



Province of Alberta

The 30th Legislature  
Second Session

# Alberta Hansard

Wednesday evening, November 3, 2021

Day 123

The Honourable Nathan M. Cooper, Speaker

# Legislative Assembly of Alberta The 30th Legislature

Second Session

Cooper, Hon. Nathan M., Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills (UC), Speaker  
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Aheer, Leela Sharon, Chestermere-Strathmore (UC)  
Allard, Tracy L., Grande Prairie (UC)  
Amery, Mickey K., Calgary-Cross (UC)  
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Official Opposition Deputy Whip  
Dang, Thomas, Edmonton-South (NDP),  
Official Opposition Deputy House Leader  
Deol, Jasvir, Edmonton-Meadows (NDP)  
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Eggen, David, Edmonton-North West (NDP),  
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Feehan, Richard, Edmonton-Rutherford (NDP)  
Fir, Hon. Tanya, Calgary-Peigan (UC)  
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Ganley, Kathleen T., Calgary-Mountain View (NDP)  
Getson, Shane C., Lac Ste. Anne-Parkland (UC)  
Glubish, Hon. Nate, Strathcona-Sherwood Park (UC)  
Goehring, Nicole, Edmonton-Castle Downs (NDP)  
Gotfried, Richard, Calgary-Fish Creek (UC)  
Gray, Christina, Edmonton-Mill Woods (NDP),  
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Horner, Hon. Nate S., Drumheller-Stettler (UC)  
Hunter, Grant R., Taber-Warner (UC)  
Irwin, Janis, Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood (NDP),  
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Government Whip  
Jones, Matt, Calgary-South East (UC)  
Kenney, Hon. Jason, PC, Calgary-Lougheed (UC),  
Premier  
LaGrange, Hon. Adriana, Red Deer-North (UC)  
Loewen, Todd, Central Peace-Notley (Ind)  
Long, Martin M., West Yellowhead (UC)  
Lovely, Jacqueline, Camrose (UC)  
Loyola, Rod, Edmonton-Ellerslie (NDP)  
Luan, Hon. Jason, Calgary-Foothills (UC)  
Madu, Hon. Kaycee, QC, Edmonton-South West (UC)  
McIver, Hon. Ric, Calgary-Hays (UC)

Nally, Hon. Dale, Morinville-St. Albert (UC)  
Neudorf, Nathan T., Lethbridge-East (UC)  
Nicolaidis, Hon. Demetrios, Calgary-Bow (UC)  
Nielsen, Christian E., Edmonton-Decore (NDP)  
Nixon, Hon. Jason, Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre (UC),  
Government House Leader  
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Leader of the Official Opposition  
Orr, Hon. Ronald, Lacombe-Ponoka (UC)  
Pancholi, Rakhi, Edmonton-Whitemud (NDP)  
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Phillips, Shannon, Lethbridge-West (NDP)  
Pon, Hon. Josephine, Calgary-Beddington (UC)  
Rehn, Pat, Lesser Slave Lake (UC)  
Reid, Roger W., Livingstone-Macleod (UC)  
Renaud, Marie F., St. Albert (NDP)  
Rosin, Miranda D., Banff-Kananaskis (UC)  
Rowswell, Garth, Vermilion-Lloydminster-Wainwright (UC)  
Rutherford, Brad, Leduc-Beaumont (UC),  
Deputy Government Whip  
Sabir, Irfan, Calgary-McCall (NDP),  
Official Opposition Deputy House Leader  
Savage, Hon. Sonya, Calgary-North West (UC)  
Sawhney, Hon. Rajan, Calgary-North East (UC)  
Schmidt, Marlin, Edmonton-Gold Bar (NDP)  
Schow, Joseph R., Cardston-Siksika (UC),  
Deputy Government House Leader  
Schulz, Hon. Rebecca, Calgary-Shaw (UC)  
Schweitzer, Hon. Doug, QC, Calgary-Elbow (UC)  
Shandro, Hon. Tyler, QC, Calgary-Acadia (UC)  
Shepherd, David, Edmonton-City Centre (NDP)  
Sigurdson, Lori, Edmonton-Riverview (NDP)  
Sigurdson, R.J., Highwood (UC)  
Singh, Peter, Calgary-East (UC)  
Smith, Mark W., Drayton Valley-Devon (UC)  
Stephan, Jason, Red Deer-South (UC)  
Sweet, Heather, Edmonton-Manning (NDP)  
Toews, Hon. Travis, Grande Prairie-Wapiti (UC)  
Toor, Devinder, Calgary-Falconridge (UC)  
Turton, Searle, Spruce Grove-Stony Plain (UC)  
van Dijken, Glenn, Athabasca-Barrhead-Westlock (UC)  
Walker, Jordan, Sherwood Park (UC)  
Williams, Dan D.A., Peace River (UC)  
Wilson, Hon. Rick D., Maskwacis-Wetaskiwin (UC)  
Yao, Tany, Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo (UC)  
Yaseen, Hon. Muhammad, Calgary-North (UC)  
Vacant, Fort McMurray-Lac La Biche

## Party standings:

United Conservative: 20

New Democrat: 24

Independent: 2

Vacant: 1

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Tanya Fir	Associate Minister of Red Tape Reduction
Nate Glubish	Minister of Service Alberta
Nate Horner	Associate Minister of Rural Economic Development
Whitney Issik	Associate Minister of Status of Women
Adriana LaGrange	Minister of Education
Jason Luan	Minister of Community and Social Services
Kaycee Madu	Minister of Justice and Solicitor General
Ric McIver	Minister of Municipal Affairs
Dale Nally	Associate Minister of Natural Gas and Electricity
Demetrios Nicolaides	Minister of Advanced Education
Jason Nixon	Minister of Environment and Parks
Ronald Orr	Minister of Culture
Prasad Panda	Minister of Infrastructure
Josephine Pon	Minister of Seniors and Housing
Sonya Savage	Minister of Energy
Rajan Sawhney	Minister of Transportation
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Doug Schweitzer	Minister of Jobs, Economy and Innovation
Tyler Shandro	Minister of Labour and Immigration
Travis Toews	President of Treasury Board and Minister of Finance
Rick Wilson	Minister of Indigenous Relations
Muhammad Yaseen	Associate Minister of Immigration and Multiculturalism

## **Parliamentary Secretaries**

Martin Long	Parliamentary Secretary for Small Business and Tourism
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## STANDING AND SPECIAL COMMITTEES OF THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ALBERTA

### **Standing Committee on the Alberta Heritage Savings Trust Fund**

Chair: Mr. Rowswell  
Deputy Chair: Mr. Jones

Allard  
Eggen  
Gray  
Hunter  
Phillips  
Rehn  
Singh

### **Standing Committee on Alberta's Economic Future**

Chair: Mr. Neudorf  
Deputy Chair: Ms Goehring

Armstrong-Homeniuk  
Barnes  
Bilous  
Frey (formerly Glasgo)  
Irwin  
Rosin  
Rowswell  
Sweet  
van Dijken  
Walker

### **Select Special Child and Youth Advocate Search Committee**

Chair: Mr. Schow  
Deputy Chair: Mr. Jones

Goehring  
Lovely  
Nixon, Jeremy  
Pancholi  
Sabir  
Smith  
Turton

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

Chair: Ms Lovely  
Deputy Chair: Ms Sigurdson

Amery  
Carson  
Frey (formerly Glasgo)  
Gotfried  
Hunter  
Loewen  
Pancholi  
Reid  
Sabir  
Smith

### **Standing Committee on Legislative Offices**

Chair: Mr. Rutherford  
Deputy Chair: Mr. Milliken

Allard  
Ceci  
Long  
Loyola  
Rosin  
Shepherd  
Smith  
Sweet  
van Dijken

### **Special Standing Committee on Members' Services**

Chair: Mr. Cooper  
Deputy Chair: Mr. Schow

Allard  
Dang  
Deol  
Goehring  
Long  
Neudorf  
Sabir  
Sigurdson, R.J.  
Williams

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

Chair: Mr. Rutherford  
Deputy Chair: Mr. Jeremy Nixon

Amery  
Dang  
Frey (formerly Glasgo)  
Irwin  
Long  
Nielsen  
Rehn  
Rosin  
Sigurdson, L.

### **Standing Committee on Privileges and Elections, Standing Orders and Printing**

Chair: Mr. Smith  
Deputy Chair: Mr. Reid

Aheer  
Armstrong-Homeniuk  
Deol  
Ganley  
Gotfried  
Loyola  
Neudorf  
Renaud  
Stephan  
Williams

### **Standing Committee on Public Accounts**

Chair: Ms Phillips  
Deputy Chair: Mr. Reid

Armstrong-Homeniuk  
Lovely  
Pancholi  
Renaud  
Rowswell  
Schmidt  
Singh  
Toor  
Turton  
Walker

### **Select Special Committee on Real Property Rights**

Chair: Mr. Sigurdson  
Deputy Chair: Mr. Rutherford

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Ganley  
Hanson  
Milliken  
Nielsen  
Rowswell  
Schmidt  
Sweet  
van Dijken  
Yao

### **Standing Committee on Resource Stewardship**

Chair: Mr. Hanson  
Deputy Chair: Member Ceci

Dach  
Feehan  
Ganley  
Getson  
Guthrie  
Lovely  
Rehn  
Singh  
Turton  
Yao

## Legislative Assembly of Alberta

7:30 p.m.

Wednesday, November 3, 2021

[The Speaker in the chair]

**The Speaker:** Please be seated.

### Government Motions

#### Equalization Payments

101. Mr. Kenney moved:

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly:

- (a) recognize the results of the referendum held on October 18, 2021, where 61.7 per cent of voters supported removing section 36(2) of the Constitution Act, 1982, Parliament and the government of Canada's commitment to the principle of making equalization payments,
- (b) reaffirm the principle articulated by the Supreme Court of Canada in the 1998 reference re secession of Quebec that it is "the constitutional right of each participant in the federation to initiate Constitutional change" and that "this right implies a reciprocal duty on the other participants to engage in discussions to address any legitimate initiative to change the constitutional order,"
- (c) authorize an amendment to the Constitution of Canada to be made by proclamation issued by Her Excellency the Governor General under the Great Seal of Canada in accordance with the schedule set forth below, and
- (d) direct the government of Alberta to take all necessary steps to secure a fair deal for Alberta in the Canadian federation, including the reform of federal transfer programs, the defence of provincial powers enumerated in the Constitution, and the right to pursue responsible development of natural resources.

#### SCHEDULE

#### AMENDMENT TO THE CONSTITUTION OF CANADA

1. The Constitution Act, 1982 is amended by repealing section 36(2) thereof.
2. This Amendment may be cited as the Constitution Amendment, [year of proclamation].

#### [VERSION FRANÇAISE]

#### MODIFICATION DE LA CONSTITUTION DU CANADA

1. Le paragraphe 36(2) de la Loi constitutionnelle de 1982 est abrogé.
2. Titre de la présente modification: Modification constitutionnelle de [l'année de la proclamation]

[Adjourned debate November 3: Mr. Nally]

**The Speaker:** The hon. the Minister of Jobs, Economy and Innovation.

**Mr. Schweitzer:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'll be blunt with the Speaker. I'm just right here going to help get a little time until a few other members get into this Chamber.

**The Speaker:** You wouldn't want to refer to the absence or presence of anyone.

**Mr. Schweitzer:** No, no. I would never want to do that, Mr. Speaker, but I'm going to do my best here to speak to this motion and as eloquently as I can on the spot.

When it comes to the equalization referendum and the vote of Albertans here, with about 62 per cent casting their vote, articulating their frustration with how Alberta is treated in this federation and particularly with the focus being on equalization, when you take a look at how Alberta has contributed immensely over the last few decades in particular and the hundreds of billions of dollars that Alberta has contributed to federation overall and the need for us to ensure that – I wouldn't want to comment on a member that I was waiting for, Mr. Speaker. I'd never do such a thing to make sure we have enough time here.

I also want to comment about the fact that when we take a look at Alberta's industries and what we have built in this amazing province, when you take a look at the energy industry, the innovation in our energy industry, the fact that right now in our province we're seeing cutting-edge petrochemical facilities, a first of their kind with Dow Chemical's net zero, you know, committing to many of the global ambitions towards net zero by 2050, a lot of that technology to solve these challenges around carbon, everything there is being developed right here in Alberta, yet we have a federal government that's in Europe right now, making global commitments without recognizing truly the commitment that Alberta is making to solve all of these challenges, not giving us the credit when it comes to off-setting coal-fired generation around the world. It could be off-set by clean-burning natural gas here from Alberta. They're not working with us constructively as to what the future of Alberta's energy industry looks like.

When we see a federal government that time after time tries to stymie the prosperity of Albertans and communities across this province, it's no wonder that they have frustration, Mr. Speaker. It's no wonder that Albertans are frustrated with how this federal government has treated them. It's no wonder that they want to make sure that, you know, their interests are truly dealt with at the federal level.

There are a lot of academics that have nitpicked on, you know: "What's the intention of this wording or that wording? What are the legal implications of this or that?" But, Mr. Speaker, Albertans have spoken, and they want to make sure that they are treated fairly within Confederation.

I'm checking to see – not quite ready yet, Mr. Speaker.

Also, I just want to highlight as well that when it comes to Alberta's dedication to the future of this Confederation, when it comes to the investments that we've made in hydrogen, Mr. Speaker, when it comes to the collaboration that we're seeing with industry and the future of Alberta, a bright future is ahead for this province, but that doesn't mean that we can't continue to fight for fairness in Confederation.

That also collaborates when you take a look at, you know, the reason why we held a Senate election. These issues aren't just completely in isolation. We want to make sure that Ottawa hears the voices of Albertans.

I had the great pleasure of working on Senator Doug Black's campaign back in 2012, where he received, I think, over 400,000 votes from Albertans. He was appointed to the Senate and served for about nine years. He just recently retired, and I can't think of a harder working Senator in the entire country than that elected Senator from Alberta.

We've had some folks in this Chamber try to downplay, you know, more democracy. I think there was an outrageous comment, to be frank, Mr. Speaker, in politics that this was less democracy. I thought that was just one of those out-there comments that I've heard in life.

Mr. Speaker, we're giving a direct voice to Albertans. We campaigned to do that for so many people in our community, give them that voice, and they've had that opportunity.

Now, when we take a look at what's next – you know, this motion that's before this Chamber is important, a part of that next step, Mr. Speaker. It's an important part of making sure that Albertans know that this Chamber has heard the voice and will of the people, that we're going to make sure that we advocate for their intentions, what they asked us to do here in this Chamber, and I implore everybody that is in this Chamber on both sides and our independent members as well that they support this motion. It's important. It's the will of Albertans.

When you take a look as well for, you know, what's next, I hope the federal government hears this and negotiates in good faith with Albertans. We have seen the Prime Minister make comments that this is nothing but partisanship, almost to the effect that he just thinks that this is sour grapes. Mr. Speaker, nothing could be further from the truth as you look at this as an Albertan and as you look at this as people here that want to have a future for their communities and want to have a future for themselves in Confederation. You have proud Canadians living here in Canada, living in Alberta who want to make sure that they're treated fairly and that their kids have a future in our province, have a future in this country. It's incumbent now on Ottawa to take that step to work with us.

All right. I believe that I don't want to comment much further. I'm not quite sure yet who's going to pop up next, Mr. Speaker, but I've got a hunch. I've got a hunch as to who's going to pop up next. Ah, good. He's going to pop up next. All right. With that, I think it's just incumbent on this House to vote in favour of this motion.

**The Speaker:** Are there others? The hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Devon, followed by the hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat.

**Mr. Smith:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I thank the previous member for ragging the puck as well as he did there. I want to rise today – and I'm very privileged to rise today – to speak to Government Motion 101. I can tell you this. It probably wasn't more than a couple of days after the last general election in Alberta that I had constituents phoning me up and talking to me on the streets about: "When are we going to have that equalization referendum? We want it, like, next week." I can tell you that it was sometimes difficult for them to hear that, well, technically we needed to pass some legislation before we could actually go down this path. We needed referendum legislation, and the government needed to do some work. I mean, you can't just push this out right away. They were frustrated.

They were frustrated because in my little part of the world, Drayton Valley-Devon, so many of my constituents depend on oil and gas and so many of my constituents depend on a federal government actually understanding how they make a living and actually understanding the benefits of the jobs that they perform. They need a federal government that understands and a nation that understands how important the energy industry is to this nation.

We were going through and have been going through a very hard recession. Some even likened it to the Great Depression. For them, they couldn't understand, and I agree with them. I didn't understand. How is it that we could be sending billions of dollars every year through something called equalization to parts of this country that have been receiving equalization payments for decades while Albertans – their companies, their businesses, their livelihoods – were falling by the wayside, seemingly without anybody in the rest of Canada caring? They saw equalization as one of our platform campaign promises, that we would hold a

referendum on equalization, that we would start the process of trying to have the conversation in this country of ours about equalization, and they were wondering why we couldn't do it much more quickly.

There were several members in this Legislature that were part of our Fair Deal Panel that travelled across the province and allowed the members of this great province, the citizens of this great province, to have their say about what they would like to see happen if we were looking for a fair deal for Alberta. One of those recommendations coming out of that panel was indeed a referendum on equalization.

7:40

Now, in this motion, Mr. Speaker, it says:

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly:

- (a) recognize the results of the referendum held on October 18, 2021, where 61.7 per cent of voters supported removing section 36(2) of the Constitution Act, 1982, Parliament and the government of Canada's commitment to the principle of making equalization payments.

Alberta has a long history of enacting legislation that promotes grassroots democracy. We have a long history in this province of making sure that the will of the people is recognized and that the government of this province pursues the will of the people.

If you take a look at our government, I'm very proud of the record we have. Since I've been in this Legislature, we've passed legislation that has brought in more control over monies spent by PACs and monies that can be spent on elections. We've supported and I've supported citizens-initiated referenda so that now we have, for the first time in the history of this province, the capacity for the citizens themselves to decide what is important and to place it before the people of Alberta in the form of a referendum. We've supported and reintroduced bills that will support and have a senatorial election, that we just had on the same day. We've supported legislation that will even hold MLAs accountable and ultimately, should an MLA become seriously off track, be recalled. This referendum on equalization falls in line with that history of not only this government but the people of Alberta in our long history as a province.

We see the results that happened on October 18, that the people of Alberta spoke, and they spoke clearly. Sixty-two per cent – 62 per cent – of the people that participated in this election, this referendum, that we don't have very often, supported the concept of opening up discussions by having a constitutional discussion on equalization. The people have spoken, and they've spoken clearly. They want us to begin having a conversation about whether or not we should remove section 36(2) of the Constitution Act, which deals with equalization payments.

It's serious stuff. It's not – and I have talked with my constituents about this. This is not a discussion in their minds that revolves around our unwillingness to be good Canadians, that we don't want to help those in our country that are suffering, that maybe need a helping hand from those provinces that are doing better and that are wealthier. We're quite prepared as citizens of this nation to be a part of that kind of a family, where we understand that, you know, at some point in time in the future we, too, may need it. I guess that's why we were so disappointed that in the last six years, when we've been going through a very difficult time in this province, there seemed to be little understanding that perhaps equalization, that we were continuing to pay into, should be coming this way.

In this motion we ask and we say as a Legislature that we will reaffirm the principle articulated by the Supreme Court of Canada in the 1998 reference re secession of Quebec, that it is "the constitutional right of each participant in the federation to initiate

Constitutional change” and that “this right implies a reciprocal duty on the other participants to engage in discussions to address any legitimate initiative to change the constitutional order.” Mr. Speaker, you would understand that we live in a nation that is a federation – it’s a confederation of provinces – that when we came together as colonies and later as we added provinces, this is not a confederation. This is not a union of a dominant federal government that has more power and more control and is able to tell its children, the provinces, what to do. Far from it.

Set out in our Constitution Act are sections 91 and 92, which outline what laws the federal government can make law on and what duties the provincial governments have control over and can make law on. You will not see this government or this Premier attempt to pass law or legislation that creates an Alberta army. We do not have that power. Neither should we see the federal government intervene in jurisdictions that are purely provincial. We do not see the federal government as our father or our mother that has control over the decisions that we make in this province. We have our own powers, and we make our own decisions, and we have our own rights.

We see that this province has grown over the years in those rights and in those capacities. For instance, I believe it was 1931, with the Statute of Westminster, where the Alberta government gained control of our natural resources. I can remember giving my students in one of my high school classes a paper, and one of the things they had to go research was the Statute of Westminster. Out of about six or seven things they could pick three or four of them. They had to come back and be able to tell the class what the Statute of Westminster was. Two of the kids came to me and said: we can’t find anything about the statue of Westminster. I had to explain to them that it wasn’t a statue I was asking them to look up; it was a statute. It’s a law, a very important piece of legislation that gave us control of our natural resources, making us a full partner as a province in Confederation.

Of course, much of the money and the wealth that we get for the equalization payments comes from the fact that we own our natural resources and we harvest our natural resources. The wealth that generates a good living for us and for our families is also shared with the people of Canada. But perhaps as the people of Alberta have spoken, with a 62 per cent result in the referendum, it’s time to have that conversation again. Coming out of 1998 the Supreme Court reference said that, you know, each of the participants in this federation, this federal system of government, this confederation of provinces, each of those provinces, each of those parts of the country has the capacity, with a clear question, to initiate a constitutional change, to bring it before the rest of us, the rest of the provinces, the rest of these partners, and this right implies a reciprocal duty on the other participants to engage in discussions.

That is indeed what this motion is. It’s setting the foundation, now that the people of Alberta have spoken, for us to bring this before the nation, to bring this before the rest of our Confederation partners and the capacity to be able to push forth an idea that perhaps equalization should actually be going to the provinces that really need it and that perhaps we need to talk about and to redo this process, this program, this set of rules and regulations that allow us to be able to provide equalization payments to those provinces that need it.

7:50

I speak in favour of this motion, Mr. Speaker, and I would hope that everyone in this Legislature would be voting in favour of it. The people of Alberta have spoken clearly, with a clear majority, and I believe that as Members of the Legislative Assembly, who’ve

been elected by the people of our constituencies, when they speak, we should listen.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Oh. Mr. Speaker, I rise to ask for adjournment of Motion 101.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

## Government Bills and Orders Second Reading

### Bill 73 Infrastructure Accountability Act

[Adjourned debate October 27: Ms Goehring]

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

**Mr. Dang:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It’s a pleasure to rise and speak to Bill 73, the Infrastructure Accountability Act. Before I get too deep into my comments here, I do want to congratulate the Minister of Infrastructure on presenting an infrastructure bill. I know that it’s not always an opportunity every member in this place will get, and I think it’s something, particularly in the Infrastructure ministry, notable that we’d be debating in this place. So congratulations, Minister.

I do have some comments I would like to make about Bill 73. Regarding the intent of the bill I think that increased transparency around infrastructure planning and spending is a good thing. I think that, frankly, the opposition as well as the government agree that transparency and accountability around infrastructure spending is required. That’s something that indeed we had in our platform and, I understand, that the United Conservative Party had in their platform as well. However, I have some concerns at least around how this government has decided to move forward with this bill, how they’ve decided to bring forward this piece of legislation.

When looking at Bill 73, when looking at the Infrastructure Accountability Act, we see that many of the largest errors that this government has committed, many of the largest, I think, disasters that this government has committed wouldn’t be addressed, right? We’re talking about a piece of legislation that would have potentially protected Albertans, would have potentially protected Albertans from significant losses of money. We found this out after talking to the minister’s staff in a technical briefing. For example, the Keystone XL debacle where, without any consultation, without any transparency, the government gambled away and lost \$1.3 billion. When pressed on this, it turns out that the Keystone XL project, the \$1.3 billion gamble was not done through the capital planning process. It wasn’t part of the capital plan, and because of that, I think there are a couple of things to note here.

One, when this minister and this government get up and say over and over again that they have the largest infrastructure spend in the history of Alberta, that’s simply untrue. If you exclude the Keystone XL project, the \$1.3 billion they lost from the infrastructure plan, then you no longer have the largest infrastructure spend. Those are just the facts. On top of that, it shows that this legislation, which reads very much like a job description for the minister, which codifies many of the practices that are already in place, would not have protected Albertans from that massive disaster of a so-called investment, right? It would not have protected Albertans from that massive disaster. It would not have provided any additional transparency or accountability for Albertans against this disaster of a project.

Mr. Speaker, I think that’s quite the loophole. I think that’s quite the omission. I think it’s quite the error that we have a situation where the government has touted and said in public and in this place

how proud they are of their \$1.3 billion gamble with Albertans' money, how proud they are that they lost \$1.3 billion of Albertans' money, and then they come forward with a bill that's supposed to provide transparency, supposed to provide accountability, and it would have done nothing to protect Albertans. It would have done nothing to ensure that Albertans' interests and money would have been protected. [interjection] I see my hon. colleague.

**Mr. Nielsen:** Well, thank you to my friend from Edmonton-South. You know, one of the things that in my travels, e-mails that I've gotten to my office, phone calls, things like that, was a rather – well, let's just call it what it is, a very angry position by my constituents around seeing a \$1.3 billion bet placed on an election. I'm wondering if the Member for Edmonton-South has, you know, encountered that same sort of thing with his constituents. What has he heard from others across the province? I mean, as you were just mentioning, the language that's presented in Bill 73 doesn't necessarily prevent that from happening again. So I'm wondering if he's had a chance to speak to anybody about that and what concerns they have over the lack of language and maybe even some advice to me as to how I'm supposed to explain this to my constituents who might reach out again.

**Mr. Dang:** Thank you to my colleague for his comments. I think that's absolutely something that I'm hearing. I'm hearing that Albertans are disappointed, right? Albertans are upset that this government is willing to take such risky gambles with their money, with their hard-paid tax dollars, and that this government is being so irresponsible and not listening to Albertans. That's something that I think we're hearing over and over again.

I will say that if anybody in this House is hearing these same things, then they should stop and they should really consider whether they are interested in supporting a government who is going to continue to have these risky bets and not have the best interests of Albertans in mind or whether they want to look at the legislation and say: we do need to have accountability measures; we do need to have transparency measures; we do need to have real systems in place that protect Albertans and their money.

I think that it's interesting. We see in this legislation, like I've said already, a codification of current practices into legislation, right? We're seeing the capital planning process, which largely works as is described in this legislation. So it appears that the minister requires to introduce a job description bill to the House. That's interesting, but what's more interesting is perhaps the criteria that have been decided on.

It looks like the government again and again has missed the mark and didn't listen to Albertans. The minister has explained that this legislation is similar to or based on the one that's in Ontario, and the government claims they consulted. In fact, they claimed they did a large consultation throughout the summer of 2020. Mr. Speaker, there's a huge omission when they say that.

For one thing, I've spoken with many of the large stakeholders in this field, the municipalities and the municipality groups, and indeed the minister actually didn't even reach out to them to ask for their feedback. They found the submission form on the government of Alberta website, so they submitted their feedback because they were concerned that there would be impacts in their capital planning, but the ministry didn't even call them to say: what do you think of the bill we're going to be bringing forward? I think that's something that's pretty alarming. It's something that we've seen time and time again from this government, that they're not listening, they're not doing the legwork, they're not going out there and hearing from Albertans. Of course, we know that actually those stakeholders submitted their submissions anyways.

But then the government produces a what-we-heard document, right? The government produced a document that describes: what did they hear in consultation? I'm going to quote from the government's what-we-heard document. "The criteria used to evaluate capital projects should be . . . defined, consistent, and in alignment with regional and municipal planning." Now, Mr. Speaker, that's not a surprise. Municipalities obviously have an interest in capital planning. It's one of the largest investments government makes in our communities. We also know that in Ontario, the legislation the minister claims this was based on, they also have municipal capital plan alignment as one of the criteria that is so important for the legislation.

Now we look at this bill. The government not only rejected the advice of Albertans; they rejected the advice of the bill that they based theirs on. There is no co-operation with municipalities at all in this legislation. That's kind of interesting, right? It's kind of interesting. For a government that says they're grassroots, for a government that says they're about supporting community, we see, instead, policies that time and time again say that it's this government's way or the highway. It's the Premier's way or the highway. They don't listen to anybody. It's no wonder, Mr. Speaker, that this government is so untrusted. This is one of the least trusted governments – it's the least trusted government – in the entire country. It's no wonder that the feedback that this government heard from Albertans just isn't reflected in this legislation. [interjection] I think my colleague has a comment here.

8:00

**Mr. Nielsen:** Yeah. Thank you. I appreciate that chance just to jump in there. I know that when we're looking at co-operating around infrastructure between the province and municipalities, we've already seen some damage that's been done between the government of Alberta and its municipalities, you know: coming right out and throwing out the big-city charters, significantly cutting funding to municipalities. I mean, it's gotten down to the point where they're making decisions about cutting bus routes within municipalities; specifically, as I've mentioned before, in Edmonton-Decore, right up the middle of one of the main streets, 82nd Street. I'm wondering if he's had a chance to connect with some of the new city councillors that we have here in Edmonton. What's their feedback, and what are they hoping the government is going to take a look at in terms of trying to work with them and their infrastructure projects?

**Mr. Dang:** Thank you to my colleague. Absolutely. The stakeholders I've talked to, the city councillors I've talked to, which includes representatives from all over the province, have told me that they don't trust this government, that they don't trust this legislation. They're very alarmed that this legislation doesn't include co-ordination with municipalities. That's really important because when we look at this government's attack on municipalities – right? – repeatedly downloading significant costs to these municipalities, repeatedly making attacks on these municipalities, we see that time and time again they aren't actually looking to work collaboratively with the other levels of government. They're not actually looking to work in a co-ordinated manner with the other levels of government.

That's really concerning, because it doesn't even just have to be city councillors, right? It's really concerning because we're even looking at things like school boards, who have huge stakes in capital planning as well, another municipal stakeholder who has to have huge input into the government capital planning process because we know, especially in the big cities but certainly in the rural areas as well, we need to build more and more schools. In the rural areas

we have to repair many schools, we have to build new ones, and we have to build high schools. In Edmonton and Calgary we know high school space is dire, in some cases, in the public and separate school boards.

Mr. Speaker, when we look at this situation and say, “What is going on in the province, and what is going on in terms of making decisions on how this is going to work?” well, the government comes up and says that out of the six things that are important in the capital planning process, co-ordinating with these key stakeholders, who are responsible for administering some of the largest projects in the entire province, isn’t important for them. That’s what I see in this bill, right? That’s what I see. It’s completely omitted these stakeholders from the legislation, from the prioritization process.

Mr. Speaker, the minister may say that, well, that’s something that he’ll certainly take into consideration, but that’s the problem with this type of legislation. The problem here is that he’s codified, that he’s legislated the six criteria, and by omitting municipalities and municipal stakeholders from those criteria, now he’s not even allowed to consider them, right? That’s how legislation works. It tells Albertans: these are the requirements. That’s something I’m quite concerned about. I’m concerned that it’s an example time and time again of this government not wanting to listen to Albertans, of this government not wanting to do the work.

We know, Mr. Speaker, that this is going to be about a 20-year capital plan, right? One of the other big pieces of this legislation is the 20-year strategic capital plan. Of course, the 20-year strategic capital plan isn’t going to include specific projects, but to have this 20-year plan and not even think about talking to the municipal stakeholders about it, to have this 20-year plan and not require co-ordination with municipal stakeholders on it, is going to be quite shocking, I think, for Albertans.

Again, these are the people who touch Albertans the most day to day, right? We’re talking about municipalities that need funding for rec centres, we’re talking about municipalities that need funding for roads, bridges, and we’re talking about municipalities that need funding for interchanges. All of these things are, in many cases, administered by municipalities and submitted by municipalities to the capital planning process, but the minister will not have to consider what municipalities think their own needs are.

For a government that says that they’re all about the grassroots, for a government that says that they’re all about local engagement, that says that they’re about representing Albertans, it’s a glaring omission, I think, and I suggest and I hope that the government will consider amending that. I hope the government will consider making a change here, a substantive change here, because it is important that we have that type of criteria.

That’s what’s really problematic with this legislation, that we’ve laid out these criteria, that we’ve put them into legislation, and now they’re unchangeable, right? If we pass this, we’re talking about making 20-year capital plans. We’re talking about making plans that are going to last four or five Legislatures into the future. What we’re looking at here is talking about how we want to strategize around that, about what type of direction we want to go, and to not have communities engaged in that process, to not have it legally required of us that we engage communities in that process, is going to create problems. It’s going to create real problems that the minister won’t have the ability to correct, that the minister won’t have the ability to correct because it won’t be in the legislation, and that’s one of the most concerning things with this.

We look at this bill over and over again, and I just don’t understand why, despite knowing other jurisdictions that have implemented the same legislation, like Ontario, we have not

included this co-ordination and co-operation. In seeing it in the what-we-heard document – right? – and seeing it in the consultations the government did and not including it, I have to wonder what the minister was thinking, why the minister decided that it wasn’t important to hear from those stakeholders. Well, he heard from them; he just didn’t listen to them. I think that’s something that is quite concerning to me.

Now, Mr. Speaker, again, I have some substantial concerns with this, right? I have some substantial concerns with this legislation. I think that in principle I completely agree with the legislation. In principle I completely agree that we need to have transparency, that we need to have accountability, that we need to have long-term strategic planning in the province, that we need to work and have these measures in place that allow us to understand what’s going to happen in our province and where our province is going. [interjection] Just one second. I think that the problem is going to be in the details. The devil is going to be in the details, and it turns out that this bill is lacking in details and lacking in the interests that Albertans actually care about.

**Mr. Nielsen:** Well, thank you. You know, one thing I wanted to come back to and that you’d mentioned again is around the transparency. I have some serious concerns around this government’s ability to be transparent. I mean, let’s just go right back to even before the election. We have a Premier that committed to disclosing a donor list and hasn’t even managed to accomplish that. When I hear this word “transparency” thrown around all the time, let’s just say that my faith in that is shaken, to say the least. We have seen multiple examples over the course of this government’s term where they’ve been, shall we say, less than forthcoming with regard to information.

**Mr. McIver:** Point of order.

**The Speaker:** A point of order is noted. The hon. Member for Calgary-Hays.

#### **Point of Order Relevance**

**Mr. McIver:** Under 23(b), “speaks to matters other than the question under discussion.” I don’t think you had to listen to too much of what we just heard over the last few minutes to understand that the folks across – while they’re welcome and even invited to say bad things about the government, let’s try to stay on topic while they’re doing that.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Edmonton-South on the point of order.

**Mr. Dang:** Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On the point of order I think this is clearly a matter of debate. The member is clearly commenting on matters related to the speech I was just giving. I think that there are only a few seconds left here, and I’m happy to continue my debate if you’ll rule in that way.

Thank you.

**The Speaker:** I am prepared to rule, and I must admit I was listening very intently to the hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore’s remarks to try and get the tie-in as I know that I have provided very clear direction about relevance with respect to interjections. While I would submit there’s a wide swath at this stage of debate with respect to the actual debate before the Chamber – and perhaps I have no concerns with that particular point – but on the intervention I would suggest that it certainly was challenging to find the

connection. He has approximately five seconds left if he wants to try to tie it all together, or we can proceed back to the Member for Edmonton-South.

**Mr. Nielsen:** I don't think I can do it in five.

**Mr. Dang:** If I may, Mr. Speaker.

**The Speaker:** Go ahead.

**Mr. Dang:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I think that I'm happy to take all comments under advisement tonight.

#### 8:10 Debate Continued

**Mr. Dang:** Certainly, when we look at the Infrastructure Accountability Act, when we look at this legislation, when we look at how this government has decided to move forward in this legislation, it becomes abundantly clear that this government is trying to codify and trying to create a system where they don't have to do anything they aren't already doing, right? That includes consultation. That includes engaging with stakeholders. That includes creating an actual accountable act, an act that encourages accountability.

It becomes very clear to me, Mr. Speaker, that when we're looking at this piece of legislation, it's a job description. It describes and codifies systems that are already in place. A deputy minister's council that will suggest capital projects: of course, that already exists. Those are things that governments should be doing and are doing every single day. Every government, for as long as modern memory, has had these systems in place. The capital planning process has had these criteria in place for a very long time.

The problem here, of course, Mr. Speaker, is that by writing this down, by putting it into the bill, by making it legislation, we're in this situation now where it becomes clear that significant omissions and oversights were made in the drafting. It becomes clear that the government did not sufficiently engage with the stakeholders. It becomes clear that the government did not sufficiently listen to the stakeholders. It becomes clear that this legislation was not complete when they presented it to this place, right? It was not sufficient when they presented it to the House. It becomes clear that there are critical projects that will not even be included in this legislation.

Albertans were looking for transparency. Albertans were looking for accountability. Albertans were looking for answers to why this government gambled \$1.3 billion away. They won't get any of that. They won't have any of those answers. They won't have any of the solutions. It becomes clear to me, Mr. Speaker, that this bill is nothing but a job description. Instead of actually having brought forward something that would have worked to create a system that could have a strong 20-year capital plan, a strong 20-year strategic plan, we're left with a bare-bones bill that basically does nothing except exclude key criteria from the capital planning process, except exclude key issues from the capital planning process. I'm very concerned about what that means for Albertans. I'm very concerned about what that means for municipalities.

Thank you.

**The Speaker:** Are there others? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Whitemud.

**Ms Pancholi:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise today and speak to Bill 73, the Infrastructure Accountability Act. I have not yet had a chance to speak to this bill, and I'm pleased to do so. I want to begin by, you know, echoing a lot of comments that my colleague the Member for Edmonton-South has raised. If there is

an opportunity, I will come back to some of the points he made around, for example, this government's decision to invest, incredibly unwisely, in Keystone XL as a huge infrastructure project that has borne nothing, no results for Albertans, as well as the comments that he has made and that I know a number of my colleagues will make around the lack of consideration for municipal planning and even school board planning with respect to the development of capital plans.

But, if I may, I am struck by a comment from my colleague the Member for Edmonton-South, who began by actually congratulating the Minister of Infrastructure on the opportunity to bring forward legislation on infrastructure. It's true that it had not really dawned on me until that moment that it is very uncommon to see many pieces of legislation brought forward around infrastructure. Mostly, infrastructure is done by capital planning projects that are approved, and that's primarily where the work of the Ministry of Infrastructure is handled, through policies and approving projects and spending but not generally through legislation. With that in mind, it lends itself to think that this is actually a remarkable opportunity – right? – where we're talking about, you know, a pretty broad, objective-driven piece of legislation that is more of a guiding framework around infrastructure planning in Alberta.

If I may, Mr. Speaker, I'd like to take this opportunity, given that it is a bit rare to be talking about infrastructure legislation, to think outside the box and to kind of talk about an issue around infrastructure that I think is deeply important and something that's certainly been on my mind quite a bit in the last two years and probably on the minds of a lot of people. You know, generally – and I think this bill reflects this – when we talk about infrastructure, we're generally thinking about capital projects. We're talking about physical assets, the construction of things we can see and feel. We talk about roads and buildings, highways. Those kinds of things are what we typically think about as infrastructure.

But I think what we have seen over the past two years with respect to the pandemic and how we've responded to that is that we've realized that there are a number of other important things that are critical infrastructure for our economy, for families, for Albertans, that need to be in place in order for us to function as an economy. We've talked a lot about how important – we know that we need to build big projects to put Albertans to work, actually doing the work of building those projects but also because within those capital assets we see the delivery of goods and services that are critical to creating jobs, employing people, generating economic activity. We talk about those types of infrastructure as critical to our economy, but there are other types of infrastructure which are sometimes also capital assets that we don't generally think about as necessary for our economy.

But I think we've seen – and, yes, I'm going to talk about this – that child care itself might be a critical piece of infrastructure. [interjection] I'm just going to give way to my colleague for a moment.

**Ms Sigurdson:** Yeah. Thank you so much. I really appreciate sort of looking at what, you know, is actually the definition of the types of projects that this bill will cover. I believe the member was just going to talk about other sort of value-added programs. I'm wondering if they would fit in this category. Certainly, from my critic areas I know that the investment in affordable housing is key to the well-being of many people in our province, and indeed I would venture to say that it's to do with the well-being of all of us. We know that if our neighbours are cared for, if we're cared for, if our families are cared for, then always our well-being is improved. We're more productive, we make better neighbours, and we contribute more to our communities, so if people have those kinds

of supports in place, it makes a huge difference for society in general. I believe the Member for Edmonton-Whitemud was just going to describe that.

**Ms Pancholi:** Thank you to my colleague the Member for Edmonton-Riverview. Yes. I think what I'd like to talk about is that there are other types of critical infrastructure. Now, infrastructure is not actually defined in this bill, which I think presents an opportunity to discuss that other infrastructure. Capital assets are certainly described and defined but not infrastructure.

I'm struck by a quote that I actually keep referring back to in my work as the critic for Children's Services quite often. It's actually a quote by Senator Elizabeth Warren from the United States. Her quote was from August 19, 2020, which, by the way, is my birthday as well, so I thought that that was kind of cool. The quote is this:

We build infrastructure like roads and bridges and communications systems so that people can work. That infrastructure helps us all because it keeps our economy going. It's time to recognize that childcare is part of the basic infrastructure of this nation. It's infrastructure for families.

I think about that all the time. We saw what happened when that critical infrastructure, child care, was not available for families. We saw that right in Alberta. We saw the implications of that, of parents not being able to go to work, of children not being able to access early learning developmental opportunities, socializing. We saw many Albertans lose their jobs. We lost 20 per cent of the early childhood education workforce in this province over the past year. It is critical infrastructure.

Any parent of a young child will know that it is near impossible to go to work, to keep our economy moving without having access to affordable, quality early learning and child care. Particularly for those families where they either don't have the option of one parent staying home or, frankly, both parents would like to work, as is all individuals' right to do – I know for myself that I certainly was very proud of the work I'd done in my profession and education and wanted to get back to work. We all benefit when as many Albertans as possible are participating in the workforce.

So when we talk about important infrastructure, I'd like to see some recognition of sort of thinking outside of the box a little bit. Let's talk about a plan, a 20-year strategic plan for all kinds of infrastructure. Now, that means investing and making sure that we are thinking of things like child care as infrastructure, as critical to get people to work.

8:20

I would add on to that that there is also opportunity, of course, within this bill itself to actually think of the actual capital assets of child care. Child care is more than a physical structure. For many people it is operated out of their own home, but of course we do have child care centres, so certainly there is an opportunity – we have not yet seen this provincial government or a provincial government in Alberta really invest in the capital assets around child care. I would like to see more of that because, as we know, in this province we have a significant shortage of child care spaces available. We only have enough licensed spaces in this province for 1 in 7 Alberta children. So spaces, actual concrete spaces, are part of the need that we need to fulfill, that should actually be part of – I believe it's a public good. It should be delivered publicly through public funding, actually supporting the development and creation of more child care spaces. I'd certainly like to think about that.

I know that has not typically been part of a capital planning process for a government, but again I'm inviting all members of this House to think a little bit outside the box and to think about actually investing in the creation of child care spaces and the building of

child care spaces. One obvious way to do that, of course, Mr. Speaker, when we're talking about school building projects, is to actually create child care spaces right in those schools.

I had the honour of working within Alberta Education many years ago, and this was a conversation that was happening. This was under a former PC government. It would have been back in 2008, probably, so 13 years ago. I'm sure that conversation is still going today. But back then . . .

**Ms Sigurdson:** Hon. member, will you give way?

**Ms Pancholi:** Yeah. Certainly, I'll give way.

**Ms Sigurdson:** Yeah. Thank you very much. I'm looking here at the six criteria that the act does identify for prioritization of infrastructure projects. It talks about improved delivery of programs, return on investment, creates positive economic impacts, enhances resiliency of community. I would say that what the hon. member is sharing is sort of covered in all of those categories. Certainly, you know, I think we can put some dollar value on a return on investment on what she's indeed explaining to us right now about, for example, having child care centres right in schools and what kind of improvement that creates for families, for society in general. I'd just like the hon. member to go ahead and continue and tell us more about that.

**Ms Pancholi:** Thank you to the member. Yes. That's precisely right. I think Bill 73 does talk about capital projects having, you know – one of the considerations or criteria would be whether or not “the project or program is expected to result in positive economic impacts.” I know one of my colleagues, earlier on in debate on another day, the Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview, raised this question about: well, how are we actually measuring economic activity and economic impacts? I actually note that in the minister's comments, when he was bringing forward this bill for second reading, he mentioned: how does this legislation create jobs? He actually said that he didn't think that most people would consider that economic activity to be an important criterion for building school projects or school buildings, saying that most people don't associate school buildings with economic activity.

I'd like to challenge that a little bit by saying again: what are we talking about when we say “economic activity”? There's certainly, of course, the people who work in school buildings. We certainly know, if we're talking about the investment in child care spaces, that having those child care spaces, not just early learning but also out of school care, is a huge challenge when a number of children who are in school don't then easily have access to out of school care, which means a number of parents often cut their workday short, most often moms – it happens to me often where I have to be there for school pickup – and it limits economic activity that way.

We also know first-hand that when parents have safe schools and child care for their kids to go to, they can participate more fully in the workforce. The pandemic has shown us that absolutely clearly. How many parents were really struggling, those who didn't have an option for working from home, who had to go to work and were trying to manage without child care? We know that a lot of women, for example, left the workforce because they couldn't manage both, especially if they were managing at-home learning for their child. But even parents who were working from home: I know, I think many of us know first-hand how challenging that experience was.

I'm just again using this somewhat of a unique opportunity of having an infrastructure-related bill before this Assembly to really challenge our notions of what we think about as infrastructure and

what we think about as economic activity. I would like to see government taking more active measures to think about things like schools and child care and out of school care as actually contributing to economic activity.

One of the reasons why, when we were in government, we brought forward a pilot project for \$25-per-day child care, which, if we had remained government, at this point in time would've been implemented province-wide, available to all families and all kinds of licensed child care, including for-profit, not-for-profit, and day homes – that would've been available across the province. That was our goal. That was our objective and our intent. There are many good reasons for doing that, Mr. Speaker. Of course, it was about making sure that all children had access to early learning opportunities, but it was also because we know of the economic benefits of investing in child care, and, yes, it included the creation of child care spaces. We knew the potential for \$6 billion in GDP growth in our province. We've seen, by other provinces' examples, that the workforce participation rate of women goes up significantly when they have access to universal, affordable, licensed child care, which is precisely what happened in Quebec.

The economic activity, the economic benefits of child care were recognized by our government. It has not been recognized by this government. In fact, we've seen a significant undercutting and undermining of our child care sector, and it continues to be in an incredibly precarious state. I will continue to be in this House and talk about how child care is critical infrastructure for families. It's critical infrastructure for Albertans to go to work, and when we are not investing in it, we are cutting down our economic activity. [interjection] Yes. Go ahead.

**Ms Sigurdson:** Yes. Thank you so much for your comments, Member for Edmonton-Whitemud. I know that you are a lawyer, and I am not, so sometimes reading legislation is quite confusing for me. I think that we have established that certainly the six criteria that are outlined in this bill really, to my assessment, should be inclusive of child care. Of course, you are speaking about that and, you know, the resiliency within the community. Obviously, this is a program that would make a big difference.

I noticed that, you know, sort of, the seventh criteria that's not really talked about in it is (g) here on page 5. It says, "other criteria as determined by the Responsible Minister from time to time." That seems to be a catch-all. A minister could allot or specifically decide on something. I don't know if she could explain that at all or what exactly that means and what's the breadth of power.

**Ms Pancholi:** Thank you to the member, who is certainly putting me on the spot a little bit. Certainly, yes, I think the member is right. I mean, criterion (g) – well, it would be section 4(g) of the proposed bill – does say that the responsible minister basically could determine other criteria by which to judge a capital project. That could be anything, and I think that's the point. It's not set out in this bill. I don't necessarily see that as a problem if it is clarified by the minister as to what those criteria will be although, I will say that if the goal of this piece of legislation is to provide that transparency and accountability, having a catch-all phrase like that certainly leaves it open to anything and may not provide the accountability that was the objective or the stated objective by the minister.

You know, as I mentioned, I think certainly within what's in the bill there are bases upon which a government could, say, justify investment in child care under several of these criteria, but I think what I'm inviting this government to do is to actually think about child care in those terms and not just – you know, right now it's limited in this bill to the physical asset, the capital asset, right? I understand that. That is what the traditional way of thinking about

infrastructure is, but there's actually no definition of infrastructure in here.

I'd like to challenge this government to take this opportunity to think about infrastructure in a more broad perspective and to think about not just the investment in creating physical child care spaces, as I mentioned, not just within schools but even stand-alone child care spaces – that's critical for sure. If we think about the investment generally in the programming and the delivery of child care as critical infrastructure and critical infrastructure for economic activity, I think that that would be a remarkable opportunity to rethink some of the ways that child care is framed in this province.

8:30

I'd just invite the minister to consider that perhaps when we have some opportunity in Committee of the Whole, we can have a bit of a back and forth on these discussions and see if there is some room for that. It just really strikes me as a very traditional approach to what infrastructure is, and I think we've learned a lot in the last little while about that. [interjection] You know what? I will give way to the minister.

**The Speaker:** My apologies to the hon. minister. The Member for Edmonton-Whitemud has already taken three interventions.

**Mr. Panda:** Yeah, but I thought it's up to the member if she wants to allow . . .

**The Speaker:** It is up to the member to the maximum of three interventions because that's what the standing order says. The hon. member can't just provide additional interventions.

**Ms Pancholi:** Apologies to the minister. Perhaps he'd like to make his comments when I've done mine.

Again, this is meant to be an open invitation for a constructive conversation around how we think about infrastructure. I welcome that discussion. Seeing this as an opportunity, I could not let it pass, Mr. Speaker. The concept of infrastructure has been on my mind quite a bit over the last couple of years, so when this opportunity presented itself, I had to take it. I appreciate that there is some consideration within this bill of, you know, measures which, we understand, this government and our government before have already assessed and evaluated: capital projects and thinking about social and environmental circumstances in the community and local conditions generally. I see there are those provisions.

But to date that has not been used as a way to justify an investment in capital assets for child care. Again, a broader discussion about what critical infrastructure is would be valuable, I believe. I thank the House for indulging me in a bit of an open box thinking exercise. I think there are some questions that the minister raised himself, even when he introduced the bill, about what the purpose is behind this bill when it sort of codifies what has already been the practice for some time.

I do note that the minister also commented that it didn't fulfill one of their campaign promises around sustainable funding. Although the minister, in his comments when introducing this bill, said, you know, that the pandemic taught us that we need to be flexible and that that's why there's no commitment to sustainable funding, I do know that that sustainable funding piece was pretty key for a lot of stakeholders in Alberta. It was pretty key for municipalities wanting to have that stability and a long-term vision but knowing that that funding is going to be sustainable.

I would question whether it's just the pandemic which taught this government that they needed to be flexible, because we haven't

seen a whole lot of evidence of flexibility when it has come to the pandemic but more so when it comes to infrastructure planning. The fact that \$1.3 billion was blown on an infrastructure project that is not subject to this legislation: certainly, that probably hindered the government's ability to actually commit to sustainable funding, and really that may be the real reason we're not seeing this in this legislation. I do, you know, think that this is a bill that we will probably have some more discussions about.

I thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**The Speaker:** Are there others? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

**Mr. Schmidt:** Mr. Speaker, I'm hurt that you desperately searched the room for any possible member other than me to call upon before calling on me.

**The Speaker:** I'm an equal opportunity Speaker.

**Mr. Schmidt:** But I'm pleased to rise and offer some comments on the bill that's before us this evening. I find it interesting, Mr. Speaker – well, a couple of things I want to say at the start. First of all, I want to thank my friend from Edmonton-Whitemud for shoehorning child care into discussion around infrastructure. The passion with which my friend from Edmonton-Whitemud discusses child care in this province is unmatched, and I'm sure that if the House were considering sorghum tariffs or amendments to the Line Fence Act here in Alberta, my friend from Edmonton-Whitemud would find a way to talk about child care during debate on those issues.

The second thing I want to say, Mr. Speaker, is that I find it incredibly ironic that I just witnessed the Minister of Infrastructure tell you how to do your job while we're here discussing a bill that tells him how to do his job. I would suggest, perhaps, that the Minister of Infrastructure should display some humility when it's quite clear that the Premier feels he needs this kind of legislative direction on how to do his own job, and perhaps he should stick to his lane before he starts trying to do the Speaker's job. Those are just a few of the comments that I have off the top.

But on the job of the Minister of Infrastructure, Mr. Speaker, I will say that it was interesting that we had to get to this point where Executive Council had to lay out in legislation what the Minister of Infrastructure's job actually is. You know, I had the privilege of sitting in cabinet for a few years myself, and while none of the jobs in cabinet are easy, I will say that being the Minister of Infrastructure is probably one of the most pleasant jobs that any cabinet minister can do.

You know, you don't have to make any controversial decisions other than telling people that their projects aren't being funded, but of course that's part of it. The upside is that you do get to tell a lot of people that their projects have been funded. You get to go around the province digging into the ground with silver and golden shovels at the beginning of a project, and at the end of the project you get the nice novelty-sized scissors when you cut the ribbon. It is definitely one of the most attractive jobs in government, Mr. Speaker, and that's why it's incredibly concerning to me that apparently the minister needs a little bit of guidance in the form of legislation on how to do this job, and that's why we are discussing this bill today.

It's interesting to me, Mr. Speaker, that in discussions around why we need this piece of legislation, the government has talked about how this will promote jobs and economic activity in Alberta. This repeats a pattern that we've seen from this government over the last two years of telling people that they're doing the things that they aren't actually doing, and that's the case with this bill. There's

nothing actually in the bill that promotes jobs and economic activity. It just lays out in legislative form the job the government does when it undertakes a capital planning process.

Where the jobs actually come from is in how much money the government decides to spend on capital projects. It's incredibly concerning to me, Mr. Speaker, and to many of the constituents that I represent in Edmonton-Gold Bar that this government is not spending enough on capital projects. You know, this government was elected on a platform of jobs and the economy and pipelines, and they fulfilled all of those promises except the jobs and the economy and the pipelines. One of the reasons that they failed to create jobs is that they've significantly cut capital spending compared to the spending that we undertook when we were in government. [interjection] I see my friend from Edmonton-Whitemud would like to interject.

**Ms Pancholi:** Thank you to the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar. You mentioned a few things, I think, one that hearkens back to your time sitting as a minister around the cabinet table and getting an insight into what the role of the Minister of Infrastructure was. You also mentioned, of course, a number of times about – well, you were just, I think, getting there, about to talk about the capital projects that the NDP invested in when we were in government. Myself, I know that watching not as part of the party and not part of government or an MLA during that time but as a young parent, I was pretty excited to see the number of school projects. I'm very proud that even within the riding I now represent there was an investment by the NDP in a school building, the development of the auditorium at Lillian Osborne high school right in my riding. Nellie Carlson school, which is now a little bit outside of my riding and falls within the riding of the Member for Edmonton-South, was also a school that was built when we were in government. If you could talk more about that.

**Mr. Schmidt:** Well, I appreciate the Member for Edmonton-Whitemud's intervention because she knew exactly where I was going with my comments. As I was saying, this government has significantly underspent compared to our capital planning when we were in government. In 2017-2018 we spent over \$9 billion in capital planning. Over the course of our four-year term in government we committed to building or modernizing almost 250 schools across the province. I'm very pleased that the constituents of Edmonton-Whitemud are still benefiting from the decision that we made.

8:40

In fact, our capital plan when it came to education was so extensive that the current Minister of Infrastructure is taking credit for the projects that we decided to fund when we were in government. It's interesting that he tries to spin that as capital spending that has been made by his government, but I just want to remind folks that it was actually our government that funded all of those education projects that this minister likes to take credit for.

More importantly, it wasn't just schools, Mr. Speaker, that we funded. We funded all kinds of capital projects. I just want to refresh the House's memory, if I may, on some of the Advanced Education capital projects that we funded while I was Minister of Advanced Education, because we funded a number of projects. In my three years in that office we committed to the new science building at the University of Lethbridge. My friend from Lethbridge-West can tell the House a great deal about how that project has benefited her community and the province as a whole.

We funded the renovation of the MacKimmie complex at the University of Calgary, one of the largest infrastructure projects in

the history of that university, creating much-needed spaces in the city of Calgary, where physical learning spaces for university students are at a premium. We funded the renovation of the Dentistry/Pharmacy Centre on the campus of the University of Alberta. We also invested in the district energy complex renovations, which will significantly improve the environmental sustainability of the University of Alberta campus. We funded a new campus of Northern Lakes College in High Prairie.

Now, Mr. Speaker, I can't tell you how badly needed that particular project was. I was happy to go and participate in the groundbreaking ceremony when that project kicked off. It took place on the site of the old building. It was an old forestry building that was actually on platforms. It was a temporary building that unintentionally became permanent because nobody decided to invest the necessary money to make this building permanent. So underneath the skirting of the building all kinds of animals would go in, and sometimes they wouldn't come out. The poor students who attended classes in Northern Lakes College had to deal with the smell of the rotting raccoon and skunk carcasses that made their way underneath this old building. I was quite pleased that our government actually invested in modern facilities that, I hope, do not stink of dead skunks anymore. [interjection] I see my friend from Edmonton-Whitemud would like to intervene.

**Ms Pancholi:** It's just really hard to resist the opportunity, when the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar is talking about stinking animal carcasses, to not step in for the sake of decency, perhaps, and try to steer the conversation in a different direction for fear that he leads us astray, as he sometimes does.

On that note, the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar was commenting on a number of infrastructure projects while he was Minister of Advanced Education that were clearly brought forward and approved, and we hear about some of the criteria that are contained in this bill. As the Minister of Advanced Education what were the criteria, what were the bases upon which you were bringing forward those projects for approval? I mean, you must have understood the value that all of those projects brought, both economic activity and generating jobs, and the need for them, as you mentioned with the Northern Lakes College example. If you could talk a little bit about that. As Minister of Advanced Education how did you put forward those projects?

**Mr. Schmidt:** Thank you to my friend from Edmonton-Whitemud for that question. The criteria that we used for selecting these kinds of projects are actually quite similar to the criteria that we find in the legislation. You know, as my friend from Edmonton-Whitemud suggested, considerations of the economic impact that it would have in the community were one criteria, the need that was met in terms of creation of new spaces. Certainly, safety or improvement of the student experience was a big one. In the case of the new campus at Northern Lakes I've already gone into gory detail about the way the new building would protect students and make their student experience much better. Another similar example was at Campus Saint-Jean, which is in my riding. Now, we funded the upgrading of the science labs at that campus. Now, those science labs predated the discovery of DNA, Mr. Speaker, and I think it was more than high time that the equipment and rooms were updated to handle modern scientific experiments.

Those were certainly some of the criteria by which we selected these projects. Now, there was no shortage of projects to select from, Mr. Speaker. The problem isn't criteria. The problem is that the government needs to have the will to spend the money on capital projects, and this is what this government has not had, right? We've had the worst economic recession in the entire history of our

province with the possible exception of the Great Depression, and this government continues to spend less than we did when we were in government and setting out our capital plans. I can't help but wonder how many people would be employed if the government would have actually spent the \$9 billion a year that we put towards a capital plan in 2017-2018.

Certainly, the Advanced Education capital plan is pretty meagre by comparison to when I was minister, Mr. Speaker. You can look there. Most of the projects were the continuation of ones that I had the pleasure of announcing when I was the minister. The current Minister of Advanced Education has done next to nothing when it comes to investing in infrastructure projects in the advanced education system, and I think our university and college students will be paying the price for that for many years to come.

Now, the third thing that the government likes to talk about when it's discussing this legislation is accountability. I want to just share a little bit of a story about the lesson in accountability that I got yesterday when I had the opportunity to question Education officials about their capital spending, Mr. Speaker. The first pages of the report, you know, those are the good pages, where the government likes to talk about the good things that it's done. It talked about \$244 million that it spent on capital maintenance and renewal in the education system. It said that this money was dedicated to supporting safe learning spaces for students who were going to school during COVID.

Well, Mr. Speaker, it was just natural. You know, as a curious member of the Public Accounts Committee I just wondered what kind of capital projects were they that they were funding with this \$244 million that was allegedly designed to keep students safe from COVID. Well, they were forthright about \$44 million that they spent on HVAC upgrades. Now, they didn't actually admit to us whether or not they consulted with the chief medical officer of health or any other public health officials to determine whether or not it was fact that COVID is airborne and that upgrading HVACs should be a top priority when it comes to capital spending in schools, but they did fund \$44 million. [interjection] I will take this question or comment now from my friend from Edmonton-Whitemud.

**Ms Pancholi:** Thank you to the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar. I didn't want to cut you off mid-story, but it felt like a bit of a cliffhanger was coming there in terms of what was going to happen next. I mean, I had the opportunity as well to sit as a member of the Public Accounts Committee and to hear. I recall also poring over that annual report from Alberta Education, and the capital investment of that \$244 million, as the member noted, was supposed to be for keeping kids safe. It was touted as part of their COVID safety dollars, that \$244 million. I know you engaged in some thoughtful questioning of the department officials during that Public Accounts Committee. If you could, you know, I'm sure there are some takeaways that you had, much probably the same that I had. When you questioned them as to how those capital dollars were being spent and how they were contributing to COVID safety, because, of course, that was how they were being glorified, I guess, in the annual report, what was the outcome of that discussion?

8:50

**Mr. Schmidt:** Well, I appreciate my friend from Edmonton-Whitemud asking me to cut to the chase, Mr. Speaker. Now, I will, first, say that it was difficult to get a straight answer from department officials, you know. They were quite adept at filling the air with bureaucratic fog and doing everything they could in their power not to actually give us a straight answer. But one of the things that changed in the nine minutes that I had to ask them about this –

at the beginning of the nine minutes this \$244 million on capital maintenance and renewal was to keep our kids safe from COVID, but after I continued to ask them what exactly the projects were that they invested in that kept kids safe from COVID, after they finally gave up their song and dance, they then tried to change their tune and say: no, no, no; this \$244 million was actually intended to increase the number of jobs in the province. Well, which is it? Was that money supposed to go towards keeping our kids safe in schools, or was it supposed to create jobs? Maybe it was meant to do both?

Part of the problem, Mr. Speaker, is that there were no clear criteria set out at the outset for that \$244 million in spending, and my concern is that there's nothing in this legislation that would actually prevent a repeat of what we saw at Public Accounts yesterday morning. Under the criteria that are set, they are vague and open enough to interpretation, as my friends from Edmonton-Riverview and Edmonton-Whitemud have pointed out in their comments on this bill. There's sufficient leeway in the language that any clever deputy minister and assistant deputy minister, when discussing the results of their capital plan at a future Public Accounts Committee meeting, could make that same claim, that the money that was invested to apparently enhance public safety was actually invested to create jobs or generate economic activity, and they can go back and forth in those claims in the nine minutes that they have under questioning from plucky opposition members such as myself and my friends from Edmonton-Whitemud and St. Albert.

Mr. Speaker, it's incredibly frustrating to me that the government is talking about accountability when the legislation itself does nothing to actually guarantee that the people of Alberta will get the accountability that they say that they are providing through this legislation.

I just want to close. In the minute that I have left, to recap: this is a bill that does nothing to actually create jobs or put Alberta's economy back on track. It's simply a job description for the Minister of Infrastructure. It also does nothing to enhance accountability, as the government says they do. So it's incredibly disappointing. The people of Edmonton-Gold Bar have been failed yet again by this government, so I cannot support this legislation as it is written.

Thank you.

**The Speaker:** Are there others that wish to join in the debate? I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

**Ms Sigurdson:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm happy to join the debate on Bill 73, Infrastructure Accountability Act. Of course, as my colleagues have discussed already, this bill actually identifies six criteria to assist in deciding which capital projects go ahead and are prioritized. The minister said that the bill would remove political bias from the decision-making process. Of course, that is laudable. Certainly, we know that since the UCP government has the least trustworthy Premier according to polling in provinces across Canada, I mean, I think that's probably a very important thing if indeed this legislation will fulfill on that. Certainly, sadly, this government hasn't shown very much accountability or transparency in many areas, not just this one.

However, as was already discussed, these six criteria also have a seventh criteria that is quite discretionary. It's up to the minister to decide at times – I guess when they feel it's in I don't know whose best interests; hopefully, the best interests of Albertans – that perhaps none of these criteria apply and that a project needs to be prioritized or go ahead because of the discretion of that particular minister. You know, that doesn't create a lot of faith that this indeed will create accountability and transparency and that we can indeed have more trust in this UCP government.

The six criteria that are described, I'll just briefly identify them: decreases the risks to health, safety, or security of Albertans; aligns with the strategic objectives of the government; creates positive economic impacts, job creation, and economic development; improves the delivery of the programs; return on investment is available; enhances the resiliency of the community; and other criteria determined by the minister, which, of course, is that seventh criteria. Of course, you know, these all sound quite – I don't know. Who could question any of this, right? It sounds fairly positive, but, I suppose, if we dig in a bit, we can see how this isn't maybe something that can be measured or something that has a lot of discretionary powers, so decisions can still be open to political bias, unfortunately, despite the minister's words of assurance.

Another thing I noticed is on page 4, section 3 of the bill. This is the role of the responsible minister, and it goes, "the Responsible Minister shall," and in subsection (c) it says, "analyze and evaluate capital planning submissions, other than capital maintenance and renewal submissions." So this category of capital maintenance and renewal is excluded, I guess, from this infrastructure bill, which is kind of surprising. I'd be very curious to know from the minister . . . [interjection] I'll give way to my colleague.

**Ms Renaud:** Well, thank you. My question really is – you touched on it – about why it is a good thing, actually, to as much as possible remove political biases and, I think, you know, particularly interesting timing given that we've just seen a piece of legislation around housing that I think we're particularly worried about, particularly worried because there isn't much there and we know that most of it will be made up during regulation. That in itself is concerning. But I'm wondering if you can touch on that, why not just the appearance of the removal of political bias but actually the removal of political bias is really important, particularly as it relates to something like housing infrastructure.

Thank you.

**Ms Sigurdson:** Yes. The hon. Member for St. Albert, of course, is referring to Bill 78, which is the affordable housing amendment act. Yeah. I just had, I guess, the opportunity to have a technical briefing yesterday regarding that legislation from the public servants and one political staffer also. It is quite, you know, a thin document. It doesn't have a lot of detail in it, which I believe is what the Member for St. Albert was referring to. For example, it says that the Minister of Seniors and Housing, the minister responsible, has the authority to define affordable housing, but it doesn't say what that definition is. Of course, when we asked about that in the technical briefing, they said, "Well, that's coming," that that's not available to us yet. When we talked about sort of more details about these public-private partnerships – what that means and how will those be, what will those contracts look like, what that's all about – well, there's no information right now. That information also is coming.

[Mr. Reid in the chair]

Of course, you know, as my colleague has suggested, there is very little transparency in that legislation, yet we're being asked in this House to pass that legislation with so many details coming. And when I asked, "Will those be in regulations, or how will that be?" I was told that it could be policy. Some could be in regulation. So it's not even going to be sort of in any kind of legal form, some of it. You know, I think it would be April 1, 2022, before we even know some of the details that we were asking about.

9:00

It is kind of troubling for me because I feel like the government is suggesting by this legislation that they value this. They believe

we should be accountable. [interjection] Yes, I'll give way to my hon. colleague.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

**Ms Renaud:** Thank you. I'm sorry to interrupt you, but one of the things that just made me think, because you are the critic of Seniors and Housing and I know that that's something that concerns you, that public buildings or other infrastructure, certainly housing infrastructure, be barrier-free as much as possible and certainly be accessible, at the very least perhaps living up to the goal of the new federal legislation around accessibility, which this particular government has done nothing to address – anyway, going back to this, you know, looking at the criteria for capital planning submissions, which is section 4, it doesn't really talk about the need for accessibility. It talks about a lot of things . . .

**The Deputy Speaker:** Hon. member – sorry – can you just face your microphone?

**Ms Renaud:** Oh, yes. Certainly. Sorry, Madam Speaker.

**The Deputy Speaker:** Thank you.

**Ms Renaud:** . . . “the extent to which the . . . program is expected to result in positive economic impact,” which is great, and all of the other criteria that are listed. But nowhere on there does it address the need for accessibility, and accessibility is far more than just a ramp.

**Ms Sigurdson:** Well, thank you very much, hon. Member for St. Albert. I think that you're pointing out something that's very significant, sort of the omissions of this bill. Again, these are significant, important parts of a just society, that we do have accessible accommodation, that everyone is included, and that we create that equity. We're not on the same level playing field, and some people need more assistance to be with someone who is able-bodied, and we need to not make that an onerous burden on the individual. So having accessible accommodation – and certainly we see that not everywhere, sadly. We see that in our sidewalks, for example, that we have sort of a sloped ramp and things like that so that people cannot have access or be able to move around in their communities. Yeah. It is silent on those issues.

You know, another issue that this legislation is silent on is that when you are – of course, we're a provincial jurisdiction. We are representatives of the Legislature of Alberta, but we know that there are other levels of government we work with. We work with the federal government, and we work with municipal governments all across this province. It's so important that there is connection with those.

That's another thing. There's no consideration offered in this legislation for the federal government, that we have to work with our federal partners. Certainly, we receive funds on programs from the federal government, and we negotiate those terms. Certainly, when I was Minister of Seniors and Housing, we did a significant agreement regarding affordable housing where we created much more autonomy – well, not autonomy; that's not the word – much more ability to make decisions here in Alberta about affordable housing the federal government used to be responsible for and used to sort of guard decision-making on. But we were able to shift that and have an agreement where we as the local province, obviously, could know better what we needed. [interjection] Yes. Go ahead, Member.

**Ms Renaud:** Thank you. You know, you were just talking about the fact that we absolutely do work with different levels of

government. I think we all do. We understand that we work with municipal governments, federal.

But one of the things that this particular legislation doesn't do very well is to ensure – it's not squarely in the legislation so there is no question about it. It doesn't ensure alignment with regional municipal planning to ensure co-ordination. So I think that we have seen – you know, this government talks a big game about working with other levels of government, but they don't do a really great job. They seem to be in conflict very often with organizations that represent municipalities. They don't seem to take their advice, and it seems like that holds true for this piece of legislation. So I'm wondering if my colleague can just touch on that, why it is important. What is missing in this legislation are just some concrete ties that any future development of plans will involve other areas or other levels of government and their strategic capital plans.

Thank you.

**Ms Sigurdson:** Yeah. Thank you very much for the question regarding other levels of government and working together. I'll just reiterate that this legislation seems to not take that into consideration at all. Certainly, none of the criteria that they identify suggest that the minister should be looking at that. But we know that, sadly, the UCP government has decided that sometimes they don't want to play nice with the federal government.

One area where that was really a hard hit for us here in Alberta is with the rent supplement program for affordable housing. Albertans waited. It was, like, over two years delayed. Province after province after province had signed agreements, and Alberta languished. Guess what? This is all during COVID, when that money in Albertans' pockets would have made such a huge difference. Of course, it is the rent supplement program, so that would mean that landlords, you know, private citizens would have benefited, too, because they would be able to rent out their accommodation because there would be more people who had that kind of support.

Sadly, it took the Minister of Seniors and Housing an extraordinarily long time to secure an agreement with the federal government while province after province did sign agreements, and that meant that their local citizens had that money in their pocket, certainly, during a very challenging time when so many people had lost jobs and, you know, had financial stresses. I mean, that is disturbing. It's fundamental, I suppose, to being part of a federation that we do work with other levels of government and that the federal government does have a responsibility to fund programs in provinces, but the province also has a responsibility to work with the federal government to try to get the best agreement for its citizens and not let them languish. That's one example of that.

Another one at the municipal level is certainly here in Edmonton. The federal government has the rapid housing initiative, and they secured funding to build permanent supportive housing here in Alberta. That's great, but permanent supportive housing structures aren't enough. You need the operational dollars around them, and we have yet to have any funding come from the province, whose responsibility is in that area. That is very tragic because, you know, the city of Edmonton, in their plan to end homelessness, is saying that they need to build 900 units by 2024. Of course, this federal funding to build the actual structures is moving us closer to that goal of having people well housed, but they can't function without the operational dollars. Just to anyone who's listening in the UCP government, I mean, that funding is so badly needed, and I hope that they understand the importance of that and do fund the city of Edmonton's program to end homelessness so that they have more permanent supportive housing.

Certainly, the same issue is true in Calgary. They have a great need for an increase in permanent supportive housing, and we know

that as a whole province we have – you know, there’s an average amount of affordable housing in each province across Canada, and we’re below that average significantly. So we need more investment in that area, and I think that working with municipalities not only in the big centres but all across our province would go a long way to creating solutions for people who are struggling to find affordable accommodation. Sadly, I mean, Bill 78, that was just introduced on Monday, seems to be about selling off those assets of affordable housing instead of building more, and that’s really what we need because we need to have people well housed. Certainly, we live in a province that has cold temperatures, of course, almost year-round. I mean, it does warm up a bit in the summer, but people need to have accommodation and an investment in that.

9:10

Then I’ll just get back to that part that I was talking about before, about the exclusion of capital maintenance and renewal submissions. I’m just curious – perhaps the minister has an understanding of this, that I’m not sure about – why that would be excluded sort of from these accountability criteria that are outlined in this legislation. Certainly, we know that in Seniors and Housing alone that’s millions and millions of dollars. Maintaining the assets we have is crucial, so that funding needs to be accountable, too. I’m just curious why that would be specifically excluded, as I said, on page 4.

I guess that criterion that’s missing, certainly in my analysis, is that other levels of government aren’t even considered in this legislation, yet their partnerships, us working with them, are really a very important key piece of any kind of infrastructure. Again, that’s just some advice to the minister.

Certainly, when we look back at these criteria to decrease risks to health, safety, or security, improve delivery of programs, my colleague from Edmonton-Whitemud talked about, you know, wanting to really expand sort of what we think about – and thinking outside the box is how she put it – and include child care programs. I mean, the other criterion that it talks about here is enhanced resiliency of community. I would like to sort of continue on in that conversation and just say that that’s true of affordable housing, too. This isn’t something that can be categorized as just some sort of left-wing, crazy idea.

Certainly, chambers of commerce across this province have spoken about the importance of having affordable accommodation and making sure that people are supported and, you know, permanent supportive accommodation for people who may be experiencing mental health issues. Maybe they have some addiction issues sometimes coming from the mental health issues, but they need to have that support. The bricks and mortar aren’t enough, and that’s why that operational funding is so important.

You know, these are programs that absolutely enhance the resiliency of community, help people live with dignity, and create a healthier society, where it’s much more inclusive and connected. I’m sure many MLAs – and I won’t speak for anyone else, but I know it troubles me when I see people who are vulnerable, obviously, living rough on the streets, not well, perhaps having some kind of a reaction to some addictive substance and looking really in a lot of distress.

**The Deputy Speaker:** Any other members wishing to speak to Bill 73? The hon. Member for Lethbridge-West.

**Ms Phillips:** Thank you, Madam Speaker. It’s my pleasure to rise to speak to the Infrastructure Accountability Act. In reviewing this legislation, it occurs to me that really what we are doing here is asking the Legislature to rally around an agenda here that does not explicitly create any jobs whatsoever. In fact, what this legislation

does is formally create a scoring matrix for deputy ministers to have a meeting about. That’s what we’re doing here. I look forward to the next budget accountability bill whereby we legislate that deputy ministers must present their ministers with binders with tabs for estimates debate. What I’m seeing here is proposed criteria that are fine on the face of it because they already happen – even still these criteria already happen – so essentially what we are doing is legislating a process whereby we are observing that deputy ministers might put one foot in front of the other and attend a meeting in order to evaluate capital projects based on criteria that they’re already evaluating capital projects on.

What I am trying to say here, Madam Speaker, is that it is no wonder that Albertans are dissatisfied with the economic development plan of this government, the overall governance and governing trajectory, the lack of ability to deliver results for Albertans that they can see, that are tangible, that are solving problems for them, and there are considerable problems that people are facing right now due to COVID-19 and other challenges, not the least of which is a health care system under considerable strain.

I want to look at these criteria a little bit that are obvious, that already exist and just provide a little bit of insight on what is not here. The first thing that I would say is not here is that there is not a criterion here that says that we are going to minimize costs to the government of Alberta by either requiring a value-for-money analysis for any P3 investments or long-term liabilities and liability management around that.

Number two, I’m not seeing any criteria here around cost sharing with the federal government or our investments reflecting appropriately the priorities of municipalities and regions when we have regions who have come together around specific infrastructure. That’s not a scoring criterion, but that is something that will most certainly reduce costs for the government of Alberta at the end of the day. We have seen this before, similarly, too, with the federal lack of criteria there.

It is astonishing to me that we would even import that sort of closed-fist mentality vis-à-vis the federal government during a time when governments around the world are undertaking stimulus spending in the form of capital investment. Yet because we cannot find it in ourselves to move beyond some kind of adolescent petulance when it comes to another order of government, we would rather approach infrastructure conversations with a closed fist rather than any kind of open catcher’s mitt when it comes to the kinds of investments that we need in our communities. [interjection] I give way.

**Mr. Dang:** Thank you. I know that my hon. colleague has spoken at some length here tonight about the problems with P3s, and she just spoke eloquently to how the government often acts in a ham-fisted manner when dealing with other orders of government and in consulting with other orders of government.

I’ll note that, of course, here in Edmonton both the Edmonton public school board and the Edmonton Catholic school district both said that they didn’t want any more P3s. Despite that, this government rammed through all of the new school builds in this area using that P3 model. So I want maybe, perhaps, to ask if she could elaborate a bit on her experience with why the P3 model is so insufficient and why it’s so important that we do have that consultation process and co-ordinated process with our municipalities and with our municipal stakeholders so that we have infrastructure that works not just for communities but also for the people that live in our communities – right? – and have a process that ensures that capital is going to be resilient, in the government’s words.

**Ms Phillips:** Well, I thank the hon. member for his intervention. It put me in mind that the Lethbridge Construction Association about a year ago made representations to Lethbridge city council bemoaning this provincial government's affection for P3s given the way that the procurement was happening, that, in fact, that kind of process was leaving a number of local contractors out. I'll just note that the Lethbridge Construction Association has a new head of it because the old one got elected as the MLA for Lethbridge-East. So, you know, I think it's probably not a universal affection, but there you have it, Madam Speaker.

The point here is that even if P3s were to be the appropriate course of action, then we should be able to see that within a proper value-for-money assessment, and if we're going to codify these criteria for the civil service to guide their meetings, then we should have that as a criterion in here. If it works as well as representations we've heard from across the way, as they say it does, then let's see that proven out and let's see it published for the public to see, because we have not seen that degree of transparency and accountability thus far.

9:20

The other piece, though, hon. members and Madam Speaker, that I want to draw everyone's attention to is, in fact, climate adaptation. We are in the middle of COP 26, and we are barely two or three months out of the technical summary for the Sixth Assessment Report that came out from the international panel on climate change. What did it find? It reported in early August, and it's very clear now. The entire assessment shows that we have baked in approximately 1.1 degrees of warming over the last century, and it is very likely that from now until 2050 we are going to experience a minimum of 1.5 degrees of warming. That is baked into the atmosphere and what has happened across the world.

If we do not take action to decarbonize, to undertake electrification, fuel switching, and a number of different changes – you know, we are an energy province in every sense of that word, and we could be leading. We're not. If we do not, then the intensity of severe weather events, whether it's heat, whether it is precipitation, whether it is drought, is going to become more frequent. In fact, the IPCC released for the first time an atlas such that regional breakdowns and climate modelling could be accessible to planners around the world.

Now, we had already done a lot of this work, Madam Speaker, and we had commissioned a report on climate adaptation in Alberta. It was a report that the hon. members from the newly elected government tried to bury, but the Internet works in a number of different ways, and one of the ways that it works is that people, librarians in fact, are pretty good at finding things even if they were tried to be buried.

Now, what does this say? This is a report prepared for Albertans by a number of climate scientists. It says that the number of warm days, above 25 degrees, will very likely increase dramatically. For example, Calgary experienced an average of 34 days per year above 25 during the 1980 to 2009 period. If the world warms by one degree, the models show 10 more days above 25 degrees; 20 more if it warms by 1.5 degrees. Like I said, Madam Speaker, those numbers are essentially baked into the atmosphere right now and increasing it by a factor of four if the world warms by two degrees.

Then the report goes on, of course, on a heat moisture index, the growing season, and certainly precipitation. Now, precipitation is also a really large concern for Alberta just given our actual geographic location.

Extreme precipitation is projected to become more frequent across the mid-latitudes in general. In Alberta, the amount of precipitation falling on the wettest day of the year is projected to increase by about 20% per degree of global warming. The

number of days per year with more than 25mm of rain . . . [is, in fact, right now] rare, [but that] is also expected to increase, by about 50% per degree of global warming.

Why do I bring this up? Because a scoring criterion for climate adaptation has got to be part of our infrastructure planning. The fact is that we have baked in 1.1 degrees of warming. We are on track to 1.5. What that means for those of us at mid-latitudes is different around the world, but we know what it means in very general terms here in Alberta. It means more frequent and severe drought, heat, and more actual volume of precipitation in any given precipitation event. Those are the things that undermine the resilience of our infrastructure. We have already seen it. We have lived it. We have lived it in this province more than almost any other province, in fact. We've had the largest insurable losses and, in fact, noninsurable losses in Canada several times over the last decade.

And yet – and yet – we do not see a scoring criterion for whether any of our infrastructure that we build today will be resilient to those heat events, to any extreme precipitation events, or whether it will be able to accommodate any of those coming standards around smart grids, distributed generation, electrification, different types of heat sources, heat pump technology, anything more than what is happening right now.

Everything that we build right now has a useful economic life of at least 20 years, at a minimum. We're not, you know, building schools for 10 years. We're not building a bridge – well, certainly, we didn't build the highway 3 bridge in Lethbridge for even 50 years. Now we're coming up on 60 years, and it needs to be replaced. We build infrastructure for the long term, so we need to know that we are spending the right amounts of money in the right places to ensure that we are safe, that our infrastructure can withstand the changing climate, and that it can also take advantage of the great deal of clean technology and innovations and actual new investments coming to Alberta, whether that is in energy efficiency, whether that is in fuel substitution, whether that is in different forms of smart grid technology. All of this is coming.

Why we would not plan for this in our infrastructure has got to be one of the most blinkered things that I have ever seen in public policy and in government. Governments of all stripes do all kinds of things where they can't see past the end of their noses, but this has got to be one of the biggest omissions that I have ever seen in 2021.

Now, if we are going to give deputy ministers a list of things to do and call it a piece of legislation, then at least do that. But, no, we are opening up billions of dollars of our future capital planning to business as usual, as if we are still planning for the 1990s. That world is gone. The IPCC tells us it's gone. The entire world is moving forward, and we will not have a choice but to move forward with it. [interjection] I give way.

**Mr. Dang:** Thank you. My hon. colleague, I think, makes a number of very important points here. Certainly, when we're looking at this and thinking about it – I know my colleague mentioned it a little bit – in terms of a 20-year strategic plan, like, thinking about not just this generation of buildings but the next one as well, the government needs to be able to have considerations in such a large-spanning capacity, with technologies that we may not even be able to anticipate today.

Perhaps my colleague can comment a little bit on why, when we're looking at these horizons, when we're looking at these timelines, it is going to be so important to have considerations like this in place and why perhaps the legislative aspect of which we've built out the current bill and we see in the current bill is going to limit the ability of this and is going to not allow the minister to plan effectively for the future of our buildings and the future of our

province in a meaningful way. Maybe the member could give me a little bit of context around that as well.

**Ms Phillips:** Thank you, Madam Speaker. Now, to the hon. member's query, again this legislation is codifying that the government must release a 20-year strategic plan and update it every four years. There's no list of projects in here. This is a list of sort of aspirations, and it looks at things like – I mean, it looks to me like something on the level of about a third-year research paper: demographics, technological trends, projected industrial base. Great. All of that already happens, and it's nice that we will have a little bit more information, I suppose, collated into one place. Again, we've given some people in the civil service some nice things to do, and that's great. I hope it's colour-coded. I'm sure it's going to be wonderful. The fact of the matter is that what we are doing here is simply asking government to put out a think piece. Literally, we are just thinking about capital planning and what might happen in capital planning.

9:30

Once again here we are not talking at all about the fact that we build capital on a planet that is changing. When you are doing that, you might want to consider those as factors in terms of where you site your projects, what kinds of building material, again going to costs, and/or how we might want to take our capital maintenance and renewal envelope and actually invest in things like deep retrofits and other climate resilience and adaptation projects for the world that we are already living in. It's not in the future anymore; it's now.

Again that goes to cost, Madam Speaker. It's nice to have a strategic plan, but if we don't have an actual reckoning with real costs – and there I mean ways to mitigate those costs, whether we are making certain investments now, in particular in deeper retrofits or other renewal, or whether it is co-operating with other orders of government.

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

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

### **Bill 75 Arts Professions Recognition Act**

Ms Gray moved that the motion for second reading of Bill 75, Arts Professions Recognition Act, be amended by deleting all of the words after "that" and substituting the following:

Bill 75, Arts Professions Recognition Act, be not now read a second time but that the subject matter of the bill be referred to the Standing Committee on Alberta's Economic Future in accordance with Standing Order 74.2.

[Adjourned debate on the amendment November 3: Mr. Eggen]

**The Deputy Speaker:** Hon. members, we are on amendment REF1. Are there any members wishing to join the debate on the amendment? The hon. Member for St. Albert.

**Ms Renaud:** Thank you, Madam Speaker. It is my pleasure to rise and talk about Bill 75, Arts Professions Recognition Act, and the referral amendment, which I will be supporting. I'd like to tell you why, but before I begin, I just want to say that, you know, I was listening to a podcast. I think it was last week. This was in anticipation of reading the bill, which I had not read yet when I listened to the podcast.

The previous Minister of Culture was on the show and was talking about just how proud she was of the hard work she had done over two years to bring this piece of legislation forward, and then

she talked about how happy she was that the new Minister of Culture was going to bring this legislation forward – I don't exactly think that's how it works, but in any event we'll go along with the story – and talked about how much work had gone into this piece of legislation over the two years. Then I saw the legislation. It's a little bit shocking that this was two years' worth of work, but in any event I thank the Member for Chestermere-Strathmore, previous Minister of Culture, for her two years' worth of work doing this.

Anyway, let's talk about this piece of legislation. I think that we can all agree that this sector has taken a massive hit. Just a massive hit. What was really sad in this last, fourth wave was that they got knocked upside the head, and they didn't need to be. This fourth wave of COVID, as bad as it got, was entirely preventable, and every single member of this cabinet and caucus that went along with it is complicit. Let's just put that right out there, that this didn't have to be as bad as it is right now. This is a sector that has just been hurt so badly. I mean, I think we were all excited to see: okay; there's going to be a piece of legislation that looks at the arts professions. But it really did fall short of a lot of things.

It does a couple of things that are great. It does talk a little bit about the need to have a contract. It talks about how much we need to appreciate the profession. Actually, the preamble is quite lovely. It talks about recognizing artists as "valuable and professional members of society" and realizing that these "professional organizations make vital contributions," which they absolutely do, and "the Government . . . acknowledges the importance to Alberta artists of the right to freedom of expression" and then goes on to say a number of things. I was going to say something about how they don't appreciate artists with chalk in front of the Legislature. Anyway, that's a side note. This is lovely. This is a lovely preamble, but it really doesn't go far enough. It talks about the need for a contract. It talks about, you know, a number of other things, but this is not what we've been hearing from the sector.

I don't know about you, Madam Speaker, but the arts organizations or artists that I hear from in my constituency of St. Albert did not tell me ever that they needed contractual protections. I'm sure they'll appreciate it and it'll be quite lovely, because they don't have anything right now, so this is something. That is great. What they want are fair wages. What they want are protections. What they want are venues open, not shut down because, you know, there's a government that ignored what was going on around the world and then proceeded to usher in a fourth wave that was just absolutely devastating, and people continue to die still today as a result of really awful decisions.

The thing that I've been hearing from this community is that they want support. [interjection] Oh, sorry. Go ahead.

**Ms Phillips:** Hon. member, I was listening to what you've heard from constituents who are engaged in the arts, and I have heard the same thing. I have a good friend, Shaela Miller, who put out her album finally in August. She had held it back. She had a bunch of dates scheduled for August and September. She ended up having to scale back a whole bunch of that because, of course, we slammed straight into the fourth wave right in September, when she was trying to tour her album. This had a real effect on her and her two kids and her ability to pay her band and everything else, and even when she's playing in venues, they're smaller because people are not wanting to go out as much because of the mismanagement of the pandemic.

I'm wondering if the hon. member can share some of those stories from her constituency, because I know, for me – well, first of all, everyone should go to a Shaela Miller show, but second of all, there are many, many, many examples just like her, country musicians who found themselves doing other things during the pandemic.

**Ms Renaud:** Thank you to my colleague. I would love to go to a Shaela Miller show, and I would love to hear her music. But you are quite right. I think that individual artists have really struggled as a result, well, of this pandemic, and they're still struggling. Let's be honest about that.

I think that, you know, Lethbridge, St. Albert: they are not massive, massive cities like Edmonton, like Calgary. I think that the artists in the arts community in these smaller cities compared to Edmonton and Calgary are actually really, really struggling.

I know that in my constituency the city of St. Albert: they're very proud of being the Botanical Arts City. They come by this moniker – it's perfect for them. I think that if you haven't visited St. Albert, you really should. Some of the things that they have going on that have actually been really devastated over this last 20 months or so of COVID – you've probably heard of the Arden Theatre, which is a famous theatre in St. Albert. It's right at St. Albert Place, where city hall is, and they typically have thousands of patrons that go to different shows and concerts. Of course, like other venues, they've been devastated.

The children's festival, the international children's festival, that brings in performers from all over, has also been devastated, and I know that their board has reached out to me a number of times to talk about: "What else is there to help us? You know, we've already tried this. We've already used this, but the amount of revenue that we've lost is just astronomical." These programs brought in by the UCP are very narrow. They don't address the real need, and people have really suffered as a result. The children's festival is one example.

The Amplify festival is another one in St. Albert that has really taken a hit. There are a number of smaller . . .

**The Deputy Speaker:** Hon. member.

**Ms Renaud:** Yes.

**The Deputy Speaker:** I hesitate to interrupt you. I just want to remind you that we're on the referral amendment. If you could tie your remarks back to that, that would be amazing.

**Ms Renaud:** Absolutely. I will do that, Madam Speaker. Thank you so much for that direction.

I'm going to talk about – and this is feedback from my community saying why this piece of legislation really should go to committee. Madam Speaker, as I'm sure you realize, the committee would give us time to actually look at this legislation and see that it's really got no teeth. I don't really understand the point of it.

**Ms Phillips:** Hon. member, on this matter of the referral, then, bringing this piece of legislation to committee, I'm interested in the member's thoughts on what we might hear from her constituents if they had an opportunity to come to speak to MLAs about this matter. We know that the arts reflect a sense of place. They are deeply local. They oftentimes will communicate universal sentiments in ways that are deeply rooted in our smaller communities, and nowhere is that more true, I think, than, if the House will indulge us, outside of the two major cities, where the hon. member represents as do I. I wonder if the hon. member could tell us a little bit about who she would invite to that committee, should we refer this bill, and what we might hear from them.

**9:40**

**Ms Renaud:** Thank you for that. I appreciate that intervention. If given the opportunity, if this government were to shock us all and stop this and say, "You know what? For once I think we're actually

going to show a little bit of humility and listen to the opposition that we should probably go back to committee, go back to the drawing board," and if the point of this is actually to support the arts community, let's bring the arts community in, and let's hear what they really want. Let's bring in artists. Let's bring in people that manage venues. Let's bring in for-profits, nonprofits. Let's hear from them all because, you know, doing a consultation in 2020, the height of COVID, we didn't maybe have the perspective that we do today. Let's stop and let's go back.

If that were the case, you would hear from all of these providers and all of these artists and all of these venues in St. Albert, the Amplify festival, the children's festival, the Michif cultural centre, which is an amazing place and historical house promoting – it's almost like a living museum for the Métis culture in St. Albert. There are crafts. There are artists that go there. We have Arts and Heritage St. Albert. I could go on and on, Madam Speaker, about all of the different things that happened in St. Albert that have been impacted and, I might say, devastated, actually, over these last 20 months.

I think that in our excitement to see a piece of legislation about the arts profession, which is awesome, it's really disappointing to see how short it fell. But, you know, it's sort of in keeping with this government. I mean, the title looks great. This government is getting better about the preamble. That really sort of is quite lovely and talks about some statements of what they believe, which is awesome. What isn't great, what is not awesome is that it is just pretty empty after that. Other than the few points that it covers around contracts, there is very little.

We know what artists want, Madam Speaker. They want to be paid fairly. They want to be able to work. They want to be able to share their work.

**Ms Phillips:** They want to be respected.

**Ms Renaud:** Yes, they want to be respected.

This piece of legislation doesn't do that. You know what? Madam Speaker, if the government did allow this piece of legislation to just stall and go to committee to hear from more people so that they could take this opportunity to strengthen this legislation, they might hear from the city of St. Albert, that actually takes the time every year to do a report card on their cultural activities, which include art. They're very clear. They lay out priorities, and then they evaluate their work on those priorities.

Strangely enough, they did find the time and the insight to do it for 2020. They had, I believe, six priorities for 2020, and they rate them. For example, priority 1 was celebrating cultural assets. Priority 2 was increasing and deepening cultural participation. Priority 3 was promoting cultural tourism, difficult in a pandemic. Priority 4 was establishing sustainable funding. Priority 5 was ensuring infrastructural strength. Priority 6 was optimizing cultural service delivery. Now, as you can imagine, the only priority that was at risk, that didn't get the sort of report card mark of being on track, was priority 4 around establishing sustainable funding.

Now, that relates to part of the problem that we've been talking about, that this sector has been devastated. This government has not been there to give this sector what they need. Sadly, this piece of legislation doesn't go far enough. It doesn't go far enough for artists. It doesn't go far enough for municipalities, for organizations, be they for-profit or nonprofit. You know, just one little city's report card is demonstrating that this government is failing on a number of fronts. It would be actually . . . [interjection] Go ahead.

**Ms Phillips:** Thank you, hon. member, and thank you for bringing that report card to our attention. It would seem to me that if we were to refer this, we could in fact ensure that the province was issuing such metrics, and then we would know how well or not well we were doing. I wonder if the hon. member might want to talk to us a little bit about how arts organizations have essentially been left to the mercy of federal or even municipal programming but have received almost nothing from the provincial government. In fact, I do recall, even at venues, you know, standing with our opposition caucus asking for more and better supports from the province with the small and medium-sized grant. I wonder if the hon. member might talk about that a little bit and what we might hear at committee if we were actually going to do a good-faith engagement with small and medium-sized businesses.

**Ms Renaud:** Thank you for that intervention. I think that is a great comment, that at committee we would have an opportunity to ask these questions, to hear submissions, and to ask questions of people, not other government members or not bureaucrats but to hear, actually, from artists and from communities and to ask them questions. “What is it that you need? What can we do to support you?” Because isn’t that our role, at the end of the day, to support Albertans and to support the sectors that they work in?

You know, I think that my colleague raises a good point, that for this particular sector, like so many other sectors, whether it is education, whether it is social services, whatever it is, this government has failed miserably in terms of their COVID response and their economic support of these sectors. They have relied heavily on the federal government, and rightly so. They are there to support every province and territory, and they have done I’m not going to say outstanding, but they have been there for Albertans. I think that when you see the numbers of the dollars that are coming back into Alberta, you can see that that is happening.

Municipalities have gone out of their way. I know the city of St. Albert has done an extraordinary job of supporting all of the sectors, doing everything they can to support the sectors, within their boundaries. The arts sector is one that they have done a lot of work with, but they invest a lot of time, energy, and resources into that sector. They set out to do it. The mere fact that they have a report card every single year tells you something. It’s not just about investing, you know, occasionally in outdoor art installations or saying that you appreciate the artists in your community. It’s about digging down and making those investments. I would suggest that this particular provincial government should learn from the city of St. Albert and do the same: spend the time listening and then spend the time investing.

The fact that, you know, as I said when I began, the former minister that brought in this piece of legislation – and, again, I’m not making this up. This is something that she said in an interview in a podcast. Madam Speaker, one of the things she said was that she was extraordinarily proud of this legislation, extraordinarily proud that the new minister would bring it forward, and that it was the culmination of two years’ worth of work. It’s kind of sad that this piece of legislation is the culmination of a couple of years’ worth of work. I think that some consultation likely happened based on the information that we have and maybe what we heard in a briefing, but obviously to take the time to stop and to consult a little more broadly, to consult with the big cities – and I saw the cities where the minister or the ministry said that they had gone to consult, and it wasn’t that wide ranging. Certainly, it was the big cities, big venues, where a lot of artists will sort of cluster, but I think there’s a lot more that we can do.

Particularly, the fact that this was going on at the height of COVID – I mean, actually, we’re still well in it. But from the fact that this consultation went on during 2020, when things were very

uncertain, I think it’s worth pausing and going back and asking the question: “Okay. This is a good start. This is a good start, but how can we make it better?” Once again, I’d say this to the government members: “You know, show a little bit of humility, and perhaps realize that you didn’t get it right, that you didn’t get it a hundred per cent right and that you can make it better. If the goal is having the best piece of legislation possible that will do the best job possible supporting the sector and Albertans, then perhaps take the time to go back and make it better.”

**9:50**

I just want to say a couple of things. As we know, I’m not a working artist, obviously, and I don’t know as much as I should about this particular sector, but I would like to say that one of the things I didn’t know about the sector is how little artists earn, on average, and how many of them are actually women. My colleague from Lethbridge-West brought up the fact that, you know, one of the singers had to delay the release of her album while also figuring out ways to support her two children. Sadly, I think that story is probably far more common than not, that there are a lot of women who are artists in whatever kind of art and they are struggling.

I think of women. Add this to the long list of sectors and jobs held primarily by women that have struggled during this pandemic, continue to struggle, and will continue to struggle in the future as we recover from this. They didn’t just get to take time off to stay home because they didn’t have appropriate child care or the schools were closed or their children had to go online because of an infection.

So with all of these things, I think it’s important for us to look at these issues, just from a higher place, to see that they are all interconnected. When my colleague from Edmonton-Whitemud continuously brings in affordable child care, we all support that because we agree with her one hundred per cent that this is a game changer, to bring in affordable child care. I have no doubt whatsoever that this sector would benefit from affordable, \$10-a-day child care. So just to put my two cents in: sign the deal; make it happen. Albertans want it.

Again, Madam Speaker, if this government would just pause, you know, and acknowledge the fact that they don’t always get it right – that’s abundantly clear; I mean, you all have to know that – just pause and send it to committee so that we can actually take the time to get it right. It’s a good start. It’s a framework. The fact that we’re talking about the arts profession is awesome.

**The Deputy Speaker:** Any members wishing to join the debate on amendment REF1? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

**Member Irwin:** Thank you, Madam Speaker. My goodness, I’m a little tired here, but that’s okay. I always think, whenever I get a little bit tired, that it is absolutely nothing compared to what many folks on the front lines are dealing with, so my level of tired is very, very insignificant. I think about all those folks working night shifts and doing incredible things as we are still, as my colleague from St. Albert reminded, in a pandemic, and I just can’t imagine the stress that so many folks on the front lines continue to be under. If any of them are watching, just a shout-out to you, as always.

I am honoured to rise and speak to the referral amendment on Bill 75. This is actually – I don’t think I’ve had a chance to speak a lot about the arts in this Chamber, so, you know, I’ve got a lot of things that I want to say about this. I must reflect on the fact that I get to speak on the same day that our Culture minister stated the following in the Legislature, earlier today, about the NDP and art. It’s quite artful in itself. He said: “The reality is that the NDP would have had them completely shut down. There wouldn’t have been any art the last couple of years, none at all.”

I laugh, but it's actually incredibly troubling that the Minister of Culture would make such a statement. As we saw on social media, the reaction from people was quite intense, and rightly so. I can tell you that . . .

**An Hon. Member:** Good thing he's not on social media.

**Member Irwin:** Yes. I mean, he's not been on Twitter since 2019. I did check, so he hasn't seen it. I'm happy to share more of the comments with him.

It is important, and I truly don't mean to joke there. I do hope that someone on his team alerts him to some of the feedback from artists, not just on social media but, I'm certain, in his inbox as well. It's quite clear from this piece of legislation that there wasn't a whole heck of a lot of consultation done. I mean, I haven't seen it yet. I'm hopeful that the minister will stand and speak to this bill and perhaps, you know, refute my claims, but I've not seen that yet.

Truly, it is quite troubling that he would imply there wouldn't have been any art under the NDP. Many of those artists who've spoken up since have said – you know, of course, I wasn't part of that government, so I can be maybe a little bit more critical. Just like in many areas, we could have pushed the NDP government to do even more, but artists are saying that the amount of investment and the amount of support that they had under the NDP far surpasses anything that they've seen from this UCP government.

It's been an incredibly challenging time for artists in the midst of a pandemic, and my colleagues have talked about this. They've talked about some of the concerns that they have heard from artists in their own constituencies, and I have as well.

You know, before I talk about my constituency, I will talk briefly about our leader, the Member for Edmonton-Strathcona, who at this very moment is just preparing a significant art show in her riding, one that's been going on for 15 years, *Art from the Unknown*. What does our leader do at this event? Usually it's in-person, and it's fantastic. I had the pleasure of emceeing it a couple of years ago. It's absolutely a fantastic opportunity for artists to showcase their work, to get a platform and a venue that they might not get otherwise. Fortunately, they've had to move online for the last couple of years. Like many artists, they had to pivot. I think of our leader as an incredible example of someone who actually supports the arts, and that's why she prioritized it in her time as Premier, and her own riding of Edmonton-Strathcona is a perfect example of seeing the arts in action.

In fact, my colleague from Edmonton-Riverview and, gosh, a few other of our colleagues had the chance to go down to the Fringe this year. Again, what did we hear when we talked to those artists at the fantastic Fringe Festival? We heard from so many of them that they're struggling, that it's been really, really hard. You saw that walking around the Fringe this year. You saw that in the very diminished crowds – right? – and just not the same excitement and activity that you would see typically on the Fringe grounds. But I've got to say that we heard that there was also a lot of hope. People were feeling quite hopeful that next year the Fringe would be back stronger than ever, but they're not going to get there if they're not getting support from this government.

All right. Enough about our leader, the Member for Edmonton-Strathcona, although I'm glad I got that on the record. I want to talk a little bit about just how important the arts is in my own riding of Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

**The Deputy Speaker:** Sorry, hon. member. I look forward to this next part of your debate, but I really hope that it speaks to the referral amendment on the floor.

**Member Irwin:** Yeah. Absolutely, and I was just about to get there. I can't talk about the importance of referring this amendment

without talking about what I've heard from folks on this piece of legislation and until I talk about the perspectives of folks in my riding. As we've seen and as my other colleagues have articulated far better than I have, there was a clear lack of consultation done on this bill. You know, I want to talk to you about some of the things that I've heard from folks in my riding.

An example would be live venues. It would be spaces where – I'll give one example, and I'm certain he won't mind me talking about it. The venue is called *The Aviary*. It used to be *The Artery*, a wonderful little live-music venue. The team there, Phillip and Mark, have put so much money into a little artists' hub, an artistic hub, just on Norwood Boulevard. If anyone knows Norwood Boulevard, 111th Avenue, that is where there have been a number of abandoned buildings and a number of problem properties from a certain person, who we shall not name, who has been notoriously a problem property owner. For those two young men – I shouldn't call them young men; they're probably about my age. For those two brothers to take that financial risk and to open a venue prior to the pandemic – and they were doing really well. The pandemic came, hit them, and it's been incredibly hard. I got a message from one of them just saying, you know: is there any, like, end in sight here, especially during the last number of months with the opening, the closing, reopening, and the lack of clarity from this government?

10:00

That would just be one example where my constituents have told me that they need more from this government when it comes to investing in the arts, right? They need more tangible supports. They need to see that this government has their backs. You know, I look back. [interjection] Oh, I will, I suppose, give way to the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar for a moment.

**Mr. Schmidt:** Well, I appreciate the comments from my friend from Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood and the discussion around the particular example of an arts venue that was opened up in a pretty tough area. Now, I have dared to venture into Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood from time to time. It is a little bit scarier place than Edmonton-Gold Bar. That's for sure. I'm just wondering if my friend from Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood can speak to the importance of arts in revitalizing communities that face the challenges that the communities in Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood face.

**Member Irwin:** You would think we planned this, but I swear we did not. That's exactly where I was going to head next. Within my riding of Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood the arts have played an incredible role in revitalizing our neighbourhoods.

I think I've talked about this before. I live very close to 118th Ave., a block away in the Parkdale neighbourhood. The whole area of Parkdale, Alberta Ave., historically known as Norwood, has been a classic example of the arts coming in and really helping to support and revitalize. I actually have to give – I'm not sure if he's listening to my riveting speech – the Minister of Culture credit because he came to Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood, and he visited some of the spots along 118. I was proud to welcome him to my neighbourhood.

In his tour he got an opportunity to talk with the team from Arts on the Ave. Christy Morin is one of the key people behind Arts on the Ave, and what Arts on the Ave has done for our neighbourhood is fully apparent as you walk down Alberta Ave. You see public art that has fully enriched, brightened – actually brightened – our community spaces. You see the Carrot arts coffee house, which is a volunteer-run coffee shop, the proceeds from which go back into arts programming and into programming like festivals like the Kaleido festival, which is an incredible festival that happens in September that, you know, incorporates music, dance, Indigenous

displays – the list goes on – the Deep Freeze festival, another example, a winter festival that really brings our streets alive.

Again, this is in the same community where we have, you know, some of the highest rates of crime. We have some of the highest levels of poverty, particularly child poverty, right? But you see folks from all backgrounds coming together, and there really is – there really is – power in the arts in building community. I'm proud of that, and I'm proud of the fact that we continue to see growth and vibrancy.

But I can also tell you that many of these organizations – and I haven't even listed all of them that are doing incredible work in my riding – are struggling. They absolutely are, and it's not even just due to COVID. Of course, I've talked about some of those challenges. It's also because of just a lack of funding opportunities, right? An organization like Arts on the Ave isn't able to, you know, charge folks to attend their festivals and their events because that money is just not there. So they really have to rely on grants, and they have to rely on private donations as well. It's been really, really tough.

You know, I have to mention this one, another one on 118th Avenue, the Nina Haggerty Centre. You know about the Nina Haggerty Centre, my colleague from St. Albert. I actually met with them not long ago as well, and they would be another organization that would urge this government to just really think about their direction with the arts. The Nina Haggerty Centre works with folks with disabilities and gives them opportunities to really flourish in various art media. If you get a chance, I would urge you to come visit because the stories that the folks who've benefited from the Nina's programs, the stories that they have to share are just so powerful and so moving. Again, another example of an organization coming into our community and really strengthening it. Actually, in the same building where the Nina Haggerty is housed on the main floor, it's an arts hub above that, so artists primarily live in the housing above the Nina, a really, really cool example of the arts coming together.

I can't help but mention as well Indigenous arts organizations. We are so lucky to have the Indigenous art house, the Whiskeyjack Art House on 97th Street. It's a newer organization that, again, opened actually during the pandemic, so they've had to do a lot to pivot as well, but showcasing Indigenous work. I think of the Indigenous Arts Market Collective, who showcased their arts at the downtown farmers' market. I think of iHuman; iHuman is not just an Indigenous-serving organization, but it served a lot of Indigenous youth in particular. They really seek to incorporate art into sort of experiential opportunities for young people who are struggling, often young people who are precariously housed, who may be struggling with mental health or addictions. They have a really incredible success rate with that as well.

I look back on the summer. With summer typically in my riding and across Edmonton and even the province, you know, we talk about just the power of festivals. Edmonton, I think, has even been known as the Festival City, and, like, what a change it's been over the last few years with COVID. A lot of cancellations, right? I know some organizations haven't even been able to put on events or even pivot virtually just because it doesn't work for them. I think about the artists, I think about the musicians who count on these events who aren't getting paid. I've spoken to many of them who are calling on this government to acknowledge the critical role that art plays in enriching the lives of all Albertans.

**The Deputy Speaker:** Any other members wishing to speak to amendment REF1 on Bill 75? The hon. Member for Edmonton-South.

**Mr. Dang:** Thank you, Madam Speaker. I'd move that we adjourn debate.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

#### Bill 74

#### Advanced Education Statutes Amendment Act, 2021

Mr. Dang moved that the motion for second reading of Bill 74, Advanced Education Statutes Amendment Act, 2021, be amended by deleting all of the words after "that" and substituting the following:

Bill 74, Advanced Education Statutes Amendment Act, 2021, be not now read a second time but that the subject matter of the bill be referred to the Standing Committee on Alberta's Economic Future in accordance with Standing Order 74.2.

[Debate adjourned on the amendment November 2]

**The Deputy Speaker:** We are on amendment REF1. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood was speaking prior to adjournment. Any other members wishing to join the debate? I see none.

[Motion on amendment REF1 lost]

**The Deputy Speaker:** Any members wishing to speak to the main bill, Bill 74?

Seeing none, I will call the question.

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

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

[Fifteen minutes having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

For the motion:

Aheer	Luan	Rutherford
Allard	Madu	Sawhney
Armstrong-Homeniuk	McIver	Schweitzer
Ellis	Nixon, Jeremy	Shandro
Glubish	Orr	Sigurdson, R.J.
Guthrie	Panda	Smith
Jones	Rehn	van Dijken
LaGrange	Reid	Walker
Lovely	Rowswell	

Against the motion:

Dang	Phillips	Schmidt
Irwin	Renaud	Sigurdson, L.
Nielsen		

Totals:	For – 26	Against – 7
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[Motion carried; Bill 74 read a second time]

**Mr. McIver:** Madam Speaker, I want to thank members of the House for the insightful debate this evening, and at this point I'd like to move that the House adjourn until tomorrow morning.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 10:27 p.m.]







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