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The 30th Legislature
Second Session

Alberta Hansard

Thursday morning, November 18, 2021

Day 128

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.

Thursday, November 18, 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.

Please be seated.

Ordres du jour.

Orders of the Day

Government Bills and Orders Second Reading

Bill 82 Mineral Resource Development Act

[Debate adjourned November 16: Ms Sweet speaking]

The Speaker: I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung is on his feet.

Mr. Dach: Good morning, Mr. Speaker. Good morning, everyone. It's always a grand morning when one can start it off speaking with villagers from the small community of Clyde, as I did this morning, not too far away from, of course, municipal councillors from Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills and lovely areas from right across the province. I'm not sure if Clyde has many minerals underground that they wish to exploit, but this act might address that if indeed they did. I come from Thorhild, not too far away from Clyde, so I know the community reasonably well. It was a pleasure to sit with many councillors and administrators from Clyde this morning.

With respect to the legislation proposed before us, Bill 82, Mineral Resource Development Act – of course, in second reading, Mr. Speaker, one always has questions in principle to ask – I know that one of the questions that came to mind even before I read anything about the bill was how, in fact, the licensing and the land titling, I guess, for mineral resource development differs from oil and gas extraction. Of course, from my time in real estate I have some knowledge of surface rights and land titles for surface areas. The underground land titles are another kettle of fish altogether. I'm sure there are major differences between the types of descriptions that one would have for mineral rights underground and to describe the exact area that a company would actually be able to exploit minerals from. That would be very different from perhaps what oil and gas companies would see as a description of their mineral rights. That's one area.

When I see that the AER is going to be given the responsibility to adjudicate and to administer the new measures for mineral extraction, mineral resource development in the province, that presents to me the probability of a pretty high learning curve for the AER in terms of addressing the differences between what they now administer and adjudicate; that is, the oil and gas extraction compared to mineral resources. Not only that, Mr. Speaker, of course, the act presumes that there will be a variety of mineral resources that it covers. Indeed, they all have their differences,

which would have to be incorporated into the legislation and which the AER would have to address in detail.

Now, leaving all those details to the AER to define and to determine is something that I had some concerns about. I'm not sure what outside consultation they're going to be able to undertake in the time frame allotted. Once this legislation is enacted and proclaimed, indeed, they're going to have to be up and running and competent in their field, so it's critically important that this is gotten right before the actual transfer of responsibility to AER for mineral resource extraction oversight in the province.

If indeed AER has some way of telling the government the time frame they require for taking on this learning curve and making sure that they are competent in the capabilities that they'll need to administer the act, I think that they should be given that opportunity, and if there's not, there should be a definite opportunity to make sure that the AER can fully explain to the ministry what difficulties they might be facing, what concerns they have and make sure that the time frame is more than adequate for the plans we made and the proper consultation to be had so that when they do finally transfer the responsibility to the AER, they have the capability to deal with the industry members, who will expect them to be fully on board and capable and prepared.

We haven't really heard about a lot of the consultation, that I hope has taken place, Mr. Speaker, to get involved with the details that are going to be very different from what the AER is undertaking right now with oil and gas. Certainly, you know, there are similarities, sure. It's mining, it's underground, and it's resource extraction. There are many similarities, so I can understand why the government may have thought: "Okay. Let's hand this off to the AER. They can expand the capabilities." But it's not quite as simple as that.

It may have been a consideration of the government to create a separate entity other than AER. I'm not sure about the decision-making process there. It certainly is a lot to put on the plate of AER when you create a separate division within that organization for mineral extraction versus liquid or petroleum extraction. What happens is that it creates a two-headed horse. That potential dissection of the AER is something that has its own problems that perhaps could show their head as things progress. I'm wondering if there are any potential thoughts towards ultimately creating a separate entity to handle mineral resource extraction in the province rather than leaving it with the AER for the long term. I can envision that potentiality coming to the fore.

I'm just also wondering about the level of consultation that took place with our Indigenous communities in Alberta. Constantly this government has said that they properly consult with Indigenous communities, that they respect the responsibility and obligation that they have not only morally but in law to consult with Indigenous groups in the province on matters of such importance as this Bill 82, yet repeatedly, Mr. Speaker, in the Legislature the government ultimately has failed to demonstrate that what they claimed to be proper consultation actually took place. The aftermath of that is, of course, that Indigenous groups are up in arms, perhaps filing lawsuits and filing counterclaims, and it creates a big mess where one didn't have to take place. So I'm really interested in hearing in detail what consultations have taken place with Indigenous groups on the development of legislation under the Mineral Resource Development Act.

There's a huge opportunity here – of course, we all know that, Mr. Speaker – in critical minerals and rare earths in Alberta, but we really need to have a proper strategy for this mineral sector. Initially a regulatory regime is an important step, but we're not really sure how much actual attention the government is giving to this diversification of our underground mining industry. There are too

many open questions and details that are left to the AER to develop later, especially for an organization that will be full of more questions than answers to begin with.

For example, I spoke about subsurface rights, how conflicts will be arbitrated between subsurface rights holders. What happens if there's a conflict between an oil tenure and a lithium tenure, for example? I mentioned in my earlier remarks that the AER might have difficulty separating the two heads of the horse. Let's hope that there is a clear definition and a clear understanding that the objectivity of the AER has to be maintained when there comes a dispute between sort of the old guard, the oil and petroleum area of AER, and this new venture that they'll be responsible for, our underground minerals. It's unclear. It's an open question as to how AER will deal with their responsibilities.

9:10

I mean, they've gone ahead and suffered lots of layoffs at AER. There's a shortage of human capital there, and now we're unloading and burdening them with a huge, huge responsibility, Mr. Speaker, that we don't see a great deal of planning for on the part of the government. I don't know if AER has been properly resourced to take on these responsibilities. That question is a very big one. If indeed the government is looking to off-load onto AER this responsibility, whether or not the resources are there is an open question. The government has a history of off-loading and downloading.

We were just at the Alberta Municipalities association breakfast, of course, and that was a major topic of discussion, off-loading onto the municipalities. Of course, they lack the resources to do the jobs that they are tasked with doing to serve their communities. I've got concerns, Mr. Speaker, about whether the AER is being properly resourced to handle the new responsibilities and also being given the appropriate time and opportunity to consult with the experts that they're going to need to consult with to set this operation up. It's not a small task that they're being asked to undertake.

You know, other things that the government has done in the past lead us to question how much we as Albertans can trust them in delivering diversification. After the war room embarrassment, where we have millions of dollars out the door for nothing, opening up the eastern slopes of the Rockies for coal mining, and then losing \$1.3 billion of Alberta's money on Keystone, Albertans are rightfully wondering what indeed the government is up to with this new Bill 82, Mineral Resource Development Act, where there's another huge area of economic activity that could potentially be mishandled by this government. It's critical that the AER, which seems in principle to be the correct regulator for critical minerals and rare earth – it's critical that this increased workload that they're being given is properly prepared for. I do have some significant concerns about that.

Now, it establishes a governance structure, which I'll talk a bit more about in my next opportunity to speak. I have lots of concerns, and, Mr. Speaker, I will let other speakers bring to the table their concerns as well.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Hon. members, are there others wishing to join in the debate this morning? I see the Opposition House Leader is on her feet.

Ms Gray: Thank you very much. I appreciate the opportunity to join in the debate this morning as we talk about Bill 82, Mineral Resource Development Act, this very bright, shiny winter morning. This piece of legislation and this topic is incredibly important to Alberta and certainly a discussion that is overdue given

what is happening with global supplies of rare-earth elements as well as the other minerals that are outlined here in Bill 82.

I think it's fair to say that in North America, I suggest, in Canada and in the United States, a lot of people don't realize how important rare-earth elements and these minerals have become in our lives and how surrounded we are by them in that they're used to build flat screen TVs or computers and, with the rise in electric vehicles, energy storage cells. In fact, there have been serious concerns about shortages that have disrupted supply chains for high-tech products when it comes to video cards, when it comes to the parts you need to build a computer. Particularly, home enthusiasts have been impacted by disruptions in the supply chain because of shortages in rare-earth elements.

My understanding is that right now China controls 70 per cent of the supply and 90 per cent of the complex processing that's involved to take rare-earth elements and other minerals and, as it says in the term, complex process them into the components that we need to build what we need to run our world and our society now. [interjection] Thank you.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much. Happy to interject. I appreciate that the member has a background both in labour, obviously, as the former minister of labour as well as a background in – I was going to say tech – I think more specifically programming. That is definitely a growing sector. At least it was a few years ago in this province. I'm just wondering if there have been many conversations that the member is aware of between those two, the mines and minerals sector. She is referring to the need for technology. We're so dependent on Asia, specifically China, not just for the technology but the raw materials to build the technology. Have there been any discussions that the member is aware of between local labour groups here that might be able to fill some of those gaps and different suppliers of technology and other resources to help be more sustainable and sufficient here in Alberta or at least in Canada?

Thank you.

Ms Gray: Thank you very much to my hon. colleague from Edmonton-Glenora. Yes. As we see in both industrial and consumer markets, there are disruptions to products being developed, people having to wait six months to a year to be able to get the ingredients that they need to be able to have the products they're looking for. There have been discussions here in Alberta about what role we can play locally to develop the mines and minerals that we have here in Canada. Canada is one of the top 10 jurisdictions that have the caches of rare-earth elements and other minerals, so there is the opportunity.

But here in Alberta the last time we had a strategy for metallic minerals and rare-earth elements was 20 years ago. At the start of my remarks I did suggest that this is very long overdue, and I think that that's something that others have noted as well given the need for us to develop our resources to make sure that we are taking advantage of every opportunity we have, diversification, which is not a luxury, of course, but something we need to have an active eye towards, as well as the development of resources that will support our path to using more green energy as we continue to adjust to the serious issues of climate change that are... [interjection] Thank you very much. I will concede.

Mr. Dach: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you for allowing the intervention. I was interested to know, given the Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods' desire to not only develop our rare-earth and mineral resources in Alberta and in Canada, if there's some way with this legislation or through the AER or some way of influencing

that these minerals not only be developed and extracted in Alberta and Canada but also be value-added, be upgraded. If there is an upgrade possibility, then we should do whatever we can to ensure that that happens here in Alberta. We have a history of shipping out raw material. We're hewers of wood and drawers of water, and that has to change. This generation has got to be the last one that accepts that raw materials will be our export of choice.

9:20

Ms Gray: Thank you to my hon. colleague for the question and – also, I've been speaking fairly broadly about rare-earth elements and minerals – for bringing me back to Bill 82. I think Bill 82 and the mineral and rare-earth resource sector here in Alberta is an opportunity, but I think Bill 82 is incredibly thin on the details and how it's going to do what it purports to set out to do. Bill 82 is in effect doing what we've seen a lot of the legislation passed in the last two years do, which is defer most of the decision-making and most of the meat that should be on the bone to regulation, with not a lot of detail on what's going forward.

There's certainly opportunity. We have an underdeveloped and underdelivered strategy given that the last strategy was 20 years ago. A regulatory regime is an important step, but Bill 82 leaves a lot of important questions and details to regulations for the AER to develop later, particularly around complex issues like any kind of conflicts that might happen with subsurface rights. That is an area, Mr. Speaker, I will fully admit, I am not an expert on, when it comes to subsurface rights, minerals development, and managing these conflicts well.

I think the AER is going to be an important partner in identifying and providing a plan forward, but the details and what that looks like are not contained in Bill 82. It's deferred and will be developed later. It will be developed and discussed outside of this Chamber again, something we've seen over and over and over, whether it's – as labour critic I've seen a number of labour-related bills that do that. We know that regulations have been given a great deal of power. The Advanced Education minister has deferred a number of things to regulation-making powers. [interjection] Thank you very much.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, through you, Mr. Speaker, of course, to the Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods. She's highlighting at this point in her remarks about how much this bill relies on regulation, and I'm hoping she can elaborate a little bit on why it would be beneficial to have more in the bill and less in regulations and some of the challenges when government relies so heavily on regulations.

I imagine one of the issues is that we don't have full public transparency like we do when we're in this place going through bills. We see what's actually going to become the law in very clear black-and-white detail and have an opportunity through three readings and through amendments to all contribute as elected representatives to the process and ensure that we can report back to our constituents on how exactly it is that we help shape laws in this place. The risks when that's done through regulation might result in, please.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Ms Gray: Thank you to my colleagues for the interjections. Yes, one of the concerns when we defer to regulations – and to be very clear, I think this is a concern that all legislators share – is the lower level of transparency and the increased reliance on trust in the government to properly consult with all impacted stakeholders to get those regulations right. Whereas here when we are looking at legislation in this place, not only is it the opportunity for the Official

Opposition and our amazing caucus staff team, who help us to review the policy and analyze each and every bill – and we love and appreciate all those who work with us – it's an opportunity for the public to see the bill as introduced and for experts from a variety of backgrounds, even those who perhaps are at home watching Assembly TV, who have an interest in a bill to be able to read and consider questions and engage in the debate by contacting their local MLA. With regulation development you really don't see that level of engagement and that opportunity for back-and-forth debate, for questions, and for a chance to make sure that we're getting everything right.

That's why although you can pass a bill that says that this bill is going to let us legislate on sector X and that we're going to put all of the rules in the regulation, it would be preferable to put as much of the framework as possible into the legislation and leave to regulations some of the smaller details that maybe need to change more often. We don't want to bring something into the Legislature every time there needs to be a minor adjustment. Regulations are better for that, but in this case Bill 82 defers essentially the bulk of the work to regulation-making power.

As well, it relies incredibly heavily on the AER. My concern with that is one of resources. The AER last year was in the headlines because of the need for restructuring and laying off – in February of 2020 they laid off 200 employees. I know that during the pandemic at one point the AER suspended monitoring because of – at the time they said health and safety concerns. I have a genuine question of the AER and their capacity to take on the new work in the Mineral Resource Development Act given that this government has reduced their funding and imposed their brand of austerity on an agency that is incredibly important to our industries, to our resource development, and to making sure that there are safety protocols in place when it comes to resource development. Certainly, these are some of the concerns that I and my colleagues have already flagged through the bill debate. Those layoffs were not insignificant. I'm afraid I don't know, Mr. Speaker, the percentage of their workforce that was reduced, but it was not small.

Now, in order for the AER and this government to get this incredibly important opportunity correct when it comes to the development of rare-earth elements, to be able to move Alberta and Canada into the supply chain, which it currently maybe is not, I would suggest – it doesn't have much of a supply chain here in the U.S. and Canada for these rare-earth elements – making sure we're working with industry and making sure we're consulting is going to be incredibly important. Now, the AER is being designated as responsible for this. Obviously, that will have that increased workload.

But we're also hearing concerns that the consultation to go into Bill 82 was not held at the level that we would anticipate and expect, particularly when it comes to Indigenous communities. Now, the bill debate will be an opportunity for the government to tell us more about the consultation and how they have come to Bill 82 as well as plans going forward, but certainly we've had a number of concerns about Indigenous communities not being adequately consulted, particularly on legislation that deals with them directly. The Metis Settlements Act is one example that I will mention because it was so egregious. So I think as we move forward with the debate on Bill 82, taking into account that this is a complex issue and that many, many different stakeholders and industries will need to be part of it is really important.

My final thought – I shouldn't say final thought. I'll think of something else. One of my last thoughts, Mr. Speaker, is that right now I see Bill 82 as developing a regulatory regime. I see that as a positive step. I don't see the translation yet into new jobs here in Alberta. Now, that's likely because so much of this bill is deferred

to regulation, but I think for this to be a strong opportunity for us to diversify our economy and to be able to develop a resource that we have here in Alberta and something that there's a huge global supply and demand for, we want to make sure we're putting as many Albertans to work as possible. This brings me back to the question my hon. colleague asked earlier, which is: will more local resource processing be part of the objectives of Bill 82 and our new Mineral Resource Development Act? I certainly hope that that is the case because I think there is a big opportunity.

I know my husband is interested in getting a new, larger flat screen television in our home. I think he may not be alone in that.

Ms Hoffman: Maybe for Christmas.

Ms Gray: Right. Christmas is coming.

Rare-earth elements are a key part of that. Although this particular bill, although including diamonds, might not be as shiny as some of the other ones being debated in this Legislature, it is critically important for our modern life and the technology we use around us, the cars that we have that have energy storage cells in them or even just the cars that we have that have computer chips and monitoring and adaptive cruise, which is, I think, one of the world's greatest features. These types of components rely on some of the things that we're talking about here.

9:30

That's something that I would say, when I worked in technology, I didn't fully understand until we saw, in the last few years, the supply chain disruptions and the shortages. That meant that your video processors and graphics cards that you were waiting for weren't coming because there were shortages of rare-earth elements and other components that you wouldn't necessarily think of at the beginning.

This is a good opportunity, Bill 82, Mineral Resource Development Act, updating a strategy that is 20 years old. This is all very positive. I look forward to the debate and hearing more from the minister and the government around some of the issues I've identified, specifically: how much has been deferred to regulation – it's hard to have line of sight on what this going to look like – the deferral of so much to the AER, an organization that's had to do massive budget cuts and lay off hundreds of people just in the last two years, what potential impact this may have on them; the consultation, particularly with Indigenous communities but as well with others, to understand how the bill was developed.

Of course, I mentioned at one point in my remarks, Mr. Speaker, that it's an area I don't know a lot about, around surface rights, but it's incredibly important, particularly when it comes to liabilities from landowners. That's another area. Whereas I would say I'm not an expert, I'm really, really interested in making sure we get this right and learning more about how this bill will get this right and finding out more about how we can improve Bill 82 to make sure we are passing the best possible Mineral Resource Development Act that we can.

One of the questions that I would love to learn more about as we engage in debate. Saskatchewan, B.C., other Canadian provinces: what have they done to update their own mineral resource developments in the last five years? Is Alberta leading the way here, or are there other provinces that have started this work that we are following in the footsteps of? I think that that would be really important to understand as we continue through the bill briefing.

That's why I appreciate the opportunity at second reading to be able to start thinking about some of these big questions and issues and finding out more, as we go forward through the debate process, from the government and the ministers about these important

critical minerals, rare-earth elements, and the other pieces that are impacted through Bill 82.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, for the opportunity to engage in this debate.

The Speaker: Are there others?

Mr. Getson: Mr. Speaker, I'm like the kid before Christmas, seeing this bill come through the House. I am absolutely stoked about this, Bill 82, the Mineral Resource Development Act. The cool thing with this: Alberta has been blessed with so many different resources and so many skill sets, and we've never fully capitalized on it, rare-earth elements. Members opposite, I'm so glad to hear you speaking in support of this bill because you're right. There are so many things that we haven't developed over the years.

My background: I got to bounce around North America predominately, a bunch of different projects. One of very first projects that I ever got on coming out of college was up in the Northwest Territories, developing a diamond mine. The mining groups up north, in Northwest Territories, Yukon, Alaska, are so much more developed than what we are. British Columbia also does a fantastic job of mining. They've been blessed with a ton of natural resources as well.

And you're right. Some of the biggest countries in the world, being China predominantly on that, control that market. About five years ago they kind of gave us a shot across the bow in North America. They pulled back a little bit. They messed with supply a bit and said: "Okay. Well, good luck trying to build your trucks. Good luck with trying to build your items. Go find it yourself."

Sometimes in the province here we shy away from the whole mining opportunity because, quite frankly, we've been pretty lucky. We haven't had to go after those assets for a number of years. The members opposite had talked about global supply chains, and now the criticality of rare-earth elements is very much first and foremost to people's mindset because it's a consumer-based item. Understanding where your flat screen TVs come from, these little blessed computer phones, whatever the heck they are this week, that week: all of that is all tied up.

The member opposite had also mentioned about Saskatchewan. They've been mining for a number of years. We can talk about the uranium assets they had up there that they've been pulling out. Their development of rare-earth elements, too, is on par. Ontario has a ton of hardrock mining, both on the copper and the gold side of things. They also have some of these assets, as does Quebec.

But let's talk about northwest Canada and the Pacific North West Economic Region. Right now we're seeing – you know, our hearts go out to the folks in British Columbia, our friends and family out there – the issue with the supply chain in that part of Vancouver that's taking place. Literally, we cannot get our stuff. In the geopolitical context you have China and Russia competing very heavily right now with sovereignty in the north. Part of the sovereignty for the north isn't just the Northwest Passage; it also has to do with all the mineral assets.

Now, I'm really happy to have this conversation back and forth, talking about what we can do here not only for just – one of the members, I missed it. Basically, it was the context that we're really good at doing the bull work, taking out the raw commodities, chopping down the trees, bulking out the rocks, and in the way pushing the oil in the pipe.

But in actuality we've been processing and re-refining and selling high commodity values out of this region for years. The Industrial Heartland: I'll take Sherritt as an example. Sherritt has been doing that work for a number of years, world-renowned in their processing. Their product is sought from all over the world. Now,

when Sherritt sought up, they also brought the cobalt and the nickel from Canadian assets here. Right out in Fort Saskatchewan they're still massively in production today. They can't get the nickel and cobalt that they need in Canada anymore, actually bringing it in from Cuba. We're floating this over on boats and barges from Cuba, then we're transporting it by rail, Mr. Speaker, up here, and then we're re-refining it and then selling it to the world market, except we're missing out on one of our biggest customers, being the U.S., because they have an embargo against Cuba products, and that's coming from there. So when we're talking about rare-earth elements, it's not just that. The mineral act will also identify all those other items.

Now, I'm very happy to be leading an Economic Corridors Task Force right now, and that's where the dots start to get connected when we're looking at ports and we're looking at piers and we're looking at connecting economics between different regions. The Minister of Jobs, Economy and Innovation: I'm very happy to be working under him. He saw that there was value in this and let me loose on it, and I'm looking forward to giving him a Christmas present with recommendations of where we can go with that.

The members opposite had talked: are we speaking with Northwest Territories and Yukon? Actually, I am. Every two weeks I'm on a call with Menzies from the Northwest Territories, and we're talking about these corridors, how they tie together. Now, Menzies is interesting because he actually used to work for the Alberta energy group, so he was actually down here on our side of the fence. He got recruited. Now he's up in the Territories, so lots of these trails and these connections physically are connected by personalities, people, and also those regions. This thing is candy land.

When we start talking about these economic corridors, we're not just talking about a railroad, we're not just talking about a pipeline, we're not just talking about a hydroelectric line; we're talking about corridors that connect regions and areas together. In the context when I'm talking to Menzies, they're having issues with mine development because they don't have infrastructure – they don't have roads; they don't have the rail that's going up there – similarly with the Yukon. Mr. Speaker, you've heard me talk about that Carmacks region lots, how they've had a gateway to resources, and they can't get the roads built out to the areas where they're flush, they're mineral rich. When we start talking about these corridors and making these connections and rail assets getting there, this is where it starts making sense.

If I can walk you down the rabbit trail here a little bit, what would happen potentially. You have this corridor in place, and then potentially you have a rail conduit that connects these two regions. You do the bulk mining potentially even up in the north, so you've got Northwest Territories and Yukon. They can then get their assets bulked out. They can put it in concentrate format. They bring it down here. We rail it down. And then we're getting product from Canada, the northwest part of Canada, that's been underappreciated for a number of years. Fort Saskatchewan then does a refined product, and then they send it out to the world market. That's true trade and commerce, going back and forth between these regions.

And this mineral act, Bill 82, helps facilitate all of that because we then will be going after those spots. We will then be identifying this. We'll be diversifying. If I look at E3, the development of lithium. We're literally sitting on oceans of lithium beneath our feet, and there are a couple of ways of getting that lithium, that you require for making all the electric vehicles and such, plus all the rare-earth elements that we have up north plus in our own backyard. [interjection] Yes, Member.

Mr. Smith: Thank you. The lithium market is a really interesting market, and I know that you've met with E3, and so have I, about three years ago or so. Could you speak to how this bill will move that market forward and do so allowing us to produce lithium, probably in the most environmentally responsible way anywhere in the world? It's just another example of how, even though you may not think that this bill, through the Speaker to you, is related to something like environmental issues, it truly is. If you could maybe bring Albertans up to speed on that, that would be great.

9:40

Mr. Getson: Absolutely. The Member for Drayton Valley-Devon, great friend and neighbour. We share an industrial park. I'm trying to convince him to let me annex part of it, but he won't, so his boundary won't change. We share a lot of common threads here in looking at developing the corridors. I had asked him to give me a hand with this task force. His work on that has been valuable. The folks out in Drayton Valley-Devon: he's definitely looking at the larger perspective both across Canada and also your own western economic corridor.

The member is bringing up E3, and we're talking about lithium. Literally, when you think of the oil sands, we're sitting on one of the largest. I think it's the third-largest known deposit physically sitting on the planet when it comes to petroleum-based items. We're still going to figure out what we're going to do with that, life beyond bitumen, and rather than burning it, producing products. Lithium is similar. We're literally sitting on this ocean of lithium between our toes. When you go subsurface, the whole Leduc field, the one that started it all, the granddaddy that started everything back in this area, also is rich with lithium.

To the member's point, there are a couple of ways so far the world market has done this. You can hardrock mine, so you can pull the material out, do conventional mining. They have that type of operation down in the eastern part of Canada and around the world. But, again, it's hardrock mining. For those that want to see something cleaned up and restored within a year, good luck. I mean, hardrock mining: you're in it for 50 to 60 to 70 years, depending.

Now, the other way of doing it is taking it from brine, so actually extracting salt water, a brine that's below our feet. You've got a couple of options there. Actually, there's only really one conventional option, and some of the areas that do this work really well have the least amount of environmental protection on the planet, social, economic, governance, or anything else, with it. What they do is essentially pull this out, throw it on the surface, and then evaporate it off and scrape off all these salts. There is a ton of potential for bursts and contaminants and everything else along those lines.

Now, the folks at E3 – you know, thank goodness we've got the University of Calgary and the University of Alberta here. Some really smart folks there, both on the professor side and then obviously the students that go there, come up with some really great ideas. They act as little incubators. With work with the University of Calgary and the University of Alberta, E3 has managed to – and they're geologists, geophysicists, so they're from the energy sector, a young group, started up E3. Then they're working collaboratively with these other organizations.

They came up with a different extraction process. Essentially, it's a little scrubber that you put in place, for lack of a better description. There are little pellets inside, microscopic pellets. What you do is you run the brine solution through that, through the scrubber. They attach themselves to those pellets, and then you pull down the process, strip off the pellets, and then that's where your salts are at, the lithium salts. Then everything else that isn't being utilized goes back down the hole. Physically, you don't see much else. There are oceans that are being processed. You don't have all the evaporation.

You don't have all the hardrock mining aspect of it. You don't have the cleaning taken with it. You're reusing the drilling technology. It's all things that are within our wheelhouse that we've developed for years in the energy sector that are physically being deployed there.

Now, the other part of it is that these batteries are going to have to be built somewhere. Coming back to the members opposite – we're in violent agreement this morning on this – yeah, why don't we bring the battery manufacturing here? That's exactly what we're doing. We're reaching out to these different areas, different regions, Mr. Speaker, through you to the members, so we can start producing those products here. But you have to start with that pebble, that ripple in the pond. We have to identify these assets, and that's what Bill 82 does.

Coming back to supply chains, they've been completely disrupted. Those sea containers, before the incident happened out in British Columbia, were going to be tied up until at least 2023 before we uncoupled that. Right now we're going to see such a pressure on this. That's why we need to develop our resources, and we really need to think strongly about northwest Canada, both the Churchill port, Wells Gray port up north, and then also Tuktoyaktuk and then tying in to Alaska.

One of our members right now shot me a text. He's out in Vancouver, and he's out there with the Pacific NorthWest Economic Region. He's now our chair for that. The Member for Calgary-Fish Creek is actually the president of that organization now. And what the member from – oh, jeez, I'm going to forget his area right now, and I shouldn't. It's Pincher Creek. My grandma would be rolling in her grave, Mr. Speaker. The Pincher Creek area. I can't say the member's name, so that's what's flashing from my brain right now. The member out there right now from that area, from Pincher Creek . . .

The Speaker: Livingstone-Macleod.

Mr. Getson: Livingstone-Macleod. There we go. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I was throwing out the lifeline, and you grabbed it for me. Thank you.

The vice-president of PNWER is actually a Senator from Alaska, Mia Costello. Because our member from that area, the region that is out there – Livingstone-Macleod. I hope the member sees this; he'll rib me nonstop. The Member for Livingstone-Macleod is out there. He's talking to Senator Mia Costello because we're in PNWER, and now we're talking about connections between Alaska and Alberta. We're also talking about the 11th-largest economy. So this is what we need to concentrate on. We need to concentrate on . . .

The Speaker: I hesitate to interrupt, but it must have been some other time, because you wouldn't want to refer to the presence or the absence of a member for any reason, even if it was a positive reason like attending PNWER or whatever you might be speaking about.

Mr. Getson: You're absolutely correct, Mr. Speaker. You must have been reading my mind. I hate to say that sometimes things just come out of my mouth, and I think it's that internal thought. You actually caught me there on that one.

My very good friend and colleague, who may or may not be with us in the Chamber, did reach out and contact me to make sure that with this other Senator, that is the vice-president of PNWER, we can connect. And that's the power that we have when we start looking at developing our resources. We start looking at trade and commerce going back and forth, and we really start to light up the

Alberta economy. We are better than what we have been in the past. Bill 82 goes a long way to doing that. National security comes into play. So, again, not only is it for consumer products; it's for a bunch of sovereignty items, quite honestly.

Here's another one I will throw at you – it's pretty wild – that came across my desk. You ever want to consider being a space cowboy? I got the Speaker's attention on that one. Think of it in the context that we're blessed with a bunch of open airspace. We're blessed with a bunch of groups and organizations that want to come here. I had a discussion recently, last week, with a group out of Germany. They want to set up, believe it or not, a satellite manufacturing company here. They want to set up a centre of excellence for space technology. They want to be able to build the launch vehicles here, and then they'll launch at the appropriate places in the areas that are closer to the equator for the satellites.

Essentially, it's a symbiotic relationship, taking all of our technology, all of the innovations that we've done on the tax side and the tax credits, making this one of the most competitive jurisdictions, and having access, quite frankly, to the U of A and the U of C is massive. Having the economic relaunch identify aerospace is one of those items. This will go a long way to not only developing assets at home that help our entire energy sector, help our homegrown team, if you would, but also to garner the world. This can be a massive centre of excellence.

To do that – again, Bill 82 comes back to that – what better place to start doing that when you have the materials right in your backyard, when you can process, develop, and take this thing to the end state and then monetize it and get it out in space and do all those things for us? That is massive.

Bill 82, as some of the members have already mentioned, makes some changes so that the AER actually becomes the regulator. Now, this might seem counterintuitive to a bunch of us. You would have thought this would have been in place, but again, Mr. Speaker, it wasn't. We didn't really pay attention to it for a number of years because, well, we didn't have to, but now we do. This is part of taking a look over the horizon, not just the same old, same old but actually branching out.

Thank you.

Now, the importance of that, of having the Energy Regulator do it: they're kind of already set up for it. Without setting up a completely different body, with putting in the regulations and modifying the regulations, it means that everything doesn't have to come to the House and be passed through bills and laws and acts, but it allows those subtleties to take place with the regulations, similar, I might add, to what we did with geothermal. As you can tell, Mr. Speaker, I'm as excited as a kid before Christmas. Bill 82 is going to help us tap those resources and really light up our potential.

The Speaker: Well, it truly is the most wonderful time of year.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora has risen.

Ms Hoffman: That's it, Mr. Speaker. Thank you so much for the opportunity to rise as we continue to debate Bill 82, the Mineral Resource Development Act, and I want to begin by saying that I think there is a lot of good stuff in this bill. Also, I'm feeling a little bit of an *Office* connection. I quoted *The Office* earlier this week, and flowing from the remarks of the prior speaker, I hope he finds this in good humour. Michael Scott once said: sometimes I'll start a sentence, and I don't even know where it's going; I just hope I find it along the way. I think we've probably all experienced that from time to time, but generally I think we do find our way. Thank you for all of your enthusiasm this morning as we continue to engage on this important bill.

9:50

I want to say that I think this bill has an opportunity to bring greater prosperity and economic diversification to the people of Alberta. I think that, for those reasons, when we look at the opportunity to continue to diversify our economy and to continue to be a global leader in terms of energy needs, going to where the puck is is the smart way for us to be evolving as a jurisdiction.

I think that one of the ways that we can get increased enthusiasm from all Albertans is by committing to sharing that prosperity with one another. For example, at the – it's not the AUMA anymore – Alberta Municipalities meeting there has been a clear commitment made by our leader to municipal leaders from across this province that municipalities should benefit when provincial revenues also are beneficial, so making not just grandiose statements about prosperity being good for one another but making legal commitments through legislation that when we have beneficial years in terms of provincial revenues, we tie those benefits back to municipalities.

When I think about why that's so important, I think that being partners in prosperity is something we should all aspire to, not just as a talking point but as an actual commitment. I think one of the reasons why we have seen so much tension around prosperity is because we've seen so much economic inequality, economic inequality when it comes to individuals and their earning powers. I think the divide between incomes in this province has continued to grow and become especially – I sometimes have rose-coloured glasses when I think about what government was like a few years ago. But I do want to say that one of the objective measures that has warmed my heart and, I hope, the hearts of others is that child poverty was cut in half in the time when our leader was the Premier. One of the reasons why I care so much about that is because when I think about the jobs that we have in this place to create opportunities to seek to improve the condition of all, we're reminded of our goals and that objective every single day.

When we talk about things like expanding mining and mineral resource development, I want that kid, that kid who's, you know, maybe experiencing houselessness, that kid who's experiencing food insecurity to have benefits from the mines and minerals resource development act, for example, which we are here considering today. I think that there is a lot of opportunity in this legislation and in this sector. I want to make sure that we tie our success and development to the success of others, that we don't just come here wanting to see one private business be successful but that we think about the fact that we are the stewards, that we are the owners of these resources and how being responsible stewards and getting full and fair value for our resources can help in what I believe one of the core objectives for government should be, and that is, of course, reducing the number of children, in particular, but Albertans in general who are living in poverty.

I want to continue on some of the comments that were raised by my colleague the Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods when she touched on the significant impact of staff reductions at the AER. She is absolutely right. It is about a third of the AER employees who have been terminated. Since coming into office, the current government has fired around 300 employees, which is close to 30 per cent, so not quite a third but close to 30 per cent. That is significant. At the same time, we're asking them to be responsible for more. I have no issue with having increased responsibility, but increased responsibility without increased resources, without increased staff is a recipe for disaster. I do think that if the government wants to continue along this vein of economic diversification in terms of mines and minerals, again, I don't have a significant objection to that. I think that it is a good thing. I don't have any objection. I think it is a good thing.

I think that the government also owes it to the people of Alberta to have oversight and protection, particularly when I think about some of the mines and minerals and their need for water or their impacts in land disruption. I think that we do have significant potential in these areas. Lithium oceans, as was referred to by the previous speaker, are good points that have been made. But acknowledging that we have in Canada about 20 per cent of the Earth's fresh water and that only about half of it is currently cycled sustainably in a way that we can keep it properly in the ecosystem I think highlights the importance of making sure that we have a thoughtful, careful regulatory regime and appropriate staff oversight to make sure we can harvest the full potential that we've been so blessed to have in a way that's sustainable and ensures prosperity for this and for future generations. The AER decimation, I would say, is of significant concern when we're thinking about this bill.

A couple of questions that I'm hoping we can get answers to at this stage or further stages of the bill would be around, specifically, the types of consultation that occurred in the lead-up. Obviously, there are legal requirements around Indigenous communities and Indigenous leaders, and I'd love to have some clarity about what actually happened in that regard. If it would be possible – I'm sure that there was a report written that summarized all the feedback. I think it would help all of us to have that tabled in this place so that we can ensure – I think we're all excited about this bill going forward, and we want to make sure we get it right. I am confident that many of the people who engaged in this process raised valid advice and had valid questions, and I think it would be incumbent on us to make sure that we have that information as legislators to ensure that we move forward with it responsibly and thoughtfully.

I also want to say that some of the mines and minerals that were mentioned – one of the biggest ones, of course, was lithium. We do have huge reserves in that regard. We also have gold, copper, lead, zinc, iron, rare-earth elements, lithium, uranium, sulphur, manganite, potash, salt, peat, hematite, silica, sand, grey clay, gemstone, sandstone, dolomite, limestone, and the list goes on. We are so fortunate to have so many of these components.

When I do visit schools, I often talk about – you know, grade 6 classes are learning about government, and they want to talk about what our role is. We talk about creating laws. I also talk about setting budgets, and we talk a little bit about where the money that the government has to set budgets comes from. Of course, we talk about taxation because that is a significant portion, but I also talk with them about royalties and who the true owners are of these resources that we have as our benefits.

We again in this piece, I think, have an opportunity to get full and fair value for the resources that we have in this province as it relates to mineral resource development. I want to make sure that we have the future of this generation and the next as one of the guiding principles when we make those decisions.

Just before I wrap up, I know that the spouse of the Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods often listens to the proceedings while doing his day job. I want to go on record that I was the person advocating for him to get a new TV for Christmas in this Chamber. So if it plays out, my advocacy was successful. If it doesn't, I'll try again at a future date. But let's keep our fingers crossed, Neal, that your wish has been heard and recorded for all in *Hansard* in perpetuity.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: I might provide some caution to the hon. member to be careful when speaking about people who can't defend themselves here. Just teasing.

Are there others? The hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Devon.

Mr. Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In defence of the good citizens of Devon, it's Drayton Valley-Devon as well.

Thank you for allowing me to speak to Bill 82 today. Mr. Speaker, sometimes we get legislation that is exciting and sexy and that everybody wants to talk about. Then there are times when we in this House are just called to do the business that needs to be done in order to allow this province to move forward. It's not sexy, and sometimes you wonder: why are we even talking about this? Until you dig a little deeper, you don't realize that it's that mundane kind of stuff that you're spending money on that sets a foundation that allows the province to move forward and to meet the needs of the citizens of this province.

10:00

We are dealing with a bill here, Bill 82 – and it doesn't sound like much – Mineral Resource Development Act. Basically, it's got two parts. We're identifying and going through a bunch of data that is looking at minerals that we know are in Alberta and trying to find out where they are and in what kinds of quantities and just looking at the data. This is data mining, okay? The other part is that we've set aside some money here in this bill, too, to look at the regulations that will allow for geothermal to move forward.

You know, you might not think that this is an important thing to look at, but it truly is. It helps to lay the foundation so that Albertans and Alberta industries can move forward and become international players in the development of not only our mineral wealth that we've been blessed with but in the ancillary, secondary industries that are attached to those minerals. Alberta has the opportunity to be at the forefront of global mineral development and the harvesting of the wealth of natural resources that we have, and we do have a lot.

You know, I could go on about graphite, an absolutely huge industry that's going to dominate many of the high-tech industries in this world that we live in. We need to know about graphite. We need to know that it's not only for lubricants and for batteries and for fuel cells, but it literally has the capacity to produce a rapid sensor for COVID and for all other viruses. There's an Alberta company called Graphene Leaders Canada in this province that is working towards that with using graphite technology.

Lithium: my friend beside me here was talking about lithium and E3 Metals, again, an example of an industry and a player in this industry that is going to change the world, as far as I'm concerned, in the harvesting of lithium in the most environmentally responsible way possible.

I'm going to keep my remarks short. I will go on later, as we go through this bill, and talk more. I guess that when I look at this bill, one of the things that I'm happy to see is that as we start talking about bringing together an understanding of the kinds of minerals that we have, that we can harvest in this province, this bill does address the environmental side of the equation and the regulatory side of the equation. We can see that in this bill it talks about the prohibition on reworking wells and facilities, licences, transfer of licences, suspension and abandonment, reasonable care and measures to prevent impairment or damage, extended obligations, remedial actions, continuing liability, direction to alter programs of development or operations, and transfers of permits, licences, and approvals. It's doing just the foundational work that will allow us to move forward as a province and to prosper based on the resources that God has given us in this province.

I look forward to moving forward in this debate, and I thank you for your time.

The Speaker: Well, thank you to the hon. member, and my apologies for forgetting the riding name. It is a major Speaker faux pas, so my sincerest apologies to the hon. member's constituents.

Are there others?

[Motion carried; Bill 82 read a second time]

Bill 83

Environmental Protection and Enhancement Amendment Act, 2021

[Adjourned debate November 17: Mr. Singh]

The Speaker: Is there anyone wishing to join in the debate? I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

Member Loyola: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Thank you for the opportunity to address the House on this particular Bill 83, Environmental Protection and Enhancement Amendment Act, 2021. From what I gather, from having gone through the actual bill, it seems to me that we have a plan-to-make-a-plan proposal here. I'm not a hundred per cent sure what the minister is waiting for.

I don't feel that the bill actually proposes making any progress on moving towards an extended producer responsibility framework, and in consultation with many stakeholders this is what will provide essentially, especially for municipalities, the environment where we can actually move forward on a lot of the issues surrounding the concerns that they have. As far as I can see, it doesn't provide any concrete steps or any actions. The stakeholders are actually expecting to see a regulatory framework and clear guidance. These regulations are needed to take further steps in, of course, taking care of our environment and making sure of the impact that we'll have on the environment as we continue moving forward.

Right now the Alberta Urban Municipalities Association actually even put forward a resolution on exactly the issues surrounding this particular bill. If I could just read that into the record, Mr. Speaker.

It is therefore resolved that the AUMA advocate for the Government of Alberta to:

- expand the current recycling programs,
- establish robust EPR regulations for paper and packaging, and
- work with AUMA to establish a modern recycling framework that sets Alberta on the path towards comprehensive EPR policies.

Right here we see specifically that a very important stakeholder desires this government to actually make some steps and some concrete action on this particular issue, yet as I said, here it seems that the minister has made a plan to make a plan with this particular bill.

It's interesting, though, when you go into the clauses of the resolution that has been provided by the AUMA, and I'll read those into the record.

Whereas the purpose of municipalities is to foster the well-being of the environment and to provide services that are necessary or desirable, such as waste management, as per Part 1 Section 3 of the Municipal Government Act;

Whereas the Government of Alberta has authority to enact Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) paper and packaging regulations under Part 9 of the Environmental Protection and Enhancement Act;

Whereas EPR paper and packaging regulations incentivize producer to reduce paper and packaging waste, consistent with environmental and sustainability goals;

Whereas robust EPR paper and packaging regulations shift the responsibility and costs of recycling from local government to producers; and

Whereas recycling provides more than just environmental benefits. It creates jobs at every step in the recycling process. Collecting, transporting, and processing all need people and equipment to make sure scrap tires, electronics, paint, oil, paper and packaging materials are safely handled and recycled.

This points to a really interesting shift over the last 20 years when it actually comes to production and producing. We're seeing more and more producers move to a higher level of responsibility because they understand that we need to take care of our environment.

10:10

Whereas, you know, back in the 1950s, when economists were, like, "Okay; just mass produce, and then whatever goes to waste goes to waste," now we're actually talking about recycling in our economy, so making sure that a product's lifespan can – instead of going to a landfill after it's been used for, let's say, five to 10 years, you're actually finding important uses for it. The great part about it for the economy is the fact that if you have this waste product, that to some may no longer have a value, a recycler or producer can pick that unwanted product up and then make something else out of it, and then it would go on from there. You know, we're finding that producers are finding ways, for example, for three, four generations of products to be made through this recycling process. Now, this is responsible.

I think that Albertans and Canadians and people all over the world are encouraging these kinds of patterns because they understand that what we were doing was just not feasible and that it was having an incredibly negative impact on the environment. The important part of that is that Albertans actually see themselves as stewards of the land. This whole concept of stewardship is such an important one, you know, and one that I think – I've heard it many times from the members on the other side of the House, right? They seem to think that we on this side are so focused on protecting the environment that we don't care about the economy, which is nothing further from the truth.

What is important, though, about how all of this fits together is the fact that an economy is supposed to serve the people and not people serving an economy and the specific interests of a few, right? Benefits of the work of all of those involved in the production process: all people should be able to benefit from that and not just a select few, you know, corporations and shareholders of these corporations. Again, I go back to what I often bring up in the House, that neoliberal economists often don't talk about the externalities, the social and the environmental impacts that decisions being made by corporations are actually having on our society and on our environment.

[Mrs. Allard in the chair]

It's very important that the government start piecing together all of these matters because, of course, as I've stated before, it is the responsibility of government to actually look at this in a more holistic sense. It's really important that we aid in creating the conditions so that, yes, we can attract interest. But the question that we often ask on this side of the House is: at what expense? If you're trading in the opportunity to make big bucks on the market but you're destroying the environment at the same time or you're destroying habitat and resources that Albertans and especially Indigenous communities continue to rely on, then what's the trade-off? I'm sure that we can strike a balance between making sure that we have a strong, sustainable economy that benefits all people and, at the same time, making sure that we're taking care of the environment and we're taking into consideration what the social

impacts are that these decisions are having upon the society at large and that we have clear processes, regulations that actually define how these processes take place.

This is the key issue, and this is what the now Alberta Municipalities – as most know by now, they've renamed themselves – is actually pointing to. I think that we're way past the stage of – you know, sometimes I come into this House, Madam Speaker, and I feel like we're still in the Cold War. We're still talking like back in the 1950s – right? – where personal attacks are being lobbed from across the aisle when we should just be focusing on what the politics are, what the policies are. [interjections] Yeah. It happened to me just yesterday, where a member started to get up and personally attack when I was actually talking about a political decision and policy that was made by this government. I wasn't attacking that member personally. [interjections] Yeah. But I was talking about a political decision made by this House, by this government.

The Acting Speaker: Hon. member, I would just remind you to stay on the bill, please.

Member Loyola: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker.

Mr. Yao: Do you take interventions, my friend?

Member Loyola: Sure. Why not? Go ahead, Member.

Mr. Yao: Well, I just really, truly need to correct the record on some of the comments that you've made. You stated that people from over here lob insults across the aisle to yourself, personal attacks. I'll challenge that. Under this government we've actually made rules to increase the level of decorum here and just to simply – we're restrained from, perhaps, throwing some lobs your way as much as I'd love to. I do find that you and . . .

The Acting Speaker: Hon. members, I just want to take this opportunity to remind all members, on both sides of the Chamber, that it would be prudent to discuss, as the hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie had mentioned, the bill. Let's keep our comments and our interventions relevant to the bill.

Thank you, hon. members.

Member Loyola: Thanks for reaffirming my exact point, Madam Speaker. We're here to talk about bills; we're here to talk about policies. [interjection] I'll accept an intervention from the hon. member from the other side if that's indeed his concern.

Mr. Turton: Yes. Thank you very much to the member across for allowing me to have a chance to provide an intervention about the bill. As someone that worked extensively in the stakeholder engagement this spring and specifically worked with various municipalities right across the entire province – as everyone in the House knows, I served for three terms on city council, and environmental stewardship has always been extremely important to me. I just want to remind everyone in the House that AUMA – I do know that they changed their name, but old habits die hard – for almost 15 years, at every conference, has urged the provincial government to move forward with EPR. Every single year. When I was elected in 2010, this was something that they asked for, and every year since then and even a couple of years before then they asked for it repeatedly. It wasn't, unfortunately, the previous government that decided to move forward with this program that would totally revolutionize our recycling programs here in the province of Alberta. It was this government. I mean, this is a massive win. Just to quote from, you know, Paul McLaughlin with the RMA – they're in support of this.

Member Loyola: Thank you very much for that intervention, hon. member. I think this, as I was stating before I accepted interventions from the other side, is exactly what Alberta Municipalities is looking for, as you've stated, and I think that many stakeholders are interested in having this regulatory framework in place. You know, like, when it comes to political ideology, I know that members on the other side feel like the government should just get out of the way, but here we have a perfect example of stakeholders saying, "Look, we need the government to actually establish clear rules when it comes to these issues," right? And that's the role of government.

10:20

That should be the role of government, to establish those rules, those regulations, so that we can have a clear and level playing field for all who are wanting to engage in the economic process and actually, at the end of the day, be able to extract resources, in this case recycle and continue recycling products down the line, and move into this circular economy that so many are now wanting all governments to really engage on and really think about how they can help.

I honestly believe that government isn't the big, bad bogeyman, as I was saying last night, Madam Speaker, and that, in fact, we all – the institutions together – can work at resolving: what are the actual problems . . . [interjection] Yeah. Just give me a second. I'm just wrapping up my idea, and I'll most definitely accept your interjection there, hon. member. The reality is that we have different levels, institutions, all working together to identify what those regulations are, what the rules are, so that there can be that level playing field, and then we can have all engaged in the process. Hon. member, I look forward to what you want to say.

[The Speaker in the chair]

Mr. Williams: Well, I appreciate the opportunity to intervene on the speech from the Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie, and I want to support the member that this side believes in government. We're all here as servants who believe government has an important role. Of course there should be a limit to government; I think that's the nature of any western democracy. That's how we're here; it's why we have parameters. We think there should be blinders on things that we do, and of course civil society, individual families, individuals themselves should have some role in society outside of government. But, I mean, we have passed more pieces of legislation in this House in our time than any government before us in a comparable time. I think we're at over a hundred bills.

We believe in the value of government. We believe that there should be regulation; of course we do. As Conservatives we should conserve those institutions that were handed down to us from the generation before. I think it is incredibly simplistic to just lob some sort of, like, accusation of ideology and: they're a bunch of sort of anarchical libertarians and Ayn Randian night watchmen state nonsense. We believe in the importance of government. We believe there is value in what we do.

Member Loyola: Well, I listened intently to the hon. member on the other side, but I'm actually, of course, paraphrasing, Mr. Speaker, comments that were actually made in the House just yesterday by a couple of the private members of the government caucus. Of course, I'm paraphrasing what they were saying, right? We need to come – and this is what I'm saying: at the end of the day, my argument that I'm placing here before you is that there needs to be a balance to how we all engage together in the process and that, yes, government has a specific role that it needs to play. Here we have a stakeholder

that is specifically asking for the government to put in place that regulatory framework that it so requires, and according to – I'm sorry, Member; I'm not too sure what your riding is.

Mr. Turton: Spruce Grove-Stony Plain.

Member Loyola: Spruce Grove-Stony Plain. I want to thank you for that interjection because you're reaffirming the ask that has been in place for years, for establishing this regulatory framework.

When it comes to this bill, we have no adequate action being identified by the minister, and as you so rightly reaffirmed here inside of the House, Member, that's exactly what stakeholders are looking for. They want action on this particular file, and instead what we got with this bill was, well, we're making a plan to make a plan, right?

I would have to say at this point in the debate, Mr. Speaker, that I'm not prepared to – I mean, I support in general what the bill is about, but I won't be supporting it at this time.

The Speaker: Hon. members, are there others wishing to join in the debate? I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-City Centre.

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the opportunity to rise and speak to this Bill 83, the Environmental Protection and Enhancement Amendment Act, 2021, talking about expanding or at least looking in the direction of moving towards expanding recycling programs to implement EPR, extended producer responsibility, in the province of Alberta.

Now, here in Edmonton we've had – I think Edmonton was one of the leading communities in Alberta in terms of incorporating recycling programs. We began in 1986 with a curbside recycling pilot, the blue box program. After two years of that pilot, it was implemented as a full, city-wide curbside recycling program using the blue boxes. I remember it well. I also remember how it was criticized, mocked by many in the community at that time. Indeed, under Mayor Jan Reimer, herself being someone who was very invested in environmental concerns, the program was expanded but again was unfortunately mocked by some in the community.

However, that program did continue. In 1991 the first community recycling depot was opened here in the city of Edmonton. That has since expanded to 21 depots across the city. In 1999 the blue box was replaced by the blue bag recycling program, and we opened the city's first materials recovery facility to better allow for the sorting of those materials and then in 2002 the blue bin recycling program for residents. That's those living in townhouses, condos, and apartments. I found that interesting, Mr. Speaker, that it did take over a decade for that to happen, particularly recognizing that here in my constituency of Edmonton-City Centre we certainly have a wide range of all of those facilities, but I am glad, indeed, that that was put in place. It was almost two decades ago that we had that occur here in the city of Edmonton.

I've always been in support of that and have tried to do my efforts, so certainly I am in support of moving towards extended producer responsibility here in the province of Alberta. [interjection] Certainly, Member.

Mr. Hanson: Thank you very much, Member, and very interesting listening to you. I'd just like to take this opportunity to make a slight announcement that's a little bit off topic, but at 10:23 this morning we welcomed my fourth granddaughter into the world. Her name is Violet Joy Hanson – seven pounds, seven ounces – and her mom is doing well.

Thank you very much.

Mr. Shepherd: I certainly have nothing but congratulations for the member. Certainly, I would say, a creative and innovative use of the intervention process, and I guess you could say that it is potentially related to recycling. It's certainly the recycling of her genetic material and the continuance of that line, so a salute to that member and his family, and congratulations to them.

We have an opportunity, and clearly, as many members have noted, we've had an opportunity as a province for a considerable length of time. The AUMA, or Alberta Municipalities, who I had the pleasure of joining for breakfast this morning – I am sporting the pin that I received from the town of Vulcan, and as a lifelong sci-fi and *Star Trek* fan, it was very honourable for me to receive that. I hope they do indeed live long and prosper, and I hope that our province would as well, and Alberta Municipalities have been part of that effort and have for, my understanding is, close to a decade been calling for this step to be taken.

Now, I can understand why as I sit down and read more about this, and admittedly this is an area that I have just begun to learn about. I can see why this is important for municipalities, because, as I outlaid, they have been the ones who have been responsible for dealing with the question of recycling for some time; the city of Edmonton going back, as I said, to 1986, when it first began to invest its taxpayer dollars in expanding a recycling program, which has expanded over the decades.

10:30

There is an opportunity now, I think, and as we are all looking to deal with our impacts on the environment and deal with the fact, the real fact, the scientifically proven fact, of man-made global climate change, we are recognizing more and more that the responsibility then needs to lie with each of the people that are creating the waste or creating those greenhouse gases, and that is how we move forward together.

It makes sense that we should not be placing the burden for packaging and other things – and we know that has grown exponentially over the years, the amount of packaging. Certainly, as we see more and more things being delivered, we see an expansion of packaging and packaging materials, and those are creating real pressures and real costs for our recycling systems and our waste systems. Again, the burden of those costs falls largely on our municipalities.

Certainly, in my conversations with folks at Alberta Municipalities today the main concern I heard from them in many respects is the costs that have been downloaded on them by this government and certainly deep concerns about further costs that are going to be downloaded on them. I can tell you, Mr. Speaker, the number of people I spoke to this morning who are not fans of this government's intent to barrel ahead with an Alberta provincial police force and the potential costs that are being downloaded on them while taking away local autonomy in the case of the town of Redcliff, who I spoke with this morning.

They have good reason, then, to be looking for ways that they can relieve their tax burden and relieve some of their costs. Here with this bill was an excellent opportunity for this government to show good faith on that. To be clear, what I also heard from municipalities this morning was their concerns about cuts to MSI and other provincial funding, the breaking of the agreements that this province had with the big-city charters. There is a deep concern that this government is willing to rush ahead with things that are in its political interest but slow walks things that are to the advantage of municipalities and that they are actually asking for.

I appreciate what the Member for Spruce Grove-Stony Plain noted, that indeed under our government we did not implement an EPR program. Now, we certainly did take a number of other steps

to support and work with municipalities in terms of infrastructure funding, in terms of local assistance, in terms of those big-city charters and other partnerships. Indeed, we made that promise this morning, that should we have the opportunity to be government again, we would put the principle of partnership and collaboration in law.

Returning to the bill, it's noted that Alberta is the only province in western Canada that does not have EPR paper and packaging regulation program. We do not have these in place, and with this bill we still will not have them in place. This bill provides the opportunity for the minister to make certain exemptions, but that is about it. It is a promise for a potential future action.

Again, I think municipalities have good reason to question the promises of this government. We saw substantial promises to municipalities that were made in this government's election platform that were promptly then, again, broken. The fact of the matter is, Mr. Speaker, that this was a golden opportunity for this government to show substantive action after a considerable length of time of consultation, which I recognize, again, the Member for Spruce Grove-Stony Plain said he was involved in. I do appreciate that in this instance, unlike so many others with this government, they have actually published that in a What We Heard document. We at least have a greater bit of transparency on what was heard at those consultations, but we have not yet heard from this government why with this bill they could not simply begin to actually implement the program that these folks have been asking for.

They are looking at significant additional costs, and the fact is that producers are already operating these recycling programs in other provinces. They're already incorporating the cost of EPR into their national product pricing, so to be clear, Mr. Speaker, Albertans are already paying for these programs, but they are not getting the benefit and neither are the local municipalities. Albertans are effectively paying twice for their recycling, paying for recycling programs happening in other parts of Canada.

We have just heard these members go at great length about their concerns about Albertans paying for things in other provinces in Canada. They're willing to make a number of impotent gestures and rattle sabres, but here when they have the opportunity to do one actual concrete thing to keep more of Albertans' dollars in actual benefit to Albertans, they're saying: we may do something eventually.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

In the meantime we have producers providing more than \$367 million to fund other provincial EPR paper and packaging programs. Albertans received zero dollars' benefit from that investment. Indeed, according to the Recycling Council of Alberta an EPR paper and packaging program would save Albertan municipalities between \$65 million to \$70 million annually. This is a government that likes to talk large about cutting costs for Albertans, who likes to talk big about keeping more Alberta dollars in Alberta, benefiting Albertans, but they are missing here a significant opportunity to take substantial action now.

Let's be clear. This is a government that has not been afraid to leap ahead with things that it feels are politically good for them. They are still barrelling ahead with this principle of an Alberta provincial police force that will in fact cost municipalities more, but they are slow walking a program that they've been asking for for over a decade, that would save them \$65 million to \$70 million.

This is a golden opportunity for this government. Regardless of whether our government took action on it or not, the principles that this government says they stand for are not being reflected in the opportunity they had here or the bill that is currently in front of us

in this Legislature. We have an opportunity here, and perhaps we can talk about this as we continue in debate. We are just currently at second reading.

I imagine that my colleague the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar, our critic for Environment and Parks, will perhaps have some thoughts and some suggestions on potential amendments we can make to perhaps try to strengthen this, perhaps try to put this in a position where we have a bit more surety from municipalities that have been continually betrayed and let down by this government, who, as I spoke with them this morning at the Alberta Municipalities convention, were very clear that they feel on many, many issues they are not being heard. Perhaps with this bill this government can find a way to show them that they are willing to put a bit more on the table, make a stronger commitment to follow through on something that could have a significant impact.

What we currently have in the bill simply allows the minister to exempt materials, activities, industries, persons from the application of requirements of collection or surcharge requirements for waste. That allows current stewardship programs to be exempted from extended producer responsibility requirements. That's institutions like, say, bottle depots, which, of course, are the earliest recycling that I recall, certainly, as a kid. Certainly, we have fond memories of that because, hey, you collect empty bottles and cans and you get money back. That's a good deal when you're a child.

Ms Hoffman: Cash money.

Mr. Shepherd: Absolutely. Cash money on the table. That's a few Slurpees and chocolate bars right there.

So they can be exempted from the act and from an extended producer responsibility framework, from a framework that the bill does nothing to actually implement, from a framework that does not actually exist yet.

I appreciate that the government is claiming at this point that they intend to follow through, that they intend to bring forward regulations and actually enact this program next year. Then it suggests to me that perhaps this bill is premature, and in an environment where this government has already burned so much of its trust and credibility with our municipal partners, perhaps it would have been better for them to wait on this until they were ready to actually take substantive action rather than creating yet another situation where we have folks who are going to be sitting and waiting to watch if this government is actually going to follow through on what it said it would do.

10:40

We've had far too much uncertainty in our province under this government: continual lack of communication, last-minute announcements, acting last and acting least on everything from COVID-19 throughout the pandemic, indeed, to housing and homelessness. I think what municipalities deserve, again agreeing completely that we need to move forward with an EPR program, is that when this government steps up to act, it does so with substantive action instead of the repeated pattern of making big claims without much behind them. We will have the opportunity to explore that much more as we continue this debate.

The Deputy Speaker: Any other members wishing to join the debate? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

Mr. Feehan: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I welcome the opportunity to talk to this bill. Again, it fits into the pattern that I have been expressing my concern about since we got back into the Legislature this fall, and that is the government has yet again brought forward a bill that is absent of content. You know, I've certainly complained

about this on multiple occasions because there have been multiple occasions on which the government has really failed to do what they proposed to do. Here I am again in a position where I would have loved to support this bill. This is yet another time when the intention is marvellous.

As the Member for Spruce Grove-Stony Plain said – again I'm going to go to AUMA, but I know it's not. It's Alberta Municipalities now, and I know that they have been asking for something in this area, so I was excited. I mean, I thought: "Good. This is something I can get one hundred per cent behind." I certainly have been a big advocate of recycling as it came in in Alberta over the years and moved forward, and I was just really hoping to see that something would happen here. But as I began to read the bill, I began to get disappointed once again, and it's not because of what they are doing; it's because of what they are not doing.

I'm constantly finding myself standing up in the House and giving long lists of things that could have been in the bill, and I don't understand why the government is not doing them. If I on my own, you know, researching on this side of the House, can find so much more to put into a bill, how come the government can't do that with all of the resources that they have? I'm going to spend a bit of time talking about the things the government has not done.

I'm very concerned, when I look at this, that the intention of this bill, as many speakers have talked about, is to talk about something that we might talk about later and plan for later, and the focus was almost more on creating a circumstance where the minister will be able to exempt people from anything that actually does get created in the future. The underlying intention in this bill actually seems to be to undermine itself when it actually gets developed. I find that very discouraging because there is so much that can be done.

You know, the modern world has really started to grasp on to the very important idea that we need to take care of the place in which we live and that we need to ensure that the resources that we have in this province are continued to be used wisely and do not lead to ultimate destruction and pollution of the environments in which we need to raise our children. That really has become a very universal phenomenon. That really actually goes across political lines, so this is why I was excited that the possibility of this bill might actually lead us in some direction that would be exciting.

Right now we're standing in a city that at one time was receiving awards for its recycling program. It had, under mayor Jan Reimer, done some extremely advanced things to move us in the right direction, and, you know, I think that more could be done because the people are behind it. [interjection] You have an intervention?

Mr. Eggen: Yes. Thank you, hon. member. Yeah. I, too, was just at the Alberta Municipalities conference here this morning, AM I guess it is – I was at the AM in the a.m. – and they were talking a lot about having programs that could be augmented and reinforced through legislation, so here I am several minutes later looking at that very thing. While the intention and the motivation amongst all of our municipalities, I think, is unanimous in building a more robust recycling program with incentives, what is missing with this bill, with the extended producer responsibility, that just doesn't meet the mark for – I saw people's dismay at AM this morning, and you've sort of reflected that, too. I was just curious if you could perhaps help us with that.

Mr. Feehan: Thank you. You know, I think this is exactly what we'll use the remainder of my time to do, talk about what could be there, because I am certainly hoping the government will pick up some of these things and actually produce a bill that does the things that are necessary.

Unfortunately, right now what we have is an issue of manufacturers producing a good, generating a profit, but creating a whole series of what we refer to as externalities, and those externalities are coming on the weight of municipalities. They know that. All across this province they're saying that we have a packaging problem, we have a waste management problem, we have a landfill problem. You know, they're very concerned. The cost for all of those responses to the problems always goes back onto the municipalities. What we have is a privatization of profit and a socialization of cost and risk.

Again, this is a problem that I think is really problematic. I'm not just wanting to complain. I'm wanting to say that the government has models to work from. I mean, the first extended producer responsibility-type initiatives came in in places like Sweden and Germany in the 1990s, so it's not like, you know, this is a new concept that they need some time to get their head around. There is lots of evidence, there's lots of research that's been done on the success of various models, and the government could have looked at that.

Just to give a quick list of things that I will go into in more depth that I don't see in this bill: things like product fees, advanced recycling fees, product take-back mandates, virgin material taxes, recycling subsidies, and a focus on waste reduction with a focus on source-use reduction, material substitution, product design changes. All of these things have been done somewhere, all of these things have been tested in terms of policy, and all of these things could have been put into this bill. I'm going to take some time to talk about some of these things because I actually want this bill to be successful. I actually really hope the government decides to put some meat on the bones. Instead, they focused on making sure the minister has the right to exclude people from whatever might come up potentially in the future, and that's very frustrating.

You know, first of all, people in this province have said that they're willing to go along with this. They are used to this kind of a pattern. We, of course, right now in the province of Alberta already have five stewardship programs. We have the beverage container program, we have the electronics program, we have the paint program, the tire program, and the used-oil program. So it's not like you even have to convince the populace that this is something that's important. What you have to do is sit down and do the hard work of actually creating policy that has a direct effect on ultimate outcome. That's what you have to do.

We look at the kinds of things that we could be doing. We certainly know the problem. We know that people use, you know, the curbside recycling programs, but we also know that in the city of Edmonton, for example, less than 50 per cent of waste is actually diverted from landfills, and we know that 25 per cent of the items put into the recycling bin actually then have to get rediverted into waste management. There is a big problem here. Why is it that something that the very helpful citizen takes and puts into the recycling box has to then be rediverted over to waste at the cost of the municipalities? The answer is that the product is not produced well.

You have a box of spaghetti, and the box of spaghetti is made of wood, but they put a little window in it and put a little piece of plastic inside the window so you can see what the spaghetti looks like before you buy it. When you put that box into your recycling, if you do not open up the box, take out the little plastic film, that arrives in our recycling centre, they look at it and chuck it into the garbage because they don't have the time to take every single product, open it up, and take out the little film of plastic. That is an issue of manufacturers producing bad packaging. And there's no reason why they shouldn't produce that packaging. They probably make more sales when they put a little window in because you see what you're buying, and people like to see that. We have to create

the structures in society that counteract the desire to make a few extra sales. [interjection] I recognize the intervention.

10:50

Mr. Turton: Yes. Thank you very much to the hon. member for allowing me to just say a couple of words in intervention. Some of the comments I've heard from members opposite is that – obviously, they're saying very clearly that they wish that there was more meat to the policy. But as someone that was extensively involved in the stakeholder conversations this spring – it was in the What We Heard document – it has been unanimous appreciation for the approach that the Minister of Environment and Parks has done during this process. To use an old carpenter's saying, measure twice, cut once. That's exactly what the province of Alberta has been doing in terms of going above and beyond to learn from the experience of other jurisdictions such as Ontario, such as B.C., finding out what works best for EPR programs in those respective jurisdictions, taking the best examples, the best practices from those other jurisdictions, and making sure that we get it right here in Alberta.

The program with the regulatory process is supposed to be implemented in 2022.

Mr. Feehan: I do thank the member for that interjection. I certainly believe in the principle of measuring twice, cutting once, but I don't see that's happened here at all. What we have is a proposal to perhaps measure something again in the future but no actual plan to do anything specific here.

My complaint here is that there are models, actual things that could happen. I mean, do you see a product take-back mandate in this bill? Is there one? We know they've been used in various places. Germany, for example, has used that quite extensively. You know, they have these take-back laws, as they often are referred to in Germany, where it says that the manufacturer actually has to take back the product at the end of its regular use. I don't see that in this bill. If they want to do this relational kind of discussion with the communities about doing things, why isn't that in the bill so that the communities can respond to how that would work, what that would look like? If it was there, I'd be really excited.

They didn't, for example, also put in any kind of goals. For example, in Germany when they have a product take-back mandate, they also have a recycling rate goal that says that some percentage of all the products needs to be returned or the industry is responsible and has to do things in order to meet that goal. So then I'd say that 75 per cent of all cardboard has to be recycled. I don't see a recycling rate goal in this bill. Why isn't it there so that you can be talking to municipalities about: is that the right number? [interjection] Yes, intervention.

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, hon. member. Not to disturb your flow of thought, but, you know, further to that, where there are established programs that are working in different jurisdictions around the world, right here at home with the Alberta municipalities they have put forward resolutions to that same effect. They're meeting right now in Edmonton as we speak and talking about these issues. You don't have to go any further than three kilometres down the street right now, where there are hundreds of people that want to talk about building strengthened EPR regulations that actually create a return on those products that you wish to recycle.

I recall in a different life, same room, I was in opposition and part of a recycling committee that looked at the beverage return costs here in the province of Alberta. We chose to raise those prices, and we recycled a whole lot more.

Mr. Feehan: Thank you for the intervention. I think what you're pointing out is the fact that when we actually do something, we learn, and we then can expand it and change it. That's all I'm asking for here.

I want to be able to support this bill. I fundamentally believe in the whole concept of environmental protection and enhancement through extended producer responsibility. It's a great idea that has excellent models. And as was just mentioned by the previous speaker, we have a whole group of municipalities across the province who are more than willing to get behind this. In fact, they have been begging for this, so give them something to work with. Give them something to come back to you about and work on the details of and so on.

You know, I'd love to see that product take-back mandate in there with the appropriate recycling rate goals. If you want to keep a market system, as you tend to like to do, create it. A tradeable recycling credit program that allows the really highly successful municipalities or highly successful businesses the ability to recycle more than the percentage goal from the recycling rate goal and trade that with the municipalities that can't get there yet or the companies that can't get there yet: you could have put that in there. You could have put all of these things in here. We could have put in even the concept, the idea of some kind of subsidies for people who are doing this kind of work. There are many, many groups that would love to get involved in recycling and repairing the Earth.

I know that in my travels around to First Nations and Métis settlements and Métis communities in this province that has come up a number of times, but they simply don't have the money to build huge infrastructures of product disassembling and returning. There just aren't the dollars there. But what would happen if this bill had included something to enhance those kinds of capabilities in these communities? Not only would we have a cleaning up of the environment, a reduction of the burden on municipalities, but we would be creating jobs in communities that most need those jobs because of their unemployment rate.

My point in all of this is not to chastise the government so much as to plead with the government to put some meat on the bones, to do this work. I understand that they're trying to get it right. You know, I used to sit on that side of the House. I know the difficulty of trying to understand if you've done the right thing as you're moving forward, but unless you move forward, you will never know if you are right. If you are constantly fearful of taking the steps that need to be taken, the end result is that you accomplish nothing. That is my fear with this bill.

My fear with this bill is that if we pass it and everybody says, "That's great," five years from now we will have a bill that has actually not moved the goalposts, better yet the ball, down the field. It proposes to do that, it hopes to do that, and then it undermines itself by actually building greater infrastructure around the minister giving exemptions so people don't have to participate than it actually does around creating the program that will actually result in real cost reductions for municipalities, who are begging us to help them because they are in very difficult straits right now.

Municipalities across this province are suffering. It was just last year I was standing out in front of the Legislature, talking to reeves and councillors from across the province who were saying that they simply do not have the money to sustain themselves. And one of the reasons is – many different reasons, of course, always complex – that they simply are taking on a burden that is not theirs. The burden is in products.

And it's getting worse right now. I can tell you that during COVID many people started ordering online, so instead of going to the store and picking up a product and putting it in your hand or putting it in your bag and going home, you now order it online, and that product

comes not just with the product but with a huge amount of packaging around it: cardboard boxes, infill so that it doesn't shatter or break on its travels, and so on. Sometimes, you know, when I've seen stuff arrive, ridiculously small products are in ridiculously large boxes, and I wonder how they can possibly do this.

The answer is that there is no cost to them. The cost is going to be on the municipality who then has to dispose of that box. That's what the problem is here. This government needs to understand that the externalities of manufacturing are resting on municipalities, and only the government can stop that. Now, they can stop that through incentives. They can stop that through advanced recycling fees. They can stop that through some kind of subsidy or support. They can stop that through product take back. They can make bills where you're taxing virgin materials so that we're trying to use more recycling. There are just so many things, so many exciting things that I would love to be able to support in this bill. I would certainly sit down with anybody on the government side to provide them with some of the research that I've been doing on this to make sure that I'm up to speed on it. There is a lot of it around the world. This is not a new concept. As I said, Germany started doing this thing in the 1990s. We have experience that we can work on.

11:00

It would be really exciting to see some real product design changes that use less energy. Sometimes that's really good for business. I happen to know a relative who was working in the disposable diaper industry. They were getting a lot of hassles for the terrible environmental consequence, and they learned that if they actually put less product into the diapers, they were more absorbent. You created more space between the fibres if you put less product in. The pressure to change their product design actually resulted in reduced costs for the manufacturer in that particular case.

Thank you.

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

Seeing none. All right. I will call the question.

[Motion carried; Bill 83 read a second time]

Bill 73 Infrastructure Accountability Act

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

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

[Debate adjourned on the amendment November 17: Ms Goehring speaking]

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. members, we are on the hoist amendment known as HA1. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. Would it be possible to have the amendment read into the record, just for my reference?

The Deputy Speaker: Do you have a copy of that amendment? Otherwise, I will . . .

Ms Hoffman: Or if a page could run it. Either way, I just want to make sure that I'm being accurate.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore moves 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.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you so much, Madam Speaker. I appreciate that clarity. It’s always exciting when we change pieces of legislation, then getting our brains caught back up.

I do want to say that I support the proposed amendment. I think it’s important that we find ways to bring our best work forward to this place. Of course, we can change laws, but I’m sure anyone who has been in caucus or cabinet knows how it doesn’t happen super often for most legislation. When it does, it’s a pretty onerous process that should involve good consultation and engagement from within cabinet, within caucus, and with Albertans in general. I don’t believe that where this bill is right now is our best work. I think that much could be done to actually clarify and provide greater support for the people of Alberta when it comes to some of the biggest, riskiest investments that this Premier and the UCP government have taken to date.

Of course, the biggest one, that’s top of mind for me at this moment, is at least \$1.3 billion which was gambled by the Premier and cabinet prior to the U.S. election, a big bet on Donald Trump becoming President and forging ahead with a project that the Premier decided to take at least \$1.3 billion that belonged to the people of Alberta and gamble on without any consultation, the one specific project that wasn’t a huge surprise to the world when now President Biden put a pause on that project or stopped that project. That’s what he said he would do for over a decade. It was only Donald Trump who said that he was going to forge ahead. This Premier decided to take \$1.3 billion, at least, from taxpayers and put it towards that risky gamble that certainly hasn’t paid off for the people of Alberta.

There were other types of capital investment as well that I think have intentionally been excluded from this bill and created a massive loophole for the Premier to be able to continue to make risky decisions with Albertans’ money without proper oversight.

At a minimum, I think that this bill should be amended so that all major infrastructure projects – all infrastructure projects – apply. It doesn’t make sense why – well, it does make sense why the Premier would want to have one set of rules for everybody else and one set for him, but that definitely isn’t fair or respectful to the people of this province, and I don’t think it’s a good use of our time or the legislative process as well to basically enshrine that the Premier wants to have a different set of rules for decision-making when it comes to himself.

It’s been said in this place that the bill was modelled after Ontario’s legislation around infrastructure accountability. One of the biggest glaring differences in my read to date is around the fact that in Ontario they tie this bill towards municipal infrastructure needs as well, and I would argue that it should also probably be tied to local school authority infrastructure needs given that school jurisdictions don’t have the ability to generate their own revenue for capital in any meaningful way.

To say that the government is going to use whatever criteria they want to set their own lists and have their own reporting of those lists without taking other orders of government, which have been created by the province, to be partners in delivering for the citizens that we all serve I don’t think is putting our best foot forward. I think it also belittles the process that so many of those partners – it’s excruciating work to go through and try to create your capital

plan lists, knowing that, especially under the current government, you put hundreds of hours into this work collectively through your organizations and it seems like often they fall upon deaf ears.

For example, the city of Calgary saw no new capital for schools in the public or Catholic systems in the last capital plan. What a slight on the largest city in our province, on the parents who choose to send their kids to public and Catholic schools within the city of Calgary, on the advocacy that they need this government to take and deliver for the people, the students who want to attend schools in the largest and the third-largest districts in this province, within the city of Calgary. If we want to make sure that we’re actually living values around accountability and transparency and if we want our infrastructure to meet the needs of the citizens, it would be wise for this government to vote yes on this hoist amendment and come back to the table with something that will actually do that instead of window dressing. Our time in this place is limited, and the bandwidth that is available to bring legislation forward is limited. If this government wants to take this opportunity to bring forward something which can actually meet what has been stated as the objectives, I would fully support that, but I don’t think this bill is it.

Municipalities are meeting today and this week. Of course, I know that many of us will probably have meetings and other engagements with locally elected councillors, Reeves, and mayors. I will tell you that one of the biggest frustrations that they’ve mentioned is, of course, around the disrespect through the cutting of the MSI, the cutting of GIPOT, grants in place of taxes, and this current government treating municipalities not as partners. You know, the lip service that there’s only one taxpayer: we know that that’s true. What this government continually does is download responsibility on to those other orders of government without giving them any tools. Then, of course, they force cuts in services and increases in taxes to that one taxpayer, but they are trying to make somebody else hold the bag when it comes to the folks that we all represent having to pay one way or another to get basic services.

If the government really wanted to demonstrate a desire to be partners, they could act by restoring the cuts that they imposed on MSI. They could act by paying their taxes fully, not bringing in changes and cutting grants by 50 per cent, because that’s not responsible. Everyone knows that when you refuse to pay your bills, the people on the other end get a different taste in their mouth about what you’re all about.

11:10

In terms of important infrastructure projects it’s not every day when you canvass – or at least it’s not most of the days, as I’ve canvassed for more than a decade – that people will bring up the need for a lab. People don’t often think about what happens with those samples once they’re taken. But I can tell you that over the last two years, especially when we were seeing delays of days or even up to a week in getting lab results back for folks who were being tested for things like COVID, it caused extreme stress and anxiety for so many, especially parents who were forced to take time off work and kids who were forced to leave their classrooms and their in-school learning, to have to wait such an onerous amount of time when the government had an opportunity to continue with a plan to build a much-needed lab here for Edmonton and the north zone, within AHS, for the people of Alberta.

What a difference it could have been if the government, you know, instead of digging their heels in and spending millions of dollars to build a soccer field, could have actually moved forward with the building of the lab on land that was already owned by the government here in the city of Edmonton. What a difference it could have made over these last two years while people have undergone so much suffering and hardship and delay.

As I've said, more and more people have brought that up while I've been door-knocking over the last two years than definitely did before. For infrastructure projects like major capital investments, that are done in an economically sustainable way on land the government already owns with an opportunity for world-class testing and results in a timely way, it sure would have been great if the government had thought about some of the lasting negative impacts of their changes or cuts to infrastructure.

Another one that parents in particular and also folks who work in schools – staff, including teachers, educational assistants, principals – have brought up with me more often than I anticipated was the cancellation of the children and adolescent mental health facility here in Edmonton to serve children, youth who have mental health needs. This, again, would have been a kind of facility where, I would imagine – when your child is struggling with mental health, it's a scary time for everyone. I will say that some of the spaces that we ask children to go to for treatment right now are not appropriate. I wouldn't want my child to spend time in many of the physical spaces that currently exist.

I hope that the ministers involved in the decision to cancel that important, life-saving facility for so many children at least took the time to tour the centres where kids are struggling now the most and the limited supports that they are able to receive physically because of the space that they're in. It wasn't designed with the intention of children being in those spaces, for the most part.

Also, there is a need to expand the number of supports for both in-patient and outpatient services. The children and youth mental health facility, CCCAMH, that was proposed and was already in the capital plan process and had been advocated for for many years by folks, including those on the board for the Royal Alex hospital and the Stollery board, would have been a place where I think – when you're in a time of crisis and stress and your child needs support for their mental health, you want to at least bring them to a place that feels safe, that is well lit, where it feels like we're not putting kids in the worst leftovers that we have in a hospital and telling them to get better when clearly we haven't prioritized the spaces that they need to receive proper treatment and support.

Of course, then, the other piece is outpatient services; having a hub where parents and children could go for emergency care but also for consistent outpatient care with mental health professionals. That would have been a very valuable investment for children and youth in Edmonton and the surrounding area, for sure. I doubt that the government's bill here would have changed that outcome. The same government wrote this bill that made the decision to cancel this important, life-saving facility. Perhaps creating a bill that actually puts some of that criteria into consideration would have been a better use of the parliamentary time of the drafters and Executive Council.

I think it's important to ensure that we do leverage every dollar we have in a way that brings about the most good for the most people and the most vulnerable people in our province. I think that there was a lot of potential to bring forward something that would actually improve the infrastructure process that this government has clearly run roughshod over, but instead it seems that we're going to have, you know, a few talking points and no actual real change to the way that decisions are made.

Again, just to sort of reiterate, working in partnership with other orders of government should have been a priority in this bill if we really wanted to model it off Ontario's legislation. I'm sure the cross-jurisdictional talked about the significant changes... [interjection] I certainly welcome the interjection.

Mr. Dach: Thank you, Madam Speaker, and thank you to the Member for Edmonton-Glenora for allowing the brief intervention

on my part. We were listening to the member talk about evaluating risk for infrastructure projects. It is outlined in section 4 of the bill that one of those criteria should be "protecting community members and assets from natural disasters." I feel that the one glaring example – and it's evidenced in what's going on in British Columbia right now – is that municipalities do not have the requirement and our provincial government do not properly assume that we need to look at climate risk and identify the risk that we have in our municipalities to infrastructure while they're being built and while the projects are being proposed and what climate risk we indeed have in the future. Obviously, we are grossly unprepared in this country to protect our infrastructure from the risk of climate change events that are evident right now in British Columbia.

Ms Hoffman: Thanks very much, Madam Speaker. Definitely, the impacts of climate risk, I think, are an important consideration. I don't think they can be the only consideration. Let me use one example. I happened to work with the two MLAs from Fort McMurray at the time around addressing a plan that prior Conservative governments were moving very aggressively forward on. Fort McMurray has needed long-term care for a very long time, and we made a commitment to build long-term care for the people of Fort McMurray. There was a proposal in place that it be on the top of the hill instead of the bottom of the hill. Part of the argument that was used was because of flooding and other natural disasters caused by climate change, et cetera.

It was very clear from engagement with the community, including engaging with the two MLAs that represented the community, that the places where seniors and their families most often frequented weren't at the top of the hill. They were at the bottom of the hill. They were close to where the downtown services and supports were provided. By working with the actual MLAs in an across-the-aisle way when I was the Minister of Health in partnership with the Premier's office and with the Minister of Infrastructure, of course, we were able to put in other risk-mitigating factors to reduce some of the risks of flooding of that facility.

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

Mr. Rutherford: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I rise to seek unanimous consent for one-minute bells for the remainder of the morning sitting.

[Unanimous consent granted]

The Deputy Speaker: Are there any other speakers to the bill? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

Member Loyola: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. It's a pleasure to get up and speak to this particular bill. Of course, as has been highlighted by many of my caucus colleagues on this side of the House, this bill really does lack intent. I'll leave it at that. With all due respect to the minister, one of the reasons why it's really hard to support this particular bill in the way that it has been drafted is the fact that, you know, even though they did do consultation on this particular bill, went out to the public, did ask questions – they developed even their own What We Heard document – right in that What We Heard document, which is within the consultation, is the fact that there's no alignment with municipal capital plans.

11:20

Last night I had the privilege of going to a few events associated with the Alberta Municipalities conference, that's taking place here in Edmonton, and speaking to a number of representatives from throughout Alberta, rural Alberta, and I can tell you that they all

have these great dreams for these infrastructure projects in their regions or their municipalities. Right out of the What We Heard document, a direct quote: “The criteria used to evaluate capital projects should be . . . defined, consistent, and in alignment with regional and municipal planning.” I heard this time and again while at the events last night by the representatives there when we were talking about what their dreams were for their particular municipalities and their regions.

This is one of the reasons why it’s really difficult for me, when the minister brings this proposed bill into the Legislature, to support it, right? The minister has heard it. I’ve heard it directly from elected representatives from different orders of government. I would love it if the minister would get up and actually speak to this particular issue when it comes to direct stakeholders that are wanting to make sure that this ministry actually addresses their needs. And there are needs. There are needs for greater economic development in their regions, requests for a number of aspects related to community development in these municipalities and different regions throughout the province.

This is one of the reasons why it’s going to be really hard for me to support this bill in its current draft, and I’m really hoping that by the time we get to third reading, the minister will actually consider making some changes and bringing perhaps even his own amendments into the House to reflect the consultation that was already done and making sure that within legislation we can actually demonstrate that there’s co-operation between the different orders of government. Of course, this is what representatives all over the province are actually asking for.

I spoke to one gentleman last night who stated that communication is completely broken down, saying that they don’t feel listened to when it comes to their actual municipal plans. I’ve got to say that the gentleman was really frustrated. You know, I will give kudos where kudos are due. I did see the minister at the same event, and I applaud him for that. I applaud that he was there. He was speaking with stakeholders, and I hope that he heard the same messages that I was hearing from these elected representatives.

It just seems to me that the quality of – I think the best way to put it is that there needs to be a process. There needs to be a process by which we are all working together in determining what the plans are for these municipalities, that we understand where certain municipalities within a certain region can actually co-operate on specific infrastructure projects that they could all use in common. It would seem that this would be a good place for the minister and the ministry to actually provide spaces for collaboration, at least at a very initial stage of communication between different stakeholders and representatives, so that they can all understand what each other is doing, what their desires are for development.

We’re all very familiar with the fact that, you know, transportation plays such an incredibly important role in economic development. Of course, making sure that these corridors exist and . . . [interjection] I’m sorry. I forgot the . . .

Mr. Turton: Lac Ste. Anne-Parkland.

Member Loyola: The Member for Lac Ste. Anne-Parkland, you know, often gets up in this House, and he talks about this issue. I hope that the members on the other side can recognize that on this we agree. We believe in economic development. We believe that things need to move forward. [some applause] So stop getting up in this House and saying that we don’t agree. Thank you. That’s what I would really applaud, right?

We just believe that these things should be done in a measured approach, right? Here municipalities are specifically requesting – well, number one, they’re requesting from the minister and his

government greater communication or an increased level of communication. That’s what I heard last night, and last night wasn’t the first time. I’m sure the minister has heard it a number of times. When you have a budget allocation of this size and you have so many asks from so many different regions, I’m sure that it can get overwhelming. All the more reason, then, in particular regions, to get people together, start chatting, having the discussions, and then prioritizing the work.

You know, maybe the minister can offer some insight into what his approach is to actually discerning how things are prioritized because I have yet to hear anything on that particular issue. What is the process by which these projects are prioritized within the government? Here we have, like, another plan to make a plan on actually creating a strategy about how these infrastructure projects will be prioritized. This is good, again, but there is not that level of collaboration between the different orders of government which we’re all looking for.

Now, particularly when it comes to the riding of Edmonton-Ellerslie, I do believe that the minister has actually been out to Edmonton-Ellerslie a couple of times, if I’m not mistaken, and specifically out to the Ivor Dent field, where an organization by the name of the Punjab United Sports & Heritage Association actually administers a part of the Ivor Dent Sports Park. They’ve been allocated a certain area for it. They’re responsible for maintaining it. In years past the PUSHA, the acronym for the Punjab United Sports & Heritage Association, were actually requesting funding from all different levels of government to actually establish [interjection] – let me just finish, and I’ll recognize you, sir – a clubhouse on the particular fields which they administer.

Of course, this all ties into, well, the fact that municipalities will then require the sustainable funding so that they can actually work with these community organizations, because as we all agree, it’s the community organizations that are putting in an incredible amount of time and effort to make sure that infrastructure dollars are being used wisely and going to the benefit of the community, which are going to the specific objectives that we all have.

Now, Madam Speaker, I’d like to recognize the Member for Lac Ste. Anne-Parkland.

11:30

Mr. Getson: Well, thank you, Madam Speaker and to the Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie. I really appreciate that we share some commonalities. In fact, we walked up today to the House together, and we talked about our kids that are in, you know, the same age bracket, some of the challenges kids are going through. But some of the things, member opposite – we do agree that we have to move forward, but it’s the methodology of how we get there. From our perspective, in a lot of cases it’s kind of haphazard. Some of the socialist ideals that, rightly or wrongly, you hold are a lot different than us. We look to other jurisdictions like Venezuela; it didn’t work out so well, so my concern is, honestly, for my kids going forward and how we get there.

The Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview and I have already debated on this bill back and forth, and we seem to be closer together. What I would offer to that member: if we want to have a fulsome conversation and debate, I’d be more than happy to talk to you, and maybe we can invite the Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview and he can help as a translator between us. Again, with this bill, I feel strongly that it’s going to help move things forward, and I honestly believe that it’s a good bill.

Member Loyola: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. As you see here, I am contributing to a debate, to a proposed piece of legislation, not attacking anybody personally, right? The members

from the other side always have to bring in personal jabs, and it just demonstrates that – you know, they claim that they’re trying to increase the level of decorum inside of this House, but I’m not going to fall to their level. I’m choosing to focus on the proposed piece of legislation before us.

Again, I agree. We may have different approaches to getting towards where we need to be, but of course I believe and I’m sure that the member on the other side of the House believes that, at the end of the day, we should be listening to the stakeholders. Here we have a direct example of how the minister reached out to particular stakeholders. Those stakeholders actually gave the minister feedback, and what they were requesting – again, I’ll read the quote: “The criteria used to evaluate capital projects should be . . . defined, consistent, and in alignment with regional and municipal planning.” Yet the minister has not chosen to actually honour the feedback that was actually being provided by stakeholders, and this is what I’m getting at. So far be it from me to lob personal insults across the aisle, Madam Speaker. I won’t do that because I’m not a back biter. I’m calling on the minister to actually focus on the feedback that he’s getting from stakeholders in his own consultation and what he then therefore published within the documents released after said consultation.

Now, getting back to the electoral riding of Edmonton-Ellerslie and the projects in my particular riding that I’ve been bringing forward to the House, the minister knows, because he’s had an opportunity to actually visit Ivor Dent sports park, again, which is the – it’s actually sectioned off. There are a number of sports fields, soccer fields where PUSHA actually holds soccer tournaments. They also hold cricket tournaments, and I have to say, Madam Speaker – I don’t know if you’ve ever had the opportunity to watch a cricket game, but, oh, my goodness, they’re pretty exciting. They’re pretty exciting. And I have to admit, like, I’m new to cricket because, of course, I’m a big soccer fan, but let me tell you that constituents in my particular riding happen to love cricket, so I made the effort of learning all the different rules and actually took in some of the games of the World Cup of cricket, specifically Pakistan against Australia. It was a phenomenal game. [interjection] I digress, but I’ll give an opportunity to the hon. member to interject.

Mr. Turton: Yes. Thank you very much to the hon. member for allowing me to intervene real quick. Just for the record I will say, actually, that when I’m not sitting in the Legislature in the summer, I probably spend a couple of days a week at that Ivor Dent soccer field with my son’s soccer team. We play high-level soccer there, and I can attest that it is truly one of the best soccer facilities and field facilities in the entire Edmonton area. I know it very, very well. My son’s team has been beat many times on that pitch, but it’s good times.

Back to the bill, I just want to speak real briefly about some of the tools that exist for municipalities to talk with other municipalities. I know the member talked about that maybe there weren’t some tools there. Under the ICF program, the intermunicipal collaboration framework, there already is an opportunity for municipalities to collaborate with other municipalities as they’re required under the MGA to be able to come up with agreements regarding library services, fire services, cost-sharing agreements: for a whole host of different services. The ability for municipalities to work with other ones on facilities currently already exists.

Member Loyola: Thank you very much, hon. member. I’m sure that your son is going to have some wins in the very near future, perhaps next summer, when, you know, all the snow and ice melts away and they have the opportunity to get back on those fields once again.

Another one that I’d like to mention to the minister, because, you know, they’ve been coming to me ever since, and I’m sure that they’ve been coming to all of the representatives of Edmonton-Ellerslie, is the Edmonton Scottish Society. Now, when I was first elected, the Edmonton Scottish Society had big plans to also build, well, first of all, a clubhouse, but along with the clubhouse would be an indoor soccer centre. They were really focused on building a world-class indoor soccer centre so that they could attract international players and leagues to actually come and play here. Everybody knows because we had the Speaker of the House mention the Canada-Mexico soccer game that took place on Tuesday night and the fact that Canada won. This is fantastic. Here is a great example of an infrastructure spend that has a great rate of return if you’re looking at it from the perspective of externalities – right? – which we like to talk about on this side of the House.

Now, of course, when you invest in an indoor soccer field and you’re creating spaces for the community to come together where you have young people that – and I’ll be honest with you, Madam Speaker. I’ve heard it. It’s not only in my opinion but opinions that I’ve heard from other constituents, particularly Mr. Ricardo Casanova, who’s very engaged in YEG Soccer and promoting soccer here in the city of Edmonton, that it tends to be that children of lower economic status – soccer is the best sport for them to participate in. I remember doing it. I remember being that kid. I remember asking my parents: “Hey. I want to play hockey like all of the other kids in school.” And they were just like: “I’m sorry, son. We can’t afford it. We can’t afford to buy all of the pads.”

The Deputy Speaker: Any other members wishing to join the debate on the hoist amendment? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

Mr. Feehan: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I have had an opportunity to speak to this bill a little bit in a prior session and have expressed my concern that this is one of the bills that mystifies me about what they hope to achieve at the end. You know, certainly things I can agree with. I read through section 4, for example, and see many things in there which I fully support, but in many ways this bill is simply a codification of routine practices, things that could easily have been done in regulation. I’m not sure that a bill was required unless the minister himself feels there needs to be some kind of core set of rules in the absence of internal integrity in the department.

You know, I guess I want to support this, but I am here again finding myself wanting to add to the bill. I know that members opposite have stood up a number of times in the House and apparently bragged about how many pieces of legislation they’ve passed since they’ve been in government. My response is: of course you can if you don’t put anything in any of them. It’s easy to write them and easy to pass them. If you actually stop and create a fulsome bill that actually achieves something new in legislation, it takes some time. The debates are therefore much richer. I certainly would love to be in this House debating about richer content, more depth, but I’m not. Passing a bunch of vacuous bills is nothing to be proud of. Instead, I’d like to see some things that have some real substance to them.

11:40

I have mentioned things that I don’t think are in the bill. I mean, you know, section 4 is the part that pleases me the most, and I’d certainly like to see some of that move forward. I support many of the ideas, for example, that this project will actually help “to decrease risks to the health and safety or security of Albertans.” I

am very glad that's first and foremost. You know, congratulations. I see that as a priority as well and will be happy to see that happen.

[Mr. Hanson in the chair]

Of course, it makes sense in 4(b) that the bill is intended to assess "the extent to which the project or program aligns with the government's strategic objectives." You know, that kind of makes sense. You shouldn't be doing stuff that you don't intend to do and so on. I'm not sure again why that necessarily needs to be in a bill. It should be part of practice and internal to the ministry itself. I'm not sure it needs to be debated here, but I guess that if the minister feels like that won't happen without the force of legislation, then I would want to support that. And so on. I mean, I could read them all, but I certainly like a number of things.

I do, you know, appreciate section (f), for example, which gives some sort of omnibus situations under which the minister should consider things like enhancing resiliency, protecting communities against natural disasters, and so on. Given what's happening in British Columbia right now, I certainly would support an extensive review of our infrastructure bills with an eye to natural disasters. Unfortunately, I think many of the climatologists are telling us that while we do not confuse weather and climate, we can say from the changes in our climate, in our fast, headlong rush into having too much carbon in the atmosphere, that we will likely have an increased number of significant environmental disaster events. Therefore, I actually really appreciate that the minister is saying that that should be one of our considerations as we're moving forward.

Unfortunately, we've seen some horrible disasters here in Alberta as well: the floods in Calgary, the Fort McMurray fire, the Slave Lake fire, and, of course, many other things I could go on and mention. Those are some big ones that stick in my mind right now. Of course, now we're looking at British Columbia, where the very same communities that were on fire are, four months later, totally flooded out and evacuated.

So I would love to see more of that. In fact, that's an area, a section, that I would have loved to have seen four or five pages on and how those kinds of things will be assessed and how they'll move forward. Perhaps the minister would just suggest to me that that will be found in regulation, but my argument is that you sort of are writing regulation into the legislation already, so why didn't you just continue and give us the full range of considerations?

I do appreciate, for example, that the minister is talking about enhancing community culture and heritage and just generally helping local and community initiatives to grow. These are all areas that I think are things that are important. The one that I wanted to mention and skipped was "providing a remote community with core infrastructure." I certainly as the critic for Indigenous Relations welcome that, and I would love to see more about how that will be done, how you will assess.

One of the issues – and I'm going to talk about this in two different ways as we move forward – is that many of the rural municipalities are struggling with the fact that while an infrastructure piece is extremely critical to them, there is no way it will ever on a calculation serve as many people as a large municipality piece of infrastructure will do. A bridge built in Edmonton or Calgary, for example, will certainly have thousands of users on any particular day whereas a bridge in Little Red River across to Fox Lake reserve, for example, will only serve at best hundreds in a day and actually is probably more critically important for that community than yet another bridge in Edmonton or Calgary. I appreciate that the intention is there in terms of helping remote communities, but, you know, now I'm full of questions about criteria, about how we will do that, how we will make sure

that the size differential between various municipalities is not continuously undermining the potential success of rural and remote communities.

As other speakers have mentioned, there really doesn't seem to be a reference to the government infrastructure priority plans of municipalities, that they are required to fill out every year. There doesn't seem to be a reference here that that must be considered in the decision-making. Again, it just makes me a little bit nervous about how the decisions will be made. I guess, you know, in the end, some of these things we'll find in regulation. But this is the point of why we don't want this bill to proceed at this time. Just too much is unknown. We seem to be laying down a small procedural piece without any substantive clarity and direction for people involved.

I want to give an example of another area that I'm very concerned about, and that is that there's no mention here about procurement policies when infrastructure is being built. As I mentioned, with small communities always being secondary to big communities, the same thing is true for small industries often being secondary to big industries. I had a recent example of a situation where a smaller company made a bid on a piece of infrastructure by one of the departments. It was not this particular minister's department. Upon my investigation I was redirected to three other departments but eventually had a very helpful, by the way, aide in environment walk me through the procedures and so on. So I'd like to thank the minister for that.

The situation was that a small company made a bid on a project, and a big company made a bid on the same project, and even though the smaller company's bid was lower than the big company's, the project went to the big company. I said: what was that about? You know, if the situation is such that it's always structurally advantageous to give it to a big company because, of course, they have more examples of having done this kind of work in the past or they had more relationship with the ministry and therefore have more understanding of the intent of the ministry and so on, then we're going to be in a situation where small companies in rural Alberta are not going to be able to compete on projects in their own area against massive companies that are based in Edmonton and Calgary.

The problem in this particular case was in the way that the point system had been assigned. Even though the smaller company had bid on the project at a lower rate, the amount of points for having a lower cost was so small that it didn't counteract the fact that the big company had other advantages. That will be always true. In every situation it will be true, and that's the concern. So I wonder about the notion of putting something in this kind of legislation to talk about procurement, to say that companies will be evaluated partly on the advantage of having more diversity in our workforce and in the companies that receive government contracts in order to do these things so that we don't have it all slowly narrowing down to a single large company.

One of the things that I was informed about in this particular case, that I was talking about, was that the smaller company wasn't able to demonstrate that they had built that exact type of facility in the last five years. Well, if that's a criteria, then eventually no company except for the last one that was successful will be able to demonstrate they've done something in the last five years. If they were the last ones to do it and there hasn't been another project of that exact same nature in the last five years, only one company can meet that criteria. It just is very frustrating when we don't think about these things and so on.

[The Speaker in the chair]

11:50

I must say that I did have some very reasonable conversations with someone in the ministry about this just trying to express my concern and purposely bringing it forward, not because I wanted it to become a big challenge in the House and cause a fight between us but because I actually cared about the small companies in the small rural areas getting contracts. If we have structural barriers that prohibit them from getting contracts, we are going to see those companies start to fail. We're going to end up in a situation where we have three companies doing all the infrastructure in Alberta and none of them based in rural Alberta. That's something I just can't find acceptable.

I would have loved to have seen something in here that said that if you have a project in a rural community, some consideration that the project actually be built by a company based in that community or in a closer community or in some other rural community would enhance that, perhaps even a procurement policy that talked about requiring some employment or enhancement of the community in which the project is built so that if you do decide to build a bridge in northern Alberta, how many northern Albertans are you actually employing to build that bridge? I would love to see something along those lines.

I realize you can't, you know, be rigid on this and always guarantee a certain number of jobs for the local community. I get that. But because this is just a list of intentions or considerations, could there not have been a consideration for that kind of geographical procurement policy? Support of small and growing companies versus big companies: those kinds of things are of concern. Last time I talked about other concerns like while this list in section 4 is good – and I appreciate it – I think I would like to see more.

I would like to end my time with this and certainly look forward to further conversations with the minister.

The Speaker: Hon. members, on amendment HA1, are there others? Seeing none, I am prepared to put the question.

[The voice vote indicated that the motion on amendment HA1 lost]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 11:52 a.m.]

[One minute having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

[The Speaker in the chair]

For the motion:

Dach	Gray	Loyola
Eggen	Hoffman	Shepherd
Feehan		

Against the motion:

Allard	Lovely	Schweitzer
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Armstrong-Homeniuk	Luan	Shandro
Ellis	Nixon, Jason	Sigurdson, R.J.
Fir	Nixon, Jeremy	Singh
Getson	Orr	Smith
Guthrie	Panda	Stephan
Hanson	Rowswell	Turton
Hunter	Rutherford	Walker
Issik	Sawhney	Williams
LaGrange	Schow	Yao
Totals:	For – 7	Against – 30

[Motion on amendment HA1 lost]

The Speaker: Hon. members, pursuant to Standing Order 25(2) all other questions must now be put.

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

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 11:57 a.m.]

[One minute having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

[The Speaker in the chair]

For the motion:

Allard	Lovely	Schweitzer
Armstrong-Homeniuk	Luan	Shandro
Ellis	Nixon, Jason	Sigurdson, R.J.
Fir	Nixon, Jeremy	Singh
Getson	Orr	Smith
Guthrie	Panda	Stephan
Hanson	Rowswell	Turton
Hunter	Rutherford	Walker
Issik	Sawhney	Williams
LaGrange	Schow	Yao

12:00

Against the motion:

Dach	Gray	Loyola
Eggen	Hoffman	Shepherd
Feehan		

Totals:	For – 30	Against – 7
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[Motion carried; Bill 73 read a second time]

The Speaker: Pursuant to Standing Order 4(1) the House stands adjourned until 1:30 p.m.

[The Assembly adjourned at 12:01 p.m.]

Table of Contents

Prayers	6261
Orders of the Day	6261
Government Bills and Orders	
Second Reading	
Bill 82 Mineral Resource Development Act	6261
Bill 83 Environmental Protection and Enhancement Amendment Act, 2021	6268
Bill 73 Infrastructure Accountability Act	6274
Division	6280
Division	6280

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