparency is good on anything in any sector or every sector or every department.

We have seen the investment fiasco in the history of Alberta that happened under this government. The government member can stand up and say that this is the thing that already happened, that this is a conversation of the past. But why we keep bringing this issue up when we're discussing this bill is that there is no mechanism going forward that will stop those same mistakes, I will call them, because when government tried to keep the loophole in this legislation, we will not even call those mistakes. It means the government has done that deliberate action to gamble \$1.3 billion from Alberta's revenue. It was their basically ideological move that

they didn't do any assessment reporting. They did not try to introduce any mechanism.

They could back their action by showing their accountability to Albertans. I don't want to use any unparliamentary words, so I'm struggling, like, very carefully with which word I should use around that topic. But what we are saying, a number of those issues: this bill has, you know, come up with tons of broad, vague terms but not specifically addressed any issue that has been controversial in the past.

Even not only that as this bill is saying that this is kind of modelling the legislation that's in Ontario, and it is not even following those criteria. In Ontario one of the key criteria to evaluate potential projects is alignment with municipal capital plans. Why I said that it seems the government hasn't learned anything from their past mistakes: it wasn't long ago when this UCP government cancelled the city charters in this province, and that halted the key projects in the two major cities. That was widely criticized not only by the municipal governments but also by Albertans. When we are moving towards addressing the issue of transparency in capital planning, it is naturally expected that government will try to address some of those issues around those big, controversial actions, and we don't see that in this.

Not only that; we have discussed the P3 projects many times in this House. We have brought forward the evidence, statements, and decisions of not only the past PC governments of this province but also the information from the governments or experts from other jurisdictions like Saskatchewan, Manitoba, and, I believe, New Brunswick about how the P3 projects have wasted, I will call, the public dollars with high-cost but very low-quality projects. A number of those projects in Saskatchewan, as the government said, increased the cost four times, and they're still struggling with deteriorated building structures and a number of those issues. To repair those projects, the cost is enormously, unexpectedly high and costing the citizens of those provinces. That was the decision based on those experiences, a decision made by the previous Conservative government in 2014, that the government will not go ahead with any P3 projects on some certain public-sector projects.

The findings are there. It's in the public domain. They were brought to the attention of this government by the opposition members on many different occasions. I've seen that the government has not learned any lessons even on the four new schools the government has announced. One of those is in my riding. The constituents of my riding, Edmonton-Meadows, have been actually advocating for that school for many years, and I stood up in this House many times to advocate for that school. Now that's gone as a P3 project. The P3 project was widely opposed in my riding of Edmonton-Meadows.

We wanted to see the legislation that would build accountability and transparency on those decision-makings. You know, I'll be happy to learn if any of the government members wanted to shed any light on how this bill will prevent those kinds of mistakes, or if the UCP government doesn't think that those were the mistakes and they philosophically still feel that's the best way to go and don't want to take the evidence and the information and the controversies around those into consideration, I will be happy to learn how this piece of legislation will increase the transparency around those issues and those decision-makings. I haven't seen that it will help in any way on those. Such criteria are not affected by this legislation. That's sad to see.

9:50

Another thing the government said was that when they consulted, they heard loud and clear that they should co-ordinate with municipalities. That was the key criteria in the legislation in Ontario,

and that is what the government claimed they have heard from the stakeholders or the Albertans they have consulted with. That is not included in this piece of legislation we are discussing here. I will be happy to learn why government decided to ignore those voices they heard from Albertans. What was the meaning of those consultations? If the government has heard from Albertans, why did they not address that concern in this piece of legislation?

This does not have a co-operation clause with municipalities. This seems totally after . . . [interjection] Yes, go ahead.

Mr. Panda: Thank you for yielding. You wanted to know what we heard. What we heard is that through the 3,200 surveys, the responses we got from public engagement, we learned that many people are not even aware of this capital planning process. Unfortunately, that's the truth. Now, that's why overwhelmingly, you know, the awareness is very important for them. That's what they asked us. So 72 per cent of the respondents noted that the legislated framework is needed to provide more transparency and increase government's accountability for how capital plan decisions are made.

There were some questions about procurement. That's outside of the scope of this bill, but I can address that when I get the chance. I just wanted to put that in context, what we heard. That information is available publicly. I can share it with you.

Mr. Deol: Thank you for the information. I appreciate that.

The information still did not really address the concerns in the questions I raised through my speech. Why is this bill not addressing the issues that arose in the past? Transparency is good. That's what we have been saying since April 2019, the day the government rolled back taxes on large corporations, and the government said that it will create jobs. On the day the government sped up on rolling back the taxes in two years instead of four years, as their previous plan, we asked in this House for the transparencies and accountabilities and if they could really back up any data, any information to support their move.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

We are on second reading of Bill 73. Are there any members wishing to join debate? I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-West Henday has risen.

Mr. Carson: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker, for the opportunity to rise to speak to Bill 73 here in second reading. It is interesting, and I appreciate the debate that we've heard so far. The speaker before me, the Member for Edmonton-Meadows, touched on a few things that I had planned to speak to, so I appreciate hearing his comments.

It's interesting, this bill before us. As we've heard so far, the majority of what we're seeing here is already done through regular government process, particularly when we look at the criteria that are being included in this legislation or the criteria that are going to be considered on capital projects moving forward if this were to be passed and proclaimed. Looking at the idea of the expected decrease in risks to health and safety, the economic impact, the full life cycle cost of projects, including the decommissioning of those projects, protecting community members and assets from natural disaster, these are all things that are considered on a regular basis through government procedure already, as we've heard through this debate.

Again, I am very concerned specifically with the idea that even though municipalities deserve to have a voice on important infrastructure investments – and we've heard that, I believe, through the what-we-heard document that the government presented to stakeholders – the fact is that we are not seeing that in this legislation, which is very concerning. Obviously, this government and all

provincial governments should be doing everything they can to work with their municipal counterparts across the province, not only because we need to look at these projects across the board and make sure that they make sense for the future of our province and these municipalities and that there isn't potentially unneeded overlap in certain projects, that a municipality might consider building something that actually the provincial government is already considering.

We've seen this lack of vision from this provincial government particularly, as has been discussed already, in the decision of this government to cancel the city charters, and we've had the opportunity to speak to that quite extensively in previous pieces of legislation. The fact is that when the government made that decision – again going back to when the UCP was in opposition, they fully supported the city charter when our NDP government had put it forward. In the campaign of 2019 the UCP committed to supporting those city charters, but when they became government, they went back on those decisions.

I remember quite clearly that the mayor of Edmonton, already pretty much boarding a plane to take a business trip to work on bringing more investment to Edmonton, actually had to cancel those business plans because he had to come back to the city to hear, I guess, and find out why this UCP government made that decision. In those conversations that we saw through the media, the mayor was quite clear that he was not told ahead of time that this was going to happen. Much the same situation in Calgary with our mayor at that time.

It's quite frustrating that while this government has had some time to reconsider that decision or consider how we might fix those relationships between the provincial government and our municipalities, here we have a bill that is excluding them from those conversations. These are important conversations not only between the provincial government and a municipality for the reasons I've already described, but the fact is that when we are considering leveraging different levels of government funding, these are conversations that must take place.

It's quite disappointing that we're headed down this road or continuing down this road. I was hopeful that we may have turned a corner from the outbursts that we've heard in the past from this UCP government. You may remember the previous Justice minister calling Mayor Nenshi Justin Trudeau's mayor and the conflict that that created. Again, Mr. Speaker, I was hopeful that we might be turning a corner, but through Bill 73 it doesn't seem to be the case.

10:00

Again, we come back to the session continuing into the fourth wave, and our NDP opposition was hopeful that we were going to see a commitment from this government to job creation, to transparency, to protecting Albertans and our loved ones across the province, but this legislation is essentially what looks to be a make-work project for this government.

We might consider the secrecy that this government has been known for in the past. You may recall that this Premier and this government were called the most secretive government across Canada. I believe that was potentially last year, maybe even 2019. But that was specific to the KXL deal, which, again, would not be subject to what we're seeing in this legislation because it is not considered a capital investment and instead is being done through, I believe, the Alberta Petroleum Marketing Commission. So it's not a capital project, once again, and is not affected by this legislation. We are seeing other gambles that this government has committed to that have not paid off for Albertans, that have cost us dearly, decisions that this government is making that are not going to be

accountable to this legislation. So that's another concern that I have looking at this.

Again, I appreciate the Member for Edmonton-Meadows discussing the idea of P3s being such a disaster in the past, not only in our province but in provinces across Canada. You can look to Ontario's Auditor General in 2014 reviewing the 74 P3 projects that they had been working on, and that Auditor General at the time concluded that they cost the province \$8 billion more than if they would have been procured publicly. The same thing happened in Nova Scotia, I believe, in 2014, from their Auditor General coming forward and saying that these projects cost more.

And we've also seen, I believe, through some of the projects that have even happened in Alberta, anecdotally, I suppose, stories of teachers and facility staff that have worked in those schools talking about how it's nearly impossible in some instances to get those companies to come back and fix things, whether it's boilers or whether it's wrong-sized doors or whatever it might be – nearly impossible to get them back – that the timelines are not effective, and that potentially, whether it's wintertime and the boiler or a heater breaks down, they have no way to fix these issues themselves because of the way that these P3 models have been drafted.

Again, when we consider the criteria that this government is putting forward, including the expected full life cycle costs of a project, I don't think that this Infrastructure minister's decision to move forward with P3s is meeting those criteria that this government is even putting forward in this legislation. We can look back to 2014, under the Progressive Conservative government here in Alberta, and at the time that Infrastructure minister's decision – I believe it was Minister Wayne Drysdale – to go back after years of considerations and commitments to building several schools throughout the province. At the time they were scheduled to be P3s. They came back and made the decision to not go forward with those projects because it was going to cost Albertan taxpayers so much more compared to if it was done publicly.

Again, when we look at the secrecy that this government has become so well known for and the lack of transparency, the P3 model, specifically in education, I would say, and potentially in health care, continues down this path because it's a way for this government to keep these capital debts off the books. On one hand we're talking about this government wanting to be more accountable and having four-year and 20-year plans, but on the other hand this government is trying to push off these capital investments and capital costs to further years and potentially other governments in the future. It's incredibly disappointing.

When I consider the decision of this government to cancel those city charters, it has been absolutely devastating to municipalities across the province. But when I think that in Edmonton and in my community of Edmonton-West Henday, we went from talking about a world-class rec centre – and I doubt that has changed, Mr. Speaker. But as the conversation has progressed and as this provincial government has come back and said, "We're cancelling the city charter; you're going to be getting, you know, hundreds of millions less in MSI funding over the next several years," it's unfortunate that projects like these important infrastructure projects, like this rec centre, are having to be scaled back.

Further to that, because of the decisions of this government specifically talking about raising the administration fees for policing across the province, municipalities are now having to take on these costs. Of course, at the same time, this government is saying: that's not the case; we're not cutting police funding. But, at the end of the day, municipalities are losing money for policing, so it is effectively a cut coming forward from this provincial UCP government.

Again, I think it's important that we don't do this work in silos. While what we have before us may look like it's increasing transparency, it's effectively not changing many of the processes that already take place. If anything, by removing the idea of ensuring alignment with regional and municipal planning to ensure there's proper co-ordination across the province, it seems that we're actually potentially weakening this process.

I think that there are other important considerations that have been made in the past regarding the criteria for how we ensure infrastructure accountability, as this legislation is apparently calling for, and I think that there are other pieces of criteria that are missing that have traditionally been considered by governments in the past, as we heard from previous members on this side. Not only the NDP government; we weren't the ones necessarily who created this process – it was happening before our time – but we continue to follow that because it is important that we are getting fair value and, when we are creating infrastructure projects, that we are considering things like risks to health and safety or decreasing risks to health and safety across the province, that we are protecting community members against natural disasters, and so on. Unfortunately, we aren't necessarily seeing that happening through this legislation.

We have heard to some extent about the what-we-heard document. I would be interested to hear from the UCP government or from the minister that has put this legislation forward why we aren't including things like ensuring that municipalities have had their say on these important issues, why we aren't considering the fact that we need to leverage money from three levels of government, why that is not explicitly stated in this legislation. We've heard from members that we shouldn't make this too prescriptive, and I completely agree. But the fact is that we can also do quite the opposite and not be accountable at all when that is truly what our goal was the entire time, Mr. Speaker.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I'm not entirely sure where I land on this at this point. I think there is a lot missing from this legislation. I think that there's a lot more that needs to be considered, that we need to have more stakeholder feedback from municipalities and other organizations that are going to be affected by this, whether they be municipalities themselves, whether they be boards of education from across the province, both public and separate potentially. These are important conversations that I'm not sure have been fully discussed and reviewed to a point where I'm willing to support this legislation as we see it right now.

Again, I think that we need to go back to the drawing board on this one. I think that this government has a lot of work to do when it comes to strengthening the relationship between themselves and their counterparts on municipal levels and on town councils. I think that a lot of damage has been done to this point. Again, I went over the story of the previous mayor of Edmonton, Don Iveson, having to cancel his business flights to come back to Edmonton to figure out why the government went back on such an important decision, after so much work had been put into that as budget considerations had taken that decision and those discussions into account. To find out with a day's notice . . . [Mr. Carson's speaking time expired] Thank you.

10:10

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any members wishing to join debate? I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs.

Ms Goehring: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise this morning to speak to Bill 73, the Infrastructure Accountability Act. I've been listening to the debate, and one of the things that's already

come up is that this was a platform promise from this government. While I think that increasing transparency on infrastructure is a welcome addition, there are just questions that I've heard being raised from members of this side of the House about the necessity of this legislation. It's something that's already been occurring, so I just question why, out of all of the things that this government talked about in their campaign platform, this is brought forward now.

One of the key platform promises that this government made was jobs. Prior to the pandemic, Mr. Speaker, this government lost an incredible number of jobs, 50,000. I can't even articulate how much damage has been done because of the lack of planning to help Albertans maintain their livelihoods while we're in this place in the world where we are, in the middle of a global pandemic. The priority of their platform was to bring forward Bill 73, Infrastructure Accountability Act, and we've heard questions brought up in the House about the relevance of this considering that it's something that already exists. It's something that's already outlined. It's confusing.

One of the things that, you know, this government talked about when they introduced this piece of legislation is that it's modelled on Ontario's legislation. One of the things in Ontario is that one of the key criteria to evaluate potential projects is alignment with municipal capital plans. What we're hearing over and over from municipalities is that they weren't consulted with this piece of legislation. So I question why that part of the Ontario legislation was removed in this piece of legislation here.

[The Speaker in the chair]

Why is this government continuously putting forward legislation without consultation? It just doesn't make sense to me. We have other elected officials in other parts of this province that really should have a say in what's happening in their municipalities. They're the experts in what's going on in their communities, and the fact that this government didn't consult with them is concerning.

Mr. Panda: That's wrong.

Ms Goehring: I had the minister stand up to tell me it was wrong. I'm not sure if he's wanting to interject or what.

We have the criteria laid out in this piece of legislation. In section 4 of Bill 73 it says:

Criteria for capital planning submissions

4 When evaluating a capital planning submission, other than a capital maintenance and renewal submission, for the purpose of making recommendations to the Treasury Board, the Responsible Minister shall consider the following criteria.

There's criteria that's outlined, but I want to speak directly to section (f). Section (f) says:

the extent to which the project or program is expected to enhance the resiliency of a community, including by

- (i) enhancing the resiliency of existing infrastructure relied on by members of the community.

I would argue that the municipality would have the highest level of understanding of what's required in their community.

- (ii) protecting community members and assets from natural disasters.

Again: community. That would be municipalities and the leaders that hear directly on a daily basis from their constituents.

Providing a remote community with core infrastructure. I would like the minister, if possible, to clarify what that criteria means. What is determined to be core infrastructure? I would argue again that the municipality would have an understanding of their community and would be able to identify what their belief of core

infrastructure is. Has the minister consulted with the municipality to identify what the definition of core infrastructure is?

The next criteria is:

[providing] or enhancing the community's culture and heritage.

Now, this one, I think, is extremely important considering I'm the Culture critic and considering that this government has cut significant funds to the culture file and specifically the heritage file. The fact that it's laid out in here, I think, is an attempt to show that there's a priority for the culture of this province, but based on their spending and cutting, I would argue that this is just words.

The next criteria is

improving social and environmental circumstances in the community and local conditions generally.

I think that is an essential part of looking at the heart of a community and being able to improve social circumstances. Well, we know that culture and the arts do that. We know that in order to have a thriving community, the infrastructure required needs to support the arts community. We have a government that has continuously cut and ignored artists, gig workers, so many that contribute to this beautiful culture in our province. Yet they've cut it. And here it's outlined that it's a priority. I just don't understand. It's a complete disconnect from the practice of the government to the wording that they're using.

Then (g) is something that I would love to hear from the minister: other criteria as determined by the Responsible Minister from time to time.

That is so sweeping in powers, and who are they consulting with for what those other criteria are? It's a big piece in here that has concerns. We have a government that Albertans have said over and over they don't trust. There's a lack of transparency. If a project is denied, is this where it's going to fall under? That the criteria determined – it just doesn't make sense. If it's a project of a friend or someone that they want to support, will that be the criteria? I would love some clarity around what section (g) means, "other criteria as determined by the Responsible Minister from time to time." That is so vague, Mr. Speaker. That is not transparent despite what this government is claiming this legislation does.

I see the minister has risen for an intervention, and I will accept that. Thank you.

Mr. Panda: Thank you. Thank you for raising some of the concerns you have. You talked mostly about municipalities. They are not bound by this legislation. The Municipal Affairs minister will continue to work with different municipalities, and they can discuss their unique capital projects through Municipal Affairs and put forward their processes. They can use their own process for their own unique priorities, but when it comes to submitting their capital plan request to the provincial government, they are guided and informed by the criteria.

You asked whether we consulted. We widely consulted; 60 of them submitted their feedback. To your question about the minister's discretion, during the pandemic, for example, that's a scenario we had to respond to in the emerging situation. Those are the things when municipalities come to us. In fact, in the House I heard some members talking about the uniqueness of their projects and how we responded in the last two years to prioritize those projects outside the process just to respond to the local community needs. That's what it meant.

Ms Goehring: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the minister for speaking. I'm concerned when I hear other ministers. I think that when you have the important role of infrastructure, there should be an ongoing consultation with everybody.

10:20

I would love to know what the Culture minister's information and feedback has been and their influence on this because in my role as the Culture critic I talk to organizations, community leagues, agriculture societies, the culture industry all across the province, from the very north to the south to the east to the west, and in that process of consulting and listening to the community, not only have they identified that they don't feel that there's any sort of support or plan to help them to create jobs; they're also saying that there are considerable outstanding infrastructure needs in their communities. A lot of these organizations rely on gatherings, and during the pandemic that wasn't a possibility. They weren't able to raise funds through fees and gatherings and events, so some of their infrastructure has been ignored because they couldn't financially provide for the services and the things that they needed.

There was an example of an agriculture society that reached out to me to express concern about their arena. Their arena in their community is a huge gathering place. It's supported by the majority of the community for activities. One of the main things of this arena is the ability to provide hockey to the community. They're a remote community, and it's the only facility in their area where the kids can go and skate. Last year, with the way that this government let the province know about restrictions and being open and everything regarding the guidelines for the pandemic, they were told: we're going ahead. So they flooded the ice. They had ice ready to go, and within a few weeks, despite knowing what the numbers were, despite not making a decision early enough to give everybody a heads-up, they cancelled child and youth sports activities. Because of the delay in a response from the government and because of lack of support to communities and infrastructure, this arena had to pay around \$2,000 a month to maintain the ice because they didn't have the ability to drain it. They had to wait until spring.

These are stories that I'm hearing from communities all across the province. Every one of our ridings has community organizations that are struggling. They need help. They need a response from government. Talking about different things that this bill will do, I don't see the response to the communities.

Mr. Eggen: There's an intervention.

Ms Goehring: Oh, sorry. This is a new process.

Mr. Eggen: Yeah. This is not that other kind of intervention where they sweep in.

Thank you. You just reminded me of so many outstanding projects, and we saw that with quite a dramatic decrease in CFEP funding and community initiative funding, communities have been shortchanged. You know, I'm curious. Now, you saw this bill land on our desks the other day around infrastructure accountability. My feeling is that there's a lot of accountability as to where and how the disbursement of community initiative funding happens around the province. Sometimes it just comes down to someone being able to be better at writing grants than other people or having somebody advocating more strongly for them or so forth. How can we make this Infrastructure Accountability Act fit into community initiatives?

Ms Goehring: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you for your patience with my interventions.

Mr. Deol: Can we do another one?

Ms Goehring: Thank you. I'll allow the member to speak.

Mr. Deol: Thank you for allowing me to interject. I'll quickly use this opportunity to actually discuss the concern in relation to what

the Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs has eloquently actually brought into the discussion. I wrote a letter on behalf of my constituents back last year, in 2020, to the Ministry of Infrastructure. There was an incident in the community, an accident, actually, yesterday in my riding, a train accident. The individual was injured in the Tamarack, Maple communities. That newly developed community is surrounded by two secondary freeways, Whitemud and Anthony Henday, and has only a single access.

Thank you.

Ms Goehring: Thank you, Member.

Mr. Deol: One minute goes very fast.

Ms Goehring: It does go very fast.

One of the things that is concerning to me is when I hear from so many organizations across the province that are struggling, that have had their budgets cut in the culture sector, and communities are impacted all across the province.

Mr. Deol: Can I do it again?

Ms Goehring: I don't believe I'm allowed another intervention.

The Speaker: Unfortunately, there have already been three interventions during these remarks, so there will be no further interventions. While I am on my feet, may I just say thank you to the hon. member. While it is a new process, I appreciate everyone's patience with it. I think that the intervention process has been going quite well thus far.

Mr. Panda: I counted four interventions, including mine.

The Speaker: Okay. There have been three interventions: one by yourself, one by the hon. Member for Edmonton-North West, and one by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadows being the three interventions. So that concludes interventions for this speech.

As I was saying, I appreciate . . .

Mr. Panda: I'm just trying to learn.

The Speaker: Yeah. No, no, no. I appreciate the fact, and I understand that there is going to be some learning curve for us all, so thank you for everyone's patience. I might suggest that if a member would like to intervene, it would be appropriate for them to say: "Would the member make way? May I intervene?" Provide some sort of oral notice to the member in case they don't see. Perhaps that would have been helpful for the hon. member, but I appreciate everyone's patience.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs has four minutes and 22 seconds remaining, which includes the additional two minutes that were granted to her speech.

Ms Goehring: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and I like your suggestion to clearly articulate that they are standing up to ask for an intervention. I think that while we're learning, it's wonderful.

Back to what I was talking about with the concerns about all of the cuts and the grants that support culture, support community, support the heritage of our province. There is absolutely nothing in this bill that requires this government to apply it to the upcoming Budget 2022 capital plan. They're introducing a piece of legislation that actually isn't going to be in effect for their upcoming budget, so I question what the purpose of this being introduced right now is. We know we've heard: it was part of our platform promise. Like

I mentioned in my remarks earlier, so were jobs. We haven't seen that.

I think that when this debate continues, it's important to remember that there are so many that should be consulted when we're making decisions in the Legislature. For me, I know it's important to hear from communities and their representatives, like their municipal leaders. I just question why this government would put this forward without having those consultations, without talking to the communities, because it takes a simple phone call for me to reach out to one organization in the province, and they have a list of outstanding needs. They have a list of things that they actually require in their community to keep it going. In some of our small communities their community centre, their ice arena, their club house, whatever it is, is the core heart of that community. To know that they're struggling and that there is funding being cut to different grants where they can access that is a concern.

10:30

We have a piece of legislation that just really reinforces what the government already does. We have criteria that are questionable at best. While I appreciate the minister being able to respond to the pandemic, which I think is absolutely important, they were able to do it without this, so it's confusing to me why that wording is put in here. It's just very sweeping, huge powers that are given to a government that Albertans simply aren't trusting at this point. We've seen a huge lack of transparency from this government, and I question why some of the wording is in here.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I will conclude my remarks for this, and I would like to adjourn debate.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Bill 49 Labour Mobility Act

[Adjourned debate October 26: Member Ceci]

The Speaker: Are there others wishing to join in the debate on second reading of Bill 49? I see the hon. the Member for Edmonton-Manning has risen.

Ms Sweet: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you for recognizing me. It's an honour to rise and speak to Bill 49, the Labour Mobility Act. Given that we're in second reading, I mean, I have some thoughts and some questions that I look forward to, hopefully, hearing from the members opposite for maybe some points of clarity.

But before I go there, there were some comments that were made yesterday in the House by the Premier in regard to, of course, the forestry sector and the agriculture sector, sectors that I have, you know, obviously been talking to over the period of time that the Premier mentioned. Some of his comments were speaking about the economic drivers and how much GDP forestry and agriculture have provided, that they have been the economic drivers in Alberta over the last year and a half. I don't dispute that.

I find it odd, though, that as the Premier is talking about the economy and the need for this act and all the great success stories that he has, he would focus on forestry and agriculture at a time when commodity prices were through the roof because of COVID-19, because people were buying lumber and building houses and decks and doing all the home renovation projects that they'd all been putting off because everybody was at home, and people were also at a place where food was top of mind because, of course, everybody was at home, and people were making sure that they had

enough flour and were able to make their own yeast and do all the things that people were doing during COVID.

So to hear the Premier celebrating, “Look at this great economic thing that we did, and it’s all because of the government policy, and it’s all of the changes that we’ve done, you know, since we’ve been elected,” and all the things: that is not the case. The reality is that it’s based on commodity and it’s based on the market, and the market dictates what the costs of products are. The cost of lumber went through the roof because there was a high demand for it. That wasn’t a government policy that made that happen; that was the demand of the market.

Agriculture products: the same thing. The Premier yesterday said that this is going to be one of the best seasons for agriculture because of the commodity price. You know, what’s really disappointing about that statement is that it’s a have and a have-not statement, because agriculture producers that are going to benefit from being able to sell their grain products, their cereal products are the ones that actually had any yield this year. But what we know is that across the province, due to the drought, many of our producers don’t have the yield that they normally would have.

So, yes, there will be many or some producers that are going to do very well this year. There are also going to be very, very many producers that will not. To hear our Premier giving kudos to the Minister of Agriculture and Forestry, saying look at the investment and all the things that are happening, is a very false narrative. It’s disappointing because what it does is it takes away from the reality of what’s going on when it comes to our markets. I get really concerned when there isn’t a recognition that the powers that are in control of the government to support those industries – actually, those mechanisms aren’t being used.

For example, going back to agriculture and looking at producers that are going to do well and those who will not, they are looking for supports right now for drought response, called for it all summer, yet we only saw \$96 provided per head through AgriRecovery. We’re still waiting for \$1.06 million. Many producers haven’t received those payouts. Some of them haven’t even received the first payout, so they’re stressed because they need to access feed costs, they need to access water. They need supports from this government, yet we have radio silence.

We have producers whose yields were so low that they don’t even know if they’re going to be able to buy seed next year, yet the Premier is super excited about commodity prices. Like, we’re seeing that some tonne that was \$8 at the beginning of the season is now up to \$20 a tonne, yet those producers need to buy seed next year, and they have no capital to buy the seed. But let’s celebrate today and ignore the fact that this government needs to be working with our producers to make sure their crop insurance is paid out, to make sure that a recovery is triggered to make sense, that we’re looking at all of the different things that we know our producers have been asking for, and, at the same time, supporting our AFSC staff, who now have to deal with AgriRecovery, have to do crop insurance payouts, have to do crop assessments, have to do grain assessments, have to reassign and start processing future insurance applications. There’s a lot going on for those staff. They’re exhausted and they’re drowning, yet the Premier is super excited about commodity prices.

Those are my comments on the Premier’s comments yesterday. Oh, no; and I just wanted to quickly touch on the forestry comment around increasing of yield and being able to have timber access allocation. You talk to any of our producers in forestry, and they’re going to say that they don’t even think they can hit those targets. It looks good on paper, but, like, it’s not something that they actually feel is something that they’re going to be able to achieve. Sure, I mean, congratulations. The allocation was changed for timber

access. The reality of it is that they’re not going to hit those targets. Even with COVID and the fact that the demand for timber was so high, they just don’t think that the fibre access is really something that they’re going to be able to do right away. So there’s that. Now, those are my things around yesterday.

The one thing I do really enjoy about this bill is that because it’s about labour mobility, it’s about the economy, we just get to talk about the economy the whole time. But some of the questions that do come up for me, again going back to some of the professions that are listed in this piece of legislation, are veterinarians. We know that in COVID either you had a baby or you got a puppy. It was sort of like the COVID puppy or the COVID cat. Lots of people got animals during COVID. If it wasn’t an air fryer, it was a dog. Some maybe a baby, like, it was kind of whatever. The thing around that, though, is that what that’s done is substantially increased the pressure on our small-companion-animal veterinarians and also moved some of our bigger animal veterinarians around a bit, just because now they’re doing kind of small and big. What we know is that we’ve got 850 vacancies currently in the province when it comes to vets and veterinary assistants.

10:40

Now, fun fact: there’s an agreement nationally that if you are certified with a national exam, which most vets are, you can move wherever you want in the country. You just apply to the local provincial association, and they’ll give you your certification, and away you go. You don’t actually need anything per province in any special way when it comes to accreditation because the veterinary associations and the national veterinary board created a system that allows vets to move wherever they want. In fact, it only takes about three days turnaround if you apply in Alberta to get your veterinary accreditations done. Super fast. Great.

I guess my question would be: why are they included in the bill? If the mechanisms already exist and the associations have already created an agreement and there’s an ability for this to already happen, why is the government sticking their fingers in it? I thought this government of all governments would be the government that says: “We don’t need to touch it; it’s already fixed. That actually looks like red tape.” The association would like to know: why are you creating more red tape? Why are you making them put the application online? Why all the things? Why pulling people out of the association that are already doing the accreditation and making them work on some online project, where they have to create a website now to demonstrate the accountability? Like, this is what we’re doing? Why does that need to be done? It’s already successful.

Veterinarians can already move across the country with no barriers. Alberta is one of the most successful when it comes to the turnaround times for accreditation. If Service Alberta, the minister of labour, anybody would be able to answer that question for me, I would appreciate that.

The other thing, I think, is that just by allowing labour mobility and saying, “well, a vet in rural B.C. could move to rural Alberta, and a big-animal vet, which we need, in Saskatchewan may want to move to Alberta,” those are good things. It’s already happening, if they so choose.

[Mr. Milliken in the chair]

What we know about veterinarians specifically, though, is that once they establish their practice, they tend to stay, because they’re business owners, and they’ve already built their business, and they’ve invested, and they’ve hired local people. They’ve probably started their family here. Their kids are here, their grandbabies are here, whomever. So they don’t tend to move around a lot.

I'm not saying that they shouldn't, and I'm not discouraging that; we need vets in Alberta, for sure, but, again, the mechanism is in place. What would be really beneficial, though, if the government wanted to do something to help veterinarians, is to invest in infrastructure for our postsecondaries and to fund more spaces. The reality is that we have a vet shortage across the country. We actually have a vet shortage internationally, and we also have a discrepancy between companion-animal vets, so cats and dogs and fishes and reptiles and other things that maybe people want – I don't know; I'm a dog person myself – versus big animals, so our livestock vets. I think, you know, that would be a solution to a problem that I think the government could seriously look at and potentially fix, right?

Let's build the infrastructure needed to train vets, because it's a huge infrastructure demand. I mean, you need barns and things for animals. But also create postsecondary spaces. Don't just give funding to postsecondaries and say: we think you should do this, but actually, specifically, fund certain areas like vets. What that would do then is keep Albertans working in Alberta, doing the very thing that this bill is trying to address, which is to keep more veterinarians locally in the province, right? You encourage our rural Albertans . . . [interjection] I will give way.

Mr. Neudorf: Mr. Speaker, thank you to the member opposite. I do actually appreciate the arguments brought forward by the member, and it sounds like she's also supporting our Bill 73, Infrastructure Accountability Act, to possibly put some of those infrastructure projects on the list in the future. What I would like to ask her, particularly, is about veterinarians. I think the points she makes are very thoughtful, but I wonder if the ability to include them rather than exclude them would be the motive to bring that collaboration and bring that expertise which she just espoused to the rest of the group.

Being a carpenter – I am also a red seal carpenter – I know that in that trade as a red seal I also have that ability to move anywhere across Canada I so choose because my credentials are already recognized. However, many in my graduating class passed their carpentry but did not pass the red seal. They obviously need to continue to work on that so they can transfer those things over. I would ask the member to speak to that if possible.

Ms Sweet: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Absolutely, I can. I mean, what we know is that there's actually a process already in place by the regulator, the association, so international veterinarians that come here, if they don't have the credentials, have the ability to get that done, again, in a very short period of time. I think it's a great question.

Something else that I think is important is that we know there are still regulations that have to be developed about how this is going to roll out. I would encourage the minister of labour, because he also has veterinarians under his purview, to make sure he's sitting down with the association when those regulations are developed, because the devil is really in the details. If those regulations are not developed in a way that already aligns with what they're doing, then the government is actually undoing really good work.

Again, I think the system that's in place, the agreements across provinces and territories and even federally – because, of course, veterinarians specifically are also under the CFIA. There is a federal component to this as well where, if it's not done right, we actually can start impacting our food safety. Right now part of the reason why this agreement is set up the way that it is and the understanding of mobility is there is because if the CFIA needs to move a vet from Saskatchewan to, like, go into a meat plant, for example, they can do that right away, and they can address whatever concerns or

issues are coming up. I think it's important to just look at the regulations.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

I believe that we are on second reading of Bill 49. I see the hon. Member for Calgary-East has risen.

Mr. Singh: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my privilege and honour to rise today and speak to this important piece of government legislation. Bill 49, the Labour Mobility Act, will make it faster and easier for skilled professionals and trades workers in Canada who have been certified in other provinces to have their credentials recognized here in Alberta.

Let me first express my appreciation to the Premier for taking the initiative of introducing this bill, that would make it easier for skilled professionals to come and work in Alberta and help grow the economy. I also want to express my appreciation to all the stakeholders who have provided their feedback during the virtual consultations held with Alberta's regulatory bodies both inside and outside of the government.

Mr. Speaker, Bill 49 will create a streamlined, consistent, and transparent approach for recognizing skills, education, and credentials of workers from all across Canada. It will also be the very first and only legislation among the provinces in the country that requires a limit of 20 days to assess the applications. By having that time frame, it assures Alberta's job creators that they will be able to meet their labour market needs with skilled professionals as we move forward in diversifying our economy.

10:50

Alberta has always been an attractive place to live and work. We have here the vast Canadian Rockies, wonderful, clear lakes, and we are a world leader in the ethical development and production of natural resources with high environmental standards. People from all across Canada, from all across the world, in fact, come to Alberta and settle here because of the rich opportunity this province provides, opportunity for individuals and families to work hard, grow their businesses, and support all of their aspirations.

I believe the fondest example of this that comes to mind is for anyone who has spent time working in Alberta's oil and gas sector. If that's your experience, then you have spent time working with folks who travel here from Newfoundland, the totally opposite end of the country. I know our two distant provinces share a special relationship because of those experiences. Myself, Mr. Speaker, I immigrated to Canada, first to Ontario and then later settled here in Alberta as I saw a huge opportunity for success. I was able to establish my business, which I have maintained for more than 20 years.

I am happy to support this piece of government legislation because I believe it will help position Alberta as a national leader in labour mobility, which will continue building up Alberta's economy as the province comes out of a very tough couple of years. Bill 49 aligns with changes introduced in 2019 through the Fair Registration Practices Act to help speed up the process of assessing and recognizing credentials so skilled newcomers can work in areas they are trained for. The bill is also in keeping with the government's goal of reducing red tape, helping to create more jobs, and removing barriers between the provinces and territories in order to better harmonize provincial mobility for apprentices and skilled tradespeople. That is what this government committed to, and that's what it's doing, Mr. Speaker.

For example, the government introduced the job-creation tax cut to help create more jobs by lowering the corporate tax rate and attracting some of the world's biggest investors into Alberta. Also,

with the job-creating tax cut that the provincial government has made, Alberta became the province with the lowest corporate tax rate in Canada, and Alberta's combined federal-provincial business tax rate is now lower than that of 44 U.S. states. Alberta is now the most tax-competitive business jurisdiction and amongst the most attractive investment destinations in North America. I'm happy to report that last month Alberta added 20,000 new jobs, the province's third consecutive month of significant job growth in a row. This means Alberta gained back all of the jobs lost since the beginning of 2020.

The government also introduced the film and television tax credit, which has been a massive success in attracting major film industry projects to this beautiful province. I look forward to seeing the familiar scenery in some of these upcoming flicks such as the TV adaptation of *The Last of Us*. The government also introduced the Red Tape Reduction Act to help speed up regulatory approvals, attract investments, remove administrative burdens, and modernize many existing pieces of legislation.

To date this government's initiatives have been extremely successful. By now I'm sure everyone has heard that the company Dow Chemical recently announced plans to build the world's first net zero carbon emission ethylene complex right here in Alberta. This will be the largest private-sector investment to happen in Alberta in decades, reaching upwards of \$10 billion.

They plan to build a complex which will increase their polyethylene and ethylene production, including a 1.8 million tonne per year ethane cracker in Fort Saskatchewan. It is a huge project that will create a long-time demand for natural gas, thereby maintaining and creating more jobs in the exploration and service sectors. It will also boost our global exports as we diversify our economy. Dow's commitment to net zero emissions will also benefit the environment, something Alberta has always and continues to prioritize.

In March of this year Infosys, which is a global leader in next generation digital services and consulting, announced that it will be bringing 500 jobs over the next three years. This expansion by Infosys will enable them to undertake work with clients in western Canada, the Pacific Northwest, and the central United States across various industries, including natural resources, energy, media, retail, and communications.

To help continue this positive trend, the government is introducing Bill 49, the Labour Mobility Act. The positive growth I have mentioned means that Alberta has to ensure there are enough skilled workers to supply their growing sectors. The Labour Mobility Act will help provide this for more than 100 regulated occupations in a wide range of sectors. It is just one more growth opportunity for job creators in sectors where there are simply not enough skilled Albertans right now.

The bill, Mr. Speaker, will make it easier for workers such as engineers, accountants, architects, dentists, skilled tradespeople, and many, many more to bring their expertise, their work ethic, and their families from every province and territory to Alberta, and they will be able to utilize the credentials regardless of where in the country they earned them. The Labour Mobility Act will do this by including in its provisions strict timelines for regulatory authorities to make decisions about skilled workers' credentials. Regulators will have 10 business days to acknowledge the receipt of an application from a skilled worker who is already certified elsewhere in Canada and who wants to work in Alberta. Those regulatory authorities will then have 20 business days to make a decision about those credentials and another 10 days to let the person know their decision. A suspension on a licence to practise in a home province would result in a denial to practise in Alberta.

While other Canadian jurisdictions already have some legislation aimed at improving labour mobility, Alberta is once again ... [interjection]

The Acting Speaker: Do you choose to accept the intervention, hon. member?

Mr. Singh: Sure.

The Acting Speaker: Sure. Okay. Please.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Member, for allowing me to make a couple of comments. The member mentioned about previous legislation that relates to foreign credentials, and the member also mentioned something to the effect that that has helped Alberta. I'm wondering if the member has any specific data to share on how that bill relating to foreign credentials and the timelines set in that legislation have helped Alberta and those who are coming from other jurisdictions to get their credentials certified and be part of the labour force. If there is any specific data that he will want to share or specific information about that legislation, that would be great.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. member, with about four and a half minutes remaining.

Mr. Singh: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you, hon. member, for this important question. I will do my best to answer your question as I continue to express my thoughts about the bill. Your question will also shed more light on this bill.

The regulators will have 10 business days to acknowledge the receipt of an application from a skilled worker who is already certified elsewhere in Canada and wants to work in Alberta. Those regulatory authorities will then have 20 business days to make a decision about the credentials and another 10 days to let the person know their decision. And I mentioned the suspension on a licence to practice in the home province will result in the denial to practice in Alberta.

11:00

While other Canadian jurisdictions already have some legislation aimed at improving labour mobility, Alberta is once again leading the way by being the first to enshrine timelines for decision-making in legislation. Multilaterally and bilaterally, agreements with other provinces and territories will override this legislation to support further actions that reduce labour mobility barriers. Regulators will have to keep records of their decisions for three years. There will be a new appeal and internal review process. The documentation required for application from other parts of Canada will be lowered, and the required documentation and fees for the process will have to be publicly posted for all Canadians to view.

Of course, the government will not leave the regulators to meet those requirements with no consideration. The government has committed in good faith to working with regulators to ensure they have the ability to meet these new timelines and requirements. Sufficient time will be provided to regulatory authorities to build resources and capacity. Should there be any issues that will arise, the government has also committed to work with them to resolve these possible issues. The provincial government will work with regulatory authorities to ensure Alberta maintains high professional standards while also attracting highly skilled Canadian certified workers to our province.

This is an important step for helping to continue Alberta's upward economic trend. Improving labour mobility is a key priority for many industries in Alberta. David MacLean, the vice-president

of the Alberta and Saskatchewan, Canadian Manufacturers & Exporters, said that one of the biggest challenges facing Alberta businesses is attraction and retention of workers, including skilled workers in trades. Economic growth and diversification hinges on the ability of employers to acquire the people they need when they need them. By reducing red tape and adding increased accountability and transparency, the proposed Labour Mobility Act gives a needed boost to businesses struggling to bring essential workers to the province.

A recent C.D. Howe Institute report shows that improving labour mobility would add approximately \$2.8 billion per year to Alberta's GDP, and a Conference Board of Canada report estimated that Canada's economy could expand by up to \$17 billion if we were to improve the country's learning recognition system.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

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

Mr. Deol: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Once again, it's my pleasure and honour to rise in the House and speak to Bill 49, Labour Mobility Act, on behalf of my constituents. As this bill intends to standardize, streamline processes to recognize credentials and trainings from other jurisdictions in Canada, in one way this is a welcoming step. Looking at the basic spirit of this bill, I really support the idea.

Yesterday the Premier also gave quite a lengthy speech on this mobility act, this piece of legislation, adding his comments and, you know, exciting – the weight around the argument of this bill is going to contribute to the economy of our province. While listening to those comments, I was thinking about the same kind of narrative, mostly about nine, 10 years back, by the Premier as a federal minister, about championing similar policies as a minister of immigration that came into force with numerous and heavy changes. Looking at those changes after 10 years, we can see, like, how they have positively or negatively contributed to our country, to the economy of our country, the job market of our country, and, basically, the quality of life as well as the citizens of this country and our province.

Those policies the Premier claimed to be championing changed from basically, fundamentally based on the humanitarian, compassionate grounds from family class to spousal class on a number of those issues to basically moving towards a more temporary basis with less liabilities, providing more opportunities to temporary foreign workers. The Premier does, you know, claim the benefits of credibility of that, increasing the number of immigrants to our country, and in that context you deserve it.

How is this serving after 10 years, when we see how these policies have impacted the humanitarian, compassionate grounds? In the first place, I see how families are struggling in Canada for decades now to reunite with their family members. The program has been reduced to the lottery system. They are applying for years and years and waiting every single year, first of all, lining up to the computers on the 1st of January or February or April, whichever the date, then getting to successfully see that they're able to enter into the system. And if they do so – I know families have been doing this for five years and six years – they wait for the government response, and they don't receive one. Their loved ones, their families and their parents, if they're back home, they're already aging, they're alone, they're going into hospitals. They're losing hope to reunite with their family members and, in many cases, with their children. [interjection] Sure.

11:10

Mr. Neudorf: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member. I do appreciate them making way. I would be interested to hear from the member opposite a little more of his story, how he ended up in Alberta. I know my family, my parents were both born in Europe, in Germany. They came over as young children, and they came over because Canada was such an attractive country to live in. My mother's family actually ended up in Coaldale, only five minutes away from where I now live. I was born and raised in B.C. and then came back to Alberta, to Lethbridge. I came here because Alberta was a land of opportunity and a place where we could find hope and jobs, and I believe this legislation seeks to do that.

I would love to hear more of the member's story on how he ended up where he is now. Realizing that there are challenges, I believe this legislation helps move that towards a place that does attract and make it easier for people to come and settle in Alberta.

Mr. Deol: Thank you kindly to the Member for Lethbridge-East, I believe – yes – for adding your comments and giving me the opportunity to expand on my experience as that's where I started from. I came to Canada about 28, 29 years ago through the family class.

[The Speaker in the chair]

That's what I was saying. That was helpful for families in Canada and families that wanted to unite their families abroad in countries like Canada and other European countries that you mentioned. It's such a smooth transition to kind of become part of this Canadian society in many different ways. Your family circumstances, your family values, and the kind of support you get as soon as you land here in this country: they have many different ways to make a smooth transition to become an important part of this society and learn about this society and then be able to upgrade your education, apply for jobs, and contribute to our economy. That was the very aspect. I didn't really want to spend a lot of time elaborating on what those humanitarian, compassionate-grounds-based, focused policies were in helping people.

I actually referenced, in starting my speech, that that was compromised by all those moves that happened federally. Not only that. The temporary immigration programs and the number of students moving, international students in Canada, eventually led to the idea and narrative that the government became less and less responsible in terms of spending, or I will say investing, into postsecondary education. In the last 10 years the dependency of the postsecondary institutions on international students has actually moved exponentially as well as the data suggests one-third of postsecondary institutions' funding is coming from international students now. Not only that. Those students are immigrants having postsecondary education diplomas – and I can show you in my riding; if somebody wanted to even join me, I can have a tour – that are struggling to find low and low-paid wages jobs, and if they find one, it is not full time.

How has that impacted the quality of life? We can see in Toronto, we can see in Alberta, we can see in Edmonton-Meadows, we can see in many other parts of this province, in Calgary and other places that they're living together as many as five, 10, 20 people banding together to struggle to afford the livelihood to – I will not even say to pursue their career. They are just trying to hold, to survive through the situation.

I just wanted to highlight this issue, how this Bill 49, Labour Mobility Act – if we are not creating jobs, if we have already given up on the idea of investing into the creating of our own talent within our province. We hear the stories, not once, not even twice, of the

mass exodus of our Alberta youth to other provinces. We have seen net migration to other provinces, and I'm hearing from the youth that after receiving their diplomas and degrees and not being able to get a job. There are institutions coming in place. They're asking those students or individuals and young people. They will give you a refresher and, if you are able to get a green card, will grant you a job in the United States.

So without . . . [interjection] You want to intervene? Sure.

Mr. Eggen: Thank you so much, hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadows. I just was reflecting on the same idea in regard to net flow, immigration, and then emigration. I guess what you always have to do when you're part of a Confederation is to make arrangements that are reciprocal, and I just noticed that when we made some trade concessions here in this province to the rest of Canada a couple of years ago, when the UCP government was newer, no one seemed to have a reciprocal agreement to go back onto that as well, and again here we seem to be moving down the same road or the same path, where we in Bill 49 look for more net immigration to Alberta from other parts of the country but not necessarily with reciprocal agreements in place. I don't know. It seems a bit odd, right?

Mr. Deol: Thank you, Member for Edmonton-North West, for asking the question. That is very important, and it's very much related to the topic, the concern that I was sharing in my speech. The failure of the government to achieve the reciprocal agreement with other provinces is quite concerning. I think the government or their own members or the private members from the government side – I would be happy to hear from them if they would like to bring, discuss some information on this. What were the efforts, and where are you in those efforts? Why were they not included in this Bill 49?

I've discussed the concerns from those young adults that are not able to find a job in Alberta, and the institutions, the online colleges: they're asking as much as \$10,000 to \$20,000 in fees for the course refreshers and different training and then providing kind of the hope to get a job or just asking them to move to the U.S., and then you still yourself will be able to, you know, obtain a green card, and then they guarantee jobs.

As well, this is important to streamline and standardize the process, to speed up the process so that the people who decided to move and come to Alberta can, you know, as fast as they can be able to continue to participate in our job market and continue in our economy.

11:20

But, as I was saying, listening to or reading all those reports in some of the credible media outlets about the mass exodus of youth specifically from the cities like Calgary, it is not only America. Also, the Premier has loudly said and made statements during the election, after the elections about the empty Calgary downtown. Two and a half years into the government, we could not put enough efforts to fill those downtown buildings and, similarly, not seem to have effectively created programs for all those youngsters they wanted to move here in Alberta. As much as I remember, the number of those categories in the federal AINP program has been actually still stopped in Alberta. They are not open. How are we trying to strike a balance between this? Is this just a bill for the sake of grandstanding?

A number of those issues around even this particular bill, some of the high-demand sectors in Alberta that are not really actually discussed – I'm trying to look into one of those. Construction. [interjection] Oh, sure. I'll give way to the member.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you, Member. I appreciate the comments that you're making on this bill. I was just curious to hear your thoughts.

I mean, we're talking about labour mobility, but, again, if part of the intention through this bill is to attract and make it easier for labour to come to Alberta, you know, what are your thoughts on how the government's policies have impacted our postsecondaries, our health care system, our quality of life here in Alberta? Their policy decisions: how do you feel that they will impact the professions listed here that will be fast-tracked for being recognized? How does the whole group of their policies impact decisions on whether or not families will stay in Alberta or families will move to Alberta? Curious to hear your thoughts on that.

Mr. Deol: Thank you, Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview. Yes, the quality of life is, you know, one of the key factors. As an immigrant I can definitely stress this. When first you make up your mind or make a decision to leave that very place where you were born, where your loved ones and relatives and friends and all of those things belong, and for the very first time you decide to leave, the key factors for the future of your life: the security and safety of the individual and the safety and security of a society at large. Those are the major components of your decision-making, and that is what we haven't seen in these two and a half years, the government's direction they have taken.

Thank you.

The Speaker: I see the hon. Member for Lethbridge-East is rising. I hope that the Assembly will provide me just a small, tiny little indulgence. Just a few minutes ago I was doing an interview with the School at the Leg. It's a program that we offer here through the Legislative Assembly. I was interviewed by some wonderful grade 6 students from Kitscoty. I know that they tuned in to watch the proceedings immediately following the interview, so I thought I would just briefly say: thanks so much for tuning in, Jackson, Elyssa, Eddie, Nash, Taryn. I hope that the members will provide them the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

Mr. Neudorf: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I hope they stay tuned to this riveting debate.

I'm honoured to rise today and speak to Bill 49, the Labour Mobility Act, a bill I believe is the best response to adapt to the challenging economic times we find ourselves in today. As we are seeing some very positive signs of economic recovery through investment dollars pouring back into Alberta, we also need to make sure that we have enough skilled workers to keep that moving forward and making the most of these precious investments. Over the past month our government has met with nearly 20 major industrial associations and hundreds of Alberta's largest employers. The hard truth that they all reported is that the single greatest challenge that they now face is a shortage of workers.

One thing I'm happy with about this bill is the fact that it cuts the blame game off when we see it happening practically globally. You can blame who you want. You can blame whatever program you want. You can blame COVID if you'd like to, but at the end of the day we need to find a solution to a critical problem that is at hand, and that is what this bill will help advance, and that's a labour shortage. A labour shortage of any kind would slow the economic momentum that we have begun to see building back here in Alberta, and that is something that we simply must avoid.

If passed, the Labour Mobility Act will help ensure Alberta's economy remains competitive on a global stage. It will increase the speed and efficiency of skilled professionals and trade workers certified in other provinces to have their credentials recognized here in Alberta, attracting the necessary skills and the talent for businesses and communities to grow and succeed.

Also, this legislation will make it easier for workers like optometrists, possibly not veterinarians but hopefully so, accountants, architects, tradespeople, engineers, and many more to bring their expertise and their work ethic from across Canada to our province regardless of where in the country they earned their credentials.

This bill will streamline our processes, reducing red tape and introducing clear and uniform legislation requirements for Alberta's regulatory authorities. The Labour Mobility Act will affect more than 100 regulated occupations in a wide range of sectors across Alberta's economy. This will be a growth opportunity for job creators in sectors where there are simply not enough skilled workers available here in Alberta. Mr. Speaker, having the necessary skills and talent in our province will make our province an even more attractive destination for many businesses.

As a former contractor I understand the importance of timelines, not only for my business but for my clients, the suppliers, and employees. An efficient, transparent timeline goes a long way to a successful project. That is why I am happy to see that the Labour Mobility Act will make Alberta the first and only jurisdiction in Canada to legislate timelines for registration decisions. What this means is that regulatory authorities will have to be required to assess applicants and communicate registration decisions within 20 business days. In other words, if a certified professional submits the necessary documents and meets all the requirements, they can expect to work within one month of applying.

One other factor that is vitally important to skilled trades jobs is proper documentation across industries and trades. When a skilled trades worker comes to Alberta looking for work, we don't want them bogged down by regulatory red tape and documentation hoops that they have to jump through. We want them working as quickly as possible. The Labour Mobility Act will limit the documentation required to evaluate the credentials of an out-of-province worker to include proof of certification in a Canadian jurisdiction and other documents stated in regulation.

Additionally, in a commitment to transparency, the act will require regulatory authorities to make information on required documents and fees available to the public. We believe this free trade is the pathway to prosperity, as the Premier was sharing yesterday.

Also, as part of our commitment to transparency in this bill, Mr. Speaker, we are outlining what actions are offences and their associated penalties. This includes actions like failing to register eligible applicants or failing to meet the legislated processing timelines. We are committed to clear public communication about offences and penalties and set guidelines that are clear rules right from the start. If this bill is passed, everyone should be able to know about penalties and what regulations and guidelines they need to follow so they can best avoid them.

Mr. Speaker, together the actions mentioned in this bill will significantly reduce red tape and create a streamlined, consistent, and transparent approach to recognizing the skills, education, and credentials of out-of-province certified professional workers. However, Albertans can rest assured that this will not come at the expense of maintaining Alberta's high professional standards.

11:30

In unique cases where regulated occupations here are significantly different from the same occupation in another province, recognition will be restricted until the distinction is properly evaluated by the regulatory authority. In other words, we are approaching a thorough and fair case-by-case-basis model that will prioritize efficiency and ensure safety. This process will also ensure that out-of-province certified professional workers have the

equivalent skills to perform that occupation right here in Alberta while recognizing the potential differences in scope of work to be safely and individually reviewed.

Whether it's rural broadband and once-in-a-generation irrigation projects in southern Alberta or shovel-ready transportation, health care products, and schools, our government is focused on building the infrastructure Alberta needs today so that we can dream big for tomorrow. With this bill we are providing the necessary supports Alberta businesses and families need to get back to work and thrive. I strongly believe that this legislation will help Alberta break down the barriers that restrict the movement of people and goods to our province while at the same time attracting much-needed investment to our province that will support our economic recovery and future growth.

The future's bright in Alberta, and the majority of banks and analysts have predicted that we will lead Canada in economic growth both this year and next. We are already attracting job-creating private-sector investment from across Canada and around the world, making Alberta's economy the most diversified in North America. As I said before, Mr. Speaker, we are building for Alberta's future needs today so that we can dream big for a better future tomorrow. It is time once again for Alberta to lead Canada and across the globe as a haven for job creation, innovation, safe and strong business practices and as the heartbeat of economic prosperity right here in Canada.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Hon. members, are there others? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs has risen.

Ms Goehring: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise this morning to speak to Bill 49, the Labour Mobility Act. I wanted to just start by saying hello to the students in Kitscoty tuning in today. I think it's pretty cool that their teacher was able to arrange a virtual viewing of the procedures here. I'm excited that they're tuning in and paying attention, and I hope they have a lot of great questions for their member as well as for their teacher about the conversation that we're having today.

Bill 49, the Labour Mobility Act, is an interesting piece of legislation. I've heard members in the Chamber talk about what's happening in the province right now, and what we're seeing is an incredible brain drain occurring. I can appreciate that government wants to try and improve access to employment and ease of transition into the province. I just think there's so much that's happening. I mean, specifically in arts and entertainment businesses, over the last 20 months 10 per cent has been lost out of the province. That is well below the national average. We are seeing a mass exodus of incredible talent leaving this province.

There is an attempt with this piece of legislation to draw people to come to the province. I just worry that this government is missing the bigger picture. When we look at what's causing people to flee the province, perhaps we should be focusing on that. We have a government that has attacked health care in the middle of a pandemic, that has forced physicians, health care practitioners to leave. Those individuals took an oath to be able to provide the best care to Albertans. Under this government they've expressed over and over that they cannot do what they need to do, so they're leaving.

When I talk to physicians that have students with them, that are in their residency following them, this is the first time that many of them have watched students leave the province. They get their education here, and then they go to another province to practise. Seeing the decisions that this government has made, taking highly educated, talented young people, educating them, and then creating

a workspace, a province, that they don't want to stay in: to me, Mr. Speaker, that is absolutely devastating. We have an absolutely world-class postsecondary system in this province, and the students who are coming out of these education systems are leaving.

To me, Mr. Speaker, it's a bigger problem than what this piece of legislation is actually going to address. The Labour Mobility Act, they're saying, is going to draw people to come to the province because of this reduction in red tape, if you will, being able to have an ease of transition with their education, with their skilled profession. But what about those that are leaving the province that we already have here? Why aren't we focusing on keeping the incredible talent that we have here? We have shortages all over this province because of some of the horrible decisions this government has made prior to the pandemic, I'd like to say.

I remember being in the budget estimates with the Minister of Culture, and . . . [interjection] Oh, an intervention.

Ms Sweet: Well, I didn't mean it to be that abrupt, but thank you, Member. I just wanted to maybe ask the member a question as the critic for arts and culture, as someone that's working with the community there and people in the film industry specifically. Obviously, that's an industry where we see a lot of movement, whether it be with production crews, actors, different things like that. I'm just wondering if she would like to comment a little bit further on that industry and the impacts that have happened in that industry over the last little bit. Then how is it that they're able to continue to have crews available and actors available, especially at a time when we know that B.C. is also quite successful at this? Maybe she's hearing from the film community a little bit about that.

Ms Goehring: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I commit to trying to be better at acknowledging interventions. Thank you to the hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning for that question. I think it's a really valid point when we hear from industry and film that we have a shortage of crews. Why do we have a shortage? Well, when this government came in and attacked culture and arts, they left. So much of our talent has left the province. Alberta has . . .

Mr. Hunter: Will you give way?

Ms Goehring: Absolutely. I will give way to the hon. member.

Mr. Hunter: This is my first, so hopefully I can get it right. Thank you to the member. That was an interesting question that the Member for Edmonton-Manning just asked. I would ask another question: seeing as we've seen the largest growth in that sector, would that not be a contributing factor to us not having enough crews in order to be able to facilitate the productions as we've seen so much of a growth in that industry?

Ms Goehring: Thank you to the hon. member for the question. Yes, film has been thriving here, absolutely, but what are they saying? It's not necessarily Alberta crews that are working on these projects. What industry has said is that they need to take Alberta talent and create capacity within our province to meet those needs of those incredibly explosive projects that are happening here.

Some of the suggestions have been to look at postsecondary and take some of those skilled trades that aren't working in film right now but have been laid off in other fields, perhaps oil and gas or whatever industry they're working in, and enticing them to come to film. That takes a concerted effort for conversations to happen between industry and film and government and postsecondary. They want to be able to facilitate all of those workers that are currently skilled, can't work in their trade, in their field, and bring

them over to film and television because it's a relatable skill, but they just aren't aware of that.

11:40

It's more than just looking at taking people from out of the province and bringing them in. It's: who do we have here right now that has been laid off, that can't find work, but would be an easy transition into the film industry? There are so many calls out right now to help support film, but they're not employing Albertans. It's bringing film crews in from out of province. There isn't a requirement for a certain amount of capacity to be Alberta film crews. There is so much that could be done to look at those skilled trades workers we already have here that are struggling, that aren't working, and educating them in the film industry.

That takes collaboration and that takes initiative from government to start having those conversations and start looking at ways that we can take a worker who has worked up in the oil field, perhaps driven big trucks, heavy mechanics, those kinds of things, carpenters, and bring them into the film industry. It's essentially the same type of work, but there is a little bit of nuance in what they need to actually be productive and skilled in the film industry. There are programs that exist, but it's not enough. They don't have capacity right now to take all of those skilled trades and bring them into film to get them ready to go and walk onto a set. I would encourage government that when they're looking at ways to increase employment in the province, we look at what we have here. Why are people leaving? Why are people still unemployed and can't access a similar job to the skills that they already have?

A program that we had done in government, the Helmets to Hardhats program with the military, for example, was taking those that were members of the Canadian Armed Forces – they were skilled and trained in a career – and when they retired, it was giving them the opportunity to easily transition into a civilian position. The expectations and the requirements were different, but they were very comparable. We worked with the military to create a program that allowed a soldier to retire and go into a civilian career. That was taking an Albertan and keeping them employed in Alberta. It was looking at the abilities and the skills that workers already have that just needed a little bit of tweaking. [interjection] I'd like to give way the hon. member.

Thank you.

Ms Sweet: Thank you, hon. member. Just following up on your comments around the military, can you maybe elaborate a little bit about what that looks like for spouses of military members? When I look at this piece of legislation, it talks about specific trades, but it doesn't talk about: if one person moves to Alberta, what about their spouse? What is that plan? Like, that idea of also needing – what entices people to come to Alberta? Why would they move from a different province and come to Alberta when they could maybe be posted in Victoria, for example, or Halifax? What is it that excites military families to move to Alberta, and what are they looking for from a province that would maybe want them to stay here?

The Speaker: Can I just very briefly intervene and remind members, mostly for the benefit of *Hansard*, if you can be a little bit directive towards the microphone. It makes it very difficult for *Hansard* to pick up voices if their perhaps back is towards the microphone. I take no offence personally; it's just for the benefit of *Hansard*.

The hon. member.

Ms Goehring: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the Member for Edmonton-Manning for that question. When I was the government liaison to the Canadian Armed Forces, I sat on a

committee that was a national committee with the federal government and all provinces represented, and it was called Seamless Canada. Employment of spouses was one of the top issues that we were trying to navigate as a country because every province has their own standards, their own regulations, their own criteria. In order to make it a truly successful transition throughout province to province, all provinces need to be at the table, all provinces that have the ability to make these decisions need to be present and engaged. What happens in Alberta should also be seen in other provinces. When a military spouse finds out that their partner is being posted to Alberta, the number one thing that they probably want to make sure is: can they work? Should they give up their job that they have in their home province to follow their spouse to a new province?

Mr. Speaker, over and over I have heard heartbreaking stories of families separated because of a job. The spouse had a very successful career in their home province, and it wasn't transferable to this province. There were too many barriers; there were too many restrictions. As a national committee we came to the table with the intention of trying to facilitate ease of transition between provinces. I would encourage this government to look at some of those meeting minutes that occurred, because that was a topic that every single province was aware of. The military happened to be the topic, but it would apply to anybody in the country that's looking at moving across the provinces.

The other thing that entices people to come to Alberta is what their family life is going to be. If you have one spouse that can come and get a job, they need to be able to convince their kids and their loved ones that moving to Alberta is the right decision for everybody. When you talk to families and you talk to employers and you talk to investors about what they need in a province, it's more than just the ease of employment. There's so much more that comes into play. They want to know: is there a high-functioning, structurally sound, safe health care system? Right now, Mr. Speaker, that is not the case in Alberta. If you have a child with high medical needs, a child that needs to have any sort of regular scans, those processes are being delayed. If I had a medically fragile child and I was told the services that I'm being provided in one province, the province where I am, are not going to necessarily be provided in Alberta, hands down the decision would be that I'm not moving to Alberta. When you're asking a family to relocate to our province, there are so many factors that come into play.

Education is another one. When we look at what this government has done with education, when you look at the curriculum, for example – parents are invested in their children's futures. They want to make sure that they're healthy, that they're safe, and that they have access to high-quality education. When you look at what this government is doing to the education system, as a parent I can say that I'm relieved that my children have all graduated school. They were able to get an education that I was proud of through public school. I hear over and over that parents are worried about what they're going to be teaching their children, some of the things that have been left out of the curriculum or added into the curriculum that don't seem to make sense.

When you're looking at the Labour Mobility Act and what it does to entice people to come to the province, this is one small component of what brings people here. It's one small component of what gets people to work in our province. I think that by having more of a global outlook on what is required to get jobs in the province, this government has no plan. They've brought forward Bill 49, the Labour Mobility Act, but it's not attracting people to come live in our province. People are concerned about the complete disruption that has happened because of the lack of leadership from this government. I don't think that creating this mobility act is doing

what the government is saying it's going to do. I know Albertans want to see an economy that's stable. They want to see an economy that's thriving. They want to know that if they come here and their children are educated here, they're going to stay. I think that with all of the disruptive decisions, the lack of leadership during the pandemic, we've watched so many industries struggle. This is not the solution to create jobs. We don't have a clear jobs plan.

11:50

I know that in culture since the beginning of the pandemic they have been pleading with the government to be part of the economic recovery plan, and they've been ignored. The example that I shared earlier in my remarks about taking the skilled workers that we have here and offering additional training to transition into a thriving industry makes sense, but we've seen a piece of legislation introduced about the arts, and there's nothing in that legislation either that supports job creation. Zero.

With those comments, I would really, really, encourage the government and all members in this House to look at this piece of legislation and determine whether this is doing what the government is saying it's going to do. Is it going to entice Albertans to come here? Is it really working with other provinces to make sure that everybody is working together to truly allow people to transition into our province? I would say no.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I really look forward to more fulsome debate, and I will take my seat. Thank you.

The Speaker: Are there others wishing to join in the debate this morning? The hon. Member for Spruce Grove-Stony Plain.

Mr. Turton: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's an honour to rise and speak on Bill 49, the Labour Mobility Act. I'd like to thank the Premier for putting forth this important legislation and for all the hard work that the previous Minister of Labour and Immigration has put in to make this possible.

Alberta's government has worked hard to make Alberta one of the freest and fastest growing economies in North America, and this work is indeed paying off. Since being elected into office, Alberta's government implemented a job-creation tax cut, reduced redundant red tape across multiple industries, and enacted policies to attract businesses from around the world to invest and set up shop here in Alberta.

The Labour Mobility Act continues this commitment by streamlining the current processes so that out-of-province Canadians can have their professional credentials recognized more easily, which will allow them to start a new job or open a new business here in Alberta quicker than ever before. As a dual-ticketed tradesman, a member of local 1325 of the carpenters and joiners of America, and the private-sector union liaison for the Ministry of Labour and Immigration I know how important this legislation is when dealing with the labour shortages impacting the skilled trades and other occupations.

Businesses need skilled workers in order to flourish, grow, and hire more workers of all qualifications. Now, this legislation will make it easier for skilled professionals in over 100 regulated occupations to be able to have their credentials recognized here in Alberta. This includes doctors, dentists, optometrists, skilled trades workers, and many, many more. This legislation will achieve this by introducing uniform legislative requirements for regulatory authorities that govern regulated occupations, incorporating common features from legislation introduced in other provinces and by including features that were previously introduced under the Fair Registration Practices Act.

Now, to achieve this objective, this legislation will bring in a 20-day maximum time frame for registration decisions. There will also be a requirement for there to be an appeal process and an internal review of applications. Bill 49 will also limit the documentation required to evaluate an applicant, define offences and financial penalties, and require information on compulsory documentation and fees to be made publicly available.

All these actions will make the process quicker and more efficient for professionals outside of the province to get their credentials recognized so that they can quickly contribute to our economic progress, create new businesses, and generate new jobs for Albertans. Now, this is extremely important for my riding of Spruce Grove-Stony Plain, just west of Edmonton. We are a fast-growing city and town with a lot of industrial and commercial businesses. For these businesses to continue to grow, they will need skilled professionals like engineers and skilled trades workers, and this legislation will help address the labour shortages that they currently have. I know, from talking with the Greater Parkland Regional Chamber of Commerce and multiple businesses in my business visits around the constituency, that this is a key concern for many businesses and business owners in my area.

Once again I'd like to thank the former Minister of Labour and Immigration for his work on this legislation. This legislation is sorely needed, and I encourage everyone in the House today to vote in support of the Labour Mobility Act.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Are there others? I see the hon. Member for Calgary-McCall has risen.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to speak to Bill 49. Yesterday in the House the Premier spoke at length about this bill, how this bill will help Alberta attract skilled labour, that it will help

Alberta with its economy, and all those positive things. I think that any attempt, any action that helps Alberta attract skilled labour, helps Alberta attract skilled tradespeople, and helps make Alberta's economy better we are certainly in support of, but there are certain questions that we have. We expect that the government can help us understand how in practice all the changes proposed in this bill will be operationalized.

Also, I think that in order to attract and retain skilled professionals, tradespeople in Alberta, there are many other things as well that the government needs to look into. For instance, since the government took over in 2019, they have been fighting with the health professionals, they have been fighting with the doctors, they have been fighting with the nurses and front-line staff, and there have been reports upon reports of professionals – health professionals, doctors, nurses – leaving this province. They've been overworked and exhausted. I think that in order to attract and retain professionals in Alberta, among other things the government also needs to look at how they are treating the professionals who are currently in Alberta.

The second thing is that when people decide to move to Alberta, there are many things they will look at. For instance, when I was moving to Alberta, certainly the boom in the economy, in the oil and gas sector, was one thing, but at the same time opportunities for education, postsecondary education were also a key consideration. When I came here, certainly I pursued that route, went back to school, upgraded, and got the education that I thought would help me better settle here. I think those opportunities are important to attract and retain . . .

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

[The Assembly adjourned at 12 p.m.]

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