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The 30th Legislature
Second Session

Alberta Hansard

Wednesday morning, November 17, 2021

Day 127

The Honourable Nathan M. Cooper, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta The 30th Legislature

Second Session

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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

9 a.m.

Wednesday, November 17, 2021

[The Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

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

Hon. members, I would be remiss if I didn't mention our friends and colleagues in the province of British Columbia this morning. We are thinking about them and just want all of them to know that while we have experienced fires and floods in the past, it's never a good time. I know that our members of this House have reached out to our colleagues in British Columbia to express our thoughts, condolences, prayers, and any other assistance that can be provided.

Please be seated.

Ordres du jour.

Orders of the Day

Government Bills and Orders Second Reading

Bill 78

Alberta Housing Amendment Act, 2021

[Debate adjourned November 16: Member Irwin speaking]

The Speaker: Hon. members, are there others? The hon. Member for Edmonton-North West has the call.

Mr. Eggen: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker, and good morning to everyone. I rise to speak to Bill 78 with some trepidation because I just find this bill to be so utterly appalling that I wonder how the minister and this UCP government had the audacity to bring it forward at any time but especially at this very time in our history here in the province of Alberta. To solve Alberta's housing issues, this provincial government needs to build more affordable housing and not sell it off and not sell off the responsibility that they have to build and to maintain affordable housing as it's defined by its very term. Affordable housing needs to be ensured to be affordable at all times, and it needs to be something that people can count on at every juncture.

This UCP government has refused to work with municipalities around the province and the federal government, since they have been elected, to build affordable housing and to maintain it in all corners of this province. This bill simply reinforces this government's abdication of responsibility to build and to maintain affordable housing for Albertans here in the province. The whole idea of contracting out affordable housing, again, is absolutely appalling. This idea that you can use private entities to build these units – right? – simply undermines the whole notion of what affordable housing is in the first place, which is to have assurance to know that if people have limited income, they can have these units and that they are there and that the price is maintained and remains affordable at any time.

Selling off affordable housing that is already a public entity, again, just simply reveals and shines a clear light on what this

government and this minister are really here for. They're here to put money into the pockets of private contractors and not to look after the people who actually need these houses and these places in the first place. We all know that poverty has grown considerably during this pandemic. The gap between the wealthy and the poor has only been exacerbated as a result of the pandemic over the last couple of years. The UCP's cuts to programs such as AISH, seniors' benefits, rent supplements have made it even harder for people to find affordable housing.

I know that each one of the MLAs here, if they were doing their job – right? – were back in their constituencies and had people banging down their doors because of a lack of affordable housing, people being booted out of their places, people not having access to affordable housing or not being able to pay their rents and ending up in a very dire situation. This Bill 78, this abominable bill, simply exacerbates that same problem that we see every day in all of our constituencies. If anybody thinks that they don't have this problem in their constituency, they are simply not opening their eyes.

The Official Opposition is firmly in opposition to this bill and the principles behind it. I ask the minister here, now, in this place and demand an answer: why is there no legislative requirement for the proceeds of the sale, as ridiculous as that is, of affordable housing to be reinvested in more affordable housing? If there is any reason why they would be selling these entities in the first place, at the very least, if they're making some money off it, that money should be very firmly put to those same units, to build more units around the province. [interjection] The minister seems to be saying that that's what they will do, but there is no provision in this legislation that would suggest that they're compelled to do so, right?

We know that this UCP government is determined to move the public good into the ledgers of private entities and to move the public good into their idea of how to balance or rebalance their budget. It's as simple as that. The idea that they should do so on the backs of people who require affordable housing is absolutely unconscionable and absolutely appalling. Everyone in this province needs to know exactly what's going on with Bill 78 and with this initiative that they have more generally as well.

I ask as well: what was the involvement with municipalities and the federal government in creating this bill and this strategy? It simply flies in the face of municipal governments' initiatives, especially now with the new municipal governments that we see across the province looking for ways by which we can build affordable housing, not just shelters – right? – but actual affordable housing to meet the needs of our population. We know that in places from Edmonton to Calgary to Fort McMurray to Wetaskiwin to Lethbridge to Medicine Hat there is a record number of people without any housing at all. We're looking for emergency ways by which to build shelters, but shelters are not the answer, Mr. Speaker. Shelters are just a way to mitigate an emergency situation that we're dealing with here now, today.

What is the beginning of a solution to housing – and it's the beginning of a solution to poverty – is to ensure that there is place for people to live on an ongoing basis, to have that security. It's a way by which to deal with the addictions crisis that we're facing as well in this province, Mr. Speaker, right? Without a place for people to stay, without not just a shelter but an actual roof over somebody's head from month to month, from year to year, then that undermines any other efforts of these ministers in trying to deal with mental health issues and the epidemic that we see around opioids and addictions as well. The minister that is in charge of this, supposedly, around addictions and so forth, should be advocating for more affordable housing and talking to this minister about this bill specifically and how it undermines his responsibility to deal with addictions.

This whole government, I think, can be summarized very succinctly by Bill 78. It demonstrates an abdication of responsibility by the government to deal with the issues of the day. They didn't deal with the pandemic very well, and they're certainly not dealing with the affordable housing situation as well.

9:10

For affordable housing plans to be successful, all levels of government need to work together. Why has this government, for example, not invested in supporting the cities of Edmonton and Calgary, their specific requests, which have been redoubled in the last number of months and number of weeks, to build and operate permanent supportive housing? Why have they failed to do so? It's as though they haven't listened one iota.

The municipalities have a mechanism by which they can see things on the ground perhaps better and on a more individual basis than the provincial government can. Use the municipal governments across this province to tell and to let this provincial government know where they need to make those investments. This whole idea – obviously, we can see Bill 78 – is a clear indication that none of those consultations took place, Mr. Speaker, that there was no talking to the municipalities or the federal government around what is required at this moment in regard to affordable housing.

I think it's very appropriate and apt to go back to your comments at the beginning of this morning, Mr. Speaker, around the immediate crisis that British Columbia is facing with the storms and the flooding that are taking place there. This government: do you not think that those things will not happen again here in this province at various times along the way? We need to build the capacity to have affordable housing for people to ensure that they have shelter during a crisis such as what we're seeing in British Columbia.

I've never seen, in all the time that I've been in this Legislature, a government that is so incredibly short sighted in regard to looking after the needs of the people of Alberta. Bill 78, I think, is a perfect example of that irresponsibility exhibited here by this UCP government.

I would like to know why or how – I'm asking the minister directly, Mr. Speaker, right now – she is giving herself the power to create competency requirements for housing management bodies. Will this practice be applied to all housing management bodies? If not, when is the minister planning to use this power? Given that these boards are already doing so much work to manage affordable housing with very minimal funding, this can damage relationships between the government and housing management bodies even more. Why is the UCP implementing these kinds of changes?

Mr. Speaker, I see this government doing this all the time. They're in a lot of trouble. I know that they are, and I can see, demonstrably, politically why and how they are losing the faith and the respect of the people of Alberta. Their choice around the difficulty that they face is to go after different entities like management bodies for affordable housing, going after teachers, going after nurses – right? – to try to create battles and fights and conflicts to deflect from their own incompetency. That's what they're doing with affordable housing. It's as simple as that. Prove me wrong. Maybe there's another reason the minister can tell us here this morning why they would be going after boards that do manage affordable housing, which I think can demonstrably damage the relationships that they have between those things in order to manage our affordable housing reasonably.

Partnerships with housing partners and providers require financial backing. How does this minister believe that this bill and

this strategy can be effective without giving providers, especially nonprofits, the financial support that they need to provide affordable housing and to manage that affordable housing as well? You don't create programs by simply writing down declarative statements in a bill. You need to make sure that you are financing and backing those things with funds. That's what we do here in this Legislature, right? We're not just producing words; we have to produce action. Bill 78 is clearly a way by which this government can provide words without action. In fact, it's quite the opposite; selling off affordable housing for the sake of selling off the responsibility that they have to provide that housing for Albertans.

Mr. Speaker, I ask: what research and evidence can this government provide that demonstrates that there's any profit being turned while also keeping safe housing, decent housing, and affordable housing? Is there a model that they propose that perhaps is working anywhere else? Can the minister provide the history and the logic and the thinking behind this bill? I really haven't seen anything that resembles as such, but I certainly welcome and will cede the floor to the minister right now, this morning, to let us know why on earth did they choose this route and this approach to affordable housing here in the province of Alberta. We need to have demonstrable facts. I've seen nothing. I've only seen this government reacting to criticism of this bill, criticism that is not just coming from the Official Opposition but from Albertans in general. I open the floor to him.

Thanks.

The Speaker: Hon. members, are there others? The hon. Member for Calgary-East, followed by Edmonton-Castle Downs.

Mr. Singh: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to voice my support here today on this important bill that will ensure affordable housing is available to thousands of families that are wait-listed for months. Bill 78, Alberta Housing Amendment Act, 2021, will be a key initiative to improve and expand affordable housing here in Alberta. I would like to thank the Minister of Seniors and Housing for taking the initiative to implement ways to ensure housing is affordable to all individuals across Alberta. This is a significant bill that would allow a new way of expanding and co-operating to improve and strengthen the housing sector within our jurisdiction.

I want to express my gratitude to the Member for Calgary-Cross for convening the 2020 Affordable Housing Review Panel, which brought together stakeholders to offer suggestions on how to make the affordable housing system more sustainable while still meeting growing demands. This review would not have been possible without the support and assistance of the private and nonprofit operators, housing advocates, policy and academic experts, and real estate investors and developers with a variety of opinions and knowledge on affordable housing. During engagement sessions the panel heard from about 160 people, groups, and businesses, and received more than 120 written comments. As well, I extend my appreciation to the 2020 Affordable Housing Review Panel for everyone who has participated in the crafting of this important legislation. The proposed changes to Alberta's housing sector are recommendations that will improve access to safe and reasonably priced housing.

Mr. Speaker, we will take aggressive action here over the next 10 years to provide more affordable and accessible housing options for low-income Albertans. It is obvious that for tens of thousands of Albertans the existing system isn't working. Alberta's government has developed nearly 1,500 units in the previous two years, but this investment will not be enough to keep up with the rising demand. Rent supplement program funding was increased by \$16 million in Budget 2021, rounded up from \$15.5 million, in government

communications. The new program will give vital housing assistance to approximately 11,600 households every year, an increase of 3,800 from the previous year, and in 2021-2022 the rent supplement program will receive a total yearly budget of \$68 million.

9:20

We will continue to safeguard the most vulnerable in order to ensure that they are not forgotten, and we need to attract more outside funding and delivery methods as well as enable more innovative finance and transfer options. Long-term strategic collaborations will assist us in meeting Alberta's various demands now and in the future. The plan is community driven and aimed at improving community outcomes. Providing secure, stable housing is part of Alberta's recovery plan to achieve economic development and, importantly, to ensure that Albertans have the basic necessities to survive.

Mr. Speaker, more than 110,000 low-income Albertans reside in affordable housing as of April 2021, with over 24,000 on a waiting list. In the previous 10 years this figure has more than doubled. Now is the time to take action to meet the growing need for housing that is both safe and economically affordable. On November 1, 2021, Alberta's government made the affordable housing strategy public. The government has developed a strategy to modernize the affordable housing system to better meet the needs of Albertans and bring it in line with other jurisdictions. The government wants to provide a better environment by concentrating on partnerships, increased investments, and innovation. This will ensure a more long-term affordable housing system that increases access to affordable housing.

Alberta's shifting demands as well as tenants' efforts to achieve housing independence – and we'll give continuous assistance to those who are most vulnerable. Mr. Speaker, these efforts will be in line with the Affordable Housing Review Panel's recommendations, and I'm pleased that all 19 suggestions in the panel's final report were approved by the Alberta government. As per the panel's first suggestion, the government would focus on creating a provincial strategic plan for affordable housing that includes both short- and long-term goals and objectives. Alberta's government has already taken measures to be more innovative with housing solutions, including responding to three of the panel's recommendations.

Many initiatives by the Alberta government have already been put into action through the Canada-Alberta housing boost. The modernized rent supplement program allowed more Albertans to be covered as well as provided a temporary benefit to working families and maximized federal resources.

Mr. Speaker, the launch of the online housing portal helped many applicants to determine their eligibility as well as connected them with providers and housing options that matched the needs across the province.

In Morinville the opening of the Paul Krauskopf Court, the community's first net zero dwelling development, ensured that the building generated all of the energy it requires with solar panels, which lowered utility costs and ensured that the rent remained reasonable in the long run.

In Lethbridge an announcement of funding for a mixed-income housing development for seniors was initiated, with the residents being able to pay rent at a rate that is appropriate for their specific circumstances. This initiative is also a test bed for a public-private partnership strategy to development funding and management.

As well, I was to be part of the government's announcement of a capital grant for \$1.1 million for the Homes for Heroes Foundation's 20-house construction in Edmonton. Mr. Speaker, in 2019 15 units were opened at ATCO Village in the Calgary-East constituency to serve veterans of the Canadian Armed Forces, and I was happy to

be able to support this great initiative. Residency in the village is transitional, with the goal of having each veteran leave the village and re-enter mainstream society employed, stable, and self-sufficient. Homes for Heroes know that far too many veterans of the Canadian Armed Forces are struggling in their effort to leave the forces and return to civilian life, and many will find themselves – I am grateful to know their vision is to have veterans in need progress towards a secure, self-sufficient life through access to housing and a robust support system offering stability and dignity. I would like to thank all the officers and staff of the Homes for Heroes Foundation for providing a caring, innovative, and comprehensive solution to homelessness among our veterans.

Mr. Speaker, lastly, the YWCA courtyard project used shipping containers to create affordable homes and barrier-free living in Banff. Because of its net zero energy footprint the property will be cost-effective for both tenants and the housing provider.

The Alberta Housing Act lays out the groundwork for providing affordable housing in our province. The Alberta Social Housing Corporation, ASHC, is managed by the Alberta housing authority, AHA. This framework restricts the formation of new collaborative relationships. Mr. Speaker, the proposed legislative changes will enable ASHC to enter into joint ventures and partnerships, including new definitions of affordable housing provider, in a combination that will enable more types of partnerships, provide an accountability mechanism for known HMB providers, enable a shift to competency-based HMB boards, and simplify administration.

Bill 78, if passed, will reform the act to give the authority to implement measures indicated in the 10-year plan to promote new partnerships and ensure oversight, attract investments into affordable housing, strengthen governance and capacity of housing management organizations, and streamline administration. To help more Albertans in need of affordable housing, the government must form partnerships with commercial and nonprofit developers and operators. The proposed . . . [interjection]

Mr. Sabir: Thank you for accepting my intervention. Just a bit of background. I have worked in homelessness, this area. I was minister responsible for homelessness as well. The question I have for the member, as the member has said that this bill will make it affordable – the thing is that in the Alberta market there are homes, we have capacity, we have builders, but people can't afford it. Can the member explain how privatizing existing stock makes it affordable for Albertans who can't afford to buy homes in open markets?

Mr. Singh: Thank you, hon. member, for a very important question here on a very important bill here. By enabling more partnerships and empowering local responses, we will collectively be better able to meet Alberta's need for affordable housing. We're making the affordable housing system more flexible and adaptable to local and regional needs. As recommended by the Affordable Housing Review Panel, Alberta's government is shifting its role from owner and operator to that of partner and funder. We will continue to be involved in planning, funding, regulating, and developing policy to support affordable housing. We will remove red tape so affordable housing can be available faster to meet growing demand. We are focused on partnerships, not privatization. Government investment alone cannot keep up with the demand for affordable housing. We will enable new and innovative ways to meet Alberta's demand.

9:30

To help more Albertans in need of affordable housing, the government must form partnerships with commercial and nonprofit developers and operators. The proposed revisions will allow the

government to develop these partnerships, paving the way for the transformation of affordable housing. A basic step is establishing new co-operation models to define affordable housing providers and affordable housing accommodation, and allowing the Alberta Social Housing Corporation to form joint ventures and partnerships will attract private and nonprofit involvement, allowing the government to accommodate more people without the burden of all of the operational cost.

That being said, Mr. Speaker, the government of Alberta will make it easier for Albertans to identify housing alternatives, understand eligibility requirements, and connect with the housing provider, which includes continuing to invest in the web tool Find Housing. Tenants will have more alternatives and flexibility in how they meet their specific requirements by making it easier for them to access and manage housing supports. As tenants strive for housing independence, assistance in improving their personal situation will make it easier to apply for affordable housing and to simplify eligibility requirements so that the regulations are more fair for everyone.

Mr. Speaker, Bill 78 will ensure that affordable housing providers and new collaborations are overseen and held accountable as well as allowing the minister to impose certain knowledge or skill requirements on housing management boards. At the end of the day, the strategy is aimed to accomplish the following results by 2032.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Are there others? Oh, sorry. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs I had called earlier.

Ms Goehring: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. You know, it's interesting listening to the previous speaker talk about Homes for Heroes. I think they're an absolutely incredible organization that has stepped up and done some incredible work with the veterans community across the province. They first opened their original village in Calgary in 2019 and then are breaking ground right now in Edmonton. It's an organization that I've worked closely with.

I am curious, though, as to how much actual funding this government provides to that organization. I mean, we talk about all of these incredible organizations that provide incredible services to our homeless population, but really we're relying on them to provide the services. This government hasn't provided additional supports to the housing sector, nonprofit sector, and this bill, Bill 78, Alberta Housing Amendment Act, 2021, doesn't do that. It gives government the opportunity to sell off housing and not take that money and put it back into housing, which is just simply confusing to me.

Mr. Speaker, I have spoken in the House in the past about my experience, about my life. You know, as a young parent I relied on affordable housing. I was a student still. I needed to work and raise a child. If that had happened under this government, well, I wouldn't have qualified for minimum wage because I was a minor and I was still in school. This government took away the \$15 minimum wage for those young people that were in school. As a young person I needed to graduate. I needed to provide for my child. I wouldn't have qualified for minimum wage. This government right now is making it harder for people to actually afford safe housing, adequate housing, and access to education. [interjection] I'm not going to be taking an intervention at this time. Thank you. Perhaps in the future. I'm not done with my thoughts yet.

You know, when I was a young mom, the wait-list for affordable housing at that time, in the '90s, was two years, and I required subsidized housing. I needed to continue to go to school. I needed to continue to work, to provide for my child. Now with the pandemic, with the horrible decisions on policy and lack of supports

and cuts that this government has made, our poverty has increased significantly. People are struggling.

November is Domestic Violence Awareness Month. We know that through this pandemic domestic violence has increased. What that means is that people fleeing domestic violence need a safe, affordable place to go to. Does this bill provide those safe, affordable places? Absolutely not. There are wait-lists. People are struggling. People are in a situation where they can't flee domestic violence because they have nowhere to go. We've seen shelters' budgets cut. We've seen AISH cut. This has an impact, a human impact. [interjection] Absolutely. I would love to take your intervention.

Ms Pon: Well, thank you so much for bringing such important information to share with us. As a new immigrant, moving from Hong Kong with a family of six with my parents, I certainly know how you feel about affordable housing. Six of us with my parents lived in a basement for a long time. Affordable housing? Yes, definitely, it's important for Albertans. I can feel for you. That's why this Bill 78 is so important. I want to make sure there's a home for Albertans who are in need, Mr. Speaker. Thank you for sharing. This is important. That's why we have Bill 78, to build more affordable housing, to build an additional 25,000 households, in total 82,000 households after 10 years, working with the federal government, with the national housing strategy, and with municipalities. I'm going to meet with both federal and municipality leaders within two weeks and work on this bill. This is a good bill for Albertans. To whoever is listening to this: we are working for you.

Ms Goehring: Thank you to the minister for the intervention. While I appreciate that you can relate to the importance, it would be wonderful to see action on that.

This is something that this government continues to do. They stand up. They talk about how they're supporting it, but this legislation doesn't actually do that, which is very frustrating. She talks about wanting to meet with municipal leaders in two weeks. Well, this legislation is here. The consultation should have occurred already. You should have already been talking to those municipal leaders. This is something that we continuously hear. It's something that goes on and on, about how they're not consulting. [interjection] No, thank you.

At this point we're on the legislation. Municipalities have been ignored. MSI funding has been cut. What's happening is that this government comes up with their strategy and then puts it on others to implement. They put the responsibility and the supports on other people, other levels of government. She mentioned the federal government. She mentioned the municipalities. It's very frustrating to see this expectation that others carry the weight of their mistakes.

This piece of legislation should have included a requirement that any money the government makes on the sale of affordable housing is reinvested into affordable housing, period. When you talk about a strategy, when you talk about a passion of actually achieving an affordable housing strategy, there needs to be action. This Bill 78 doesn't actually do that.

9:40

We've heard members in the House talk about partnership, not privatization. Albertans don't believe you. When you talk about partnership, what we've seen is that this government makes a decision and then tells those that are impacted how it's going to be. There isn't consultation. There isn't an understanding about what this government actually needs to do to support those communities. If those nonprofits were at the table, I can tell you that they would

say that they need to be able to support those that are trying to access affordable housing, not cut their programs. They would tell you that those providing services in shelters actually require support.

We have front-line workers who are struggling to meet the needs of our homeless population right now, workers that work in nonprofits that are in tears because of the number of people that they have to turn away, and that is a direct result of this government's cuts. We've seen poverty throughout the pandemic explode. People are losing their housing. People are losing their jobs. What is this government's solution? To put in a bill that has all the language that says that they're supporting affordable housing but no actual action to support it.

I know from personal experience, Mr. Speaker. I have a very dear family friend whose sibling is currently homeless, him and his partner. They've been homeless for 18 months. Since the end of September the two of them have gone every day to the shelter in an attempt to get into an addictions treatment. They can't. The lineups are heartbreaking. When you go to downtown Edmonton, you see so many people struggling with addiction, struggling with mental health, struggling with finding a place to live. They can't get services. The beds simply aren't there. The staffing simply is not there. We are now in the middle of November. They have been trying since September, every day. Their whole focus every day is survival. Where are they going to get their next meal? Where are they going to find somewhere safe to sleep? They're terrified to separate because of the assaults that have occurred while they've been on the streets.

The situation is not good. We are in a crisis, and when we look at a government that is working independently, without consulting municipalities, without consulting nonprofits, without actually talking to those that are impacted by homelessness and what they need, we have pieces of legislation like Bill 78 that come forward that have no actual teeth. It creates a financial situation where the government is making money and not reinvesting in the services that they're making money from. It doesn't make sense to sell affordable housing and not have it legislated to be reinvested in affordable housing.

The way it is right now we don't have enough beds. It's simple. People all across the province are struggling financially. I would say that the number that's reported is probably underreported because trying to interact with that population can be difficult. When you look at what homelessness is defined as, is couch surfing considered homeless because for that night they had a roof over their head? I would argue yes. I would say that if someone does not have an address where they can go every night and know that they are safe and that they are secure, that person is struggling with homelessness.

Edmonton-Castle Downs is the very, very north of the city. I go to the northern boundary of the city of Edmonton. In years past we haven't seen a lot of homeless people in the community because there's not a lot of infrastructure there – it's downtown; that's where the homeless shelters are, that's where the soup kitchens are, that's where the clothing exchanges are – but in the last, I would say, year and a half years we have seen an increase in people panhandling, people desperate for a meal, desperate for safety. It's heartbreaking, absolutely heartbreaking.

Our churches in the community have stepped up. They're providing safe spaces. I know the mosque Al Rashid just outside of Edmonton-Castle Downs provides shelter. They've opened up their mosque. They send buses so that people have a temporary safe place to go. Are they being supported by the government to do that? No. They stepped up because there was a need. Organizations shouldn't have to do that with less money and no support from government.

When there is a need, Albertans step up. Why isn't this government doing it? We have such a beautiful community of giving, and people want to help, but those nonprofits are struggling. They have limited resources, limited space but the desire to truly help.

What they need is a government to listen to them about what those supports are, what those needs are, what actually would help. I can tell you that it's not selling off affordable housing and not reinvesting. If they had a place at the table to discuss what their concerns were, what their strategies were, what their solutions were – these are the experts, Mr. Speaker, those that work passionately day in, day out to work with our vulnerable people, to work with those that are trying to flee domestic violence, to work with those that are struggling with addiction. Is this government talking to them? Is this government actually talking to those that are struggling to hear what they need? I can't imagine that anybody who is struggling with homelessness would say: sure; sell this affordable housing unit and don't reinvest in housing. It does not make sense.

I think this piece of legislation has wonderful words. It gives them the opportunity to say that they're investing in affordable housing, but at the end of the day it doesn't actually do that. I would like to know what in this act actually ensures that people are having access to safe, decent, affordable housing. It's an issue, and it's just being made more difficult for those that are struggling financially, struggling with domestic violence.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I would encourage everyone to vote no. Thank you.

The Speaker: Unfortunately, there is no time left to intervene and the minister has already spoken, so the hon. Member for Lac Ste. Anne-Parkland. Just one moment, hon. member.

The hon. Member for Lac Ste. Anne-Parkland.

Mr. Getson: Perfect. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the hon. members opposite, the Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs, I always appreciate hearing her speaking here. She speaks with passion and from the heart, and a lot of the same challenges that she's seeing, we're seeing the same thing here. We might have a different way of approaching the situation, but it's for the same reasons.

9:50

I've been on the minister's advisory committee for seniors' housing and affordable housing for the last couple of years here now and was very honoured with the minister to scoop me up and bring me in as part of that group. One of the things that was really interesting with this group is that we've got not-for-profit organizations that are at the table, we have some for-profit organizations, we have folks that have been involved in the real estate industry for a number of years, both in those models and outside of that, we have some elected folks like myself that bring a different lens to it. One of the reasons why I kind of pestered the minister in the hall was because of circumstances in prior life, et cetera, and also my real need to try to do some of the social issues out there. Many times we get painted with a brush that we're not listening, we're not caring. It's quite the contrary. We just approach things from a different angle.

Seniors have always had a real soft spot in my heart because my grandma literally, like many families, was kind of the matriarch that held our family together. Everybody gathered at grandma's house and did those things. She taught me a lot of real basic lessons, very Victorian. You know, you don't talk about sex or religion in polite company; you don't talk about politics either; you always look at somebody – you don't judge them by their clothes; you judge them by the person they are.

When I was on a project out in Vancouver as a young project engineer, we were installing fibre optics along the Burrard Inlet. We were tying in back down to Seattle, and it was part of the whole infrastructure, that SuperNet build that we did right across the country, worked along the CP Rail tracks. Our office for Leducor when I was there was actually at 1066 West Hastings. It was evident to me, the drug abuse issues and the homelessness and all the other desperations that took place as soon as you crossed over the line into East Hastings. We were right along those train tracks.

I'm going to give you a circumstance here, because the member was talking about how bad things are starting to get with homelessness, drug addictions, and with people that really need affordable housing. Quite frankly, Mr. Speaker, I'll get back to Bill 78 and why it's going to address those issues, you know, getting an additional 25,000 beds out there for accommodations for folks.

Along this inlet: massive drug abuse. There is a place there that they call the church. This is going back about 20 years ago. Present day is a heck of a lot worse. When the Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs is talking about this, let me give you a shot of the way-back machine and then a projection of how it's starting to change and why we're looking at this angle based on our experiences. Along there there's this place called the church. That's where all the heroin addicts would go and shoot up, and right along East Hastings they would go off just on the railroad tracks. Now, seeing that for the first time was a bit disconcerting. The worst part is getting accustomed to it. Once you're immersed and you're around that environment for a while, you don't even see it anymore.

Where it started to really set in, the differences and the challenges: I was looking at hiring a security company to secure assets along there. We had to leave fibre optics cables, and we would leave our equipment out there. One of the companies I was interviewing used attack dogs. Now, from working across the rest of Canada, I'd never run into that circumstance. I asked him why, and he said, "Well, because I won't put my people in harm's way because of stickups with needles and other things." Now, this is desperate homelessness. I'm asking him, "How desperate is that?" He says: "Can you imagine only having five minutes left to live in your life? What would you do or what would you not do to get that next fix or to not have your life end?" That's how a lot of this desperation goes with the folks that are in that extreme end of drug abuse. That is coming to our downtown area. We've talked about why we want the model for recovery; this is pushing a lot of that.

The social issues out there come to economics. We've seen a downturn in the economy, and we've been going through that. We've had COVID taking place. It's displaced a bunch of people. Absolutely. When the minister first started to talk about this, of how we could come up with a better way of doing it – we haven't touched this for 20 years. The model has not been touched or reviewed in at least 20 years. Having seen that and this projection, my concern when I first sat with the minister was: "Okay. You've got 144,000 that are on the books seeking affordable housing right now. We're going to have a crunch in the next year and a half. Maybe it's going to be longer than that. It's protracted. What are you not seeing because those are lagging indicators?" In some circumstances people have been on those lists for over seven years.

One of the things I challenged the group with was: how do you streamline this? How can someone languish on a list for seven years? It's because the application process is so convoluted. By the time you get through the system, you may or may not fit within one box. When some of the data was being presented, the individual presenting it said: I apologize in advance because it's not going to reconcile because we don't have a clear line of sight on this. That sent chills down my spine, knowing that we're going into an

economic downturn and all the pressures that folks had and those that really needed it, the single moms, the working families.

Here's another model that came up. Once they were on the system or needed it . . . [interjection] I'll take one in a bit if I could. If they needed it, they would not be able to keep their same housing. If their income model came up, all of a sudden they'd be kicked out of the affordable housing they had. So you had these people being stuck in the system with that backlog, and that's a real challenge. When we're seeing these issues, it's absolutely – now, when it comes to the housing stock, when we look at things, it's a little bit different. Again, please understand it's with compassion, that we're in agreement here. We're trying to solve the same problem. We're just approaching it from a different angle.

When I was working with these folks – and they're way more savvy than I am when it comes to real estate. One of things they said – and I started throwing ideas out there, again from that project side, of trying to unlock equity and get funding and move things ahead. We had a ton of assets, literally properties scattered throughout the province, different areas and jurisdictions, that we were doing nothing with. There are various states of repair or disrepair or mismanagement or management of these that we can't unlock that capital.

When these not-for-profit groups are approaching us and they're asking us for contributions, dollars and cents, I'm trying to do it for the least cash-flow output so I don't have to take cash out of the province's pocket and put it on the table. I'm looking at all these assets, and I'm going: can I leverage these properties? And they're going: yeah. That would account more in a public-private partnership. Some of these properties would amount to about 25 to 30 per cent of the actual build. If we're sitting on something, we're literally not doing anything with it but I can unlock that equity, that goes into this model. All of a sudden we're not taking taxpayer dollars, throwing it against the wall; we're actually using this. It's not a bad thing to get rid of some of these assets, to sell them off to get better locations or to allow those to be leveraged. That's part of the concept and the connotation of it.

If the member wants to intervene now – I just wanted to try to make that point – if you still wish, or if you want to let it pass, that's fine, too.

Ms Ganley: Oh, I'm happy to rise and ask a question.

I mean, it's all very well that the member is aware of the problem. I'm glad to hear that. But I think the issue we have with this bill is that it doesn't solve the problem. In fact, it makes it worse. In my former riding there was an affordable housing building that had been under a CMHC contract. That contract ended, and the people who owned it, the organization, immediately jacked up the rent. This bill allows you to sell affordable housing. There's no provision anywhere in this bill that'll stop the people who take it from immediately raising the rent. So I'm just wondering, like: how is this a solution as opposed to something that adds to the problem?

Mr. Getson: Thank you for the intervention on that. Again, I don't believe that any bill that we ever put forward from both sides will solve it a hundred per cent. There are going to be give-and-takes and there are going to be circumstances where the model may not suit perfectly. However, I would propose to the member, you know, that if we want to sit down and go through it with the minister in that specific circumstance, we can look where the offset potentially by a different organization or that asset could be used otherwise to unlock that equity. That make sense? You might have one building here that that doesn't perfectly fit, but you go down the street to a different NGO or something else, and we've actually allowed that.

Now, one of the examples I want to use is on the rent side. When the rents are being increased, it's also testing market conditions. It doesn't mean that that has to be stuck there. One of the items we looked at was a mixed-income model. If we use that same building as a circumstance, and let's say that it's a four-storey building or a five-storey building, the top floors might pay the full rents, the middle floors kind of get a subsidy, and the basement floors kind of get a deep discount. The other thing that that helps to happen, when you do that in those different types of models, is that people aren't displaced from their work. Literally the overall package, the building is being paid for. Whether it's through corporations, NGOs, or government involvement, the overall package and the building envelope is being paid for in whole, but each floor, each door might pay a little bit differently.

And then it doesn't displace that individual, let's say, in the circumstance that they need a trampoline rather than being stuck in the flytrap, that when their incomes come up, they don't have to displace and move out of those environments and go somewhere else and seek different employment, different child care, all those other things. That's part of the intent to come around with it. [interjection] If I can, Member, I'm going to try to make a few more points.

[Mr. Milliken in the chair]

Ms Pon: Oh. May I?

Mr. Getson: Oh, sure.

Ms Pon: Just quickly to answer the question. I think you addressed this really well. In fact, just some additional information I can supplement is about the rent. It is of some concern, too. It's a good concern that if we're going to transfer the title to those nonprofit organizations or partner on the operating agreement, there would be a cost and caveat to make sure that the rent is within the limit and also to make sure that we transfer the title. That building, that partner will continue to maintain those buildings as affordable housing.

Mr. Sabir: For how long?

Ms Pon: That is going to continue. That's going to continue for as long as they own it, okay? That is a concern that we have, too. That's why we have this Bill 78.

Thank you to the member.

10:00

Mr. Getson: Thank you for the intervention, Minister.

November 1: this is when it was kind of rolled out. We did a ton of consultation on it with those other task forces coming up with those ideas, and it wasn't exclusionary by a lot of these other groups because they were involved, they were engaged in it. November 1 it came out. The strategy aims to increase the number of households in the affordable housing system by an additional 25,000. Half of this will be met by affordable housing stock and maximizing federal funding. Again, there are different programs out there from the feds. We're definitely going to reach our arms out and make sure we're participating in those. Quite frankly, it's us getting our Alberta tax dollars back, so we're going to maximize on that. The other will be met through increased rent supplements, again, what I was talking about a little bit earlier.

The strategy reflects advice from the Affordable Housing Review Panel to redefine the government's role, tap into the community expertise that operates in those areas, expand those partnerships, and then to simplify the system, again talking about the process and how it's rather cumbersome.

Bill 78 takes the steps to implement the affordable housing strategy. Currently the Alberta Social Housing Corporation operates under a prescriptive regulatory structure, which limits opportunities for innovation, collaboration, and partnerships. So that's part of the challenge that we have. It's been kind of fixed and stuck for a number of years, and it needs to be tweaked so that we can allow new ideas to hit these problems, again from a different angle, before they happen.

The last thing that I want to see is East Hastings come to visit us here in Edmonton and also in the rural areas because of the impoverished state. Again, a big concern as we relaunch the economy and get things going again is that we don't let people fall through the cracks and, moreover, that we act as a trampoline, that we're there to bounce them back, get them back on their feet rather than them being stuck in the system.

Bill 78 makes changes to Alberta housing to increase opportunities for partnerships, ensure the appropriate oversight for new ventures, and improve governance. It promotes new partnerships and ensures oversight: I can't stress that one enough. It's going to bolster the number of players in that place and look at our role as government. Should we be stuck in the middle of that? I would suggest we're not the best property managers. When I go into that group and I start to ask where all the housing stocks are at and I can't get an answer within 20 minutes, there's an issue. And it's no disrespect to the group that does it, but that would never be accepted in private industry at all. When I go over a month to two months and I'm still not getting accurate information, that's not a good deal.

Again, this isn't any reflection on either party or a reflection on the folks. It's just the system in which they're operating. So it definitely needs an overhaul. It needs to be snappy; it needs to be quick. And if we can't do that, if we can't react and we can't deploy capital where it needs to go, the unfortunate part is that we're not going to catch the people that need it and bounce them back out when they need it the most. So that's the angle that we're going at this, Mr. Speaker.

This will attract new investment into that affordable housing envelope. It allows potentially – I don't want to keep talking too much more but just a little bit more if you wouldn't mind. It attracts new investment into that affordable housing market. It also allows potentially, when you look at it, for current housing or accommodation that's out there. If you looked at some of the private stock that's out there currently that isn't being used, so some of the rents in different apartments, well, there's a potential for tapping into that as well with these unique models, and it starts to seem more like a village concept or a different area or region. Then when you start talking about affordable housing, the same stigmas don't go with it. It's not that shoddy old building down on the corner or anything else. It might just be down the road from you.

You can work the financial models and the contractual agreements so that nobody knows the difference and no one is the wiser, and when someone needs it, they can get into the system quicker. It improves the governance capacity of the housing management bodies. That needs to be done. It simplifies administration.

Now the specific changes to it. It's making it possible for the province through the Alberta Social Housing Corporation to enter into joint ventures or partnerships to provide that affordable housing, again to react, to be more nimble and quick for those organizations where this is their mainstay of business, where this is what they do, both on the not-for-profit and the for-profit sides. It's a mixed bag of tricks; all over the place. Others are playing in that environment, but they're really the experts in it, not us.

It is adding definitions for affordable housing accommodation and provider; giving the ministry the authority to formally designate affordable housing and accommodations and providers; ensuring oversight and accountability for the affordable housing providers and those new partnerships; and giving the minister authority to require specific knowledge or skills for the housing management bodies.

I think the minister was going to intervene. I'm not sure if the member opposite was. If there was still an intervention, I would accept it now if you wish.

Ms Ganley: Yes, actually, there is. I mean, I appreciate what you're saying. I appreciate that the system as it currently exists is definitely imperfect, extremely imperfect, one might argue. I think what we're trying to say is that what is happening in this bill, where you're allowing it to be sold with no legislated requirement that it continue to be affordable housing, that it continue to provide the same number of units, is making the problem worse, not making the problem better.

I admit that new buildings should probably be the mixed-market model. It seems like a good model. It allows the thing to be sustainable. My concern is that if you take a building with a hundred units and 50 of them become market rent units, what you've done is decrease the number of affordable housing units, and that is the opposite of what we need. I'd love you to speak to that, Member.

Mr. Getson: Thank you to that member. Honestly, I wasn't sure how these interventions would work out, but when we have dialogue back and forth like this, I actually think it's two thumbs up on my side.

In that context, that's where you have to look at the broader envelope of what's totally in that marketplace, whether it's a region or area. When you look at the specifics of that one building, coming back to that envelope – I'm not trying to boil the ocean, Member. Sorry. I should be speaking through the Speaker to you. When you look in the context of that one specific building, I can see where you would have those concerns. On the surface it would seem like you're displacing those 25 units, but in actuality you might be only displacing the value coming into that one specific building. Now, those units, those 25 beds, if we're using that number, could be tacked into a new building that doesn't yet have it but has capacity, has a higher rent value, isn't fully prescribed. But then it's offset. That model, then, is again replicated in another area. Overall, we'll increase it by 25,000 units based on that model because you now have more spaces available that are more sustainable at those different levels.

Again, in the context of playing Monopoly, you've got a three-storey building. From everything in your context and the model you have right now, it's kind of the law of diminishing returns. It keeps being low rents, falling down. The building structure can't be sustainable. You can't get enough units to make it viable. The building is becoming dilapidated. Your operating and maintenance budgets are going out. We're stuck at the point where you have to calve out the whole building itself, and then you're building a new structure and displacing the entire building.

With that mixed model, what happens is that you can now have several buildings. More people want to be involved in that type of operation, and it isn't taking on that entire asset yourself. You're kind of displacing the risk model. With that, you're guaranteeing those spaces because they'll be replicated in a bunch of other buildings in that context elsewhere. You've got more volume coming in and taking that capacity. That's the conversation we'd have to go back to and look at the model. We did consider that, Mr. Speaker, through you to the member, and it's a very valid point.

This was a lot of the debate that we had in that housing committee group as well.

With that, Mr. Speaker – I've rattled on a bit – I'm supportive of the bill, and specifically since I had line of sight, I can understand where some of the other members are having some of these concerns. It's really good to have this dialogue. Again, we're seeing the same things and with sort of the same heart and the same mind and compassion to try to fix that. Honestly, my concern is that blindside of all the folks that need it and can't get it because our system is just too cumbersome to react and be there. We need to do something bold. We need to fix these problems, and we need to make sure that we're not turning out like East Hastings was 20 years ago. Now when you go down to that area, it's nonstop sirens every night in that same district and region. They're having one heck of a problem, so we sure don't want to bring that here.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

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

Mr. Deol: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise in the House and add comments on Bill 78, Alberta Housing Amendment Act, 2021, on behalf of my constituents of Edmonton-Meadows. Before I start my comments, I just wanted to read a little piece of the universal declaration of human rights of the United Nations, article 25(1).

10:10

The first important document that qualified the right to adequate housing was the universal declaration of human rights, adopted by the UN General Assembly in 1948.

Everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of himself and of his family, including food, clothing, housing and medical care and necessary social services, and the right to security in the event of unemployment, sickness, disability, widowhood, old age or other lack of livelihood in circumstances beyond his control.

The declaration has been signed by all 192 member states of the United Nations, including Canada. My purpose in reading this declaration after 73 years, since being included in the Charter – it seems this piece remains very important, unfortunately just on a piece of paper. Homelessness has been a huge problem around the world, and I can speak to the issues in India. I can definitely say that, comparatively, things are better or worse here and there. I would not necessarily blame this government as a problem and responsible for everything that is happening here in Alberta, but it is also a fact and truth that for successive governments in different countries as well as in Alberta – one party ruled for over 45 years, and it technically not only failed to solve the problem, but their policies in the early '90s, really, actually caused an increase in homelessness, creating the chaos in the affordable housing issues.

Looking at all those things, first I just wanted to say to the minister that we appreciate that she is getting up every time to participate in the debate by providing her insight on this bill. What this bill actually does to really solve the problem of homelessness in Alberta: the bill amends the Alberta Housing Act to allow the province to establish public partnerships and enter joint ventures, which allow the province to be co-owners of affordable housing units. This takes place in section 8 of this bill, which amends section 25 of the Alberta Housing Act.

The bill creates a definition for affordable housing and gives the minister the ability to designate units as affordable housing. There are no criteria included in the legislation about what the implications of this designation are. Effectively, the designation allows these units to be part of joint ventures and public-private

partnerships. The definitions of affordable housing accommodation and affordable housing provider are in section 2 of the bill, and the minister's power to designate is in section 9.

Having no criteria is significant because whoever is awarded these contracts or deals has a significant impact on the supply of affordable housing. Entering deals with nonprofit providers is significantly different than working with large corporate landlords, who are required to provide profits to shareholders and therefore need to consider raising rent when possible.

There's a lot of information. I don't really need to go into details. The UCP government had a KPMG report on their response to the first COVID wave, and their report specifically, you know, pointed to problems in profitable long-term care, that have really caused the problem in the seniors' facilities – I don't really want to go into detail; there are a lot of recommendations – how the private owners for profit kept their profit motives before providing the services they're supposed to do. The government's communication around Bill 78 and their housing strategy emphasizes working with the private market, but the government has not clarified how they will ensure accountability from who they make deals with.

The bill also provides the minister the power to create the board competency requirements for housing management boards, and this is in the section of the bill that amends section 34 of the act.

This bill is the first part of the UCP government's affordable strategy, but reading all this information and looking at the realities and the history of the work in different departments, including Seniors and Housing – there are more than 24,000 people who are on the waiting list. One important question that I'm looking at is: the government is spending over 75 per cent less than the previous government's allotment of budget for Seniors and Housing and still claiming they are expediting the work to address homelessness in this province. [interjection] Sure.

Ms Pon: Thank you very much for allowing me to intervene to address some of the questions about the wait-list. Yes, currently there are 25,000 people on the wait-list. That's why we have this Bill 78, to solve that problem, because in the NDP government's four years the wait-list increased by 65 per cent. We are unable to continue to do that. That's why we do a new way, Mr. Speaker. This is an innovative way in partnership with our private-sector housing providers and creates an innovative way to partnership. Let me be clear to people, the Albertans watching this. This is not a privatization; this is about a new way to do new things. If we continue to do the old way, that was formerly, we are unable to catch up, to provide more housing for the people that require affordable housing in need. Bill 78 is to build a stronger community with our people and serve Albertans.

Mr. Deol: Thank you for your information, Minister. You know, that was a good political speech but did not really relate anything to the content in this bill. That is what I was exactly, actually trying to refer to. When we are trying, then the minister says one thing that seems like she has invented a new idea.

10:20

I would also refer to the Member for Calgary-East when he says that the government alone cannot really address the homelessness issue with the affordable housing. It is very clear and it is historically true that what the previous Conservative governments have been trying to do did not really solve the problem in the province. They are just departing from the responsibility, as they read in the United Nations declaration, as successive governments have been trying to do the private partnership.

I even spoke to the other bill – like, we are discussing the other bill named something similar to the Infrastructure Accountability Act, that's also in the House. It still did not provide that, how you are really adding accountability. Even then the PC government in 2014, after so many complaints and with obvious facts, stopped the P3 contracts specifically for the school buildings and the education infrastructure, and we see this UCP government's U-turn, moving back to that sole, same old idea that has provided just, I would say, unaccountable profit to UCP donors.

To Albertans that brought, like, the problematic infrastructure with a number of ongoing problems and repairs and maintenance, unexpected and expensive maintenance, what does this basically do? It's moving the government's responsibility to the private partners and more of it with the public funding instead of the government owning these projects with the taxpayers' dollar. They're also transferring the . . . [interjection] Sure.

Mr. Eggen: Yeah. No. Sorry, hon. member. I didn't mean to cut you off in midsentence. Again, from my initial comments I was just curious for yourself in Edmonton-Meadows. We were on a constituency break last week, right? In Edmonton-North West we were absolutely inundated with people who have been cast out, evicted from their rental properties. Besides the obvious heartbreak that that entails, it also, I think – you go from anecdote to a trend. What I'm seeing is lots of anecdotes of people simply being evicted from very modest accommodations that they have in Edmonton-North West. They have to scramble. You know, if they're calling their MLA, it's the eleventh hour, really, Mr. Speaker, for a person. They've exhausted so many other possibilities. Here we are with Bill 78, which is throwing a huge monkey wrench into affordable housing here in the province of Alberta. Did you see examples of this in Edmonton-Meadows recently?

Mr. Deol: Thank you, hon. member, for your intervention. I was just coming to, actually, this side.

Affordable housing is not only the responsibility of the government by investing in affordable housing plans, but it is also related to a number of other things in life. Affordability comes with good-paying jobs, affordable education, accessible, affordable health care, and a number of those things. What had happened in the past in what we're seeing: the UCP government's commitment of \$230 million in three years, still calling that they're bringing a new idea that's comprehensive and expedites the solution to the crisis in affordable housing, compared to \$1.2 billion that the previous NDP put forward for four years.

Also, what this government did to the most vulnerable people. They're more prone to homelessness issues. Deindexing AISH funding: that happens during unprecedented growing inflation, and COVID impacts a number of those issues. They also deindexed the Alberta seniors' benefits, the people already living close to the poverty line; deindexed income support, special needs assistance; and rolled back youth wages. The government is not only lacking vision; they're totally out of touch. They're failing to see the connections between all those things to address the fundamental issues of homelessness.

Not only this – I really didn't want to go and pick on just private partnerships as wrong, but the way the UCP is designing the work, obviously it's not going to work. I have people in my riding and in my neighbour riding, people from my community, who purchased this same idea. The minister is proposing that she's bringing a new idea, a new way. The community who purchased that affordable housing from a private partner, the government-funded private partner with a huge lot of problems, next year with brand new properties: when they turned back to the builder, he didn't answer

the questions. He didn't address the issues. They delayed the concerns, they delayed the complaints, and two years later you find out that the company who built the project is no longer even in business.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

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

Mr. Carson: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a privilege to rise to speak to Bill 78, the Alberta Housing Amendment Act, 2021. I've appreciated most of the comments that we've heard so far this morning. I think that the previous member was about to make an important point about the fact that we often, in some cases, do see companies potentially folding after the fact, after collecting millions of dollars of government money and being able to, you know, for lack of a better term, siphon the money that they need from a project and then being able to pass it off and potentially give it back to the government with all the liability with it. So I rise to share my concerns and share that I under no circumstances see myself being able to support this legislation.

It's interesting. We've heard the Minister of Seniors and Housing continue to say that these are, you know, new ideas and that they're new solutions, but the fact is that this has been tried before, Mr. Speaker. Over and over again we see this government continue down the road of trying to make P3s a thing, and unfortunately we've just seen in so many instances where it's simply not effective policy.

10:30

We see it across other jurisdictions across Canada. Most often, when it comes to building schools, we see Conservative governments come into power, give these contracts, often not in a transparent model, to friends and insiders, and at the end of the day the Auditor General comes back and tells the government and tells the public that it would have been much cheaper, billions of dollars cheaper, if the government would have done it themselves. On top of that, the accountability is not there: through the contracting process, through the procurement process and the RFPs, and on. Yet we have this government trying to tout this formula that they're trying to put forward to the public as something new. Honestly, Mr. Speaker, it's tired, it's an old process, and it's not innovative, by any means.

Unfortunately, what we've gotten from this government in the midst of all the infighting that they're having – you know, from the outside it looks like they're on the verge of collapsing their own government caucus – they're doing everything they can as fast as possible to see how much money they can get out the door to their friends and insiders. This is just another case of that, through Bill 78, the Alberta Housing Amendment Act, 2021. They are doing their best to sell off these government assets as fast as possible, and it's just devastating.

You know, we heard the Member for Lac Ste. Anne-Parkland, and I appreciate that that member was willing to join the debate. [interjection] I'm not going to take any interventions at this moment. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate that member sharing anecdotes, and we went over the idea of if housing assets disappear in one facility, hopefully it will be built in another facility. But, at the end of the day, that doesn't help the people who are living in those accommodations potentially. If they are being used, potentially they need modifications to raise the standard of living in that property, and that is a government responsibility.

Again, I do not believe that we should be selling off these assets and hoping – because, unfortunately, through Bill 78 there isn't the accountability of assuring potentially based standards or ensuring

that those products are actually going to stay as affordable housing after they're sold as an asset. You know, we're told and the people who are potentially living in those accommodations are told that, hopefully, in the near future, after they're kicked out of that affordable housing, there will be some new stock, hopefully in the same area that they are trying to live in. It's so unfortunate, Mr. Speaker. Again, there are no accountability mechanisms through Bill 78.

I just want to make another point here. Again, we heard from the Member for Lac Ste. Anne-Parkland, and unfortunately it's really hard for me specifically and especially on this issue to listen to the opinion of that member. I know that it's important to listen to the opinion, but the fact is that that member has shared their opinion on what they felt about people receiving government supports, and that has been widely reported by Edmonton CTV News. The fact is that that member said that people who are receiving CERB through the pandemic – again, these are potentially people that were on AISH that got moved over to CERB, that are on Alberta Works that got moved over to CERB, for a variety of reasons, or people who simply couldn't find work. That member criticized them as using that money to eat Cheezies and watch cartoons and that this money was fuelling drug addictions in that sector.

It's so disappointing that this is the attitude of a government – of course, the member never apologized. The member said that it was taken out of context. That member chose, I guess, to say his quiet part loud in that instance, and I wish that we would have heard an apology from that member, but that is definitely not going to be the person on this specific issue where I'm going to be willing to take his word for how he feels about how we should be moving forward in terms of affordable housing in the province.

Now, this is not a simple issue, by any means. We've heard about the complexity of mixed-market housing and affordable housing, but there are so many opportunities to do our best to support Albertans before they get to a point where they need to be considering affordable housing. That is where there is a massive divide between the decisions that we made when we were in government, from 2015 to 2019, and the decisions that this government has made over the last two years.

We've heard it already: the deindexing of AISH, the deindexing of the Alberta seniors' benefit, of income supports, of supplemental accommodation benefits, of seniors' lodge assistance programs. I hear it again and again from people, constituents that reach out to my office talking about how they were able to access benefits before, you know, to supplement their often \$1,100 a month that they're receiving from the government. They might be getting extra, a couple of hundred dollars, that they're able to use to support their family, in many cases to support their children and educational needs and so on.

Unfortunately, this government went back on their previous support of indexing those programs. When they came into government, they changed their mind even though it was an election commitment, even though it was a commitment when they were in opposition. We've seen this time and time again, Mr. Speaker, and unfortunately when you start making decisions to cut people off their benefits in the first place, we find ourselves in an even worse situation not only when it comes to health outcomes, not only when it comes to justice outcomes but when it comes to affordable housing outcomes as well.

We have seen these statistics. We know from study after study that supporting Albertans, supporting people up front is going to save us money not only in the long term but in the short term when it comes to justice costs, when it comes to housing costs, and so on. Especially as we continue through the pandemic, when we talk about overloaded ICUs and overloaded hospitals, these are people

that often find themselves in the emergency room and in situations where they are accessing medical supports. Unfortunately, the changes that this government has made to benefits across the board have only devastated our hospitals, our justice system, and our shelters even more.

This, Mr. Speaker, seems to be what happens when we elect governments that believe that government should be run like a business under all circumstances. Myself as a proud New Democrat, I believe that there are some things that we should just not be leaving up to corporations, one of those things, of course, being universal health care. Another one, I would say, in most instances if not all, would be how we are tackling affordable housing. Again, we have a government that is trying to pass a bill to sell off assets that in many cases should be handled by the government, should be invested in by the government. There is more accountability when those investments are made by the government.

Past that, unfortunately, this government has committed no real extra dollars. You know, we see the strategy of a \$238 million commitment from this government. Of course, when we were in government, we had committed \$1.2 billion. Now, I think that in any circumstance, no matter how much you might argue or this UCP government might argue that this money spent by government is not going to be efficient, these are quite drastic differences in how much governments were willing to invest. [interjection] Sure. I will take that intervention.

Thank you.

Ms Pon: Thank you so much for allowing me to share my comment with you about the partnerships about affordable housing, why this Bill 78 is working. What is Bill 78? It's to have a vision and try to solve the problem. We don't believe throwing money at affordable housing and to keep injecting money is how to solve the problem. That's why in your last four years the wait-lists still continued by 65 per cent. For us, with Bill 78, in terms of the partnerships, we're going to have an open and transparent process. Everyone is looking at who is going to sell, sell it to whom, and by how much. It's not something hidden. It's not something sold to a particular group. I just want to let everyone know that we're watching that this session, that this partnership is working, because it's working with the private housing and nonprofit organizations.

10:40

Mr. Carson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again we hear from the minister empty speaking points about inefficiencies of government spending. Do you think the Albertans that are accessing programs like the Alberta seniors' benefit or AISH are concerned about the efficiency of the ministry? The fact is that the decisions that this government has made have taken hundreds of dollars out of people's pockets, the most vulnerable people in our province. I truly don't think that they care about the talking points and the empty platitudes from this minister. At the end of the day, they are struggling more now than ever to feed their families, to feed their children, potentially dependants, their own parents, because, in most instances or in many cases, through no fault of their own they are stuck accessing government funding.

At the same time as this minister says that we have to scale back funding because it's not efficient, we have the Member for Lac Ste. Anne-Parkland telling them that they should stop spending their money from accessing those programs on Cheezies and cartoons and abusing drugs. [interjection] I think I see another intervention, so I'll take that.

Thank you.

Ms Ganley: Thank you very much, Member. I mean, you've spoken very passionately about this issue, which I think is incredibly important because I think that for those listening to this debate, they need to understand that there is a real human impact. While the minister calls affordable housing inefficient, the frank fact of the matter is that affordable housing relative to housing someone in prison, which is often the alternative, is actually significantly cheaper, and most enforcement experts would tell you that that is a much cheaper way to go about it.

[The Speaker in the chair]

The minister's essential argument here is that if we sell off affordable housing units, we don't require that they stay affordable, and we don't require the building of new units, that will create new units. I would love to hear the member's thoughts on that particular leap of logic.

Mr. Carson: Well, thank you to the member for that intervention. The fact remains that through this legislation, while the government continues to say that they are bringing some kind of transparency to the process, what we are seeing here is the selling off of Alberta's affordable housing assets with absolutely zero accountability for how that will take place, zero accountability to ensure that that money will stay and go back and be reinvested into affordable housing, zero assurances that the process for the selling off of these assets is going to be transparent and go through a fair process. There are just so many questions that are left here that we have not heard answers for.

We've only heard this minister continue to defend this bill with empty platitudes about how the system isn't efficient, yet nothing in this legislation is going to make the system more efficient or more transparent or more accountable. What we are likely to see are opportunities for corporations to make more money while the cost of housing stock potentially goes up with it. I don't think that that's what Albertans expect or want to see from the decisions of this provincial government. It's truly devastating, Mr. Speaker.

I was hopeful that we would see a stronger commitment in terms of the funding model that this government is putting forward, but it's clear, through this legislation and many other pieces that this government has put forward, that they would much rather pass the dollar or pass the buck on to the next government, push off those capital costs, and simply farm it out to private companies so that they don't have to carry it on their books.

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

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Government Motions

Equalization Payments

101. Mr. Kenney moved:

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly:

- (a) recognize the results of the referendum held on October 18, 2021, where 61.7 per cent of voters supported removing section 36(2) of the Constitution Act, 1982, Parliament and the government of Canada's commitment to the principle of making equalization payments,
- (b) reaffirm the principle articulated by the Supreme Court of Canada in the 1998 reference re secession of Quebec that it is "the constitutional right of each participant in the federation to initiate Constitutional change" and that "this right implies a reciprocal duty on the other

- participants to engage in discussions to address any legitimate initiative to change the constitutional order;”
- (c) authorize an amendment to the Constitution of Canada to be made by proclamation issued by Her Excellency the Governor General under the Great Seal of Canada in accordance with the schedule set forth below, and
 - (d) direct the government of Alberta to take all necessary steps to secure a fair deal for Alberta in the Canadian federation, including the reform of federal transfer programs, the defence of provincial powers enumerated in the Constitution, and the right to pursue responsible development of natural resources.

SCHEDULE

AMENDMENT TO THE CONSTITUTION OF CANADA

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

[VERSION FRANÇAISE]

MODIFICATION DE LA CONSTITUTION DU CANADA

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

[Adjourned debate November 3: Mr. Smith]

The Speaker: Hon. members, is there anyone who would like to speak? The hon. Member for Red Deer-South.

Mr. Stephan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm honoured and feel a great desire to stand and speak in favour of Government Motion 101. Part of my desire is founded on, I think, that each and every one of us has the desire to see that we are treated fairly and respected. Collectively, Albertans have that desire. We all want to be treated fairly, and when we perceive that others or ourselves are treated unfairly, we want to act to see that rectified.

Mr. Speaker, section 36(2) of the Constitution Act contains equalization. This provision was enacted under Pierre Trudeau. I want to share an irony with those in the Legislature. Ironically, Quebec, the principal taker of equalization, refused to sign it. If Quebec refused to sign the Constitution, why are they getting the vast majority of equalization payments under it? The act does not specify how the principle of equalization is to be applied. Those details are calculated under a formula manipulated by politicians. Merely amending the formula does not protect Alberta from future unprincipled politicians of tomorrow. A litigation lawyer friend of mine suggested this government should explore a reference to the court to see if equalization is being misinterpreted by politicians to mean annual structural welfare payments primarily from Alberta primarily to Quebec.

Mr. Speaker, I have served in partnerships. Partnerships where principles govern should not need to litigate good-faith relations. What happens in the real world when there is a lack of good faith is that partners leave dysfunctional relationships.

We all know the facts. Since 1961 Alberta businesses and families have contributed more than \$600 billion net into the Canada partnership while Quebec took more than \$476 billion net from it. Quebec is the principal beneficiary of equalization on a per

capita basis. Alberta businesses and families are the principal per capita payers. The Premier of Quebec says that one of his favourite things about Canada is receiving equalization. "I love you because of what I take from you" is never a functional relationship. Over the last three years Quebec has received \$13 billion in equalization each year. Alberta received nothing. The Premier of Quebec says that there is no social acceptability for Alberta pipelines. How are inbound oil tankers from dictatorships in the Middle East who contribute nothing to Canada acceptable?

A suggested response by the Canadian Taxpayers Federation is no more equalization for Quebec. They are correct. But, Mr. Speaker, what is more disappointing is that equalization is gained. Here is an example. State-controlled Quebec Hydro provides the lowest residential power rates in all of North America to Quebecers at below-market prices. This subsidy has resulted in Quebec having one of the highest per capita swimming pools in North America, including more than California. Quebec is selling its power to heat those pools at deep discounts. But as Quebec Hydro artificially sells power under market, it reduces Quebec's official capacity in billions, thereby increasing its share of billions in equalization from Alberta families and businesses. In essence, under equalization Alberta families and businesses indirectly pay for and subsidize Quebec Hydro, providing the lowest residential power rates to Quebecers in all of North America.

Mr. Speaker, I know the opposition doesn't give a crap. They do not care.

10:50

Mr. Sabir: Point of order.

Mr. Stephan: But looking at our own power bills, this is occurring at a time . . .

The Speaker: A point of order is called. The hon. Member for Edmonton-North West.

Point of Order Language Creating Disorder

Mr. Eggen: Yeah. I think that that's deliberately provocative language from the hon. member for Red Deer somewhere – north or south: I can't remember – and 23(h), (i), and (j) is, I think, appropriate in that circumstance, Mr. Speaker. I think you would agree.

Thank you.

Mr. Stephan: Mr. Speaker, I apologize and withdraw. I just feel so strongly about this, but I apologize.

Debate Continued

Mr. Stephan: Looking at our own power bills in Alberta, this is occurring at a time when some Alberta families and businesses are suffering under unprecedented increases in our own power costs, including due to escalating carbon taxes imposed by Ottawa, which by design disproportionately harm Alberta businesses and families. Informed Albertans see equalization for what it truly is, and they overwhelmingly rejected it.

Mr. Speaker, I have been a member of a partnership. I have drafted many commercial partnership agreements. While individual partners may not unilaterally change partnerships, they should speak up when they are being treated unfairly. Likewise, while Albertans may not unilaterally change the Constitution to end equalization, we need to speak up as we are treated unfairly. The truth is that Canada is becoming a dysfunctional partnership.

In the real world this partnership would never survive. Mr. Speaker, this is the truth. In the real world Quebec would be kicked out of the partnership. Another truth: if Quebec was Alberta, they would have left this partnership long ago. How well will Ottawa and Quebec respond when confronted with principle requests for fairness? Will they be principled and act in good faith, or will they respond with indifference or hostility? Forced to confront reality, will they seek to deflect, defer, or distort the truth? Albertans will be watching as their response to this referendum will reveal our partners for who they are.

Mr. Speaker, I think we have our answer. Justin Trudeau deflected, deferred, and distorted the truth. He tried to make the referendum about the Premier. This referendum has nothing to do with the Premier. This is about Albertans. There are Albertans who see equalization for what it is and want it removed who do not support the Premier. Principled requests for fairness transcend partisanship. Let's be honest. The Prime Minister, by his words and his actions, is hostile to Alberta and wants to plunder and pillage Alberta, its businesses, and individuals.

Mr. Speaker, a recent article said that Trudeau was Canada's first NDP Prime Minister. While that is true, he is also Canada's first separatist Prime Minister. Justin Trudeau appointed Stephen Guilbeault as Canada's new environment minister and appointed Jon Wilkinson to be the minister of resources. This is what Lorne Gunter said in an article titled *The New Cabinet is a Disaster for Alberta*: "The two cabinet portfolios most important to Alberta's economic future are now held by the two ministers in Trudeau's cabinet most hostile to Alberta's interests."

When I was running for office, Mr. Speaker, I was asked the question: what is the greatest threat to Alberta's freedom and prosperity? I said: government. Jesse Kline said in her article titled *Anti-oil Crusader Steve Guilbeault Hasn't Grown Up Since His Radical Lawbreaking Days* that "the true enemies of Canadian prosperity are not some shadowy overseas money men looking to undermine our natural resources industry with vast . . . funds, but key members of Her Majesty's Government in Ottawa."

Plan A is not working, Mr. Speaker, so what's plan B? We have to honestly confront the realities of our current circumstances. We need to protect ourselves. Alberta businesses and families should not be subject to unprincipled federal politicians who have demonstrated that they will not hesitate to attack the livelihoods of Alberta individuals and families to further their political ambitions for power.

Mr. Speaker, I mean this from my heart. Canada is spending itself into oblivion, threatening to take Alberta down with it, adopting policies of economic self-destruction, undermining the capacity of Alberta businesses and families to provide for themselves and others. What Canada was is less important to what it is and what it's becoming. When legal plunder displaces work as a ruling principle, a sustainable society is lost. I mean this in all sincerity. Alberta may need to act quickly and abandon this sinking ship while it is still able to do so.

It is time to wake up, Mr. Speaker. In the real world unprincipled, hostile partners have no moral authority to claim unconditional loyalty. In the real world loyalty is earned; it is not conferred. Here is an important question: how is leverage increased when appealing for fairness and good faith from unprincipled and hostile partners? In this case it is produced by Alberta needing Ottawa less. The less Alberta needs Ottawa, the more leverage we have.

Our requirement for fairness is not one founded on anger. It is founded on principle. The right path forward is for Alberta to seek greater self-reliance, to free ourselves from hostile interference, and insulate our children from a looming fiscal train wreck. We are seeing exploding inflation and government debt, dramatic social and economic volatility, and an unpredictable virus. Let's be

honest. Let's be prudent. There is an urgent need for all of us individually and in our families to prepare more to become more self-reliant. [interjection] Yes.

Mr. Schow: Thank you very much to that hon. member. I would like to go back about 45 seconds into his remarks, talking about that looming fiscal problem we have. Now, I heard members from the opposition laughing when talking about this looming problem. Members on this side of the House absolutely take that very seriously and recognize that we are in an unequal, unfair partnership with Ottawa. With the hon. Member for Red Deer-South's experience in finance and taxation in general, maybe he can elaborate a little more about the differences between what we believe on this side of the House as a crisis versus what they believe as borrowing their way out of a problem that our children and grandchildren will have to deal with later. I think it's irresponsible to take such a stance, but I'd love to hear his expert advice on that.

Mr. Stephan: Mr. Speaker, how much time do I have?

The Speaker: Two minutes and 51 seconds.

Mr. Stephan: Thank you.

Mr. Speaker, in the real world families and individuals must live within their means.

Mr. Schow: Give way?

Mr. Stephan: Mr. Speaker, socialism is an enemy of self-reliance.

Mr. Schow: I'd just like to also ask if that member would also relate back to some of his professional experience. In giving the second intervention, I believe it gives that member two more minutes of time.

The Speaker: The hon. member has four minutes and 34 seconds remaining.

Mr. Stephan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. During the time that I served as a tax lawyer, I can honestly say that I did not meet one business owner who felt that a socialist NDP government was doing a good job. We know that under the socialist NDP government, unfortunately, we saw tens of thousands of private-sector jobs less than when they started at a time that our population grew. There is a human tragedy that underpins that. This is being replicated by a socialist NDP Prime Minister in Ottawa.

[Mr. Milliken in the chair]

Mr. Speaker, our government is exploring some great opportunities supporting principles of self-reliance such as our own police force and our own pension plan. This will save billions of dollars each year and will keep that money for Alberta businesses and families. The public interest compels us . . . [interjections] I'm sorry that the other side is upset about self-reliance, but we do a great service to Alberta businesses and families when we empower them and seek to allow them to be more self-reliant. We must do so ourselves as a province. We must seek greater self-reliance from this socialist train wreck in Ottawa.

11:00

Mr. Speaker, there are many other great ideas from Albertans for greater self-reliance such as the free Alberta strategy, a series of initiatives our provincial government can implement without needing any permission from Ottawa to make Alberta a sovereign, more autonomous, more self-reliant jurisdiction within Canada. No doubt many other great Albertans have many other great ideas to

increase our self-reliance. Of course, having an equalization program that plunders and punishes Alberta businesses and families, that is manipulated and pillaged by unprincipled partners: it is in the public interest that that is removed.

Mr. Speaker, thank you for your time to speak on behalf of Albertans.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any members wishing to join? I see the hon. Member for Lac Ste. Anne-Parkland.

Mr. Getson: I apologize, Mr. Speaker. I was trying to intervene with the last speaker. I'll just take my seat. It was a mix-up there in the hand-off.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Any members looking to join debate? I see the hon. Member for Calgary-Falconridge has risen.

Mr. Toor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We promised to bring the referendum of equalization forward during the recent municipal elections. This was the promise made, and we kept the promise, too.

I want to start by addressing a few things that have come up in the media about this referendum and its legitimacy and relevance. First, some people questioned it. Even some members in this House questioned it. But still we got a successful result. It's almost 62 per cent, 61.7 per cent. Does this really matter since it's not binding? These were the rumours. These were the conceptions by the members opposite to Albertans. But in a democracy it's a very good result.

My friend from Red Deer-South mentioned a few things about the calculation and how we're missing billions of dollars. The sad part is that as Albertans, as the members representing this Chamber, we're saying that we're losing and we want our share back, and some people still laugh at this. I think it's a simple question. Why we're not united is very hard to know.

It's not a question of how we contribute too much. It is a fact now that we contribute way more than we receive. Politicians have talked about this, and as Albertans we have been frustrated by it. This referendum was the first time that we could actually express how many of us are frustrated with a hard number. Albertans did not disappoint us; 61.7 per cent is a majority. This allows us as a government to move forward with a more concrete base of how many Albertans are frustrated by this and begin the conversation.

Mr. Speaker, we're not the only province. We're not alone. The vote was about starting somewhere. This was about starting with democracy and having the people speak for what they wanted to see. This is the whole purpose of our system. That's why we are here in this House.

Second, I want to speak to the criticism around its legitimacy. It's true that the turnout was lower – it could have been better because I thought it was a simple question to Albertans – than we would have expected on this important issue. But regardless of this, it does not decrease its legitimacy. What this really means, Mr. Speaker, is that those who did not vote on this issue ultimately decided that whatever the result was from those who did vote would be fine with them. Those who voted said that equalization is unfair and that something needs to be done to improve Alberta's position. By choosing not to vote, those who refrained chose to support the result, and the result ended up being yes.

Now I'll mention contributions. I'm talking about \$240 billion that left Alberta and had gone to Ottawa from 2007 to 2018. This is an average of \$21.8 billion a year. I'm sure we could all imagine what we could do here with an extra \$21.8 billion per year. Debt is

piling up. We never thought that we'd have over a hundred billion dollar debt. We can reduce the debt.

Last week the Prime Minister was here kind of taunting us that Quebec is providing \$8.50 daycare. We could have done this instead of sending the payments to Quebec, if we could stop it, and provided those social services and public services to Albertans. They deserve it. They received \$170 billion in equalization. Yes, they can afford to provide those public services because, as my friend said – I don't know. When they go to Ottawa, they say that they are Liberal. When they come to Alberta, they are basically maybe a colour difference between red and orange, but it's the same thing. They try to fool Canadians with different names, but at the end of the day it's the same thing. At the end of the day, they pander to eastern Canada and cause the division between east and west. Albertans need to stand up to these bad politics.

People can argue that this is to even out income levels and so on, but as Albertans we cannot buy this. Alberta's low tax rates have made it a booming economic success, and it has been historically good for Albertans. We have been able to achieve through our resource development. It has not been perfect, but it has led to Alberta contributing more money than British Columbia and Ontario combined. Alberta is a small province, but when we look at British Columbia and Ontario, we contribute more than them.

Let's expand this for a minute. Quebec opts for higher taxes and an economy that leaves much of their resources in the ground and only promotes mostly lower income jobs. Even now their government is aware that if they see an increase in natural resource revenue, they lose out on equalization transfers proportionately. This has become a conscious choice for Quebec.

The general idea behind equalization is to make sure that provinces have the ability to spend equally on their citizens as the other provinces. Let's take a look at that. In 2021 Quebec will have income after equalization of about \$118.2 billion – let's say \$118 billion – with a population of about 8.485 million. This enables them to spend \$13,930, almost \$14,000, per resident in their budget. Albertans will have income this year of about \$43.7 billion, and with a population of 4.37 million that allows us to spend \$9,997, almost \$10,000, per year.

11:10

This, Mr. Speaker, is the problem. The outdated equalization concept is no longer about equalizing a province's ability to provide for its residents. It has become a mechanism for provinces to choose to say no to resource development, yes to lower paying jobs, which are gotten by votes in Quebec. All of these are a slap in the face to Albertans who work hard to provide for themselves and subsidize the rest of the country.

The money that ends up in Quebec has allowed for them to have much lower child care costs, as I said previously, than we have here through our government subsidies. I'll point out, Mr. Speaker, that they just received – I don't know what to say – a honeypot deal, I guess, for further reductions to their child care costs from Ottawa before the recent federal election. They got the same deal that Ottawa told us could not be done for Albertans. Ottawa has yet to reach an agreement. They just signed it, like, last week, but it's kind of a bullying practice: Alberta, you sign it or leave it. We were not asking for more. We were just asking for what Quebec receives, but with the help of the NDP I think the Prime Minister dares to say: no, you can't get the same deal.

We are tired of being Ottawa's piggy bank for the east, and the results from the referendum are clear on this. [interjection] Yes, Edmonton was the majority of the no votes. This, however, does not mean that Albertans as a whole are not unhappy. This is a

province and a democracy. This is one resident, one vote. Edmonton is but one city in Alberta, and their votes were tallied with the whole of the province. The majority voted yes, and we must proceed with pushing for constitutional reform with the other provinces that support it. If all members of this House are serious about democracy, they will support this motion. [interjection] Go ahead.

Mr. Stephan: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. Thank you for the opportunity to make an intervention. I appreciated your comment about the Albertans in Edmonton not supporting the referendum on equalization as much. Why do you think that this NDP caucus opposite is hostile and looks down on Albertans seeking fairness from equalization? What is it that they have a problem with, do you think? I'd appreciate your thoughts on that.

Mr. Eggen: People who don't wear masks properly.

Mr. Toor: Thank you for your intervention. It's a good question. I think there's a simple answer. Mr. Speaker, I heard them . . .

Mr. Schow: Point of order.

The Acting Speaker: A point of order has been called. I see the hon. Member for Cardston-Siksika to argue it.

Point of Order Allegations against a Member

Mr. Schow: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise on 23(h), (i), and (j). The hon. Member for Red Deer-South stood up and gave an intervention, what I thought was an eloquent and well-thought-out intervention. Part of that question was: why does the NDP have a problem with equalization? The Member for . . .

Mr. Eggen: Edmonton-North West.

Mr. Schow: . . . Edmonton-North West clearly stated: you're my problem and people like you who don't wear masks.

While I recognize that the member he's referring to is clearly wearing his mask at the moment and while I recognize that that member may not like what that other member has to say, I think there should be a level of decorum in this Chamber that's becoming of a Member of the Legislative Assembly. Certainly, saying, "You're my problem" or "People who don't wear masks," suggesting that that member is an antimasker or something, would be inappropriate. I would ask that member, as he clearly knows, giving me his constituency and raising his hand, that his comments were a problem, to apologize and withdraw.

The Acting Speaker: It looks like the hon. Member for Calgary-McCall is looking to stand up and respond to the point of order. Is that correct? I will just put on the record that I did not hear the Member for Edmonton-North West, so it will be difficult for me to rule on a point of order given the fact that I specifically did not hear the comments.

I will offer the opportunity to the Member for Calgary-McCall should he still want to stand up and debate it. I will also offer an opportunity to the Member for Edmonton-North West if it is, in fact, true that, you know, there were comments that obviously aren't going towards effective decorum, et cetera, or something along those lines that might be within the realm of a point of order.

Again, I am speaking from the perspective of having not heard the comments. If there is no reason for that – and I'm not seeing either member standing up right now – I do not find that this is a

point of order, simply from my perspective, because I did not hear the comments.

If the hon. Member for Calgary-Falconridge could continue.

Debate Continued

Mr. Toor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Going back to the intervention, I think the Member for Red Deer-South raised a very good question: why was the voting trend lower in Edmonton? This is because of, I can state . . .

The Acting Speaker: I hesitate to interrupt the hon. member. I do want to just remind all members, courtesy of the rules as proposed for Chamber debate by the Speaker, that when one is speaking, one is not required to wear a mask. That may have something to do with the potential comments that were made earlier.

If the hon. Member for Calgary-Falconridge could please continue.

Mr. Toor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I totally agree with you. I think there is a process for interventions, as the Member for Red Deer-South raised and asked me the question. For the member opposite, if they want to have a question or intervention, there is a proper process, and they should do that instead of saying the stuff which you and I can't hear so that I cannot respond to that either.

But going back to the result, why was it lower in Edmonton? This is because some members in this House, not only in this House – they go outside and they tell Albertans that we don't want to stand for you. They really want to say that they are the heroes for this democratic one member, one vote. But here is the result; 61.7 per cent of Albertans spoke about this. They said: "Yes, we want a fair share. Yes, we want the changes in equalization." Why don't the members opposite now admit that? It's the onus on them to listen to them. [interjection]

Mr. Getson: Thank you. For the record I'm removing my mask to speak. Some of us really respect the decorum in the Chamber and don't offer those types of things when it comes to personal protective use, et cetera.

But to the member that's talking about this, if memory serves, I believe the opposition was in power at the time when there was an opportunity to have a conversation with the existing Prime Minister, who just recently got re-elected, and they chose not to engage on the equalization discussion, not to give Albertans a chance to get their fair share, not a chance to reconcile given that the economics were trending down that way. So maybe if the member wouldn't mind talking about that a bit or seeing what you've heard from your constituents on why the opposition didn't represent them and that now they're going against 61.7 per cent of Albertans who feel that we should open this dialogue up. Quite frankly, Mr. Speaker, we've paid more than our fair share, and we want our dollars back.

Mr. Toor: Thank you. You're absolutely right. They were in power for the last four years. They didn't say anything because the problem is, Mr. Speaker, that when they were in power, they were saying something different. When they were in this Chamber and when they were going to talk to the Prime Minister, then they were saying something else. They were not standing up for Albertans. They were the ones signing off on those \$20 billion cheques every year, but they didn't say anything. Albertans were losing money, and they were piling up debt. Albertans, our future generations, are going to pay that debt.

11:20

Mr. Stephan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last week I made a comment that was unparliamentary. The Speaker did not hear about it, but I had the integrity to recognize and apologize for it.

I have a question for my friend, though. Trudeau has been described as the first NDP Prime Minister of the country. My friend, why do you think that the media would refer to Trudeau as the first NDP Prime Minister in our country, and how does that relate to his attitude towards equalization and plundering Albertans?

Mr. Toor: Thank you, Member. I think it's a serious question. Albertans need to know what is happening in the federal government and the provincial government here, too. We've got an opposition who supports this Prime Minister and their federal counterparts. They come to Calgary, and they oppose our pipelines, and they oppose every infrastructure development in Alberta while they say that they're different parties. They don't even admit that the federal NDP is their counterpart and is basically their parent party. I would say company, not party even.

The truth is that this is a clear campaign to hurt Albertans. They don't allow us to develop our infrastructure. They want to grab more money to pander to voters in eastern Canada. The NDP should know that if they want to represent Albertans, they should stand up for Albertans. This is the time. We have the results, that 61.7 per cent of Albertans stood up and said very clearly: we want a change; we are paying more; we need to start somewhere.

I personally have a hard time to believe . . . [interjections] The members opposite are saying some stuff. I can't hear what they're saying. The question is now for them to stand up and tell me: can they stand up for Albertans? Yes or no? Instead of just telling those lies to the feds and Albertans, let's not play games. It is time for us to stand up for Albertans. [interjection]

The Acting Speaker: Unfortunately, there have already been three interventions, so the hon. member can continue, with about a minute and 45.

Mr. Toor: Listen, through you, Mr. Speaker, this is yes or no. Before I close, these members, when they go to their constituencies, need to tell them: are we standing for Albertans? Yes or no? It's as simple as that. Albertans told us that they want this formula to be changed, that they want a fair deal, and they have spoken. The duty of each and every one of us, the members opposite included, is to listen to them and move forward on what they have asked us to do, vote yes.

With this, Mr. Speaker, I would request to adjourn the debate.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Government Bills and Orders
Second Reading
(continued)

Bill 73
Infrastructure Accountability Act

[Adjourned debate November 16: Mr. Rutherford]

The Acting Speaker: Hon. members, are there any members wishing to join debate? I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-North West has risen.

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the opportunity to speak briefly on the Infrastructure Accountability Act. Perhaps I will just introduce the amendment that I have first, please. I'll just keep one copy.

The Acting Speaker: All right. Just before you continue, once I'm done, feel free to read it in on behalf of the hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung. If anybody wants a copy of it, please go ahead and put up your hand. There will be copies on the tables. This will be referred to, for everybody's benefit, as HA1.

Hon. member, please continue.

Mr. Eggen: Okay. Great. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's actually on behalf of the hon. Member for Edmonton . . .

The Acting Speaker: Decore.

Mr. Eggen: Yeah. The Member for Edmonton-Decore will move 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 it be read a second time this day six months hence."

Mr. Speaker, I am moving this amendment and supporting it. I think that what we do need to do is make sure that we are co-ordinating properly with municipalities. I think that, you know, as an added courtesy to the municipal elections, which were just completed here some weeks ago, in order to evaluate the criteria for capital projects, it should be consistent with regional and municipal planning. When we look at this bill, I think it has a certain incongruity with the long-term planning, necessarily. Maybe not, but it could be with the new municipal governments that we see across the province. I think that in reaching an accord – right? – with that level of government, we have the priorities of cities and towns across this province reflected in an infrastructure plan.

You know, I know from personal experience with building schools across the province – our government had almost 200 projects over the three, four years that we were in government – that when you work with the local municipalities and the school boards, then you can build not just the schools that are required for young people, but you can build other infrastructure that can help to complement that. An example that pops to mind straight away is the location of the new high school in south Edmonton, right? I think that the municipal government, working together with Alberta Health and so forth, were building an access road to where that school would be located and building, potentially, transit to where that school would be located and then having a centre where you have a hospital there, too. By having those sorts of synergies happening in infrastructure and planning, you have the ability to realize efficiencies and to have long-term planning for municipalities as well.

With all of those things together, I think that, you know – of course, reading this bill six months hence does not preclude the projects and the building that still need to happen here in the province of Alberta; in fact, quite the opposite. I think that as part of helping to diversify our economy and building a modern physical infrastructure as well as investing in people in the province, we should and will continue to build. You know, we support that wholeheartedly, but I think that in terms of criteria and in terms of code, building codes and so forth, working with municipalities to synchronize the long-term plans of municipalities with the provincial legislation is the right thing and the prudent thing to do.

11:30

Based on that, I encourage everyone to support this amendment, and I know that we should and will have some constructive debate around this amendment for Bill 73, which is essentially a hoist. Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

We are, as mentioned, on the hoist amendment HA1. Are there any members looking to join debate? I see the hon. Member for Lac Ste. Anne-Parkland has caught my eye.

Mr. Getson: I appreciate that, Mr. Speaker. With respect to the member opposite bringing this on behalf of another member – actually, I like this member. I'm forgetting which. I think it's the Member for Edmonton-Decore that brought this forward. Is that correct? I'm not sure.

The Acting Speaker: Edmonton-Decore.

Mr. Getson: Edmonton-Decore. I want to make sure I give credit where credit is due.

Typically I really appreciate the Member for Edmonton-Decore. He brings some good debate back and forth. He and I can reconcile on a number of things. His background is – we have some similarities where we find some common ground. Unfortunately, on this one, I'm not going to support the amendment to extend it, to hoist it. Part of the reason for that is that Bill 73 is a decent infrastructure accountability act. Essentially, Mr. Speaker, a Coles Notes version: it's categorizing which projects take precedence and priority. It's putting in an actual matrix of why, and it's taking into account all the items that the other member was trying to articulate about efficiencies. Efficiency is accountability, so if he wants those things to take place, that should be considered.

Additionally, just as a side note, the minister that brought this forward: his entire career was managing and running major projects. He is very familiar with efficiencies in project sites, very familiar with the bidding processes, having been accountable for those in many oil and gas sectors. This minister has tapped into a bunch of us before, too, to look at some of these legislation items based on our backgrounds of running major projects, looking for efficiencies in a positive manner, and that's why a lot of us are very stoked about bringing this forward, making sense of it, taking those good learning experiences.

The municipalities will have a windfall from this. They won't have a detriment, because we're spending the dollars and cents more appropriately, it's categorized, it's easier to understand, and, again, Mr. Speaker, the old adage of not picking winners or losers. I can understand why the member who just spoke opposite can't reconcile with that, but this gives it a matrix that's more transparent, gets it through the hopper, makes things happen.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: All right. Thank you for those comments, hon. member.

I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview has risen to debate on HA1.

Mr. Bilous: Yes. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I was actually also rising to intervene on my colleague across the floor. You know, I appreciate that members of government are saying that this provides a matrix and makes it really clear how projects will be evaluated. What it doesn't include is the evaluation matrix. It doesn't include a rubric. It doesn't include how projects will be evaluated, so to say that they're going to be evaluated with five general categories – it does not provide the specifics on how each

project will be evaluated by what criteria of each of those specific categories.

The other thing... [interjection] I'll give way in a second, Member. The other thing is what this does. I don't oppose the fact that this bill is codifying what government has done and how the government of Alberta evaluates projects. I know this because I worked closely, when we were in government, with our former Infrastructure minister, that how projects are evaluated do go through a process. It's not random. It's not just political decision-making, although one can argue that even if this bill is passed and the current government decides to fast-track or accelerate a project, for whatever reason that they deem, this bill doesn't prohibit them from doing that. It doesn't prohibit government from taking a project that they're most interested in and giving it top marks on each of the criteria.

Again, I don't oppose the spirit of this bill; it's codifying what's already been done. But when I've looked through it trying to find the exact wording for scoring – I mean, again, categories are important. I'm a former high school English teacher. It's important that students know that they're going to get certain marks for grammar and syntax and certain marks for their ideas or flow, but they need to know concretely what's the difference between an eight and a six. [interjection] Now I'll give way to the member.

Mr. Getson: Well, thank you, and thanks to the Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview. There was an opportunity to give you a chance when I was on a roll the other day and I didn't give a chance to intervene, so I was hoping to reciprocate that. If you would have caught my eye, you would have had that opportunity with me, so we'll go back and forth a bit.

The member makes some points on the bill itself. No, it doesn't get into the weeds. Typically with acts, so laws, they'll be a higher level, and then you'll have the items that fall beneath, regulations and everything else. Specifically within a bidding process, since there are a number of contractual items that are all over the place, you wouldn't have that level of detail in a bill. The member is correct. When I was making assertions that the current structure, which has to be changed, gives way more latitude for government to pick or departments to pick without having that, this actually gives some of that framework. But you don't want to necessarily cut your nose off to spite your face. If there is a project or emerging interest or need or safety or some of those things, then, yeah, you would want that mechanism.

To his point on the codification of marking students: very similar in any bidding process, but typically that bid evaluation is set up prior to those estimates going out. Depending on market conditions, et cetera, those are always modifiable.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate that the regs are where the details are; however, I think that there was an opportunity within this existing legislation to provide some colour, some description a little further than the criteria that's been laid out. I think as well – and I talked about this in the previous opportunity I had to speak to this bill – there are two components that I wish would have been a part of this bill.

One, addressing issues of procurement. We know that this is a significant challenge for Alberta businesses, those who have not previously been awarded government contracts. I appreciate that procurement is a huge topic, but I know businesses would love to see the government take some action to address some of the inconsistencies and challenges that they're facing.

Then, as well, when we're talking about infrastructure and bids, how can we reward companies that are being innovative; you know, for example, if it's under the building/construction sector, those that are using recyclable products, those that are being innovative? I

know I spoke about the concrete sector and the fact that current legislation does not allow any recycled materials to be used in concrete. Years ago now, probably four years ago, the concrete industry had said that they could actually reduce their footprint by 30 per cent if they were able to use some recycled products as opposed to all brand new. That's another example where as opposed to just codifying what's already been done, let's look at this as an opportunity for breaking open the legislation to do much more than that. [interjection] I will give way a second time.

Mr. Getson: I appreciate that, Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview. This actually works out really well. We have folks that can go back and forth and have these items.

The first item that you're talking about, on the procurement issues: again that's down in the level of detail when contracts go out, so that kind of addresses those items.

When you're talking about specifics and specifications, that again would be an engineering principle. Everything has to be signed off and stamped off, depending if you're talking about recycled concrete, recycled asphalt, looking at using – oh, shoot – a hydraulic hammer versus a screw pile versus a driven pile. All of those things come into consideration. Some engineers are a little more hesitant to take on new technologies, and I found that as well with the departments. Some are very antiquated. But bringing those new ideas forward: that's how you get it into the procurement cycle. You would never take that on the legislative side.

I think, hon. member, you and I agree. We can have this debate once we get back on the bill. The amendment itself just goes to show we're pretty close here and that maybe this amendment should be voted down, which I will be voting against, so we can get back on the main bill.

11:40

Mr. Bilous: Yeah. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I mean, I appreciate those comments, but I do disagree that there isn't a place for procurement within legislation. I think that there is. I don't know how involved the member has been, but I can speak from having been in cabinet. Trying to make changes to GOA procurement policy was extremely challenging. So I think there is a role for legislation to provide a framework that sends a signal to all levels of the civil service that there's not just a new culture but one where, again, you know, the idea of in part a concierge service, in part making an effort to communicate with those companies that are unsuccessful as to why they were unsuccessful and how to get them over the finish line as opposed to giving an answer and companies not knowing what was it about their bid that was unsuccessful. I think a general framework would at least set the stage and send a very important signal government-wide, not just to a specific department or ministry.

I think as well that when we talk about innovation, right now how government currently evaluates their projects, or at least up until this bill, predominantly what we've seen in certain bids is that they'll only look at the bottom-line cost. Now, I appreciate that cost is important and needs to be part of the formula on how it's decided if a company is successful or not, but I think we're missing out on a real opportunity here to ensure that we are rewarding Alberta companies, that we are putting the men and women of Alberta to work, first and foremost.

Being the former trade minister, I am well aware of what I'm saying and implications that that could have. However, we're seeing in other jurisdictions ways that governments are being creative to ensure that government dollars benefit first and foremost their own people. I mean, I'm a federalist. I believe in the country of Canada, and it's great to support the men and women of other provinces and companies from other provinces, but I think, you

know, when you look at the challenges that our province has faced, now more than ever is the time to be supporting Albertans. [interjection] Now I will give way.

Mr. Getson: Perfect. Mr. Speaker, hell did not freeze over – we just had a very big snow storm yesterday – but I am in agreement with the member opposite. Some of the items – and this isn't a surprise because, again, there is some common ground here – that we're talking about I agree with, that the procurement processes need to have a better feedback loop. We need to be able to identify and recognize Alberta companies. We also have to be cognizant of deals that we already have, and as a former trade minister you'd understand that full well.

Again, the hon. member put an amendment forward that has that in it, and we can actually maybe get it into the law, but to talk about hoisting it for another six months: with respect, that's when I think it's wasting time. Let's get back on the main bill. Put your amendment forward, and then we can have a really good dialogue.

Thank you.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I'll thank the member. I appreciate that there has been more than one occasion where we've agreed on certain elements of bills, of what's in a bill or should be in a bill. A valid point. I think part of the reason for the hoist is to give the opposition and the government a little more time to make sure that we get this right. I'm not sure if a single amendment will do the trick.

The other challenge, which the member will know, is that we cannot put forward an amendment that opens up a different piece of legislation, so it might be impossible to try to address procurement with this current bill as it stands. Therefore, I think – well, not I think. I know that that's why I'll be supporting this hoist motion, to ensure that we can get this right, that we're not just codifying a system or a process that, for the most part, already exists but that we can look at how we can, you know, move forward in a way that will benefit and maximize the benefits to Albertans, including rewarding innovation, creativity that we know Alberta companies have and are doing. They just need the support through legislation. For that reason, Mr. Speaker, I will be voting in favour of this hoist.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

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

Mr. Deol: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Once again it's my pleasure to rise in the House to speak to the amendment to Bill 73, Infrastructure Accountability Act, presented by my colleague the Member for Edmonton-North West on behalf of the Member for Edmonton-Decore. My colleague the Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview has actually very eloquently and effectively spoken to this bill. The lack of framework in the bill when it comes to addressing the accountability issue itself is an important proponent for the support of this amendment, that this bill would have a better place in the committee, that we can look into the missing aspects in this bill. If the government is really serious when it comes to the word that we have, you know, discussed, heard, and seen in the titles of the many bills, the word "accountability" – and the majority of the time, and maybe every time – I hate to say that – what it says in the title is really missing from the intent.

The explanation is that this piece of legislation is really enforcing the idea of the title, which in this case is the accountability. What I want to say is to read the government's own words. As you know, there is legislation that is similar to this bill in Ontario. The government said – and I will just go to the government's document, the what-we-heard document: "The criteria used to evaluate capital projects should be

clearly defined, consistent, and in alignment with regional and municipal planning.” That is exactly what is missing from this bill even though the title says and the government’s document admits what the public want, what they hear, and what the stakeholders are saying. That middle part is actually missing from this bill, so that itself explains how much work we need to do with this bill.

The other important concerns around this. I have been listening to my constituents about the recent decision the government has made on the high school that has started in my area. I spoke to the previous bill: why is the government walking back to very infamous ideas and experiences of P3 projects, specifically when – not the NDP; the previous Progressive Conservative government in Alberta – after huge criticism and experience from those projects, they decided not to go ahead with further P3 projects like school buildings? I have raised this question many times in the House, to the Ministry of Infrastructure, but I’m still waiting to get answers on this.

What is the criteria? Why is the government walking back to those ideas? They have proven to fail in the history of the governments – not only the Alberta government but the government of our neighbouring province of Saskatchewan, releasing the detailed information of the project constructing a hospital. They ended up spending as much as four times the cost of the project, achieving a number of problematic issues that they did not expect, with high maintenance cost liabilities to the public dollars. The other project, in Ontario, and, I believe, one more project, the government in Newfoundland: there are examples after examples. Here in our province the government, after those experiences, decided not to move on those projects.

11:50

I would like to know from the minister how this bill – I did raise this question, actually, last time, when I was speaking to the main bill, but the minister did not stand up or provide any answers yet to that question – is going to address these kinds of issues and bring accountability around these projects in the future. And other than that, it is just generalizing the general practices, I will say, how to, you know, develop, I think, the government process around developing and finalizing the projects.

We had huge criticism – and it entered big news not only in our province but across borders as well – about the government’s spending of public dollars without accountability, without consultation. They failed to even come up with any kind of report or support documents for the decision they made to spend about \$1.3 billion. That’s even their figure. We don’t know the exact – there was no inquiry. There was no amount. There was no actual assessment report released or provided. This government just gave their estimated amount of \$1.3 billion for the failed bid on the KXL.

What kind of accountabilities and change in process can this bill bring? I didn’t get the answer from the ministry when I spoke to this bill last time as well.

These are some of the very important questions when we’re addressing the bill, when we’re just, you know, grandstanding in this House on accountability, transparency. But, in reality, there’s a lot more to look into if we are really serious about legislating accountability into the process of government handling public dollars on projects like KXL, major infrastructures in education and other areas.

That is the reason I am just, you know, speaking in favour of this amendment on this bill, that Bill 73, Infrastructure Accountability Act, be not now read a second time but that it be read a second time six months from this day. That gives us quite a bit of time. As I said, there was not comprehensive consultation done, but by the feedback even the government received, that is not being addressed also in this piece of legislation as it is being proposed right now.

That is the reason that I’m supporting this amendment, and I will ask the hon. House members to vote in favour of this amendment, that will give enough time if we are serious about fixing the problem in the government process of spending taxpayers’ dollars, if we spend more time looking to the issue to fix the comprehensive problems, I would say – like, losing billions of dollars without accountability – and providing reasonable information.

So, with this, I’d just conclude my remarks and ask the members to vote in favour of this amendment.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs has risen on HA1.

Ms Goehring: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It’s my pleasure to rise this morning to speak to the notice of amendment on Bill 73, Infrastructure Accountability Act, moved by the Member for Edmonton-North West on behalf of the Member for Edmonton-Decore, moving that the motion for second reading of Bill 73, Infrastructure Accountability Act, be amended by deleting all the words after “that” and substituting the following:

Bill 73, Infrastructure and Accountability Act, be not now read a second time but that it be read a second time this day six months hence.

Participating in this debate and listening to this debate, the one thing that stands out to me quite significantly, Mr. Speaker, is that there is absolutely nothing in this bill as it’s presented that requires this UCP government to apply it to the upcoming Budget 2022 capital plan. So there should be no harm in delaying this process and actually speaking to those that are impacted, giving them an opportunity to perhaps do something in this legislation that actually supports communities.

We see in the legislation that there is a request under section 4, the criteria for the capital planning submissions. In subsection (f) one of the statements is “the extent to which the project or program is expected to enhance the resiliency of a community.” When I speak to communities, they’re struggling. When they have their infrastructure requests put forward, they need support. They’re indicating that this piece of legislation doesn’t actually address the support that they need.

By moving forward on this amendment and supporting it, it would give the government an opportunity to have fulsome conversations with those communities all across the province – the community leagues, the agriculture societies, those that are asking for the infrastructure – to actually have a voice at the table. By delaying this process of second reading for six months, it gives the government an opportunity to actually consult with those that are being impacted, to hear what their needs actually are, and perhaps amend the legislation to actually meet the needs of the community that they’re indicating in the legislation that they want to serve.

I know that there are specific requirements in the legislation around preserving or enhancing the community’s culture and heritage. Being the critic for culture, I hear over and over and over that they have heard zero from this government when it comes to the culture component. And considering that this piece of legislation directly speaks to the culture of a community, I would suggest by approving . . .

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Under Standing Order 4(2.1) we are adjourned until 1:30 this afternoon.

[The Assembly adjourned at 12 p.m.]

Table of Contents

Prayers	6187
Orders of the Day	6187
Government Bills and Orders	
Second Reading	
Bill 78 Alberta Housing Amendment Act, 2021	6187
Bill 73 Infrastructure Accountability Act	6202
Government Motions	
Equalization Payments	6197

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