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The 30th Legislature
Second Session

Alberta Hansard

Tuesday evening, November 16, 2021

Day 126

The Honourable Nathan M. Cooper, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta The 30th Legislature

Second Session

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United Conservative: 20

New Democrat: 24

Independent: 2

Vacant: 1

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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

7:30 p.m.

Tuesday, November 16, 2021

[Mr. Milliken in the chair]

The Acting Speaker: Hon. members, please be seated.

Government Bills and Orders Second Reading

Bill 81

Election Statutes Amendment Act, 2021 (No. 2)

[Adjourned debate November 16: Mr. Madu]

The Acting Speaker: Historically, because of the fact that this is the second speaker, what I'll do is that I'll just – and I can discuss it later. But I'll go with the individual who caught my eye, the Member for Edmonton-City Centre.

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the opportunity to rise tonight and speak to Bill 81, the Election Statutes Amendment Act, 2021 (No. 2). Within this bill we have a number of changes that would affect how elections take place; specifically, much of the bill is focused on the process and who is in fact allowed to make donations to political parties, in what respect, and in what amount. Now, certainly, this is a practice that is happening in many jurisdictions where there are changes being made to try to improve democracy, generally by reducing and restricting the kinds of donations that can be made and the amount.

Indeed, that is what is taking place in part of this bill, but in my view, Mr. Speaker, there is an egregious and incredibly craven step being taken by this government in Bill 81, and that is what I want to discuss today. That in particular is the provision within Bill 81 which removes the limitation that currently exists on the amount that can be donated to a nomination contest. What we have currently in the province of Alberta is a limit of \$4,243 for any individual in the course of a year. That is a total aggregate amount for any political purpose, whether that's to a nomination contest, a leadership contest, to a political party and constituency association; \$4,243 aggregate.

What the government is proposing to do is to say: "That remains, but it does not apply to a nomination contest. For a nomination contest you can make an unlimited amount of donations." Unlimited, Mr. Speaker. To the best of my knowledge this is unprecedented in the province of Alberta. To my knowledge this is not the case in any other jurisdiction in Canada. The government has provided no explanation for why they are creating this significant loophole. When the media had asked, the minister has said: no comment. They have gotten no response from the minister or his staff as to why they are making this significant change.

Now, Mr. Speaker, as has been noted by reporters and by others, by doing this, this means that I can make an unlimited amount of donations to a nomination contest in which the nomination contestant can only spend \$12,500. So that individual could collect \$60,000 in donations – that could be from three individuals who donated \$20,000 each – spend the maximum of \$12,500, and then take the rest of that money and shuffle it out through the back door to their constituency association, who can then hand it over to the political party.

So, in effect, Mr. Speaker, that limit of \$4,243 for an individual to a political party or any other political entity is moot. It's meaningless. It has no effect because all I have to do is send my donations through a nomination contest, and then I am able to

donate an unlimited amount. That is disgusting. It is a cheap move by a desperate government who sees the writing on the wall as they have the lowest approval rating for their Premier, for their leader, in the country. They as a political party have an incredibly low approval rating in the province of Alberta as they have been beaten in fundraising for four consecutive quarters. And now, out of desperation, they are legislating a backdoor loophole to allow unlimited donations.

Again, Mr. Speaker, it is disgusting, but it's not surprising. There is a significant history of Conservative parties in the province of Alberta using backdoor methods, frankly, corrupt methods, to fund raise, of using money to buy their way back into government. Indeed, one of the founding parties of the UCP was well known for this, the Progressive Conservative Party of Alberta, the Progressive Conservative Association of Alberta.

Indeed, as we talk about this provision in Bill 81, in order to provide some context for the history of this kind of practice by Conservative parties, one of the founding parties of this government that is legislating this loophole for themselves, we look back to the late 2000s. An investigation by CBC in the province of Alberta found that multiple constituency associations under the Progressive Conservative Association of Alberta were illegally collecting donations from prohibited bodies, groups like municipalities, universities, colleges – a total of about \$17,655 that was identified by the then chief elections officer and that the PCAA was forced to pay back – through a scheme in which the PCAA would lean on local municipal leaders, on leaders at local postsecondary institutions to buy tickets to their fundraisers, and the money came not from the individuals but from those prohibited entities. At least half of the donations came directly from those entities, not through the individual. Those constituency associations would have known full well that that was illegal, but it was par for the course, Mr. Speaker.

After decades in government the level of entitlement and corruption within that party had reached the level where they thought this was acceptable practice. And, as I've said before, this government in a mere couple of years has achieved the same levels of entitlement and approaching, frankly, with moves like this, corruption, Mr. Speaker, that it took decades for the PCAA to reach.

Now, at the time Wildrose MLA Shayne Saskiw said that he believed those donations had been occurring for years. He said: "There was this understanding that you have to donate to that governing party or else you're not going to get the grants. And it's widespread." It shows that it doesn't matter if you change the leader of the PC Party or apparently the name of the party, Mr. Speaker; the culture of corruption and entitlement remains the same. The PCs change their leader or their name continuously, but that pattern continues to exist.

Now, of course, we have some members of this House sitting here today who were former members of that Wildrose Party, who actually called out corruption of the government, and they sit here today silent about this cheap trick, this legislative loophole being pushed through by their government in Bill 81. Where is their integrity, Mr. Speaker? Where is their spine today? Has that been left behind in service of a Premier who's the least popular in Canada?

Back to the CBC, they noted that the Lac La Biche-St. Paul riding association received money from 11 corporations that were barred by the provincial election finances act from making political donations, including the Buffalo Lake Métis settlement, Portage College, and the Lac La Biche branch of ATB Financial, a provincial Crown corporation, Mr. Speaker. There are members

sitting here today who used to oppose that kind of corruption; today they sit silent while their government uses its majority to legislate it.

7:40

The Wildrose leader at the time, Danielle Smith, said: “We have always felt that we have a situation in Alberta that is very unhealthy. I think it’s the type of thing that causes the public to lose faith in politicians and lose faith in the political process.” Undermining democracy, Mr. Speaker. Whatever protestations this minister has made, whatever claims he makes about improving democracy and improving diversity, cheap tricks like this do exactly the opposite. They undermine faith in this system because moves like this, this nomination loophole in Bill 81, tell the public that all that matters is how much money you can put into the system. That determines what your voice is worth. Every member in this House that sits silent and chooses to pass this legislation is agreeing with that statement, that it is okay for their government to put their thumb on the scale when they are in a place of desperation, to try to use dollars to influence the results of an election they know they are in a terrible position going into and deservedly so.

Ms Smith went on to say that either the people who are soliciting money on behalf of the PC Party did so under false pretenses and they were soliciting it from a group that shouldn’t have given money under the Election Act, or you have a situation where these folks are giving them money knowing that they should not. Mr. Saskiw went on to say that this is a deep-rooted practice within the PC Party. He was the Wildrose MLA for Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills at a time when that position held some integrity. They used bullying tactics, he said, to extract donations from public institutions that rely on them, the government, for funding. After 41 years in power they have established a culture of corruption that exchanges government support for money and political favours.

Mr. Speaker, when I decided back in 2012 that I someday wanted to put my name up to run for provincial office, it was because I saw how disengaged so much of the public was from the political process because they felt there was nothing they could do against an entrenched and corrupt political party that had been in power for over 40 years. I decided that I wanted to one day put my name up to try to change that, to try and show that politics could indeed be conducted with integrity, that indeed to be a politician could be a position of respect. It could be something where you actually listened to the people you represented. When I had the opportunity to run in 2015, it was not with the expectation that I would actually have an opportunity to win. I did not expect to win against an 18-year incumbent. In fact, I did not spend a dollar on my nomination race in 2015 because nobody else was seeking that nomination here.

Now, we have certainly seen a considerable change in the landscape. Certainly, now we have a nomination coming up this weekend in Lethbridge-East where we have four highly qualified candidates contesting the nomination for the Alberta NDP in Lethbridge-East. None of them require, Mr. Speaker, this legislated loophole, this cheap trick from a government intent on putting its thumb on the scale in order for them to be able to run and put their name up to do so. Neither do we as a political party require the ability to funnel thousands and thousands of dollars through those nomination contests to make up for the fact that we can’t get the trust of Albertans. Frankly, we’re doing quite fine in that regard.

But it’s quite clear that this government is not. Indeed, they had to throw off all health restrictions for the entirety of the summer, set the spark which grew into the fourth wave, which they then ignored until it was overwhelming our health care system, in order to try to revive their sagging fortunes in fund raising. Now they are

legislating this backdoor loophole to dump endless amounts of unlimited cash through constituency associations to try and buy their way through the next election because of the sad and sorry record that they have demonstrated as a government, which has utterly lost them the trust, the faith, the support of Albertans. It’s disgusting, Mr. Speaker.

It would be laughable if it were not so disgusting and craven, if it was not such an insult to the democratic process and Albertans in this province. But that has been the record of this government and this party. Certainly, they have been one of the least transparent in Canada, have repeatedly sought to hide information from the public, have repeatedly sought to use the power that they were given by Albertans in good trust, instead, for their own political advantage rather than for the good of the people that they were elected to represent and serve. That is precisely what we see here in Bill 81.

Now, Bill 81 at the same time allows them, then, to funnel these dollars, an endless amount of dollars, through a nomination contest without limit, utterly circumventing every check and balance that has been built into the electoral process in terms of donations in the province of Alberta. In addition to that, they are reducing the transparency about when they are actually going to report on those dollars. They are changing that now from quarterly to annually. That means, then, that you hold your nomination contest, you run as many candidates as you want – we know that this is a government that is, of course, fond of kamikaze candidates, or at least the Premier certainly is – and each of them collects as many donations as they want. They funnel that back through to the party, and it will not be reported for a year. Albertans will have no idea how much was donated by whom.

So that could mean that we essentially have that take place, Mr. Speaker, and there is no reporting on any of those donations, who made them, until after the election is done. Now, of course, that is exactly what this government chose to do with municipal elections, taking away the ability for any municipality in the province of Alberta to require reporting of donations before an election. This is a government that seems dedicated and focused on undermining transparency in our democratic process. It’s disgusting, and it’s despicable. It is indefensible, which is why, of course, the minister is not defending it or even speaking of it or to it. Indeed, when questioned today, we instead got a sample of his usual partisan bluster rather than actually being accountable and honest with Albertans about what he has attempted to do with this bill.

You know, Mr. Speaker, in the 2019 election nomination contestants raised \$2.1 million; they spent \$2 million. The bulk of that was raised and spent by the UCP, interestingly, so we really have to wonder at this point, then: how much are they hoping that they’re going to raise through their nomination contests to try to revive their sagging fortunes? How much are Albertans going to see eventually, after the next election now that they want to change the timing – how much are we going to see that they transfer to their party or candidates to try to overcome their lack of fundraising capacity with everyday Albertans?

Of course, this is nowhere to be found in the report of the Select Special Committee on Democratic Accountability, which this government struck. Not one stakeholder recommended this. Not one member of the government that sat on that committee mentioned anything of this ilk. This was not a recommendation made by anybody. This did not come from anywhere in the community. It’s quite clear that this was thought up somewhere in the backrooms of the Legislature by members of this government solely to attempt to use the power that they have been given in trust

by the people of Alberta for their own partisan political advantage. It is shameful, Mr. Speaker. This does nothing. In fact, this undermines the ability for us to have a greater diversity of candidates participating in the political process.

I think that as we continue, we're going to have much more to say about this bill.

7:50

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

The hon. member who caught my eye is the hon. Member for Peace River.

Mr. Williams: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I appreciate the comments from my colleague across the aisle from Edmonton-City Centre. I have a simple solution for the member opposite. The NDP is not a body of the province of Alberta. It is welcome to create its own nomination rules. I understand it currently is holding a nomination in Lethbridge-East. Congratulations to whoever of the four candidates is the winner whenever that happens. Those rules were not decided by this body. They ought not be decided by this body. The rules that . . . [interjection] The member can rise if he wants to intervene, but interjecting from a sedentary position I find decidedly unparliamentary.

As I said, Mr. Speaker, I will give way to the hon. gentleman.

Mr. Shepherd: As the member notes, indeed there are aspects of the nomination process that are not controlled by the province, but political donations at all levels in the system have been and are decided currently by the Legislature. If the member believes that this is the way to go, then let's see him provide provision that those dollars will not be transferred out of that nomination race, that they will stay there, that they can go back to the donors, that they can stay in the constituency nomination. They should not go back to the political party. Otherwise, he is undermining the very process which is under the control and the proper legislation of this House.

Mr. Williams: Thank you to the member opposite. The truth is that all the rules, up until the NDP changed the rules, were decided by nominations, decided by the political parties. The member asked for an example. He said that it was unprecedented. Saskatchewan, just next door. A simple Google search, as far as I can tell, shows that there are absolutely no rules surrounding nominations and spending limits when it comes to the Saskatchewan election body. So the truth is that if the members opposite want to find that regulation, they're welcome to put it in the NDP.

I believe in government. I believe that government has an important role to play in our society. I believe there ought to be limits on spending in general elections. I'm happy to submit to them. If the member wants to change United Conservative Party policy on spending limits, he's welcome to join our side. Come across the aisle. We have an AGM coming up. He is welcome, if he wants, to buy a membership, to vote, to put forward that policy and change those rules. As a grassroots party that's what we believe ought to happen. [interjection] I will get there in a moment and accept your intervention.

The truth is that we on this side believe that there is an important role to play for government, but we ought not be regulating every single potential election that goes on between condo boards and minor hockey associations from this body. They're autonomous. They sort themselves out. They ought to. That is the proper role for government. The proper role for the political party is for it to decide, as its own association, what its rules and regulations ought to be. [interjection] I will give way to the hon. lady.

Ms Gray: Thank you. The example that the hon. member is using, that the NDP can put in their own spending limits, ignores the fact that there are spending limits for nomination contests within this legislation. Those spending limits for nomination contests have been adjusted. What has also been adjusted is removing the fact that donations to nomination contests belong under the umbrella cap, allowing big money into the system. So the member, with one comment, says that government should stay out of nomination contests. In the legislation it does put a limit on spending, but it does not on the donations, and it provides a mechanism for those donations to go from a nomination contest with no limits directly to a political party.

Therefore, this is something that should be included in the legislation. Otherwise, we have big money, dark money, \$20,000 donations going to a political party. That is not something the political party should designate. That is something this legislation should designate. The government has deliberately left a loophole, and I think it's important to point that out.

Mr. Williams: Thank you to the member opposite for the comment. I'm very heartened to know that members opposite are concerned about the incumbents having an advantage in the United Conservative Party nominations, because the truth is that allowing these contributions to happen gives advantage to those that challenge the incumbents.

Currently, right now, I have many advantages over those who would like to challenge me, and I hope there are those who challenge me. I encourage them. I want to have a lively discussion, and in the United Conservative Party we will have that lively discussion when it comes to the nomination period, and I'm very excited that you guys are looking to protect us.

On the other hand, I believe the best thing is for us to allow the freedom of people to make the donations they want so that individuals can challenge nomination incumbents as they wish.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I wanted to make sure I right the record, and I'll cede the floor.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie has risen.

Member Loyola: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I think that the debate that we just saw going on across the floor really hits on a very important point, and that is that when it comes to elections, when it comes to legislating here in the province of Alberta, it should be about ideas and not about how much money you feed into the political process. That's what we've been debating on this side of the House.

Even when we were in government, it was one of the first things that we did when we came into power, when we did Bill 1, when we were a brand new Alberta NDP government. After that, we were happy to set up the Select Special Ethics and Accountability Committee, where we looked at every aspect of the elections financing act, because this is truly what we were after. Why were we after that? Because Albertans are concerned about the influence that big money has on the electoral process here in the province of Alberta.

This perhaps goes straight across the board. It doesn't matter which jurisdiction you're talking about. Wherever there are people that have faith in their government being a free and democratic society based upon those ideas in their constitution, people are concerned about the influence of big money on their democratic process, and Albertans care about it deeply. That's why, when we were analyzing and going through every aspect of the elections financing act, we started putting caps, because there were no caps, Mr. Speaker. There were absolutely no caps. In the 44 years of Progressive Conservative rule here in the province of Alberta they

never once stopped to think about putting a cap on how much money was actually entering the electoral process.

For me, to see the United Conservative Party on the other side of this House open up a loophole, a back door, and a way to allow big money back into politics, well, I don't find it that surprising because that's what Conservatives like to do, and not only in this jurisdiction but in jurisdictions all across this land and across this world. [interjection] I'll cede to the member.

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Now, my colleague was speaking of this being a Conservative thing, and certainly the Member for Peace River spoke at length about how he felt this was a Conservative principle, that there should be no government interference in the nomination process. But my colleague also just spoke now of the fact that our government brought in caps on donations, and indeed this government is interfering in nomination contests, as my colleague from Edmonton-Mill Woods noted, by maintaining a cap on the amount of spending in a nomination race, unlimited donations in limited spending so that the leftover has to be transferred somewhere else. I was just wondering what my colleague's thoughts were on that bit of, shall we say, irony.

Member Loyola: Thank you very much for the interjection from the Member for Edmonton-City Centre, because that's exactly what the issue is here. Now, when this loophole that they're going to create by passing this piece of legislation – and I hope, I really hope, that especially the private members of the governing party are going to take a second look at this bill that's in front of them, because they can't be speaking out of both sides of their mouth.

You know, we get the minister up in the House, and he gets his key messages in front of him. He goes on and on about how we're trying to actually not allow big money into politics. But here we have an example where they're actually opening up a loophole to do so.

8:00

It's very important, Mr. Speaker. I hope that members in this House are going to take a very serious look at what we're bringing up here and accept an amendment, hopefully. Well, hopefully, we'll get around to bringing one into the House. I would love it if the members themselves would actually contemplate the issue that's being debated here in the House tonight, and perhaps even they would bring something in, because we cannot allow this to pass in this form. We would be damaging the trust of Albertans by actually passing this piece of legislation, how it is written right now.

You can bet that I'm going to get out there and I'm going to let everybody know what's going on here, because again here we have another example of the United Conservative Party bringing big money back into the political process with this loophole. It's paramount. People, Albertans, want to have faith in the political system. They want to know that deep pockets and the interests of those people with deep pockets are not going to have an impact on the electoral process. That's what this is about, Mr. Speaker. Albertans were tired of it under the Progressive Conservatives, and I would hope that they're not going to stand for it with this United Conservative Party. That's why we're drawing attention to it here in the House tonight in this debate.

Now, that's not the only thing, Mr. Speaker, because the other aspect of this bill is that it actually wants to curb freedom of expression. Now, this is actually the wording around who is going to be not allowed to speak in this free and democratic society. It's very vague inside of the bill, the proposed piece of legislation, that we have before us. Will it stand up to a challenge? This is what we need to be concerned about before we even allow this thing to carry

on through Committee of the Whole and into third reading. What is it about this Conservative government when they want to stifle the freedom of expression of only certain Canadians? This is what we should be asking. Of course, it goes without saying that this goes against the Charter of Rights and Freedoms and the freedom of expression, and I just don't understand how members on that side can talk about transparency and democracy and freedom while at the same time they're trying to write into this piece of legislation that certain people just have to shut up.

Now, I agree that we need to be transparent on how much money is actually being poured into the electoral process in our democracy. We have to be transparent about who these people are with deep pockets and how much they are spending, and Albertans should know who is doing the spending and when they are doing it so at least they have an idea, when this big ad comes across their TV or a billboard that they see while they're driving down the street, that they'll be able to see who sponsored this ad. Then they'll have a better idea about who is supporting the particular opinion that is being broadcast, and then Albertans can decide for themselves whether they agree with that opinion or not. But to not be transparent about it: this is what Albertans don't want to see in their democracy, and it breaks the public trust.

Essentially, what we're seeing here is this United Conservative Party wanting to hide the influence of big money in the political process so that none of this needs to be reported until much later, after the election: "Yeah; we can let them know, but we'll let them know after the election, not during the election or not when these third-party advertisers are actually collecting the money and putting it all together and then actually releasing their campaigns. No, no, no. We don't need to let Albertans know then. We'll let them know after the election whose opinions those were." To me, that is saddening. It's disturbing.

It's frustrating because what we're trying to do here, Mr. Speaker, is to make our democracy better, more accountable so that Albertans have faith in the political process. I cannot tell you how many people, especially youths in our society, that I have a chance to speak with are just completely frustrated with the political process. I remember my days before being elected here to this House and being out in the community as a community organizer and speaking to young people out there and how they were just completely distraught, had absolutely no faith and no trust in the democracy here in the province of Alberta because of the state it was in underneath the Progressive Conservative government. Some of those members continue to sit on the other side of this House. They need to accept responsibility for that.

This is the opportunity, Mr. Speaker. Right now we have an important historical opportunity in front of all of us, and we have a chance to make our democracy better. I challenge the members on the other side of the House to do what's right. Don't just follow along. Don't speak out of both sides of your mouth and say that you're trying to protect democracy when indeed here you are, with this piece of legislation, actually opening up a back door to allow more big money to influence the political process. Together all 87 of us in this House can correct this. We can amend. We can make the change. We can do what's right together to make sure that we are being transparent when it comes to our democracy. That's what Albertans expect. It doesn't matter whether it's rural Alberta or people in Red Deer or Calgary or Lethbridge or Edmonton. That's what they expect from this legislative body. They expect us to do what's right when it comes to this particular matter.

I would say that we need to continue to look critically at how the financing of elections actually impacts the political process, because I'm a strong believer that elections should be about ideas,

about proposals, the ideas that you have for making Alberta better. It would be beautiful if we had a society where we actually talked about policy rather than the rhetoric and the key messages, where we had everybody engaged in the political discussion, where we were talking about ideas, where we could talk about these ideas in a respectful manner. That's the kind of Alberta I'd like to be a part of, where I'm not being discriminated against because of my political beliefs. I'm done with that, Mr. Speaker. We need to do better. Albertans expect us to do better, and here we have a chance to actually do that with this particular piece of legislation, to make sure that loopholes are taken out, and I'm really hoping we can get an amendment on the floor on this particular issue.

8:10

The other aspect of this is that the bill also increases the amount that parties can spend on a campaign. Now, when we were in government, we actually put a cap on that of \$2 million. With the piece of legislation that we have before us right now, there's going to be a new proposed formula. There's a new proposed formula of \$1.16 per voter, which would raise the amount to \$3.27 million, so from \$2 million that the party could spend, Mr. Speaker, to \$3.27 million. Now, jeez, I wonder why that is. They're opening up a back door to allow big money into the political process, and then they're increasing how much the parties can actually spend on the election campaign. I'm asking the members of this House to think about this and make the change.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

The member who has caught my eye to join debate is the hon. Member for Calgary-East.

Mr. Singh: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure to rise and speak today in the Chamber to provide my support for Bill 81, the Election Statutes Amendment Act, 2021 (No. 2). Let me first acknowledge the minister for introducing this significant bill, that will further strengthen our democracy by improving election financing rules and will set a definite election day while making it easier for Albertans to vote.

This legislation is following the democratic reforms commitment by the government. The Legislature has enacted the Senate Election Act, and it came into effect in July 2019. It brought back the Senate nominee election so voters can decide who will best represent them in the Senate and fight for Alberta's interests in Ottawa. Last month Albertans were able to vote for three Senate nominees, and I congratulate the top three Senator nominees, who got the most votes. I hope that the Prime Minister will respect the results of the Senate elections.

Alberta has held Senate elections five times now, including the one held in conjunction with the municipal elections last month. In each election Albertans voted for the Senate candidates that they wanted to put forward to the Queen's Privy Council for Canada for filling future vacancies related to Alberta in the Senate of Canada. These names were put forward by the government of Alberta for consideration by the federal government. There have been five Senate nominees elected in Alberta and appointed to the Senate of Canada since 1990.

Also, Bill 26, the Constitutional Referendum Amendment Act, was passed and made in effect in July 2020, which allowed the government to seek Albertans' guidance on initiatives beyond constitutional matters in order to get a fair deal for Albertans.

Further, in June this year, Mr. Speaker, the Citizen Initiative Act and the Recall Act were enacted. The Citizen Initiative Act permits Albertans to bring forward important matters to the Legislature for consideration. If enough support is received through a public

petition, Albertans will be able to submit proposed legislative and policy changes to the Legislative Assembly for consideration and submit proposed constitutional referendum questions to the provincial government. While the Recall Act allows Albertans to hold elected officials accountable through all of their term, not just during elections, it also created a process that would lead to the recall of elected officials, including Members of the Legislative Assembly, municipal officials, and school trustees.

Similarly, in June this year, Mr. Speaker, Bill 68 was passed. It made it clear that all Members of the Legislative Assembly, including ministers in their role as MLAs, are allowed to participate in public debate and share their views on the topics of referendums.

All of this, together with Bill 81, is with the aim to follow through on the promise made by the provincial government, with a goal of strengthening democracy and accountability in Alberta, and by enhancing and modernizing our electoral system and governance, it contributes to boosting investor confidence in our province.

Just last year alone, Mr. Speaker, we saw huge investments. Amazon Web Services has announced that they will build their second Canadian hub in Canada in the Calgary region. This investment will create 1,000 jobs and total \$4.3 billion.

The northern petrochemical corporation announced a plan of a \$2.5 billion investment to build a major petrochemical facility in the Greenview industrial gateway near Grande Prairie. The facility will create thousands of jobs and contribute to the further diversification of the Peace region. The facility will be a multibillion-dollar, carbon-neutral ammonia and methanol production facility in the municipal district of Greenview. The facility is expected to create over 4,000 jobs during the construction phase and 400 long-term jobs for the region when the facility is in operation. This investment proves that the Alberta recovery plan is working to diversify our economy, attract investment, create jobs, and, like I mentioned, Mr. Speaker, by strengthening democracy and modernizing our electoral system, it contributes to investor confidence.

Bill 81 will improve our electoral system by banning foreign money from Alberta politics. It will allow only those who live in Alberta to contribute to a third party for election advertising and prohibit those not living in Canada, non-Canadian corporations and organizations from donating to political advertising. Foreign entities have no business interfering in Alberta's elections. Our province belongs to Albertans, and elections should remain a time for Albertans to discuss and determine the fate of the province without the involvement of foreign influence. It is not acceptable to allow external influences to meddle with the electoral process of our province. Should foreign money be put in place during an important exercise of democracy in our province, then we would be seeing political agendas that will not benefit Albertans. We would be experiencing foreign entities promoting their own plans, that tend to be disadvantageous to Albertans.

This bill, Mr. Speaker, will amend the Election Finances and Contributions Disclosure Act by explicitly disallowing election advertising contributions "made to a third party other than by a person ordinarily resident in Alberta." Bill 81 will also set an annual \$30,000 limit for donations to third parties. It also carries changes to the list of prohibited individuals or groups making political advertising contributions to a third party by making it clear that a person who is not a Canadian citizen or permanent resident as defined in the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act of Canada – that is, not ordinarily a resident in Canada – is not allowed to make political advertising contributions.

Similarly, Bill 81 explicitly disallows political advertising contributions to a third party from a corporation, unincorporated association, or organization that is incorporated, formed, or

otherwise organized outside of Canada and that does not carry on business in Canada or whose only business activity in Canada consists of doing anything to influence electors to vote or refrain from voting for a specific registered candidate or registered political party. In other words, the bill will not permit a foreign entity that is not engaged in business in Canada to make political advertising donations to a third party.

8:20

Even if that foreign entity is engaged in business in Canada but only with the purpose of influencing voters to vote or not to vote in general, like promoting that all the leaders are incapable so everyone should not vote, or if their purpose is to encourage Albertans to vote or not to vote for a specific candidate or party, then that foreign entity is prohibited from making third-party contributions in accordance with the bill, Mr. Speaker. A political party, constituency association, or candidate will also be disallowed to make political advertising contributions to a third party.

As can be seen, Bill 81 is about 320 pages. With your kind indulgence, allow me to highlight some of the changes that this bill carries, Mr. Speaker. Bill 81 would establish the last Monday in May as the election day in Alberta, removing the advantage that our governing party currently has and increasing trust in the democratic process. This will ensure that the sitting government will not be campaigning at taxpayers' expense during the campaign period while delaying an election to their advantage. Alberta is one of only two provinces in Canada not to have fixed election date legislation, the other being Nova Scotia. Both the Canadian and United Kingdom Parliaments have also adopted into law specific fixed election dates. Consistent with the establishment of a set election date, the bill will make the start of the campaign period the day the writ is issued instead of February 1.

This bill would also establish a formula for determining election expense limits for parties, which would reflect the increase in costs for campaign expenses. Currently there is a flat limit of \$2 million. The new limit would be \$1.16 per registered voter.

Bill 81, Mr. Speaker, will make voting easier for Albertans by providing flexibility for increasing the number of advance voting stations where needed. It would also require voters to produce identification to vote in provincial elections, as in municipal and federal elections, increasing the integrity of Alberta elections. Likewise, it will allow voter cards to be sent electronically as well as by mail. It will change legislation so employers are only obliged to give an employee time off for voting if the employee's schedule does not provide the employee with three consecutive hours to vote during advance voting or on election day. These amendments will also help voting places run more smoothly, efficiently by allowing election officers to fulfill a variety of roles instead of being restricted to specialized duties.

This bill also introduces minor changes to election-related legislation to make sure that they're aligned and the language is consistent throughout. It would also update the language in and add references to the Recall Act and the Citizen Initiative Act to election-related legislation. This bill also will clarify that the Election Commissioner cannot start a citizen initiative petition while allowing rules for a citizen initiative vote to be made by regulation.

The expense limit for nomination contestants will be increased by this bill from 20 per cent to 25 per cent of a candidate's limit. It will also make contributions to nomination contestants, those seeking to be the official candidate in a riding, not part of the donor's maximum contribution limit while making contributions to nomination contestants no longer tax deductible.

With all that said, Mr. Speaker, the bill carries the changes needed to strengthen our democracy. The bill gets big money out of

Alberta politics while prohibiting other jurisdictions and foreign entities from unduly influencing Alberta elections. We do not want to see and experience foreign agendas advancing to Albertans. We want to leave the core of the electoral process to Albertans. We want Albertans to continue to choose their leaders freely without the control or command of foreign money.

In closing, Mr. Speaker, let me again express my appreciation to the minister for introducing these needed changes in our election legislation which make it fair and more modern. I encourage all the members to support Bill 81 as we ensure Albertans that their right – thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore has risen.

Mr. Nielsen: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the chance this evening to rise, add some comments here to debate on Bill 81, the Election Statutes Amendment Act, 2021 (No. 2). You know, I think I'll start with this phrase – people might recognize it; they might remember it – the Wild West of elections financing. Let me say that again: the Wild West of elections financing. For those that maybe don't remember, that was the reputation that Alberta had when it came to election financing laws prior to the NDP government in 2015, not something to be proud of, to say the least. The whole mission was to try to bring election financing rules under somewhat some control because we had seen trends in other provinces and at the federal level around reducing the amount of contributions that people will make.

You know, some others might remember the story of an election contribution to a specific political party back in the day totalling, I think, around \$450,000. There was a cheque that was handed in to somebody, and of course that covered a spouse and a brother and a sister and the gardener's neighbour's dog walker and things like that.

Those are the kinds of things – and my friend from Edmonton-Ellerslie was talking about this – that reduce the confidence in the electoral system. This is why you're constantly hearing things like, you know, "Politicians are a bunch of crooks" and "The whole thing is rigged" and "I don't trust the system." These are the types of reasons why people are saying this and why it's so hard to try to break through when you start to see the legislation that's contained in Bill 81.

You know, I've stood in this House, Mr. Speaker, time and time again to talk about the language that's being presented in bills, what it's saying, what it's not saying. The things that we're hearing during debate – I'll stand corrected. I think it might have been in question period Monday or maybe last week, asking about this ginormous loophole around contributions for nominations. It's so big – and I think I used this term once before when I saw the government bring in a gigantic loophole – that I could probably fly the space shuttle through it sitting in the back seat. That's what we have contained right in here.

8:30

To accept that type of language will get us back to that reputation that I first remarked about, about the Wild West of elections financing, where an individual could write a single cheque for \$450,000-plus and hand it in to a political party through a nomination contestant because there's no donation limit. So when I hear all these things about, "Well, this is to level the playing field out" and whatnot, that is one of the most ridiculous things I've ever heard given the language that's presented. Unfortunately, I left my proper copy back in my office and I can't quote the page, Mr. Speaker, contained in Bill 81, to go through the exact language.

It's those types of things where I've constantly said that they are diametrically opposed: what's being said versus what the language is saying and what it means. It's all fine and dandy. You know, the people in this room here might know what's going on because we're the ones having this debate right now, but what happens when it's somebody else outside of this Chamber that goes and reads this and says, "Huh, this now allows me the ability to spend a whole bunch of money somewhere, and" – worst case scenario – "it won't be discovered until much later, probably after the fact"?

You know, my friend from Edmonton-Ellerslie talked about the Ethics and Accountability Committee. I had the pleasure of sitting on that with him as well, and I remember some of the discussions that took place. You know, I've always said that in the labour world, when you have access to the history or somebody that knows the history – I was there, and I remember some of the, shall we say, hair-lighting-on-fire moments that we saw from members of the opposition because they thought that there were loopholes being created or something like that. And silencing people. My friend talked a little bit about the transparency and third-party advertisers in elections, so I'm trying to imagine what would have happened had the NDP government brought this forward. I suspect that members that were part of that committee back at that time would have lost their minds. As a matter of fact, they probably would have walked out a second time – if I remember right – because they thought that we were trying to rig the system.

As I was saying earlier, the presenter of the bill, the Minister of Justice and Solicitor General, had said – I think it was in question period or something like that – when asked about that little loophole: oh, that's not what it is. I remember – and I'm not saying it was right, Mr. Speaker, but I did heckle and said: "Have you read your own legislation? Because that's exactly what it says in your own book." It's these kinds of things that are very, very concerning. But that's okay because we have potentially a way to correct it.

Again, thinking back to the 29th Legislature, to all the members of the government bench that served during that time, to members of the government caucus that served during the 29th Legislature, one of the biggest things they liked to say was: well, this bill needs to go to committee because it needs to be reviewed, and we need to do economic impact assessments and talk to Albertans and get in touch with stakeholders and everything like that. And I know what everybody is going to say: this is the product of that. Well, I'm curious because I would love to see who recommended: did the committee recommend, did the Chief Electoral Officer recommend, did Albertans recommend, did anybody recommend? Did anyone say, "Let's build in a loophole so somebody could sign a cheque for \$450,000, give it to a nomination contestant"? At best, they could spend \$12,000 of it, and what happens to the other \$400,000? Well, you know, math is hard for me. I want to know who recommended that. To anybody – it doesn't need to be the minister himself; it can be anybody; I don't care – show me who recommended that. Show me who recommended reducing transparency.

Remember what I talked about earlier about reputation? Currently, right now, this provincial government has the reputation of being the most secretive in the country, yet I hear all the time: "We're being transparent. We're being transparent." Reports are delayed, coming out on, you know, Fridays at 6 o'clock at night on a long weekend, things like that. That's not really very transparent, Mr. Speaker. So again I'm challenging those members that sat in the 29th Legislature, each and every single one that thought things needed to go to committee, that if we get a chance perhaps, maybe, we should send this to committee and see what Albertans – because they're the ones that we have to convince that the system is not

rigged, that politicians are not corrupt, that elections aren't being bought by individuals with very, very deep pockets. If they agree, well, then, I guess, Mr. Speaker, I'd have to sit down and shut up, but I have a feeling that that won't necessarily happen.

So, with that in mind, Mr. Speaker, I do have an amendment to propose, and I will send that up to you with the original and wait for your instructions.

The Acting Speaker: All right. Thank you.

For the benefit of all those debating, this will be referred to, going forward, as REF1, as a referral. There will be, of course, copies at both tables close to the entrances, and if you'd like a copy of the amendment, please put up your hand and a page will deliver one to you.

If the hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore could please continue.

Mr. Nielsen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would move that the motion for second reading of Bill 81, Election Statutes Amendment Act, 2021 (No. 2), be amended by deleting all the words after "that" and substituting the following:

Bill 81, Election Statutes Amendment Act, 2021 (No. 2), be not now read a second time but that the subject matter of the bill be referred to the Standing Committee on Families and Communities in accordance with Standing Order 74.2.

Again, this is about the number of changes in the legislation that can be traced back to the work, some of the work, of the Democratic Accountability Committee, but there are a number of them that can't be, so where did these ideas come from? Who proposed them? What is the rationale for saying that they're such a good idea? Please explain to me why potentially it's a good idea for an individual to write a cheque for \$450,000 and give it to a nomination candidate, that can then only spend \$12,000 of it, and what happens with the rest? It's going to a political party and then doesn't necessarily get found out until, based on timing, after an election.

That doesn't sound very transparent to me. That sounds like trying to hide things. So I'm challenging members of this House, if you do actually indeed believe in transparency, accountability, integrity, all those fun words – it's funny how I've always said, you know: why do we actually have to teach these kinds of things? You would hope that they would just naturally be built in, but they're not.

8:40

By sending this, we can have a discussion with Albertans. We can have a discussion with stakeholders. We can invite the Chief Electoral Officer, see if maybe he was the one that presented this idea, why it was such a good, you know, thing to do. But we can also allow Albertans to weigh in on what this is. So if it really is indeed a good idea, well – you know what? – I'd probably be one of the first ones to recommend that we very quickly pass it then after that. But I don't know. I have this sneaking suspicion that Albertans aren't going to like a few of these points that are in here. There are probably some in here that they will. Of course, right now I'm focusing on the ones that I think are going to cause a problem, a very big problem, which can bring us back to that whole reputation that I first started discussing about tonight, about the Wild West of elections financing.

This is not the reputation that Alberta wants to have. I hear all the time: "We're leading the way. We're going to lead the way. We should lead the way." Well, lead the way, then. Don't be the most secretive government in the country. Don't be the least transparent government in the country. You know, maybe by chance, folks will start to have a slightly better opinion. At least, you'll give them a chance to weigh in on this bill as it's written.

If you do actually, indeed – again talking to the members that served in the 29th Legislature about how these kinds of things should go to committee so that Albertans can have their chance to weigh in on things, if you actually do believe that, here's your chance to prove it. I hope they do, Mr. Speaker. My heart is hoping they will. But there's this nagging voice in the back of my brain that's kind of countering that a little bit.

I think we can have a really good discussion in that committee. I think Albertans will provide some very valuable feedback, and we'll be able to create a bill that's acceptable for everyone to swallow.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

I see the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo has risen.

Member Ceci: Yeah. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, for the opportunity to weigh in on what my colleague from Edmonton-Decore has raised in terms of sending this to committee for further discussion. I need to break the news to you: I don't think that's going to happen. I think that this will continue to stay in this House and go through until being approved and passed as another terrible piece of legislation around election financing laws in this province, the second of which has come forward under the UCP, the first being the municipal election financing law, Bill 29, which raised the limit from a total of \$4,000 that Albertans could contribute to municipal electoral candidates to, as the other side likes to say: well, we only raised it a thousand dollars. That is just so much hokum because that \$5,000 limit is unlimited in terms of the number of candidates that can be provided that \$5,000. So this bill, Bill 81, is another bad bill for this province.

My colleague from Edmonton-Decore rightly pointed out that the Wild West was in existence before the NDP government in 2015. We took over after the terrible election financing laws put in place by the PC government. We did all that, and for this UCP government, one of their first acts was to say: we're going to have a summer of repeal. They did that, Mr. Speaker. They repealed good legislation. They repealed limits on contributions in municipal elections. They're continuing to go down that road. Only this time it's not under an election in terms of the amount that an Albertan may contribute to an electoral candidate; it's through the nomination contest.

So another note on the Wild West is that the first intervenor from the UCP side talked about, you know, that Saskatchewan has got the same rules, that we should emulate Saskatchewan, and that things are going okay there. Well, Mr. Speaker, Ontario, B.C., Quebec, and the federal government all have the annual contribution limits that also cover nomination contests, so there are two-thirds of the population under those two provinces that are governed by rules that make sense. The federal government has rules that continue to make sense, and the annual contribution limit for the federal government, I think, is \$1,700 or something like that. It's not \$4,243, as we have in this province at this point in time. Going down the road of Saskatchewan, it has under a million people in its province. Adding our 4.4 million people to be governed by the same rules when two-thirds of the Canadian population and the federal government have rules that have annual contribution limits that include nomination contests: it really is going down the road of the Wild West, as my colleague from Edmonton-Decore pointed out.

My colleague from Edmonton-Ellerslie talked a lot about the third-party contributions, and he had a great deal to say about how, again, this Bill 81 is egregious in terms of its treatment of third parties. My colleague from Edmonton-Centre didn't have anything good to say about this bill. He talked about it as a craven step by a government that continues to show its contempt for Albertans, and

this bill is all of that and more, Mr. Speaker. No one from this side can understand where the recommendations, particularly around the removal of limits for nomination contests, come from. It wasn't recommended, the CEO hasn't recommended it, the Chief Electoral Officer hasn't recommended it, so really it is a backroom deal cooked up by people on that side.

We are concerned about it, and I'm concerned that the previous speaker, from Calgary-East, did not even mention this important step that will remove limits from contestants in nominations. He said, you know, that there are no longer going to be tax deductions. Well, that's just one piece of it, Mr. Speaker. He talked about all the great things that were going to happen as a result of this bill, but not once did he talk about the egregious nomination contest rules that are being put in place with Bill 81 that will allow big money, dark money, to come into nomination contests across this province. When one person can buy memberships for another person – and that's what this bill does – when you can do that, you erode democracy. [interjection] Yes, I'll give way.

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My colleague was just beginning to touch on another thing that I indeed found interesting in this bill, that being the ability for another individual to buy nominations on behalf of someone else. It just brought to mind the Premier's leadership campaign. One of the things that came up under investigation under the Election Commissioner was an individual who came forward who said that on behalf of the Premier's election campaign for the leadership of the UCP he spent as much as \$6,000 buying 1,200 UCP memberships on behalf of others so that they could vote for the Premier as the leader of UCP, and now we have such a provision being added in this legislation. I was just wondering about my colleague's thoughts on that.

8:50

Member Ceci: Yeah. Thank you very much for the intervention. Buying a membership for someone else, plain and simple, in my view, is corrupt. It is using the abilities of a broker who may have lists and lists and lists of people perhaps who come from a club, a church, and support any other group of people who get together on a regular basis. If that list falls into their hands, they can buy memberships for all of those people and present them to them. How does that benefit democracy? It stacks contests, Mr. Speaker. It stacks contests. It's been done before, and we know it's been done before.

Mr. Speaker, selling a membership to a person, going up to them and asking them for their money, whether it's \$10, \$5, or whatever it is: that is how you build democracy. I've done it. I've talked to people, and I said: "Look, I want you to vote for me. You have to have a membership first." And they have to reach into their pocket. With this bill, that is being eroded. There's only one word for it. It's corruption. It's what many governments in Canada have eliminated. It's what we need to ensure does not take place in this province. The fact that unlimited donations can come into a nomination contest is wrong because the amount of money that can be transferred after that contest takes place in that constituency is removed as well. [interjection] Yes, I'll give way.

Mr. Dach: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Thank you for giving way, Member for Calgary-Buffalo. Thinking back to committee meetings that were held to discuss the election finances act and changes to it that we made while in government, in that committee meeting there were former members of this Legislature, somebody who I actually went to high school with, who shocked me and disappointed me when we suggested that there should be

rules governing money donated to nomination meetings, when he said very clearly and painfully that nomination meetings, political parties were private clubs. Now, isn't that the crux of the matter? What this UCP government is telling us and telling the world is that they believe that political parties are private clubs and, as that other member said, the public has no business in their operation. Does that give you the same impression?

Member Ceci: Well, thank you very much. Yeah. I think I read somewhere in the bill and notes for the bill that the removal of a nonprofit status from political parties is also in this bill, and you have to wonder why again. Like, what reason? Maybe members on the other side have a reason for that. I don't know. It just seems like – we want our politics to be above the fray and not corporations in the sense of private entities. You know, they should be for the good of the people as opposed to the good of the members in those corporations or whatever they're going to be.

Mr. Speaker, I am totally flummoxed not only with this bill but with Bill 29. You know, the members stood up and said: incumbents can be challenged with this bill. That was the same rationale that was used for Bill 29. I looked it up. I looked up the media at the time. The minister of the day said: you know, with this bill, we're allowing incumbents to be better challenged by the \$5,000 that now is available to them and to that person and that person and that person and that person. As many \$5,000 cheques you want to write, you can under Bill 29.

Most of the world is going the other way. Why is the UCP Party continually going in the way of big money? That's the question Albertans have to ask. The question they have to ask and they ask repeatedly is: why aren't they for us? They seem to be for them and to keep their own political skins on, Mr. Speaker. That's what this Bill 81 is all about. Bill 29, again, was about trying to further incent people who have fought like the right wing of the UCP. It's just incredible that most of Canada goes one way, and we go the other because of the government of this day.

I want to review a few words that were said by my colleague the critic for this area of democracy and ethics. He said that, to put it bluntly, this bill allows the UCP to run their next election on illegal money, and it's no wonder why. This is a party that's sinking in the polls, having trouble getting donations from ordinary Albertans, and that has a history of resorting to shady, underhand practices in both election campaigns and leadership campaigns.

My colleague from Edmonton-Decore, of course, talked about that famous \$450,000 that came out of – it wasn't to this party. It was to part of the legacy of this party. That came from a wealthy individual who stacked up donors, who probably didn't even know he was donating on their behalf, and it was hundreds of thousands of dollars. Now, if that's not corruption, Mr. Speaker, I don't know what is. This bill allows similar things to happen in nomination contests across this province now, which is disappointing because we won't operate that way. We will operate above board and with ethics. None of these recommendations come from the recommendations of the special select committee.

My colleague goes on to say that by removing nomination contests from contribution limits under the law, this allows unlimited funding to every single nomination candidate in Alberta. This means potentially hundreds of thousands of dollars from big donors sneaking into party coffers through nomination contests, and there could also be multiple illegal donations to UCP constituency associations as this bill will allow donations to be hidden for months after a general election.

That's another thing. There used to be quarterly accounting for donations. This will now be annual, Mr. Speaker. You know, what

do they say? The horse will have left the barn by a long deal, by a long shot when and if any accounting is actually done to bring that to light.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

We're deeply disturbed by all of this, and we're going to fight this bill. We're fighting not just against the UCP; we're fighting for a higher cause, Madam Speaker. We're fighting for democracy in this case because other democratic governments in other places, namely in Canada, have understandable bills before them around nomination contests, donation limits. We're going the other way, and in that, we're not going in the way of progress. We're going the way of retrenching back to the Wild West, which is not good. In fact, it's quite bad. In fact, it benefits the government and their donors who want to be able to funnel money to contests throughout the province and then see that money end up in the party's coffers.

Madam Speaker, there's no other way to say that this is sneaking money into party coffers through a nomination caucus. That's what it is. It reduces the transparency. If you can buy party memberships on behalf of another person without their knowledge, it eliminates critical transparency and reporting on the party funds and donations.

9:00

While the Finance minister was in the House today crowing about, you know, what the Canadian Taxpayers Federation has given that government in terms of a grade and what they gave this side when we were government, he failed to talk about the fact that the C.D. Howe Institute gave us as government around our financial books and transparency an A plus. That's not happening over there right now. So that side is selective.

I would like to please move to adjourn debate, Madam Speaker.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Government Bills and Orders Committee of the Whole

[Mrs. Pitt in the chair]

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

Bill 49 Labour Mobility Act

The Chair: There are currently no amendments on the floor. We're just on the main bill. Any members wishing to join the debate? The hon. Member for Edmonton-City Centre.

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you, Madam Chair. I appreciate the opportunity to rise and speak to Bill 49, the Labour Mobility Act, at Committee of the Whole. Under this legislation we have the government looking to, in its words, open the opportunity to make it easier for folks in other parts of Canada to come and work here in the province of Alberta.

We've had the chance to discuss this through second reading, and I think we've certainly expressed a few concerns, some different thoughts, and some different issues that have come up. Indeed, I know that my colleague the Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods has undertaken some discussions, along with some others, with different groups and organizations who are affected by this bill, and let's be clear that there are a large number of different organizations, associations, colleges who are responsible for regulating the

certification of people in a wide number of fields that are included in this bill. So, certainly, there should have been some robust consultation on behalf of government before moving something like this forward.

Now, I understand that in the conversations that my colleague from Edmonton-Mill Woods and others have had with some of these organizations, we had approximately three that raised no concerns with the bill. We had seven that mentioned that they found the bill to be redundant as it does not actually change or affect any process in place for them in their work. We had one organization which expressed concern about meeting the proposed timelines that are laid out for the certification process and each step in that process given that their organization is in fact operated by volunteers. They can't guarantee dedicated staff for the same in their current capacity.

One organization expressed some major concerns regarding the impact of implementation of the bill since they don't find that the bill addresses the lack of regulatory authority due to provincial differences in legislative procedure and scope of practice and if the practitioner's home jurisdiction should address any conflicts before they're granted a licence or certification. Moreover, they argued that the bill doesn't address the major concerns of workers or regulators, particularly in their field.

Indeed, we heard from organizations that this legislation was unexpected, that they did not see that it provided any significant benefit, and that in discussions they had been having with the government – they, in fact, had been at the table – there had been no mention, when they were speaking with the government, that this bill was coming forward.

Others expressed that the consultations they did have a chance to participate in didn't seem particularly effective because the legislation doesn't reflect that the government has actually incorporated any of their concerns or made any amendments in the proposed bill. Another expressed that the consultation did not in fact provide that much detail.

So, certainly, it would seem that the government's consultation on this legislation left something to be desired, as so much of the consultation, in name at least, that this government engages in before it sets out to do what it intended to do in the first place. Indeed, we know that the government has not so far provided any information, in fact, on what they heard in their consultations and no information about who they actually consulted with, no indication whether in any of the consultations these organizations expressed concerns. Certainly, again, when we reached out to talk with some of these organizations, some identified that indeed they did raise some concerns with the government which were not addressed or reflected in the legislation.

So it certainly leaves a number of questions about what the government's intention was and what the information was that they heard and what some of the other issues are that they perhaps did not incorporate that were raised by organizations, associations, regulators who are impacted and affected by this bill.

The bill does not appear in any way to actually flow from our short- or long-term employment forecast. It doesn't show any sign of having been designed to address current labour shortages. The government has not provided any information on what basis it is determining that these are the occupations that indeed are where we need to have more flexibility or why. This will be the first legislation of its kind in Canada which includes specific timelines and enforcement with penalties, but the government has not provided any information on how they determined these timelines, on what basis this was calculated, and indeed what was said in the consultations when they spoke with these organizations.

Let's be clear, Madam Chair. When it comes to regulatory associations, colleges, organizations in the province of Alberta, it is not one size fits all. There are vastly different requirements for different occupations. There are vastly different processes that may be needed to assess whether an individual should be certified and what is involved in that process. There are varying levels of education that are involved for different positions that are being discussed.

So I think there are still a large number of questions, and I'm looking forward to the opportunity to continue to discuss those in Committee of the Whole.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. It's a pleasure to rise in Committee of the Whole, the first time in Committee of the Whole for me for this session, I believe, on Bill 49, the Labour Mobility Act. I greatly appreciated the comments from the Member for Edmonton-City Centre because his discussion was going down the lines of thought that I've had with this. Obviously, there are a number of regulatory bodies that have been impacted by Bill 49. As Official Opposition critic for labour we've been reaching out to them to ask for their feedback, and I'm happy to say that for a number of organizations there is either positive feedback or no concerns, so that is good. But there are a few organizations that have expressed concerns, so in Committee of the Whole I would like to introduce an amendment and speak to this first.

9:10

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

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. To introduce it into the record, I move that Bill 49, the Labour Mobility Act, be amended in section 8 as follows: (a) in subsection (2) by striking out "a regulatory body" and substituting "Subject to subsection (2.1), a regulatory body" and (b) by adding the following immediately after subsection 2.1:

2.1 On request by a regulatory body at any time before the period referred to in subsection (2) expires, the Minister may provide an extension to that period of up to 10 business days as it applies to that regulatory body.

Having read that in, I will briefly just provide the rationale.

With this amendment we are trying to respond to some of the feedback we heard from stakeholders, because smaller regulatory bodies – in fact, we heard from one, that uses volunteers to do the certification credential checking, that they were a little bit concerned about the timelines that have been imposed. We noted that the timelines don't provide an avenue for the minister to be able to provide an extension should there be a legitimate need. With this amendment we have left the timelines as they stand but provided the minister with the ability to extend those timelines an additional 10 business days, as needed, by amending section 8.

That extension, obviously, would be up to the minister and the department, based on talking to regulatory bodies, based on their reasoning. There may be cases where a regulatory body would request an extension, but the minister and his office and the department may feel that through a change in process or other mechanisms they should be able to meet the original. But what we wanted to do was provide the minister with flexibility to be able to grant an extension should one legitimately seem to make a difference to these regulatory bodies. I do believe that in introducing this legislation, the minister's goals of having clearer timelines, the minister's goals of having a streamlined process are reasonable. This would provide him with the flexibility and the ability to have some flexibility – limited flexibility, even, as we've

limited it to 10 business days – in responding to regulatory bodies and their requests.

I will repeat again something that I believe I said at second reading and something that I heard clearly from a number of organizations: a lot of the regulatory bodies that are affected by Bill 49 are already doing better than 20 days, better than the timelines here. This just allows that flexibility for the smaller impacted bodies, especially in the case where these timelines perhaps would be onerous or add additional cost to those organizations.

So this is the first amendment, based on the feedback we received from impacted stakeholders. I appreciate that there are a number of government members here, and I look forward to their response.

The Chair: The hon. Minister of Labour and Immigration.

Mr. Shandro: Thank you, Madam Chair, and, through you to the member, thank you for the thoughtful and considerate amendment that's before the Chamber. I think it's been about 12 pieces of legislation that I've had the honour of sponsoring, and I'd like to thank the member, through you, Madam Chair, for giving advance notice of this, first of all. It was very kind of her to be able to do it so that I would have time to consult with the department on this amendment. It was very considerate of her to be able to do that.

As well, you know, from my experience, as I said, Madam Chair, on other bills that had my name sponsoring them, it is refreshing to see a proposal that is thoughtful and considerate and trying to address some of the considerations that have been heard, allegedly, from stakeholders. So I'd like to thank her for what she is considering to be a solution, and I think a thoughtful one, in what might be a case for any future minister to be able to provide some type of flexibility for a regulatory body if they have a concern in not being able to comply with that 20-day limitation, to at least be able to apply for an extension of 10 business days and for that flexibility to be in the hands of the minister, then, to consider. After consultation with the department, Madam Chair – I suppose this is going to be up to the Chamber for every individual member to be able to vote on – I can say that I will be voting in favour of the hon. member's amendment here in this situation. Thank you to the member.

The Chair: Any other members wishing to speak to the amendment? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

Ms Gray: Thank you so much, and thank you to my colleague for ceding the floor very briefly. I will just say thank you to the minister for reviewing the amendment and accepting it at this point. It's much appreciated and comes directly from some of the stakeholder feedback, so thank you.

The Chair: Any other members wishing to join the debate on the amendment? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

Member Loyola: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. I want to thank the Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods and our House leader for actually bringing forward this piece of legislation because, of course, as was stated by her and the Member for Edmonton-City Centre, we did reach out to a number of stakeholders regarding this particular piece of proposed legislation. Indeed, some of the stakeholders did identify this as an issue because, of course, as was stated by the Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods, some of the organizations that actually help out people in the community to actually go through this process are actually nonprofit organizations which count on the very hard work of volunteers to actually help members out.

This is typical of what I have seen coming through the constituency office of Edmonton-Ellerslie. It's often volunteers that are trying to help out people in the community, especially newcomers, to actually establish themselves right here in the province and be able to carry on with what it is that they've been trained to do, they've been dedicated to do. Often they have experience. I can't tell you the number of times, Madam Chair, that I've heard from my own constituents that they have experience from their home country and, you know, they're struggling to get through the accreditation process. Often they come up against this huge wall, and that huge wall is: well, you don't have enough Canadian experience. This is something that we desperately need to take a look at here in the province of Alberta, of course. I'm contributing this to the minister so that he can take it into consideration.

I take this opportunity to talk about what I've heard from a lot of the volunteers that are helping people to go through this process. Often what will happen is that they'll say – well, they use my name, of course – “Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie, this is my experience; I can't seem to get a job because I just don't have enough Canadian experience.” Since we're on the topic, I thought I would add at least that piece of information that I'm getting from constituents in my own riding.

Of course, specifically, this is about providing this extra 10 days. I think that it's relatively pretty easy to fill, self-explanatory. I don't think that it's anything that's going to go against the proposed piece of legislation by the minister. In fact, it would complement it very well. It would be helping out people from the community, especially volunteers that are helping people go through the accreditation process. So I want to actually thank the minister for getting up in the House, saying that he will be voting in favour of this particular amendment, as I believe it's quite a reasonable one, as he sees it the same way.

With that, I will wrap up, Madam Chair. Thank you.

9:20

The Chair: Any other members wishing to speak to the amendment? The hon. Minister of Labour and Immigration.

Mr. Shandro: Thank you, Madam Chair. I'm pleased to be able to speak a second time and perhaps just to provide some clarity. That's wonderful feedback that we heard from the Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie and hearing from newcomers being able to have that difficulty as a newcomer and not having enough Canadian experience. I would point out, though, that this is, of course, Bill 49 that's before us. This is about folks who have certification elsewhere in Canada and then want to be able to have that certification and having quick timelines for them to be recognized here in Alberta, so it would be different than the situation that perhaps we heard from the member.

I do respect that that is an issue that we have in Alberta, in Canada, throughout the world and something we do as a government want to be able to work on, helping newcomers to Canada, to Alberta to be able to have accreditation outside of Canada. It's something we are committed to addressing. I'm always happy to understand what the constituency office in Edmonton-Ellerslie might be hearing from those newcomers, being able to work with the member to make sure that those folks are having their concerns understood and heard by this government. I'm happy to connect with him any time after this to hear what he's hearing.

Because we have heard a little bit about some of the stakeholders, Madam Chair, and some of their concerns about having the 20 days being met, I would point out, though, that this is something that has been worked on for quite a long time, well before I was the Minister

of Labour and Immigration, I think going back to 2019. There was an application processing time – not process, but, I guess, test, a test that was done with all of the regulatory bodies. Those results show that almost all of our regulatory bodies would comply with this 20-day requirement. There are very few that are going to have to true up to be able to comply with the 20 days.

I'm happy, as I said, to provide my support for this amendment, to have some flexibility in subsection (2) of the section that we're discussing here in this amendment.

Thank you.

The Chair: Any other members to the amendment?

Seeing none, I will call the question on amendment A1 as moved by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

[Motion on amendment A1 carried]

The Chair: We're back on the main bill, Bill 49, in Committee of the Whole. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore.

Mr. Nielsen: Thank you, Madam Chair. I appreciate the opportunity this evening to add some first comments around Bill 49, the Labour Mobility Act. I guess I'll start off with saying that when I look at the title, it certainly looks encouraging, you know, having labour mobility. To have professions move around on the surface always sounds good, but I must say that I have heard concerns from constituents around that, about their ability to be able to seek a job.

We may have recovered some of our jobs since the pandemic, but pre-pandemic we had lost a considerable amount despite the big job-creation tax cut that the government brought in, which was supposed to spur all kinds of jobs and all kinds of companies to come to Alberta. I believe the Premier even said, you know, that some of the banks would be irresponsible if they didn't come.

On the surface, you know, I would say that Bill 49 could potentially work in our favour, but again the concerns from constituents are around jobs because the reality is that – in my experience in the past I've seen cases where employers will bring in other professionals from outside of the province at a lower rate of pay rather than giving it to the individual that calls Alberta home. That still remains a concern of mine with this. I'm looking forward throughout Committee of the Whole. Hopefully, we'll get a chance to address these types of questions.

I know one of the things that the government was very excited about was, you know, reducing all the barriers and everything like that that Alberta had. To be honest, it kind of felt like we were just allowing every other jurisdiction to come into Alberta and, quite honestly, eat Albertans' lunch. I haven't been seeing the reciprocal moves from other provinces to do the same thing. Again, on the surface while I'm potentially encouraged by Bill 49, I'm wondering if provinces elsewhere are willing to make these same kind of adoptions. Otherwise, it's going to be a case of we're going to start putting Albertans at a disadvantage.

Again, you know, all it takes, as they say, is one, and I've seen it more than once where an employer will bring in from somewhere else because, "Well, I can get them cheaper" rather than giving a job to an Albertan. Our first responsibility should be to the people that elected us, not necessarily the folks that don't live here. Again, I hope we'll get a chance to have a little bit of a further discussion around that.

You know, even if this is, as touted, all that and a bag of chips and will be a benefit, we have seen more people leaving Alberta than are coming. So you start to have that concern. Even though you have this great legislation for people to be able to come into the

province, use their credentials in the industry, we've already seen, as I've mentioned earlier, businesses won't just come here for a simple corporate tax break. That's very, very clear now by this point. They're also looking at things like: how stable is your health care system? How good is your education system? How well do we have access to talented individuals?

We've seen our health care system thrown into complete chaos. We've seen our postsecondary system being gutted, and we won't necessarily have access to those talented individuals that these companies are looking for. Our education system is in trouble. We have a curriculum, for instance, that virtually nobody wants to pilot. You know, somehow we've managed to convince a couple to test it out, and, well, that's going to be sufficient. They're looking at all of these criteria. So even though we potentially have this opportunity through the Labour Mobility Act, it's being countered by other things that are going on.

I've always said that, you know, again, it comes down to language, what's happening, same sort of thing. We potentially could have something good, and it's certainly been made better now with the recent adoption of that last amendment giving some flexibility. It made sense, and I will thank the labour minister, of course, as well for accepting that. I'll be honest. I did have a little bit of an expectation that he should have given the fact that the government has offered all kinds of extensions to everybody else for things: extensions on this report, extensions on that report, extensions on this timeline, and over there. Not to look a gift horse in the mouth, I'm pleased that you've granted that amendment because it will add flexibility for any extreme cases. Rather than have them hit the timeline and expire and everything goes for naught, add that little extension and get the job done, as they say.

9:30

I will be listening intently throughout the debate to how this is going to play out, how this affects the things that we've already been doing in Alberta, and how it potentially can impact Bill 49, especially working against it. I mean, it would be unfortunate that we managed to create a solid piece of legislation that Albertans can count on, that people that want to be able to come to Alberta can count on, yet we have other things that are going on that are pushing them away or they're just, again, looking from the outside going: it sounds like a great idea over there, but, yeah, I'll stay where I am; thank you very much.

I'll be listening intently, and hopefully we'll get a chance to hear a few more of those questions answered throughout the time discussing Bill 49.

The Chair: Any other members wishing to join the debate on Bill 49 in Committee of the Whole? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

Ms Gray: Thank you so much, Madam Chair. I appreciate the opportunity to rise during Committee of the Whole again. I am going to just begin my remarks by introducing a second amendment.

The Chair: Hon. members, this will be known as amendment A2. Hon. member, please proceed.

Ms Gray: Thank you very much. With this amendment, I move that Bill 49, Labour Mobility Act, be amended (a) in section 6(1)(a) by striking out "certification" and substituting "certification in good standing" and (b) in section 7 by striking out "certification" and substituting "certification in good standing."

With this amendment, Madam Chair, we have received feedback from more than one stakeholder concerned about what will happen

and how the process will work if there are applicants who have concerns or challenges in their home jurisdiction with the line of thinking that if there are challenges or ethics concerns, anything like that, any conflicts should be resolved in the practitioner's home jurisdiction before that certification consideration happens here in Alberta. Now, in this case we are simply saying that rather than "certification" there should be "certification in good standing" in their home jurisdiction. This may or may not sufficiently cover all of the concerns raised by stakeholders.

I want to make clear that the real consideration and the real meat on the bones, even with this amendment, is going to be the drafting of the regulations and the regulations which will limit what information regulators can require a labour mobility applicant to provide. The drafting of the regulations to go with Bill 49 are going to be incredibly important. I'm only picturing it, but, like, I think the regulations are going to be really big. There are so many different types of occupations, so many different regulatory bodies that are involved. They necessarily have very different requirements, so I imagine that the ministry of labour and the labour minister himself have plans to consult and talk to each of the different types of regulatory bodies in order to draft the regulations.

Those regulations are going to say whether a regulator can ask a labour mobility applicant for information focused on whether they have any outstanding complaints or investigations in their home jurisdiction. Can the regulator ask for information that could have to do with, potentially, criminal records? In some occupations that may be important. This amendment doesn't go as far as that because it does make sense that those details be outlined in the regulations. There will be different needs based on different occupations. What this amendment does do is that rather than just simply saying "certification," it requires "certification in good standing" from the home jurisdiction and, to my mind, implies that any conflicts around the certification that the applicant has will need to be resolved in their home province before these timelines and this process can be imposed.

Again, we did hear this concern from more than one impacted regulatory body, so we have drafted an amendment that we think will hopefully address some of those concerns. I look forward to hearing from the minister his thoughts on this amendment.

The Chair: The hon. Minister of Labour and Immigration.

Mr. Shandro: Well, thank you, Madam Chair, and thank you again, through you, to the member for the very thoughtful proposal that's before the Chamber in this amendment and as well for submissions on support and the context regarding the proposal here in these proposed amendments to section 6 and section 7.

I can say again, as I did with the previous amendment, that I got an additional heads-up on what was going to be proposed, so I did have an opportunity to consult with the department, and I can advise the Chamber what I was advised. What I was advised was that the legislation is intended to support the seamless movement of out-of-province certified professionals to meet our labour needs. The legislation does that by requiring professional regulatory bodies to recognize the certification that's obtained by a worker in another province and then, in turn, to register the professional in Alberta to allow them to work in Alberta within that profession.

The intent of the legislation isn't to allow workers to work in Alberta if they are not "in good standing" with the regulator in their home province despite being, quote, certified to work in that other province. The intent is to address the issue in the enabling regulation, and I think the member might have even hinted that that could be a possibility. That is the intent, with the result that the

workers who are not in good standing in their home province would not be allowed to work in Alberta.

So for those reasons, Madam Chair, while I do thank the member again, though, for a very thoughtful proposal in this amendment that's been proposed before the Chamber, I will unfortunately be voting against this amendment.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, and thank you to the minister for responding to the amendment. Understanding that you are coordinating with the department that's doing the drafting and trying to understand the implications, I will just say that if the intent is for it to cover members who are in good standing, from your remarks I'm not clear on what potential negative impact accepting this amendment may have.

The Chair: The hon. minister.

Mr. Shandro: That's a good question, Madam Chair. I suppose that in having that condition being added to the word "certification" in what is being proposed to be amended in sections 6 and 7 in this amendment, the difficulty is that "in good standing" is not in this act being defined. If we are to address some type of a situation that our regulatory bodies have an issue with, the best way to do that would be through the thoughtful considerations that the member is obviously getting, as well as we are, from these stakeholders. Trying to make sure that there is clear direction to all of these regulatory bodies in the regulations rather than perhaps having something – and this isn't meant to be pejorative. I have nothing but the greatest amount of respect for the member and what's being proposed in this amendment, but having this condition added to certification, "in good standing," perhaps is being more vague than what we would like to provide our regulatory bodies.

The Chair: Any other members wishing to speak to amendment A2? Seeing none, I will call the question on amendment . . .

Member Ceci: Sorry. Regarding the amendment if that's okay.

The Chair: Hon. member, I was calling the question, looking for members to speak before I called the question. However, I will allow you to speak.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

9:40

Member Ceci: Great. Thank you very much, Madam Chair. At this point in time I apologize for getting up slowly.

I was on a council where there were many knowledgeable people, and one of those was Alderman John Schmal. Repeatedly he would get up and he would talk about putting some belts and braces around the discussions and the language that we had come up with in different ways around motions that we were creating sometimes on the fly. Alderman Schmal used to get up and say: you know, if it doesn't cause a problem, why don't we just put a little more belts and braces around this?

Its intent is to give direction and instruction. I can appreciate, in listening to the minister, that, you know, there are things in the bill here that perhaps haven't been structured in the way that the amendments from my colleague have put it. But I think it gives greater understanding to what's actually the substance of the certification that a person is bringing with them, and it puts some greater certainty that that certification of that person and the

certification that they have are not in any way lesser than we would like in this province.

I know there are approximately 40 – oh, there are more than that. This is just one part of the schedule and the other part. You know, there are, like, almost 60 regulatory bodies that this bill impacts. I think we can get there with those regulatory bodies in terms of what they are looking for as well with regard to people coming here with their certifications, that they need to be in good standing, and with this many bodies we need to ensure that Albertans are getting certified professionals in all of these areas and that they are professionals who come with no difficulties. The fact that the practitioner's home jurisdiction was mentioned to us, that should address any conflicts with that person that they granted the licence to or certification to first, makes sense to me.

I think what someone like Alderman Schmal would say is that it's really putting some good belts and braces around this issue. I would agree with the amendments from my colleague.

Mr. Shandro: Well, I just want to get up, Madam Chair, because former Alderman John Schmal's name was mentioned by my hon. friend opposite. I met Alderman Schmal, well, after he was an alderman, after he retired from municipal politics. I never got a chance to knock on doors for John Schmal, but I had an opportunity to knock on doors with John. He was a wonderful human being, and I'm just so pleased to have his name mentioned in this Chamber. I'm not sure that I would agree, though, with the member that this is a belts-and-suspenders situation, in adding the phrase "in good standing" at this point, with respect to my friend who's proposing the amendment. I just wanted to get up and thank the hon. member for mentioning John Schmal.

The Chair: Any other members? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore.

Mr. Nielsen: Thank you, Madam Chair. You know, maybe I'll try and encourage the labour minister to reconsider, and hopefully this story might help a little bit. I have a couple of friends that are electricians. They've spent considerable time up in Fort McMurray building the projects that are there. I must say that some of the stories that they have told me of their experiences up there are quite hair raising, to say the least. I don't think I could accurately give a picture of how they described it. Perhaps some of the language might be considered unparliamentary. But, suffice to say, they found themselves in several different situations where co-workers of theirs that were brought in from other jurisdictions clearly didn't know what they were doing even though they had certification, supposedly, to do the job. You know, when you hear of situations of using high-voltage lines, high-amperage lines, and some individual, while their coworkers are working on connecting these things – to fire them up and send power through there is, I hear, quite the experience to see when a panel goes up in smoke.

Hearing those stories and seeing this amendment, I think that in a way it would be just a tiny, little step to ensure the safety of workers. I appreciate that while we want to be efficient and clear and quick in getting things done, it can't be at the expense of people. Thinking to, you know, my friends' experiences in the electrician trades and some of the accidents that they've seen, including, actually, even being a part of, is cause for pause. I'm hoping that that story, maybe, might sway the minister a little bit just to provide that extra layer of safety to Albertans working here and, you know, people that come here, period. You may have workers that come from one jurisdiction, a worker coming from another jurisdiction. Sure, they carry a piece of paper that says that they're certified, but

clearly it seems that they're not. Ensuring that they have a certification that's in good standing gives that level of safety. I'm hoping that I might be able to sway the minister on that just a little bit.

The Chair: Any other members to speak to amendment A2?

[Motion on amendment A2 lost]

The Chair: We are back on the main bill, Bill 49, in Committee of the Whole. Members wishing to join the debate? The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

Member Ceci: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. Just back on the main bill, of course. Bill 49 is before us, Labour Mobility Act. You know, I'm looking at some of the media around this and some of the things that have been said in the past and trying to understand what else is being done to attract employees to this province. Is this it with regard to the significant problems that Alberta is in with all of the jobs that have been lost in this province? We know that jobs were lost before the pandemic. We know jobs have been lost during the pandemic.

We know that there are significant challenges in many, many sectors, retail being one, food service being another. Employers are having difficulties in trying to find eligible people to take those positions, and it's not because of CERB or some other kind of a federal employment assistance at this point in time to supplement people's inability to work. It's because there is an effect that this government has had on the out-migration of people from our province, particularly young people. We know that the net growth is negative this year with regard to certain categories or age groups of the population. So if this is the only jobs bill before us, Madam Chair, I'd submit that it's, again, too little, too late, which seems to be the way that this government attacks every significant problem that there is in this province. I don't have to go down the road of COVID and health regimes that are necessary to protect Albertans that were only being brought in too little and too late for us not to get into a fourth wave, that has been totally devastating for people. Lives have been lost, and families have been hurt. That's an example of not enough being done, again, by this government.

9:50

You know, the feedback that we got with regard to this bill was substantial because there are approximately 60 organizations that regulate professionals in this province, that this bill deals with. One of the points of feedback from them is that there is no reciprocal agreement in other provinces with regard to professionals from this province going elsewhere, so we have some difficulties with all of this, some problems with it. It doesn't solve the significant labour problems we have in this province in some sectors. It will be something that can be useful and helpful down the road, but we have problems now that it doesn't address. Those immediate problems won't go away because of this bill, Madam Chair. This bill only is something that won't create a huge flood of people to Alberta.

What does that, Madam Chair, is having a government and policies in place, as my colleague from Edmonton-Decore talked about a little while ago. It's the total environment of this province. I don't mean, you know, the natural environment. I mean the environment, the context, what people think about Alberta when they think about Alberta. Regrettably, what people have been seeing in our national newspapers as well as the local, provincial ones as well as the *New York Times* are headlines that would say that Alberta is a smaller, lesser place as a result of the things that

are going on. They'll see headlines that talk about the government of Alberta, through its war room, going after Bigfoot, a Disney film, and trying to say that Disney needs to get it right with regard to the oil sands. Those are the things that people see across this country and elsewhere, and they make decisions based on those views, those understandings.

When I was completing my undergraduate degree in southern Ontario and working for four months in the tobacco fields to get up enough money, scratch, to come out here, I saw Alberta as a place of opportunity. I saw Alberta as a place where I could make a living and make a life. So did members of my family, though they didn't come; they stayed home. I came here because I knew that I could use my new-found education and come out here and apply that because others in my graduating class did the same thing.

Madam Chair, Bill 49 is good as far as it goes, but it doesn't answer the big questions that people think about when they decide where they want to go and what they want to do with their lives. Far too often what we're seeing now as a result of this government and its activities is, you know, worst in the nation with regard to COVID. We're seeing attacks on Disney films. We're seeing fight-back strategies that, frankly, embarrass people in this province, and that's why people decide to stay home or go elsewhere. That's why we can't get the necessary staff in huge sectors of our economy needing to start to fire the economy on all cylinders.

We won't get that, Madam Chair, until there's a reversal or an understanding by this government that what they're doing isn't helping. What they need to do are some of the things that the previous government was doing. They need to repatriate, bring back, things like the consumer price on carbon so that we can invest it in this province and we can ensure that those with lesser incomes can be supported through all of that. Then we can use those funds to innovate, to diversify. Those are the things that were happening and were benefiting this province and, frankly, have been proven to be on the mark with regard to what they were achieving. Now companies, oil companies and oil and gas companies, have taken up that mantle and gone further than this government has gone with regard to things like that.

Those are the kinds of, you know, visions, the visionary reach that a government needs to undertake to be held in high esteem by people who have the opportunity to decide where they want to go and where they want to form their lives and how they want to invest. All of that can be done by a focus by this government that currently is missing, Madam Chair, and is not in Bill 49 and, regrettably, won't be in Bill 49 because it talks about things that help people come to this province but does not address the bigger question of trying to make sure that Canadians see Alberta as a forward-looking place where they can get good health care, where they can get quality education for their children, where they can get quality postsecondary education without it being tremendously expensive. Those of us in this Chamber who went through universities and colleges were often helped out with grants and loans, and we know that this government has ratcheted back all of that while increasing, through Advanced Education, the cost of tuition. We know that that's a barrier for people who want to come here. That's a barrier for our own population of young people who want to go to postsecondary education.

Those are the things that are overarching and need to be addressed, and Bill 49 doesn't do that, Madam Chair. It was never in the purview of Bill 49 to do that, obviously, but it is in the purview of this government to do better on all of the things that I've mentioned. Without that ability to be an attractor and a beacon for Canadians in this country, then we're going to continue to have challenges. We're not going to turn that corner and be that beacon unless we can improve on all of the things that I mentioned. Improving on all of

those things is not something that this government seems to want to do. They want to improve on their cutting red tape reduction grade, it seems. They want to improve, it seems like, on only that, Madam Chair.

10:00

The work we need to do as is large, it's going to take a long time to correct, and, Madam Chair, this side is, as shown tonight and other days, ready and willing to put our shoulder to the wheel to improve the things that'll benefit Albertans and make us the envy once again of all of Canada.

Thank you Madam Chair.

The Chair: The hon. Minister of Labour and Immigration.

Mr. Shandro: Thank you, Madam Chair. Perhaps let me just say that we are becoming again the envy of every other province in the country, as we see again another deal being announced recently with Amazon announcing a \$4.3 billion investment in this province. Building one – no; two, I think, if I remember correctly – was being announced by my colleague the Minister of Jobs, Economy and Innovation as well as the hon. Premier. It's going to be creating over 1,000 new jobs.

We also saw recently even more investment that was being announced in this province. We saw that in 2020 the Venture Capital Association of Alberta was announcing that they recently had a banner year for venture capital deals, 51 deals being completed in 2020, a total of \$455 million in investment in this province, a 100 per cent increase over 2019, Madam Chair; RBC planning to open a Calgary innovation hub with more than 300 jobs; Calgary's Benevity securing a \$1.1 billion investment deal; Mphasis setting up its Canadian headquarters in Calgary, bringing at least 1,000 tech jobs to the city; Infosys, a tech giant that specializes in digital services and consulting, bringing 500 jobs to Calgary over the next three years; Exro Technologies, mCloud Technologies, Rogers; all these deals being announced because of the policies of this government.

It's unfortunate that the members opposite aren't seeing the excitement throughout the province, Madam Chair, but we do on this side because we see it on the ground from Albertans, and we again are seeing this province being the envy of every other province in this country.

The Chair: The hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs.

Mr. McIver: Well, thank you, Madam Chair. I just wanted to say, having heard the submission from the other side, that I think the hon. member might be a little out of step with where the world is today. I say that because he talks about how people won't want to come here, but I think what the hon. minister just said is that there are businesses coming here in droves: the high-tech industry, Amazon, other ones. I guess they heard that.

They talked about the reputation of Alberta. I don't remember our leader on this side, the Premier, saying things that the NDP's leader did, like calling Alberta Canada's embarrassing cousin, when she was the Premier of this province, the NDP minister telling Albertans to go to B.C. if you want a job, telling people that if you don't like it, take the bus. I mean, these are things that didn't come from this side.

This side of the House, the UCP side of the House, has been working hard to build Alberta up. We've been working hard to support not only our new industries, which is obviously working, with the economic recovery plan, with the more advantageous corporate tax rate, with cutting red tape, things that make businesses want to come here when they know they're wanted, as

opposed to when the other side was in government, that drove business out as fast as they can. I think it was north of \$100 billion worth of major energy companies left Alberta because they didn't feel welcome here, because they didn't feel the government wanted them.

I heard the hon. member also talk about what a great idea the carbon tax was. Well, they haven't apparently learned a thing, Madam Chair, because one of the big issues they lost the last election on was the carbon tax that they brought in on consumers, making everything that people buy more expensive.

Member Ceci: Ric, there's still a carbon tax.

Mr. McIver: I could call a point of order because the person just used my name, but I think just what I said is probably adequate, Madam Chair.

Here's the thing. The folks on the other side haven't seemed to have learned any of the lessons from the past. They were rejected by Albertans after talking down about Albertans – I just have to say it twice because this is really emblematic – when their Premier called Alberta the embarrassing cousin. My goodness gracious, I just can't think of anything more insulting that would drive people away. Well, our government has been working hard to undo all of that damage and to build up Alberta's reputation, to build up Alberta's place.

This bill, amongst other things, can make it easier for people to come here and have – we're actually in a place now with this government, this UCP government, where we actually have a labour shortage, and now we're working hard to make it easier for people that have the skills that we need, that have been frankly paid to get trained somewhere else, to have those skills recognized so they can come to work here. When the other side was there – I hate to say it – too many qualified people were working at jobs way below their skill levels. There was nothing being done about it. This is a promise made and a promise kept, Madam Chair.

I'm very proud of this government, of this Premier, of this side of the House doing things to build Alberta up, build Albertans up, and attract businesses and people here to come make a living, raise their families, have a great quality of life. Rather than the minimalist attitude from the other side I support what this minister has brought forward, and I look forward to supporting it with my vote as well as my words.

The Chair: Any other members to join the debate? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

Member Loyola: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. I have a deep respect for the fact that everybody has their opinion on the economy. Everybody. You don't need to be an economist to have an opinion on the economy. You just need to talk about the experience that you're having and how the economy is actually impacting you, and that's what we actually hear from constituents on a regular basis.

Now, I applaud the government for having a positive opinion about the way things are going, but we're a long way from this government being able to take a victory lap around the Legislature because the reality is that Albertans are still suffering the economic crisis that Alberta is going through, many provinces are going through, which was only made worse by the COVID pandemic. Now, I'm not about to drag this government through the mud when it comes to their response on the pandemic, Madam Chair. We know it's been lacking, but I'm not going to go there. What I am going to say, though, is the fact that while it's great that certain deals have been signed, we know it's going to take a

while for those deals to actually go through. When we are going to actually see the positive outcome of those is going to be down the line.

What Albertans want right now: they want security for their families. That's what they're concerned about, and instead this government has passed legislation through this House, members of that side of this House have actually passed through legislation that has made insurance costs go up. I cannot tell you the amount of people that actually come to my constituency office or contact my constituency office to talk to me about how upset they are that their insurance, for a lot of them, has gone up over 30 per cent, some even as much as 50 per cent, Madam Chair. They're like: what was this government thinking about? We're going through this global pandemic. We're going through this economic crisis, and this government decides to take the cap off insurance, making it even more expensive for Albertans to actually get through to the other side of the pandemic. This is disturbing. Like, talk about hitting somebody when they're down. That's exactly what that was.

10:10

Then not only that, Madam Chair; they've made it so that utility costs are going up. I just got an e-mail on Friday from a business owner who's like: the utility costs for my business are going so high that I don't know if I'm going to be able to make it to the end of the month. So when we talk about the economy, we need to be talking about those issues in relation to this particular bill, Madam Chair.

You can't just, you know, wave a flag and say, "Okay; well, we're inviting other people to come here to Alberta" and expect that that's going to make everything better, because the truth is that all the other pieces of legislation or many of the other pieces of legislation – none of them had to do with jobs, by the way, Madam Chair; none of them – deal specifically with this very narrow-sighted ideological vision of this government. They're more interested in peddling their ideology on Albertans than actually helping them. That's exactly what we saw when they decided to take the cap off insurance. They put ideology before Albertans, and I'm really hoping that in the next election they pay the price for that because the government, especially during a pandemic and especially going through an economic crisis, has to give a little bit of leeway.

Now, I get it. You know, the UCP is hard-line conservative, ideology-driven. They want to make Alberta, you know, their conservative bastion of free-market enterprise and whatnot. I would even make the argument, Madam Chair, that other jurisdictions all across North America where we've had governments of the same ilk, that push an ideology on the people rather than serving the people, end up hurting the most marginalized people, people that are struggling, and not just workers. People who are actually trying to make the move towards starting their own business, families that – I want you to imagine for a second, Madam Chair. A young family comes out of university. They've had their first child. They've been working now. They've managed to save quite a bit of money, and it's been their lifelong dream to start a business, so they go at it. They try to start a business, and all of a sudden COVID comes along.

Now, this government sat on their hands for months – for months – before they decided to do even something small for small businesses here in the province of Alberta. For months, Madam Chair. It was heartbreaking. Really, it was, because we saw businesses and not only businesses that had been open for a while; there were also people out there that had the double impact of opening up a business and then the pandemic just came in.

The Chair: Hon. member, I'm really struggling to hear any form of relevancy in your debate. I would encourage you to get back on Bill 49 here in Committee of the Whole. Lots of leeway, lots of discussions to be had in this, but it's got to be slightly relevant to the bill. Please continue.

Member Loyola: This bill is about jobs and the economy. This bill is about jobs and the economy. It's about serving Albertans better. Every piece of legislation that comes through here, Madam Chair, I would argue, has to do with serving Albertans better – right? – and this is why I'm speaking to these issues, because this is what Albertans care about.

The Chair: Hon. member, you will speak to Bill 49. That is it. You can try again. Hon. member, you can go again.

Member Loyola: Okay. When I was actually going through this particular piece of legislation, I actually decided to bring up the short- and long-term employment forecast developed by the government, by the ministries, and I started realizing that the jobs that are actually proposed in this piece of legislation don't actually correlate with the short-term plan developed by the government or even the long-term plan developed by the government, and I started asking myself: well, why would they do that? We're specifically focusing on particular jobs so that we can bring people to those particular jobs so that we can improve the economy, yet this particular piece of legislation doesn't focus on those jobs. To some extent they do but not on the priority jobs that are actually on the short-term plan or the long-term plan actually developed by the government.

The question that I have, then, for the minister is then: how was this list decided upon? Like, did the minister and his colleagues working inside of the ministry not use the short-term plan or the long-term plan to actually come up with what should be included in this piece of legislation? I'd really like to hear from the minister. If he would like to interject, that would be great, because, like, I just don't understand why the different lists and the priorities of those other lists aren't in line with this one right here, I mean, a very important concern that I have. If the minister would like, you know, I'd really like to hear from him.

Mr. Jeremy Nixon: You'll have to sit down if you want him to talk.

Member Loyola: Okay. Well, I'll give way then, Madam Chair.

The Chair: Just a reminder: there are no interventions in Committee of the Whole. You can speak as many times as you like. The hon. Minister of Labour and Immigration.

Mr. Shandro: Thank you, Madam Chair. I think the question was: why were the professions that are included in this legislation the ones that were included? The answer is: because these are our professional regulatory bodies, and they're ones that don't already have red seal programs that already deal with mobility issues within Canada.

Now, thankfully, our hon. colleague the Minister of Advanced Education is still doing a lot of hard work in being able to further harmonize our red seal programs with those in other provinces. But the reason why a red seal program isn't included in this legislation is because there are already ways in which red seal programs for those professions are dealt with in those mobility issues. That was the reason why these professions are included in this legislation and why there might not be other professions not being included in this legislation.

The Chair: Any other members? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

Member Loyola: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. I just want to speak shortly and just thank the minister for that explanation. From my understanding, not covered are most of the skilled trades, including the high-demand and moderately high-demanding trades on that particular issue, so I think that this is something that is important to consider for the minister, and I think that it will actually need a little bit more attention and concern as we continue moving forward.

Madam Chair, thank you very much for the opportunity to speak within the Legislature.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore.

Mr. Nielsen: Well, thank you, Madam Chair. I appreciate another opportunity here to add some more comments here around Bill 49, Labour Mobility Act, you know, listening intently, of course, to the debate here throughout the evening, and I wouldn't mind adding a few extra comments, I think, in response a little bit to some of the things I heard from the Minister of Municipal Affairs around Bill 49.

10:20

You know, Madam Chair, I get it. When you're in a situation where you don't have a lot of success stories and people are not happy with you and statistics aren't going your way, sometimes you've just got to find something to toot your horn about, so I get it. Everybody's pretty excited about all of this investment that has been showing up here in the last couple of weeks. The problem is that we've still got the past.

If we're going to try to encourage this labour mobility, to try to get people to come to Alberta to work, you have to create the conditions for them to want to be here in the first place. I did hear some situations, you know, some criticisms of the former NDP government and whatnot. I don't think anybody has forgotten that when the UCP came in and they made that big \$4.7 billion corporate tax giveaway, not only did companies take that money and pay their shareholders, some who weren't even in the province – there was one that took the money and just outright ran. "See you later. I'm gone. Thanks for nothing."

You know, some of the things I heard from the minister of labour about the investment in the tech sector – and I, too, am excited about that. I think that's a great sector for Alberta to get into and get their fingers in. It seems like it's exciting, but when you start to compare us to other jurisdictions, you're not seeing that same amount of growth. There are other jurisdictions that are significantly higher than what Alberta is bringing in, so how are we going to encourage that labour mobility that we were talking about earlier here to Alberta when other jurisdictions are so much bigger? Just using the tech sector as the example that the minister of labour brought up, while we seem to think we're the envy, maybe let's not get too far ahead of ourselves because there are other jurisdictions doing much, much better than we are.

Again, it goes back to what I was talking about earlier in the evening, Madam Chair, around creating the conditions for people to want to come. If they have a health care system that's in chaos, where surgeries are getting cancelled, their kids are going to school and, you know, the education is not up to par – thankfully, now at least we've got a universal daycare system that is going to be starting to go across the province. At least that'll help a little bit in that encouragement of that labour mobility. But as my friend from Calgary-Buffalo was talking about earlier and some of the things I

had said on a previous bill that we were talking about, when we start to create a negative reputation, we're not going to see people want to come and work here.

You know, one of the other things I was listening to intently about – and maybe perhaps I'll remind the Minister of Municipal Affairs about this – is in a news report from back in mid-July. Statistics Canada was showing that we've seen a negative exodus of people from Alberta to the point where almost 3,400 more people moved out of Alberta than arrived here. That was the fourth consecutive quarter that that happened. I guess it makes sense. Maybe we'd better start moving on labour mobility because we're not keeping the people that are here already working. Then from another one here that was just in mid-October, talking about since April 1 of last year, in the past five consecutive quarters, more than 15,000 people have left Alberta for good, with a net loss of 5,000 people this past quarter alone. This was just mid-October.

Why are these people leaving? Because their health care system is in chaos. Their education system is in trouble. Their kids can't go to postsecondary because it's getting too expensive for them through tuition and increases in student loans. You know, I mean, people who go to postsecondary usually drive a car. Their insurance costs are going up. People are seeing that from outside of the province, and they're not necessarily liking what they're seeing; hence why we're now seeing more people leaving than are coming back in. While Bill 49, the Labour Mobility Act, might help to try to increase people coming to Alberta to work, we have all these other factors that have been going on that are going to work against Bill 49. We won't be very much better off.

You know, as I mentioned earlier with my friend from Calgary-Buffalo and that reputation, I mean, how do you create labour mobility when you're talking about coal mining in the areas where people's drinking water comes from? I can tell you that that's significantly going to discourage people from coming here. Albertans have been very, very clear about that. That is not a good thing. The government needs to listen. If they don't, they're going to work against Bill 49.

You know, when you're throwing money away on United States elections – and my friend from Calgary-Buffalo was talking about Bigfoot there at Disney. I think Disney knew what it was doing. It made a whole bunch of money now from that movie because we were busy fighting a cartoon character, and people thought that it was ridiculous. How do we encourage people to come here to work when we have those kinds of factors working against us?

Again, I appreciate the Minister of Municipal Affairs going to toot the horn here a little bit, but houselessness has gone up in the province. I'm excited about all this investment that I'm hearing about, but how is that getting people a roof over their head right now? It's cold. That doesn't sound like much of a success story.

While I'm hoping that the government will decide to start reversing its course on some of these things that it has done – the big corporate tax giveaway is not working. Fighting with nurses and doctors is not working. Creating loopholes for election financing is not going to encourage people to come to Alberta to work. Stop working against a bill that I will say will likely hopefully improve the circumstances for people that want to come. But once they look at everything else, I don't think Bill 49 is necessarily going to help things along.

Again, if we're going to make decisions here in Alberta, let's hope that other provinces are going to follow suit here, because, again, I'm hearing from constituents that if you're going to allow all kinds of people to come in here and work, they're saying: "Well, hey, what about me? I already live here. Why can't I get a job first?"

Let's hope that the government doesn't work against this bill. Create a situation that will actually encourage people to come to Alberta. Let's get our folks working here first, too. Sometimes that even means getting a roof over their head so that then they can get a job.

Thanks, Madam Chair.

The Chair: Members wishing to join the debate? The hon. Member for Chestermere-Strathmore.

Mrs. Aheer: Thank you, Madam Chair, and thank you for the ability to participate in debate tonight. It's really wonderful to hear all of the aspects. There is a lot of passionate debate. One of the things I just wanted to talk about briefly is just a little bit of history and background, especially for – I'm a first-generation Canadian on my dad's side and third generation on my mom's side.

10:30

I think about when my dad came here from India in 1963 and what he walked into and what the world looked like in Edmonton, Alberta. One of the first things he said when he got off the airplane – and he tells this story all the time – coming from Uttar Pradesh in India, was that it was one of the most beautiful places he'd ever seen in his life, that he had reached God's land.

You know, the services that we have in this province now I imagine at that time weren't even close to that. Yet a couple in Edmonton here, George and Pansy Strange, basically adopted him and five other boys who had gotten off the airplane that day, all of them engineers coming to Alberta to find their way here. They had a few bucks in their pocket. They had been sponsored by people here in Edmonton, actually.

George and Pansy didn't have children of their own, Madam Chair, so they basically adopted these six East Indian boys and taught them about Canadian culture, got them their first winter boots, took them to their first doctors' appointments, helped them find – they were vegetarians. In 1963 finding vegetarian food in the aisles of the grocery stores – there wasn't Superstore, where you could find all of the cool things to make, you know, a curry or sabji or something like that. It wasn't like that. Even getting yogurt in a container back then was very difficult. I think my dad lived on sour cream for the first year that he was here because there was really nothing comparable. But when that's your staple – rice, yogurt, and a few other staples – and you come to a country where you get off the airplane to minus 40, coming from where on average it's plus 30, you can imagine the shock of being able to come here. I think about it all the time.

The reason why I'm bringing this up with the Labour Mobility Act is that I think one of the most wonderful days that I had spent with our government was in the early days when we had done the first outreach with the original, the former, Minister of Labour and Immigration and the parliamentary secretary, and 930 people, I believe, showed up to that first meeting to talk with us about labour mobility across the province and gave us a ton of feedback. There was so much information. I can't remember how many of us were at that meeting, but there was just such an overwhelming sense of hope of what was possible for people to have their professional designations recognized in this province.

I know for my dad, like, he came as a student, but there were many others I can name just off the top of my head, doctors. Our doctor, Dr. Maha*, came from Uttar Pradesh, and it took her another seven and a half years just to get a basic ability to be able to be a doctor when she actually came from a specialist background in India. She was a surgeon and was never able to get that

*This spelling could not be verified at the time of publication.

professional designation without going back to school full time, but she was able to be a GP.

I think about all the stories and those people and the contributions and even the survivor jobs that they stayed in to be able to feed their families and take care of them and live in this beautiful, beautiful province. And you're right. There was a lot of change in terms of emigration from across Canada into our province. You're right. It was really impacted. I don't think any of us are denying that by any stretch of the imagination, but I think if you look in regard to the numbers, it was about jobs at that time, and of course given the downturns of commodities and many other things that were happening at that time, you do see that. I think B.C. was actually the big – I don't know if you can say "winner" during COVID; that's probably not the right language. There were about 9,000 people that immigrated into B.C. versus Alberta, Madam Chair.

The Chair: If you could just speak into your microphone.

Mrs. Aheer: I'm sorry. I just wanted to address – I feel so bad having my back to people. It feels horrible. [interjection] I know. Sorry. It's horrible having people behind you. I just feel like I'm not speaking. I apologize.

The interesting thing with that, though, is that as we started to move through – and what you will see and what I believe and one thing that I would just beg of all of us, I think, at any time in here is that even at the worst times that we have, whether that's in COVID or whether that's commodity downturns, to suggest that we're not the envy of everywhere else in Canada, I would hope that every single person in this Chamber, no matter where we're sitting or what ideology we support or what side of the politics: Alberta is the envy and always will be.

If I was to speak about only my family, we have brought almost every member of my family from my dad's side – he comes from a family of 11, so for those of his sisters and brothers that were living, we've brought them here. Every time they come here, they look at not only the magnificence of Alberta but the people. Our greatest resources are our humans here.

I couldn't believe how fortunate we were, and even in our darkest days in these last two years – and I'm not suggesting that what has been said is not correct. There's a lot of value to the discussion and the debate that's happening here, but when I've had the privilege of speaking to new Canadians, Canadians that have been here thousands of years before me, people who've contributed to this province, the amount of pride and love and compassion and desire to see success, the willingness to help – I have never seen such kindness and generosity as what we saw throughout COVID. Intense generosity, incredible humanity, amazing people coming to the forefront: that's the Alberta that I know and understand. That's what makes us the envy.

Did you know that per capita in this province we donate more than anywhere else in Canada? Do you want to know why that is? It's partly because of our jobs and our economy, but, truly, Madam Chair, it's because of the people who are here. It's such a diverse group of people from every background, the fabric, the tapestry that has created this beautiful province of ours.

Then, on top of it, to layer it with what the minister is bringing forward right now to create mobility. It's not just about reciprocity in other provinces. We want people to come here. You hear the Minister of Jobs, Economy and Innovation talking all the time about all the incredible opportunities that are here right now. The Minister of Labour and Immigration listed off some of those new opportunities. Those are thousands of jobs that are going to be coming here not because government created them but because the environment in this

province is such an amazing, amazing environment, and it is where people want to come.

As a person who is a first-generation Canadian, I cannot imagine living anywhere else. I've been really blessed. I've travelled a lot, I've seen a lot of the world, and I've said this many times, but I'll say it again. I get off the airplane and I touch the ground with such gratitude, especially when I get to Calgary or the Edmonton airport, wherever I happen to land in Alberta. This province has given me so much. It's given all of us so much.

So though we may debate in here, the only request I really have is that we all agree that Alberta is enviable, that we are the envy of Canada, we're the envy of the world and that we all promote that. We might have different ways of getting there. There have been lots and lots of things, errors and mistakes and things where we can improve. I'm not disputing that. I absolutely a hundred per cent agree with that on both sides. For sure. I think we can all agree to that, but if this is our decline, we have only one way to go, which is up. We have every opportunity in the world to see incredible changes happen.

I can't remember who was saying it from my colleagues, but it is just that there's so much hope on the horizon, and I'm so grateful not only to have sat in this Chamber at the most difficult time but also to see the people of this province come out the other end and to be able to watch that transition happen. I think that in order to be able to heal from what we've all been through, seeing that happen is going to be imperative for all of us, especially for those of us who sit in this Chamber.

As we go forward, labour mobility is about attracting every single person that we can to this province. It's a humungous province. We're only – what? – 4.1 million people. We have a lot of room and a lot of space and a lot of growth and so many attractive qualities. Though we may disagree on certain things, I hope that we can all agree that Alberta is definitely the best place to raise a family, to find your livelihood, to be able to come, and with all of the amazing opportunities that will be presented to us, I hope collectively we can find a way to promote our province in the best way possible regardless of who happens to have the privilege of sitting in government.

Thank you.

10:40

The Chair: Are there any other members wishing to speak to Bill 49? Seeing none, I will call the question.

[The remaining clauses of Bill 49 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

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

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Chair: Any opposed? Carried.

The hon. deputy whip.

Mr. Rutherford: Thank you, Madam Chair. I move that the committee rise and report Bill 49.

[Motion carried]

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake-St. Paul.

Mr. Hanson: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. Committee of the Whole has had under consideration a certain bill. The committee

reports the following bill with some amendments: Bill 49. I wish to table copies of all amendments considered by Committee of the Whole on this date for the official records of the Assembly.

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

Hon. Members: Aye.

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

Government Bills and Orders
Second Reading
(continued)

Bill 73
Infrastructure Accountability Act

Mr. Sabir moved that the motion for second reading of Bill 73, Infrastructure Accountability Act, be amended by deleting all of the words after “that” and substituting the following:

Bill 73, Infrastructure Accountability 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 15: Mr. Stephan]

The Deputy Speaker: Any members wishing to join debate on the amendment?

Seeing none, I will call the question.

[Motion on amendment REF1 lost]

The Deputy Speaker: Any members wishing to speak to the main bill? The hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont.

Mr. Rutherford: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I would like to move to adjourn debate.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont.

Mr. Rutherford: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I move that the Assembly be adjourned until 9 a.m. Wednesday, November 17, 2021.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 10:43 p.m.]

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