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The 30th Legislature
Second Session

Alberta Hansard

Monday evening, November 22, 2021

Day 129

The Honourable Nathan M. Cooper, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta The 30th Legislature

Second Session

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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

7:30 p.m.

Monday, November 22, 2021

[The Speaker in the chair]

The Speaker: Please be seated.

Government Bills and Orders Second Reading

Bill 78

Alberta Housing Amendment Act, 2021

[Adjourned debate November 17: Mr. Carson]

The Speaker: Hon. members, is there anyone wishing to join in the debate?

Mr. Shandro: Question.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I know the minister of labour is eager to get to a vote, but we'll ensure that democracy is alive and well on this side of the House.

Mr. Speaker, it's my pleasure to rise and speak to Bill 78, the Alberta Housing Amendment Act, 2021. You know, it's probably no secret to members in this Chamber the issue that the NDP Official Opposition have with this bill, the fact that you have a government who talks and talks and talks about investing in housing but does nothing to invest in housing. This bill is another example of that.

Now, I will maybe give a one-handed applaud to the government for injecting some new dollars into emergency supports, but that still doesn't help solve the challenge that our communities are facing across this province of permanent affordable housing and the fact that COVID has exacerbated the challenges that Albertans are facing. In fact, more people – I don't have the stat in front of me, but I know that the number of people that are houseless and homeless has increased over the past two years. This government's bill, despite the fact that members of the government will talk about how this is going to solve the problem – this is it. Privatize a bunch of affordable housing units that already exist, and somehow there'll be a runoff of spaces that aren't used in the existing stock, that will move forward and flow through to the next stock, that'll then continue to flow through and flow through. I listened to members opposite last week try to make this argument, which made absolutely no sense to me. The fact of the matter is that if there isn't an injection of new investment, there's not going to be new stock becoming available.

I appreciate the fact that the Member for Lac Ste. Anne-Parkland brought up the point of mixed housing. I agree. I absolutely agree that there should be mixed housing. In fact, I'll give the members of the Chamber, because most do not represent the city of Edmonton proper, the history of the city of Edmonton. It's had its challenges. Go back about 50 years, maybe 60 years, Mr. Speaker, maybe a little longer than that, actually. The bulk of the affordable housing stock or units that are available in the city of Edmonton all exist on the east side of the city. Now, I represent the northeast side. We have the second-highest number of affordable and supportive housing units in the city. We're only surpassed, believe it or not, by Mill Woods, also on the east side of the city. Do you want to know the story behind that?

Back in the day, before there were wards, councillors were elected like in some municipalities to this day, where they elect, let's just say, 13 or 12 councillors and a mayor. There's no jurisdiction carve up, right? It's just whoever gets the most votes. The top 12: you become a councillor. Okay. Edmonton used to do that as well. What had happened was that the majority of councillors, term after term, lived on the west side of the city, and every time council debated, "Where should we put new affordable housing units? We'll put it on the east side," there was a significant case of NIMBYism. People didn't want it in their own communities. So the east side of the city grew a significant stock of affordable housing.

Now, of course, there's a recognition that with affordable housing units or low-income and supportive housing, supports also need to be there, so agencies went to the east side of the city and set up shop, which makes sense because that's where their clients are, and the supports need to be there. The challenge is that when, you know, the municipality or governments look at, "Where can we put in more affordable housing stock?" the default continues to this day to be on the east side.

I mean, listen, I'm a big fan of mixed housing and not just creating these areas that only have affordable housing stock or low-income stock of housing. They need to be mixed throughout the communities, right? But not every community has – I don't know if folks remember the issue of Terwilligar. The fact was that there was a community that actually resisted getting affordable housing units in their community and successfully pushed it back, which, I can tell you, was frustrating for the residents of Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview, who said, "Listen, we welcome the fact that we want to help and that we want mixed neighbourhoods, but if you look on a map" – and I can share it with members. The community looked at the inventory, and it's predominantly within my constituency and Edmonton-Mill Woods. They said: you know, if we want people to be successful, we need to have mixed neighbourhoods throughout this city, not just in concentrated areas, because we don't think that sets people up for success.

You know, I'm a big fan of affordable housing. We know that there is a massive shortage of units. We know that municipalities have been speaking out about this for a number of years. I'll remind members that when we were government, we made a commitment to a significant number of new units. We injected new dollars into creating affordable housing spaces because, again, without government support and injection of dollars it's not going to happen. The challenge I have with the current bill, Mr. Speaker, is that there isn't an injection. There isn't a commitment of new dollars. There's a repurposing of existing units. I fail to see how that's going to create new inventory to be able to house more people. That's the challenge.

I know for a fact that the Member for Calgary-Klein, I believe it is – his family has created and worked for the Mustard Seed since its inception, unless I'm incorrect on that, so I know for a fact that that's an important issue for that member. I appreciate that and the work that they've done to support people living in poverty, to help them, right? It's not a handout; it's a hand up, helping them and giving them the tools they need to change their own situations.

We know that people need a safe place to live. They need a safe home. I know my colleagues on this side of the House have referred to housing as a fundamental human right, that people deserve to have a home, not just a shelter but a permanent dwelling where they can feel safe. I mean, again, I think most members would agree with this, but it goes back to Maslow's hierarchy of needs. Shelter is one of the critical needs before we can start addressing other challenges or barriers that many Albertans are facing. In fact, again I would argue that COVID has exacerbated the number of mental health

challenges that people are facing from isolation and loneliness to the whole gamut, Mr. Speaker.

7:40

You know, my wish in this bill is that there would be, beyond a commitment to changing hands of who controls the existing stock of housing, an injection of new dollars. Now, when I started off, Mr. Speaker, I did give an acknowledgement that there was an announcement for emergency shelters, mats, but we all know that that's a temporary, Band-Aid solution. That's not addressing the root cause of houselessness and homelessness. It's evident, I think, to Albertans watching at home who are following this debate why the Official Opposition struggles to support a bill that's not addressing the root causes.

We also know that over the past two years the cancellation of safe injection sites over the province has led to a significant number of deaths, preventable deaths. I appreciate the fact that there's an ideological divide between that side of the House and this side of the House on safe injection sites, but the facts can't be disputed. They save lives. Fewer people died when they existed than today, where they're shut down. Now, I get that for whatever reason – and I'm not going to argue, whether it's on religious grounds or other reasons, why members on the other side of the House can't support them, but the frustration is that they save lives. I believe that we are all elected to this place to do everything within our power to actually improve the lives of the men and women who we represent, and I mean collectively, the province of Alberta, not just our constituents. We all have a responsibility to every single man, woman, and child in this province, so it's disappointing.

Now, you know, even if members on the government side get up and argue in favour of this bill, I don't understand how members can support a bill that doesn't add new inventory whatsoever. This bill doesn't actually require any of the money the government makes from selling affordable housing to go toward building new affordable housing units.

An Hon. Member: Shame.

Mr. Bilous: It is shameful. It's actually ridiculous. You're going to sell off stock and then take that and put it into general revenue or a slush fund or whatever you decide to spend it on. It's absolutely ridiculous.

One of the other challenges with this bill is that any of the units that do get sold off: there's no requirement in this legislation whatsoever that the housing remain affordable for any period of time. Let me give an example. The government sells off housing units that they have. Maybe it's a facility with 30 affordable housing units. Because there's no specification, every year the new owners, landlords could convert the affordable housing and decide to charge market rate. So year over year we're depleting the stock of affordable housing units. This bill doesn't just fail to create new units or spaces; it actually provides a pathway for the private sector to remove affordable housing units and take them off the market. I would love for someone in Committee of the Whole to argue how that is creating new spaces. Now, you want to talk about fuzzy math? Your math is so fuzzy, you can't even see the difference between black and white. How is it that it fails to create new units and it takes units off the market yet this is good for people of Alberta who are houseless or homeless at a time when we are seeing record levels of poverty in our province, cuts to AISH?

Hon. members, I will not support this bill.

The Speaker: Hon. members, are there others? The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View has the call.

Ms Ganley: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise and speak to Bill 78. Like my hon. colleague before me, I will not be supporting this bill. You know, this bill is bad. It is a bad bill. Worse than this bill is the sales job the minister has been trying to do with this bill. It is absolutely absurd. It completely ignores every fact, I would argue, wilfully so.

You know, this bill does nothing to increase affordable housing. The UCP plan does nothing to increase affordable housing. It sells off affordable housing with no requirement to use that money to build new units, no requirement to invest it in affordable housing anyway, and no requirement to create new units. This bill does none of the things the UCP want to suggest that it does.

A lot of my colleagues on this side of the House have stories, really moving stories, of what it was that drove them into politics. You know, there were a lot of issues that brought me here, but honestly, at the end of the day, one of the things that drove me most deeply to go into politics was just a deep and persistent dislike of truly bad arguments. The arguments that the minister has made in support of this bill are some of the worst I have ever seen.

I think we should start by talking about the issue of money. The UCP says: oh, well, this is going to save money. Well, I mean, I'm sure it will save the government some money to cut affordable housing, to take that away from people, but let's begin with the fact that people have a right to be housed and that the government has an obligation to provide them with housing. If you don't like that argument, let us move on to another argument, which is that this bill will cost the taxpayer money at the end of the day because it will cost them money in the justice system. This bill will put more people into homelessness. Ultimately, we know that housing people in affordable housing is significantly more cost-effective than housing them in jail, which is frequently the alternative. Ultimately, that starts people down a path that it is incredibly difficult to recover from.

We start by a government, like this government, cutting funds and throwing people out on the street. Then those people are living on the street. Potentially they're issued tickets for camping in the wrong place or loitering in the wrong place, which is, really, just being where you're not supposed to be, but if you have no home to go to, where else are you going to be? Eventually this can lead to individuals going to jail.

Now, part of that was solved by our government. One of the things I'm proudest of that we did while we were in government is that we changed it so that those sorts of tickets didn't land you in jail. But in a lot of instances these things will escalate, and then people do end up in jail. Then they meet other people who we don't necessarily want them to meet, learn other skills we don't necessarily want them to learn, and they get caught in this vicious cycle. They've been arrested, and potentially they have a criminal record, and then they can't get a job, so they can never get out of the cycle. This costs an enormous amount of money. Using the justice system as the instrument to solve homelessness is the least cost-effective way that you can address this. This bill will not only violate the fundamental rights of Albertans who have a right to that housing; in the long term it will cost all of us more.

7:50

Those are the reasons that it is incredibly bad. We've been having a dispute in this place over this bill, and we're having a dispute about the facts. Having a dispute about the facts is probably one of the most useless wastes of time in history, but since the UCP like to make up their own facts, that is the conversation we're having. I will quote, Mr. Speaker, directly from the bill because I think we should be dealing with facts and not the minister's talking points.

In section 2 they amend to add a definition, and the definition is a definition of “affordable housing accommodation.” It means “housing accommodation designated by the Minister as an affordable housing accommodation under section 31.1(1).” What does that say?

Designation of affordable housing.

Subject to subsections (2) and (3), the Minister may designate a housing accommodation as an affordable housing accommodation if the Minister is of the opinion that in the circumstances the housing accommodation is suitable for designation as an affordable housing accommodation.

What that is is basically a definition, Mr. Speaker, that says that the minister may designate whatever she likes as affordable housing, and she’ll just call it that. I have no doubt that the minister will go about designating things as affordable housing, not changing the costs, not making them actually affordable in any sort of a real way but designating them, and then congratulating herself for having created affordable housing. But that’s absurd because nothing has changed. It still costs the same. People still can’t afford to live there. The fact that we’re calling it designated affordable housing is of no help to anyone, and what’s so sort of deeply problematic about the conversation we’re having around this bill is that there is an attempt by the minister to sell it as something good. They can’t even admit what they’re doing. That’s the first piece of factual information.

The second is that this comes with a plan, and it comes with a plan to invest \$238 million over three years, and the UCP are relying on the fact that very large numbers like that are difficult to comprehend. We don’t use them every day in our daily lives, so people hear them and think: “So \$238 million. That sounds pretty big, doesn’t it?” Well, compare that to the NDP plan, which invested \$1.2 billion. [interjection] It is a lot. It’s also significantly more than \$238 million, in fact, roughly a billion dollars more, so that’s a pretty big deal. That’s a pretty big difference. The argument we’re having in here where the minister stands up and says that this will make more housing and that this will be delightful: I mean, it’s absurd. They’re literally using magical thinking to try and conjure up affordable housing out of nowhere. They have literally created a recursive definition that will allow them to just designate whatever they want and call it affordable housing and then say that they have more affordable housing even though the cost of the housing has changed not at all.

In addition, Mr. Speaker, we’ve got a 24 per cent cut in the rental supplement that happened in the ’19-20 budget under this UCP government. That forced a lot of people into homelessness. In fact, arguably, by the fact that they have created sort of a larger problem, their investment ought to be larger, not smaller, and it is smaller, much smaller, like, a little more than a sixth. One-sixth.

In addition, in one of their first budgets they cut \$53 million from maintenance over three years. Maintenance of affordable housing is incredibly important. Maintenance of anything is important because if you don’t maintain your assets, they deteriorate over time, so actually it is a bigger waste of money. Cutting maintenance is sort of the worst way to try to fudge the numbers, which is something this UCP is absolutely expert at. I mean, I certainly remember the time they moved the date of AISH payments, throwing people into chaos, causing untold stress and bounced cheque fees and just difficulty in the lives of people who were already incredibly marginalized, just so that they could push that one last payment out into the next fiscal year so that they only had 11 payments that year and could pretend that they were wise fiscal managers.

Mr. Speaker, this has been incredibly problematic. There’s a building in my riding, in Bridgeland. Now, it’s a Calgary Housing

building, so I’m not saying that it’s directly this particular cut. The point is that people have lived there for years – one of my best volunteers has lived in that building for her entire life – and the building will close. It’s good that it’s closing because it was falling apart. There were frequent problems with water, with heat, with bugs, with infestations. I mean, it needs to be closed down. What happens when you don’t maintain your affordable housing stock is that you lose buildings, and people are displaced, and it affects their lives. It affects their lives significantly.

Mr. Speaker, I have a lot of problems with this bill. I think that what it does . . . [interjection] Oh, sorry.

Mr. Neudorf: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for giving way. I do understand what she has shared and the member previous, that we do have different approaches to this situation. Rather than trying to be undermining that argument, what I would prefer is – coming from a construction background, there are limited applications where P3 models, private-public partnerships, can be utilized in a way to help address this problem. This is one where I do feel that the public dollars help attract the private dollars investment. That partnership creates that leverage and that incentive. Rather than getting into too many details, I just would ask if the member would share her thoughts on P3s, private-public partnerships, as it relates to this situation and if there’s any positive that she could draw from that conversation.

Ms Ganley: Thank you, and thank you very much to the member. That’s actually a really important point that I hadn’t hit on yet. Actually, I was sort of favourably inclined towards P3s before I got into government, and then I saw how the contracts are structured and how they work out in practical terms. The issue is that all these sorts of – normally in the private sector what happens is that the potential for profit and the risk of loss run together. That’s not what happens in P3s. We didn’t sign a lot of these. They all sort of hearken back to the Conservative government before us. For some reason the risk of loss always falls to the taxpayers, and the hope of profit always goes to the company. I mean, it’s problematic because it leaves the taxpayer on the hook in circumstances where they probably shouldn’t be. You know, there were a number of schools here in Edmonton with fields that were sinking. This happens a lot. I mean, they do tend to proceed a little faster, so that is, I guess, one benefit that they do tend to have.

With affordable housing, even if you argued that they would be less expensive, which overall they don’t wind up being, I think that in decreasing that investment from \$1.2 billion to \$238 million, you’re still going to create fewer units. There’s no way you’re going to see the same number of units created, no matter who builds them, with sort of one-sixth of the money. I think that will continue to be problematic. I think at the end of the day it’s one of these things where it costs money now to save money later, but affordable housing is one of the best investments you can make because it gives people a safe place to live and an opportunity to live their lives and be contributing members of society and to give back, which is, really, what I think everyone wants to do. I know that sometimes people have this view that a lot of people are trying to game the system, but that hasn’t been my experience. My experience has been that people wind up in unfortunate situations. [interjection] Oh, sorry.

Mr. Neudorf: Thank you, Member, for giving way again, through the Speaker to you. I do understand that risk and reward situation that you laid out and do agree with that. Coming, again, from the construction side, what happens on a single-time contract: all of that risk plus potential risk is put into that bid price, so you actually pay

more for that possibility than you would in a P3 model, where that is spread over time and it's a much lower increment. I do have a different opinion on that, but I do appreciate that that cost is borne.

8:00

I do hope that the member would see that there is that leverage ability to take a smaller investment when any government is not faced with only a single objective. They're faced with multiple objectives. Trying to balance a budget, trying to address homelessness: there are two tensions there, and maybe we're at a different spot on that spectrum. But I do appreciate the argument and the member's continued debate on this bill.

Ms Ganley: Oh. I thought that hand was for me. Okay.

Yeah. I appreciate that, and that makes sense, that it would go into the – I guess my concern is that, from a public communication perspective, what the public understands they're being sold is a cheaper project. But, really, it's only cheaper because they're taking on that additional risk, so it's not really actually cheaper, and they're never sort of given a side-by-side comparison of what a public build versus a private build would look like. It sort of pens in subsequent governments, right? Sure, you save the money on the potential of the risk actualizing in that year in that budget line. The problem is that in a subsequent year, when the risk materializes, which it seems to often do in these P3s, like, disproportionately in my estimation, then in that year the government has even less money than they had previously planned to have, and it has an even bigger impact on those individuals. I mean, perhaps I just sort of trend in the direction of certainty. I feel like when we're talking to the public about what we're giving them, greater certainty is better.

But, at the end of the day, better still than greater certainty or lesser certainty is more investment in affordable housing, because it does lift people out of a potential future and puts them on another track, and it does demonstrably – education, housing, mental health supports demonstrably save money. They save money in terms of corrections, they save money in terms of policing, and they save money in terms of the judicial system. They often actually save money, too, in terms of emergency room usage for health because people who are stably housed are able to seek out primary care, and primary care is always less expensive than acute care.

The problem is that when people aren't housed, it's more difficult for them to get places and to get places on time and to have some place to put down where their appointment is, so they're not able to access those primary care services the way a normal person would, or they're more prone to get infections that land them in the hospital, and that's problematic. It's more cost inefficient over time.

I think affordable housing is one of the best investments we can make. I think that our government was really committed to making it, and I wish – I wish – that we could have agreed, on both sides of the House, about the importance of it so it could be carried forward. I wish that we could have carried on with that investment because I think it would make the lives of many individuals better, and that makes the lives of all of us collectively better. Yeah. I can't honestly think of a better investment.

Mr. Speaker, I don't think this bill does anything to increase affordable housing. I'm troubled that the government is trying to sell it as that because I do not think that that is an accurate representation, and I believe that we here in this place have an obligation to represent the facts accurately when we are communicating. I won't say more than that for fear of stepping over some lines. But I certainly hope that this government will reconsider.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Are there others? I see the hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek, followed by Edmonton-Manning, if that's all right.

Mr. Gotfried: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Thanks for the opportunity to speak to this bill. Throughout the last couple of weeks I've spent many hours on the phone, face down, as it were, with my constituents, and many of them have shared their concerns about many issues. One of them, of course, is our affordable housing system. Quite honestly, I'm concerned, and I've shared that concern and knowledge for many, many years as I worked for over a dozen years in the home-building industry. For this reason, I'm really very, very pleased to see this bill being tabled. It's been a long time coming. We've needed to actually move forward with respect to our approach to affordable housing in Alberta, so when I saw Bill 78, the Alberta Housing Amendment Act, 2021, come forward, I was particularly pleased.

Mr. Speaker, the housing continuum is something that I've actually spent much of my career looking at, and it is a continuum and must be viewed as a continuum. It starts out as shelters for the homeless. Then we move into social housing with supports to help people transition from homelessness. Then we go to below-market rentals, including those receiving rent subsidies, which is well addressed in this bill as well. Then we move to near-market rentals, which has been a part of that mix for a number of years as well, then on to market rentals, equally important as well, then assisted home ownership, and finally, market ownership.

Mr. Speaker, across all sectors of the housing continuum, the key, first, really is investment, then innovation, and third, helping people to move through that continuum, not always focusing on building the silos bigger and bigger and bigger, thinking we're going to solve the problem, but to shrink the distances between the different levels of the housing continuum to allow them to actually move towards a greater degree of housing independence and, in many cases, help them in their employment opportunities and also create, I think, healthier communities at the same time. If we unsilo the system, I think it's better. I think we spend, again, too much time focusing on "We need more here, and we need more here, and we need more here" when, in fact, we should find ways to shrink the distance for people to move from one stage to the next, right from the shelter housing into those with supports, into market rentals. But what we actually want is for people to achieve housing independence.

I feel very much blessed to have been a part of that for many years of my career. I'd like to do a shout-out here to many of the home builders that have demonstrated not only that – to do well, they must also do good, and we have many examples. I was again blessed to work for a company that very, very much believed, in fact, one of the first builders in Calgary to say that affordable housing was very much a part of their corporate model and to invest in it and to invest money and time and to do so not only through their operations but through their charitable foundations as well. We've seen that these companies often stand tall. In fact, I think we should spend more time to bring forth those companies as champions of affordable housing and, of course, for their overall philanthropic efforts in our communities.

I'll reference some things here like the Resolve Campaign in Calgary. I don't have the numbers in front of me, but they created a huge number of partnerships with the not-for-profit sector not only in affordable housing but in affordable housing with supports. We see in the charitable divisions of many in the development and home-building sector through Build Alberta, BILD Calgary, building and development home builder associations across this province who have a focus or have at least a division or a foundation there. I've noticed that and witnessed that. In fact, I was the secretary for the Calgary Home Builders Foundation in Calgary for

a number of years, where we built hundreds of units in partnership with the not-for-profit, Horizon Housing being one of them, and with many other providers in the not-for-profit housing sector. Those are the types of innovators and partnerships that we seek, the public- and private- and not-for-profit sector partnerships, which can ebb and flow in terms of how much participation of each of those sectors actually makes this work.

This bill allows that. It allows that kind of participation from the three sectors that I think can be key in providing the greatest amount of support for vulnerable Albertans particularly but all Albertans. In fact, you know, we talk about affordable housing a lot. It's an essential part of what we do in this province to ensure we take care of our vulnerable, but I flip it most of the time and talk about housing affordability. That is true, again, through that entire continuum, that we have housing affordability – availability, affordability, accessibility – for all, and in doing so, Mr. Speaker, that's how we can address the problem.

You know what? I did a lot of work on what I call workforce housing, and that's a big problem in this province. Remember back to those boom times, and I hope we get back there at some point in time. But one of the biggest problems, one of the biggest challenges – and I still have a cut-out from the Calgary *Sun*. It was some firefighters from Manitoba who had moved to Alberta, and they were tired of couch surfing and living in people's basements, and they were going to move back because we did not have enough supply of workforce housing affordability at that time.

8:10

I believe, Mr. Speaker, that this brings us toward a point where we actually should be more focused in creating housing affordability across the spectrum as a very significant and a central pillar in that Alberta advantage that I often like to talk about. That includes those that are vulnerable but also the working poor and the workforces that we need to run our society, that our learned members opposite here often speak about, the workforce housing, the union members that need to come here, that run our societies, that are essential workers, our public-sector workers, to ensure they have affordability: the firemen, the policemen, the nurses, the health care workers, the seniors' care workers that need to have that housing affordability. They may be well employed, they may have stable employment, they may even have had some savings over a period of time, and it's incumbent upon us to support them.

Mr. Speaker, you know, when I hear talk from the other side about these partnerships and how these are going to take away housing stock, I mean, I reflect back, and I remember – it was when I was very first elected – noting that the then Minister of Seniors and Housing showed up at a project that I had been involved with for affordable housing, which was a partnership with a private-sector company that I happened to work for prior to that. I was there because I was involved with the project to make that happen, to innovate, to make sure we could move forward with the partnerships we created there.

Mr. Speaker, that wasn't just affordable housing; that was accessible housing. It was affordable, accessible housing, with all the builds in there done by a private-sector partner to ensure that we could meet the demand of those people. There was an incredible shortage of accessible housing in Calgary, and that accessible housing helped people, many of whom were well employed, that could pay rents. These were below-market rents that were done through a partnership, at that time a small injection of capital, which allowed that builder to build a certain number of units and move ahead with that.

Mr. Speaker, some people may know here that I was involved with an attainable home ownership program, in fact, the first one in Calgary that was launched, not the first in Alberta. In fact, the seed for that came from a group in Medicine Hat. I was quite embarrassed, actually, in Calgary during the boom times. We found out that at that time I think it was a couple of hundred housing units, townhomes, had been built for attainable home ownership in Medicine Hat, and I asked – it was National Housing Day, today, going back to 2006, actually. I said: how many in Calgary have we built so far? The answer from CMHC at the time was zero, and I was embarrassed.

You know what, Mr. Speaker? The private sector: we stepped forward, and we invested about 18 months to create Calgary's first attainable home ownership program at that time. I'm proud of having done that. I think that to date they've put over 175 people into ownership. You know what? These were people that were struggling to pay sometimes \$1,800-a-month rent, and we put them into ownership for \$1,400 a month for families, often with a couple of children.

Mr. Jeremy Nixon: Thank you, through the Speaker, to the hon. member for letting me jump in. I was just getting so excited listening to you talk about the partnerships between private sector, not-for-profits, and the government and hearing so far in the debate tonight about the importance of housing but also the significant demand that's out there. I think it's worth noting that government alone has demonstrated it can't meet that demand by themselves. It's more of a comment, but I would love for you to continue to articulate that by collaborating together and looking at doing things differently and innovatively and by partnering with NGOs who are known for being innovative and partnering with the private sector as well – just your examples already of being able to help expand and meet the significant need in our communities.

Thank you for your comments, and I'm hoping to hear more.

Mr. Gotfried: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, through you to the Member for Calgary-Klein, who I know has also spent much of his career working in the affordable housing sector. You may wish he didn't get me started on that particular point there. You know, it's the partnerships there. We know that in Alberta we have a challenged balance sheet at this point in time and have had for a number of years, going back to the term of the previous government.

I look at affordable housing across the spectrum, again to the hon. member, and that includes our seniors as well. To me, it's housing, and there's the building form, and then there's who lives in it. That includes our seniors, and we need to make sure as we move into the baby boom generation – we have that big bubble of baby boomers, and we know that that innovation is going to be required. You know, we don't have enough money in this province, quite frankly, for us to build this with the public purse. We just do not. You know what? We'll bankrupt ourselves while trying to provide that. But what we do have are some innovative ideas, those partnerships.

Again, when we did the attainable home ownership program, guess what? There was a little bit of public money, a whole lot of private know-how and efficiency and effectiveness, and guess what? Who was our partner? Who was the administrative partner? Habitat for Humanity, with an incredible depth and history, one of the best known brands on this planet for providing affordable home ownership, and guess what? We added hundreds of units. They typically would do 10 or 12 houses a year. We added – I'm trying to think. The first project we did was 83 units that we put into the program, 83 individuals. That was a mixture of apartment condos, so single people could qualify for that at different levels, singles or

young couples, but we also put families into those townhomes. You know what? We opened up the inventory, and people could move into those. There was no: this is an affordable unit. This was a mixed community.

That's one of the other great benefits of this model. We encourage the private sector to build mixed communities with some units in there. Maybe it's affordable rental; maybe it's attainable home ownership. We also encourage and allow and create that balance, and we hear it from the not-for-profit housing community all the time now, right from the civically managed ones down to some of the smaller, more private or individual not-for-profits: they want a mixed model as well.

Norfolk Housing was one of our first partners in a pilot project for a project in Calgary. Their model worked perfectly. They have some people paying market rents, some people paying on a rent geared to income, and guess what? That makes a sustainable build. It allows them to service the capital that they've put into that, whether that's on a mortgage or whether that's investment that they have put into it. They can service that capital and then move it on to the next project and build other things.

That innovation is not just in building; it is in financing. That's where we need to understand that the financing of the investment for affordable housing does not need to come from government. We need to invest the public dollars well to leverage the heck out of every penny that goes into it. That's how we get more housing units, and that's how we get them in the right communities.

We challenge our partners at the municipal level, where they have very attractive land sometimes. This can be used in a rural model as well. We've looked at this. How can you keep seniors? How do you keep young people? Maybe you build a hub there. You have an innovative approach to this where you build some seniors' housing, some housing for some young people that maybe would otherwise move to the big city, and you can keep them there. Maybe you even have some commercial or even some not-for-profit social enterprise space in the same footprint to create an incredible opportunity for building those hubs and to try and sustain those rural communities to have that entrepreneurial spirit.

I mean, you know, consider. You have some seniors there that have some extra time on their hands. Maybe they provide some child care. Maybe you've got a learning hub there that has a partnership with a Bow Valley College or an Olds College where they can have a learning hub there. Maybe they have community space. Maybe they have space in there for single parents. All in the same community because the municipality had a piece of land that was in the right place, and that is their investment. You need to have that level of innovation where you take the value of land, which could be public lands. We have school sites. We have federally owned lands. We have provincially and civically owned lands. I don't think we're using them as well as we could.

This bill will allow for that type of innovation for us to move forward, for us to build the types of partnerships which may have two of the sectors involved, private and public, or public and not-for-profit, or all three, as I was able to do with the attainable home ownership model, and make it work for everyone. We created a social enterprise, in fact, for Habitat for Humanity, which helped them to fund staffing and other programs. [interjection]

Mr. Jeremy Nixon: Thank you, Member, for all those great stories. I kind of wanted you to build off that idea. You know, the government is sitting on land, and we've been hearing, "Oh, I don't get how this is actually going to improve or increase supply," but if we're sitting on land – and you know it because you've experienced it – maybe talk a bit about how that land can be leveraged to expand

and grow our affordable housing supply through these partnerships and because of this bill.

Mr. Gotfried: Now you're really getting me going. I'm going to have to take my mask off for that one. That's one of the things I've been talking about. Again, this bill allows us that latitude for us to really look at the land. In the building and development industry land is cash. The value of that land gets brought into the project.

8:20

We've talked to some of our partners that are doing some of the services for youth and other things as well and reminded them that the land that they've owned for 50, 75 years, that was donated maybe by a philanthropist in the past, is value to the project, incredible value to the project, and particularly if it's located in a prime area where that service or that housing or that type of supports are needed.

You know, as I've been talking about for years and years – and it goes back to working with different levels of government and times – one of the things we need to do as part of this approach is to catalogue those public lands we have, not just provincial lands but civic lands, federal lands, and quit siloing those and quit sort of being protective of that land. The land is no good unless we use it for good purposes, and if it's public land, it should be used for good purposes, and we should protect that value of it.

But it might be the redevelopment. You know, I heard from the members opposite here that: well, we're going to sell it off. No. But if we've got a building that was built on a prime piece of land in 1952 and it's way, way below the density for that site – it's a single floor and it's spread out, or in some cases, though, do you remember the old bungalows? They'd have these sorts of sparsely spread out bungalows on that same site where you could build mixed housing of different sorts for seniors. You could have some market housing on the same site because the density allowed on that site through the civic development planning now allows a little more density and different types of services. You have new models that you can bring to that. You can redevelop a site, which is highly valuable.

I know some of our not-for-profit partners – and I've spoken to them – where they say: you know, let me sell off this piece of land over here because it's too valuable, actually, for me to develop what I want, and I've got a better piece of land over here, but I need to free up some capital so that I can invest in a project here so I go from having 52 housing units over here to developing over 200 over here. That's a good deal. It's a heck of a deal.

In any case, Mr. Speaker, I really appreciate the opportunity to speak to this bill. I encourage everybody in this House to take a look at what this will achieve, to take a look at the latitude it will give us as a province and for our taxpayers, to have affordable housing that we can build to meet the needs, that we can build workforce housing for the people that work and make this province work, and that we focus on housing affordability across that continuum.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Let's all support this bill.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning is next.

Ms Sweet: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's an honour to rise to speak to Bill 78 and follow some of the comments that the hon. member just made in regard to mixed housing and looking at affordability and some of the ideas that he was presenting in regard to being innovative in the housing space.

Up until the boundaries changed, I actually had an area in northeast Edmonton that was going to be in my riding, that is now in the riding of Edmonton-Decore. The intention of that is that it is an affordable housing complex. It is being run by Capital Region Housing or whatever they're called now. I think they're still Capital

Region Housing. It's a brand new building. It was built on public land. The idea of it was that there would be a daycare on the main floor, there would be some commercial space to help off-set the cost of the building, and that it would be a housing facility that would be low-income housing on a sliding scale. If you were working and you had an ability to pay a little bit more, your rent would be based on what kind of income you had access to, so if you were on AISH, or if you were on income assistance, all the way up. It does speak to what the hon. member was speaking to before, but the difference is that it was provided through Capital Region Housing; it was not a private partnership.

The concern that I have around private partnerships is the fact that we've seen this in Education, we've seen it with some of our schools, and members in Calgary will have seen this. Of course, I have a junior high in my riding, and I know there are other members in our caucus that have dealt with P3 schools in their ridings. This was pre 2015; contracts were signed, agreements were made around private partnerships.

The fundamental issue that happened at the junior high that I have in my area was that the kids were playing on the grass. They kept wrecking the grass, and the company that had the P3 fenced off the field because they didn't want the kids to wreck the grass and they needed the grass to grow back. So the kids all of a sudden had no play area because the partnership and the company that was running the partnership and in charge of the maintenance of the field was getting really frustrated with the fact that the kids kept wrecking the grass. That's a problem. The kids had nowhere to play.

Then, of course, as the population grew, we needed portables on that site, we needed access to different things, and it became a struggle with the school board about how we were going to get portables on-site, where are they going to be placed on the land, all of the things that get associated with the fact that the school board didn't ultimately have the overall say because of the agreement and how it was signed.

When we start looking at housing and we start talking about those relationships, the issue around maintenance and who is going to be taking care of the landscape, all of those things start to become a question. I think that the issue with the piece of legislation within this is that the definition of what would be considered affordable housing is a problem. Hearing that looking at land value is being brought into consideration around being able to encourage partnerships, looking at the different ways that rent may be determined, and all of the things that have been brought up in the Chamber create some concern around how accessible this housing is actually going to be under this model.

Because of that, I think that it's very important that we do an economic assessment on this piece of legislation. I think that Albertans have a right to know what the economics actually look like in relation to a P3 partnership and whether or not it actually, in the long run, will save taxpayer dollars and how these partnerships and contracts will be signed. Because of that, Mr. Speaker, I have an amendment that I will be putting forward. You need the original, and I need a copy.

The Speaker: Please pass it to the page, and then once we have it approved by the table, we will proceed.

Hon. members, this amendment will be referred to as REF1. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning has the call.

Ms Sweet: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'll try to keep this short, but as I was saying, I think that as we look at this, we're hearing a variety of different alternatives and discussions even within the Chamber. I'm not saying that some of the suggestions that have been brought up are necessarily bad ideas. What I think is

important, though, is that if we're going to be looking at shifting the housing model from its current form and we're going to legislate a change that will ultimately look at P3 partnerships, there should be an economic impact assessment completed first. We haven't seen that demonstration by the government as to how that's been done.

If there's been an assessment completed – I know we've asked and that members of this Chamber have asked – around what the impact is going to be, why is it not legislated that the sale of affordable housing not be reinvested back into more affordable housing? There are some, I think, reasonable questions here. Also, hearing from the people that are going to be impacted by this the most I think is good governance. It's a good consultation, and it brings forward maybe other ideas that haven't been brought forward before.

I will read it into the record. The Member for Edmonton-Manning to move that the motion for second reading of Bill 78, Alberta Housing Amendment Act, 2021, be amended by deleting all of the words after "that" and substituting the following:

Bill 78, Alberta Housing Amendment Act, 2021, be not now read a second time but that the subject matter of the bill be referred to the Standing Committee on Families and Communities in accordance with Standing Order 74.2.

Again, I think, Mr. Speaker, I have said my piece in regard to my request that the committee do an economic impact study before we continue on with the debate of this bill. With that, I would request that we adjourn debate.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

8:30 Government Bills and Orders Committee of the Whole

[Mr. Milliken in the chair]

The Deputy Chair: Hon. members, I would like to call the committee to order.

Bill 75 Arts Professions Recognition Act

The Deputy Chair: Are there any comments, questions, or amendments to be offered at this time? I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning.

Ms Sweet: Mr. Chair, I just have a point of question. Are we allowed to do interjections during Committee of the Whole?

The Deputy Chair: No, we are not.

Ms Sweet: Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: But, as we all know, with regard to Committee of the Whole members can speak more than once as long as there is an intervening speaker between.

Are there any members looking to join debate? I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview has risen.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. It's my pleasure to rise and speak to Bill 75, the Arts Professions Recognition Act. This is the first opportunity that I've had to speak to the bill. I appreciate that my colleague the Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs has been and continues to be a passionate advocate of our artists and creative industries around the province. I applaud the work that she's done, and I know for a fact that so do the very entrepreneurs and artists around this province that appreciate her interest, her engagement, her advocacy.

You know, I've reviewed some of the notes that my colleagues have made or comments my colleagues have made regarding this bill, where the spirit of the bill is in the right place in that the government has referenced the fact that other jurisdictions like Saskatchewan have brought in similar pieces of legislation, which is fantastic. The challenge and the reason why I recognize the spirit of this bill is that when you look at the bill and compare this current piece of legislation, Mr. Chair, with Saskatchewan's legislation, the UCP government has very creatively cut out the meaningful sections that exist in Saskatchewan's legislation here in this Alberta version.

I can tell you, Mr. Chair – and I appreciate the conversation that I've had with my colleague the Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs. One of the largest differences, the biggest glaring difference, between this piece of legislation and what Saskatchewan introduced is that Saskatchewan legislation requires contracts for anyone that engages with artists, which provides protections for all artists hired throughout the province, whether that be a government entity, a large-scale music entity, a festival, or whether an artist has been booked to play at a local pub or bar or small establishment. The legislation that we're discussing here today excludes the private sector. Essentially, this is for public entities and for government entities, so artists have been communicating with our caucus and, primarily through my colleague, asking questions like: how does this legislation actually help if the private sector is exempt from this? Your local bars don't actually have to uphold what this bill introduces for government.

The other question I have is: I don't know how many bars the government owns or restaurants or music venues; I don't think any.

Mr. Eggen: The sky palace.

Mr. Bilous: Oh, they own the sky palace. Right. So maybe the artists could get some protection if they played in the sky palace, but, I mean, I wouldn't hold my breath on that one.

The challenge here is – and it goes back to my initial comments, Mr. Chair. I agree with the spirit of this bill and what the government will claim this does if we're looking at ensuring that artists are protected and compensated and that they have the same rights as other workers in other sectors. But if we are carving out a significant portion of where our artists are performing, then this bill essentially acts as a hood ornament. It may look great, and the government will put it in the window and say, "Look what we've done," but when the rubber hits the road, what is it doing to actually benefit artists in the province? That's the challenge that I have with this bill.

Now, I appreciate the fact that in a few moments my colleague and our caucus will introduce a number of amendments in an attempt to bring this bill from where it's at, where it far – I was going to say 'undersedes,' but I don't know if that's actually a term. It doesn't come close to achieving the same outcomes as Saskatchewan legislation. My question to the government is: if you truly meant this piece of legislation to mirror what exists in our neighbouring province, then I truly hope that the government will support the amendments that we're about to bring forward, which will bring this bill up to par.

You know, I appreciate, Mr. Chair, that I will continue to go through this bill with a fine-tooth comb, but I've yet to find evidence that the bill delivers what the government claims it delivers. We've seen this a number of times in a number of pieces of legislation over the past couple of years, quite frankly, where the government claims a bill does X, Y, Z, but when we look at it, it actually does nothing.

A great example is the bill the Justice minister brought forward on recall legislation, which, of course, will never actually recall any MLA in the province of Alberta until that piece of legislation is amended.

Mr. Madu: That's ridiculous.

Mr. Bilous: It's not ridiculous. In fact, you know, if I was a gambling person, I would gamble on that. It won't because the threshold is at such a level that it will never, in fact, recall a sitting MLA, let alone that it won't even come into effect in this term.

This piece of legislation is another example where the government claims it will do one thing, but when you look at the actual wording of the bill – and that's what we're debating. We're not just debating concepts and ideas and using hopeful language like "it may" or "should" or "sometimes." We need to ensure that it is crystal clear for our friends in the legal space that the bill is very prescriptive in what it sets out. At the moment this bill does very little for the artists in Alberta.

8:40

I'm happy to take my chair, Mr. Chair, and allow or make way for my colleague to introduce an amendment and, hopefully, a series of amendments that will strengthen this bill. This is where I ask the government, who often talk about the House needing to come together, putting aside our partisan differences to enact legislation that is in the best interest of all Albertans. Now, I know that's what Albertans look for. I've also been in this Chamber long enough to know that those moments are rare. However, I do hope that the government will be open to hearing these amendments, that are truly designed to help this bill achieve what the minister and what the government claims the bill will achieve.

As written, the legal team that we've discussed this bill with – it does not actually do what the government claims it will do. It does not go nearly as far as Saskatchewan. If we're going to reference their legislation, then we should at least mirror it if not surpass it. With that, Mr. Chair, I hope that members will be open to the amendments that we will be proposing.

Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any members looking to join? I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs with, I suspect, perhaps an amendment.

Ms Goehring: Thank you, Mr. Chair. It's my pleasure to stand and rise again to speak to Bill 75, the Arts Professions Recognition Act. I want to thank the Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview because, you know, he makes some valid points that we've been hearing from industry, from artists all across the province. I would like to note that we do have some amendments that I will be putting forward this evening, and they were shared with the minister. I hope that the minister had an opportunity to review them, and I would encourage all members in this Chamber to support them.

All of the amendments that I will be bringing forward are as a direct result of consultation with the arts community all across the province. I'm quite excited to be able to take their words and their ideas on how to make this legislation, in their opinion, the most effective it can be and propose what they've asked for.

With that, I would like to introduce my first amendment, and I will be providing copies to the chair. Once you receive it, I will read it for the record.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member. As always, there will be copies placed on the tables close to the entrances. Also, if

you would like a copy, just please feel free to raise your hand, and one will be delivered to you.

If the hon. member could please read it into the record. For debate purposes this will be referred to as amendment A1.

Ms Goehring: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I will move that Bill 75, Arts Professions Recognition Act, be amended as follows: (a) in section 1 (i) by adding the following after clause (b): “(b.1) ‘contracting party’ means a person or public entity engaging the services of a professional artist”; (ii) in clause (d) by striking out “Government of Alberta or a public agency” and substituting “Government of Alberta, a municipality or a public agency”; (b) in the heading preceding section 2 by striking out “public entities” and substituting “contracting parties”; (c) in section 2 by striking out “public entity” wherever it occurs and substituting “contracting party”; (d) in section 3 by striking out “public entity” and substituting “contracting party”.

We heard this as a platform promise from this government, that they would be looking at the legislation based on the Saskatchewan statute. This amendment will ensure that that commitment is met. The legislation as it stands right now only holds government and public entities accountable when entering into a contract. What this amendment does is that it expands protections to the act to allow all entities who engage with artists as well as expanding the definition of a public entity to include a municipal-level entity. Like I said before, it only applies to public or government of Alberta entities the way it stands.

The minister has said that this legislation is about providing an example, but I would argue that the best example would be telling everybody that they must enter into a written agreement to protect artists. The written contract should be the minimum standard that we have. Once we get this legislation in place, we can then get on with providing artists with what they really want, which is prompt payment legislation, access to WCB, the ability to spread earnings out over multiple years for taxation purposes. We believe that artists deserve the minimal protections that this legislation provides no matter who they are engaging with. By accepting this amendment, it simply allows anybody that the artists engage into a contract with to be held to account to the contract, not just government or public.

With that, Mr. Chair, I would encourage everyone to support this amendment, and I look forward to hearing from the minister about, hopefully, supporting this amendment. Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you.

I see the Minister of Culture has risen.

Mr. Orr: Thank you, Chair. I appreciate the opportunity to respond, and thanks to the NDP for the amendment. I will make a few comments about it. I appreciate their spirit, I think. I trust that they’re not just being political about this. But to suggest that this excludes any artist in Alberta in any way, shape, or form is completely to misunderstand what is stated here. No artist is excluded at all by this bill. In fact, the whole intent of it is to set a pattern and to encourage all artists to seek to begin to use contracts.

Now, I know from personal experience that many artists don’t use contracts, partly because they’re uncomfortable with the idea, partly because not very many of us like to have to talk about money when it comes to a business deal. It’s awkward; it’s difficult; we’d sooner just leave it out. But I would like to speak to all artists tonight and encourage all artists. First of all, part of what this bill wants to do is to open up a conversation to actually change the culture amongst artists themselves, to be informed and be aware that every time that you offer an art product for sale or an engagement of any kind, you have every right and, in fact, should

by good practice be prepared to enter into that experience with whoever you’re providing it for by means of contract.

I would, secondly, suggest to every artist in this province – and that’s part of why we’re having this conversation – that you should connect with your art association. There are a bunch of them in this province, and every different art form has an association of artists. Those associations will help you understand how to create a contract, what kind of contract to use. They will provide you with sample contracts, give you advice on how to approach it. Every artist should actually begin to do that.

And, thirdly, I would like to say that you should just simply begin to use contracts. We’re not going to force you to do it. We’re not going to be a central controlling authority that tells you what contract you have to use. In fact, we just want to change the culture, change the conversation, encourage every artist to understand that you have the right to engage in a contract with whoever you provide your art to and that you should ask for that. You should get it, and you should present it to them and say: here, this is how I do my work; this is how my business as an artist operates. There is no one who does art in this province who is excluded in any way, shape, or form by this bill, and to suggest so is complete misrepresentation of the reality of what’s happening.

8:50

Secondly, this is a bill that’s made in Alberta. Yes, it was patterned somewhat after the Saskatchewan bill, but this is Alberta, not Saskatchewan. I would like to make it clear that even before I began this ministry, the previous minister was extremely diligent and did a great deal of work starting back as far as 2019 to begin to engage with the art organizations, to engage with artists, to hear their conversations, to hear what they have to say. Of course, then COVID interrupted and things got slowed down, but I would just like to let you know that we have in fact spoken with and have received support from the Alberta Craft Council; the Arts Council Wood Buffalo; the Arts Touring Alliance of Alberta; the Book Publishers Association of Alberta; the Calgary arts development; CARFAC, Alberta Canadian Artists Representation; Edmonton Arts Council; Red Deer Arts Council; Regroupement artistique francophone de l’Alberta; Theatre Alberta Society; Writers Guild of Alberta; and four other organizations that were invited to participate but sent regrets, not to mention 1,800 individual artists who also responded.

This is a solution that responds to the requests and the interests that these art groups have asked that we have here in Alberta. They don’t necessarily want government control over everything that they do. In fact, I would go so far as to say that artists are kind of an independent bunch. They’re independent creatives. I don’t think they actually want us totally manipulating, totally prescribing their every step and their every breath. This is about changing culture, which is far more powerful than writing a whole bunch of rules.

This is a bill that respects the freedom of artists and the arts associations as well but that encourages them, that opens the conversation, that invites them to use contracts, and that makes clear by our example that everyone should be receptive and respectful of them when they come to present their art with a contract in hand. Because of that, Mr. Chair – I was going to say Speaker; sorry – I can’t support the amendment, and I would ask those in the House not to support the amendment.

Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. minister.

We are on A1. I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-North West.

Mr. Eggen: Well, thanks, Mr. Chair. I’m happy to just say a couple of words in regard to this amendment to Bill 75. The hon. Member

for Edmonton-Castle Downs points out an obvious, glaring omission in Bill 75 as brought forward by this UCP government, and that is that, of course, the vast majority of gigs or contractual arrangements that are taking place with artists are outside of the public service.

In fact, certainly the provincial government can set an example by entering into a contractual relationship with artists when they are providing services for the provincial government, but most of those things that happen – the music, the arts commissions, and everything else in between – happen outside of any provincial contract. This notion that you would create a made-in-Alberta solution for this is simply creating something that's significantly less to protect and to allow for fair payment for artists for their work. The notion that somehow each of those groups that the minister just listed off would have signed off and agreed to something less is patently absurd, Mr. Chair. That's simply not true. There's no way that each of those groups would have said that they like this idea of just, you know, having a law that says that they would like to see people change the culture for artists. Artists want to have payment for their work. It's as simple as that.

I myself played music for many years, and we made sure that we got paid. We made sure that we had a contract to enforce that payment as well. We got burned a few times, certainly learned our lesson, but it makes it a whole lot easier if they are compelled to have a contract to back up that gig in the first place. As we grow up and mature, we want to build an atmosphere that actually supports artists and for artists to know that this is a place where you can get paid and the government backs that up. It's not a government control thing. That's absolutely absurd.

We have lots and lots of basic rules around contracts for payment in all of the other areas of business that take place in this province. Why would there be exceptionalism for artists? That sends inherently a negative message not just to the artists of Alberta; it compromises the integrity and the worth that they provide, and it sends a message even outside of the province to suggest that we have something less in this province just because there's an artificial line between Saskatchewan and Alberta. A made-in-Alberta solution. Come on. Really, Mr. Chair? I find that hard to accept.

I would suggest that all members do vote in favour of this amendment. It's probably one of the strongest amendments we've seen in a while. I certainly endorse it and encourage others to do the same.

Thanks.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Are any members looking to join? I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadows. Oh. I do not see the hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadows.

Having therefore not seen anybody, I am prepared to ask the question.

[The voice vote indicated that the motion for amendment A1 lost]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 8:56 p.m.]

[Fifteen minutes having elapsed, the committee divided]

[Mr. Milliken in the chair]

For the motion:

Bilous	Ganley	Sabir
Deol	Goehring	Sweet
Eggen		

Against the motion:

Aheer	Lovely	Rutherford
Armstrong-Homeniuk	Luan	Sawhney
Ellis	Madu	Schow
Frey	Neudorf	Schweitzer
Gotfried	Nixon, Jeremy	Sigurdson, R.J.
Guthrie	Orr	Smith
Hanson	Panda	Williams
Issik	Reid	Yao
LaGrange	Rowswell	
Totals:	For – 7	Against – 26

[Motion on amendment A1 lost]

The Deputy Chair: Moving back to the main bill, Bill 75, I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs caught my eye.

Ms Goehring: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I have to say that I'm disappointed that when the minister responded to the last amendment, he didn't actually speak to the specifics of the amendment, just in general terms. I'm hoping that perhaps with this amendment, we'll hear some specifics about it.

I have another amendment that I would like to move, and, Mr. Chair, I will wait until you have it before I start speaking to it.

Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

As with the previous amendment, copies will be at the table. If you'd like a copy, though, delivered to you, just raise your hand. This will be referred to as A2 for debate.

If the hon. member could please read it in for the record.

Ms Goehring: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I'd like to move that Bill 75, Arts Professions Recognition Act, be amended in section 1(c)(iii) by adding the following immediately after subparagraph (F): "(G) the artist holds a business licence issued by a municipality."

Again, Mr. Chair, this is a common-sense amendment that would ensure that this act captures more artists by adding the holding of a business licence as one of the three criteria that an artist must meet in order to be considered a professional artist. In order to be considered a professional artist, an artist must meet three of the current six criteria. This amendment would expand that criteria to seven and ensure that established artists will not be excluded from the act if they hold a business licence. This is something that was part of the legislation in Saskatchewan, and I would argue that by giving an artist one more criteria, upping it from six to seven, it makes sense. It gives artists with a business licence an opportunity to meet one of the three criteria, and it would expand those that are eligible.

I think that when we're looking at criteria to be included, there's no harm in putting in one extra piece. It would simply expand from six to seven. It would signal to artists, with the approval of this amendment, that this government recognizes the value of the professional arts and artists no matter how they choose to structure their profession. By including one extra piece of criteria, it perhaps encompasses a lot more artists that have this business licence in place.

When we heard from the minister that this was a made-in-Alberta plan, you know, I think that that's wonderful. When we're looking at what Alberta artists want, I don't think they looked at the Saskatchewan legislation and said, "Let's do less," which is exactly what Bill 75 does. It doesn't expand it. It doesn't create more opportunities. This amendment would increase the six criteria to seven. It still allows for three of the criteria to be met. It just gives

one more opportunity for the artist that does hold the business licence to have that as one of their three.

With that, Mr. Chair, I would encourage all members of the House to truly show support to the artists in the province. Vote yes to A2, and send a message that artists are supported by allowing for one extra piece of criteria.

Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you.

Any members? I see the hon. Minister of Culture has risen.

Mr. Orr: Hi. Thanks to the member for the amendment. I agree with the spirit of the amendment, but the reality is, Mr. Chair, that every municipality in this province already has business licence rules and regulations. Every municipality has the authority to require that and to issue it. I would encourage every artist that's in a municipality to actually comply with their local regulations, support their municipality. Because the regulation is already there, the opportunity is already there, and the expectation is already there, I really don't see the need of this, so I would not encourage anyone in the House to actually support the amendment.

Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you.

I see the hon. Member for Chestermere-Strathmore.

Mrs. Aheer: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair, and thank you for the opportunity to speak to this in Committee of the Whole and on this amendment. One of the things I think that – it's interesting that this would come forward as an amendment. I totally understand where you're coming from, for sure; however, in Alberta, when we're looking at entrepreneurs in particular, it's really significant that we're not putting up barriers to their ability to be able to support how it is that they work.

A business licence, depending on how you look at it – it's the same thing with even joining one of the music unions. There are benefits to it, but there are also things that it actually stops you from being able to do. I know that as a professional musician, for me, joining one of the unions was not feasible because I needed to be able to perform where I needed to without the stipulations that were in those although I had many, many friends that were part of the unions, and it really, really worked well for them. So it's not an either/or.

It's the same with the business licence. As a music teacher having a business licence was really important, especially because of the way that you do your taxes, the way that you leverage your business space. There are a whole bunch of things that are tied into actually running that business. When you are a gig artist or a person who is performing outside of that, quite often you are working within the scope of the space that you're working within, and your business licence does not in any way help you to negotiate that contract.

In fact, if anything, I would suggest that one of the things that the minister is doing with this piece of legislation that's going to be really helpful is the tool kit that will be provided along with that to help musicians and artists of all ilks be able to have all of the information that they need in order to know how to present and to be able to actually create a contract. I think, actually, what's missing a lot of times is the ability to know how to put one of those contracts together. When you're an artist and you're in a creative space, it's not always an easy thing to just be able to sell what it is that you're trying to sell at that moment because maybe they haven't heard you, seen you, have had no access to the work that you're doing.

9:20

It's really, really important that as much as a business licence may sound like a good thing, it's not actually opening the doors for

a musician, especially when they require the flexibility to be able to work where they need to. I think that if there was a barrier to getting a business licence, if that was an issue, I could completely understand that, but there are no barriers in Alberta to anybody applying for a business licence under the criteria that is required. If that's necessary and if that is a need, that's absolutely available. Nobody is stopping anybody from getting a business licence.

To create a criterion around that, Mr. Chair, and to add that into the pieces of criteria that are already there in order for them to be recognized as professional musicians, there are so many in this province, I would say – I mean, goodness, I haven't been out performing as a professional for some time, not at least in that aspect. I toured for almost 10 years, and I cannot think of one time in that time when I was out touring that I required a business licence or needed that in order to be able to be considered a professional or, in that matter, to be hired at the level that was required at that time.

I would suggest that if the business licence is something that is needed – I certainly don't know if the minister will back me up on this. It was not one of the things that came across the docket when we had the conversations with – I mean, there were thousands of individual artists from right across the spectrum.

Can you imagine if you're an artist that is starting out? The average business licence costs – I don't know – in excess of \$295. Or an incorporation: it's cost prohibitive for some people, especially those who are starting out. Can you imagine if you're a new artist and you've just put money into – I mean, on my side, with music, we used to do CDs. It's done significantly different nowadays, but if you're creating a piece of work and – actually, through COVID, Mr. Chair, it was incredible the amount of work that was done online. Absolutely amazing. We had musicians in Vancouver and Saskatchewan all working on various tracks: bringing them together, mixing them in Alberta, adding in the vocals or whatever. It was unbelievable the amount of flexibility that was shown and, really, the creativity. Not once in any of those situations that I was involved in was a business licence necessary nor required.

If you look in Calgary at the music centre, they bring in new musicians all of the time, and the whole creative process about bringing them in has nothing to do with a business licence. Some stuff has been supported by governments, municipal and provincial and federal. They have tons and tons and tons of courses to be able to teach and help musicians become entrepreneurs.

I'm sorry; I don't mean to be just talking about music. There's a tremendous amount of art across the province. Even the minister, I think, was talking about the craft council. The craft council has a tremendous number of artists that are incorporated or have had business licences because they are teaching or, with the way that they're selling in their business, it's necessary in order, again, to be able to do their taxes properly. However, there are multiple musicians – I was one of them that did several jobs in order to make ends meet, and none of them on their own would have garnered anything even close to creating me enough money to be able to claim taxes on those things.

I mean, any discussion around artists and what we're trying to accomplish here with this piece of legislation is very gratefully appreciated. I do wish, however, that, you know, the opposition, in speaking from their hearts – I know how much the MLA cares about the arts sector and all of that, but I would love to hear from them about the positive nature of this. In Alberta we've never had anything like this before, this appreciation and this acknowledgement for our artists. We see them as independent, strong, creative people who not only contribute billions of dollars to our GDP but to the wellness of our life and who we are.

Like I said, I do appreciate anything that comes up that would help an artist do what they need to do, but putting up a barrier by making it necessary for them to be professional artists only because they have a business licence is counterintuitive to the nature of how the business actually functions. [interjection] You can laugh about it, but, I mean, I've lived in this business. It was how I lived my life. Like I said, the only time I actually needed a business licence was when I had a bricks-and-mortar building where I was teaching that required heat and electricity and I was filling out forms in order to be able to pay the other teachers that I had in my studio or the accompanist that we were using or any of the other things that were necessary.

I think it was earlier on that one of the MLAs had mentioned: what businesses does the government own? Well, the Jubilee Auditorium is one of those things, where many of the performers throughout this province – they also perform at the AGA. They perform at the RAM. They perform at – well, once the Glenbow Museum opens up, there are beautiful stages, all of those that have been paid for by the taxpayer. Those business licences are not necessary for those spaces, Mr. Chair. In fact, if anything, it prohibits a musician from being able to go into those public spaces that have been paid for by the taxpayer in order to show there. People like Jann Arden and other artists like that got their starts in places like that.

In Inglewood, where I used to play – I played my whole life there. In fact, my oldest son used to sing there when he was eight years old on a Wednesday night, 10 o'clock at night. I know, Mother of the Year, but it was the best thing for him because he got to meet some of the best musicians in the world. Those people were travelling from all over the world. He got to meet jazz musicians, incredible musicians. It was never about a business licence. It was all about the creativity, the creative juices that flow to come together in those places, which have now turned him at 25 into a phenomenal professional musician himself, and not once in his entire career has he ever required a business licence.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Deputy Chair: I see the hon. Member for Calgary-McCall has risen.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Mr. Chair. The amendment has absolutely nothing to do with how the minister described it or how my hon. colleague from Chestermere-Strathmore described it. It does not require any artist to get a business licence. It does not force any artist to get a business licence. As my colleague described, when she was running a school, she already had a business licence.

All this amendment does is that in subsection (iii), where the artist is required to meet three criteria, it adds another criterion, provides some more flexibility that if you are incorporated as an artist, that's one criterion that allows you to jump this hoop of professional artists. It facilitates that you can meet that professional artist definition more easily. It does not mandate that you incorporate. All it does: if you already have done that, then under subsection (iii) it adds another criterion, gives some flexibility to artists to meet this definition more easily.

I urge the minister to reconsider his position and urge all members of the House to vote in favour of this amendment.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you.

I see the hon. Minister of Justice has risen.

Mr. Madu: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Whilst I understand what the member is trying to accomplish here, I think all of us, on both of sides of the aisle, must do everything we can to help artists to better achieve their full potential in this province. We all support that, and we all commend that. One of the problems we have with this amendment – this is why it's important to read the bill. Always

make sure you read the bill to understand what a particular section is trying to accomplish before you put forward an amendment or even debate the bill.

9:30

The section that has been amended to include subparagraph (F) essentially deals with the criteria that may be used in identifying an artist. That's really at the heart of that section, identifying criteria of artists. Anyone out there can go to the city of Edmonton and obtain a business licence. It doesn't necessarily mean that that person is an artist. To say that one of the criteria to identify an artist is that you obtain a business licence from the city of Edmonton makes nonsense of what is being accomplished here.

There are six criteria. Take a look. I want to put this on the record so that you can then ask yourself whether or not this amendment fits into any of the six criteria. It's odd to have that proposed amendment in here. It's odd. It's off. Section 1(c):

(iii) meets at least 3 of the following criteria:

(A) the artist has received public or peer recognition . . .

In other words, the work of that particular artist has been recognized.

(B) the artist promotes or markets the artist's work . . .

So someone who's an artist – right? – now has been in the business of promoting their work.

(C) the artist's work has been presented to the public by means of exhibitions, publications, performances, readings, screenings or other means;

(D) the artist has received training or acquired traditional knowledge . . .

(E) the artist has membership in an artists' association or in an organization representing the artist's . . .

Et cetera. And, finally,

(F) the artist holds [a] copyright in the artist's work and has received royalty or residual payments based on that copyright.

Then ask yourself: how does having a business licence fit into any of these criteria? It doesn't make sense at all.

So anyone out there – listen, we want to make sure that this piece of legislation actually benefits artists, and this amendment has got nothing to do with the section that is being sought to be amended. I urge all members to ignore and vote down this amendment.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. minister.

Are there any other members or ministers or anyone looking to join debate on A2?

Seeing none, I am prepared to ask the question on A2.

[Motion on amendment A2 lost]

The Deputy Chair: We are back on the main bill, Bill 75, Arts Professions Recognition Act. Are there any members looking to join? I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs.

Ms Goehring: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Back to Bill 75, the Arts Professions Recognition Act. You guessed it. I have another amendment. This amendment also comes from speaking with artists. With that, I will pass it to you and wait until you give me the okay to speak.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

As with the other previous two amendments, there will be copies on the tables, and if you would like a copy, please put up your hand, and one will be delivered to you.

If the hon. Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs could please continue, and if you would be so kind as to read it into the record for *Hansard*, that would be very appreciated.

Ms Goehring: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I move that Bill 75, Arts Professions Recognition Act, be amended in section 1(b) by striking out “including a federation of artists’ associations” and substituting “including a trade union or federation of artists’ associations.”

This amendment comes after speaking to many, many members that are involved with the trade union, specifically the International Alliance of Theatrical Stage Employees, better known as IATSE. After speaking with artists about this legislation, there was a concern that this bill wouldn’t cover them, so they had asked that, on top of the federation of artists’ associations, the wording include a trade union. They were nervous that this would not encompass them and wouldn’t provide them the protections that they so rely on and would hope it would include, so they had asked that it be captured in this act.

I think that when we’re talking about artists and who they work for, you know, we’ve seen two of our amendments that came directly from the arts community be voted down. I would hope that this one would be accepted. It is coming from those involved with an organization that represents an incredible number of people all across the province. This organization was actually first established in 1893. They’ve been doing it for a long time. It’s not new. Many, many of those that work in film depend on the protections afforded by IATSE. While they looked at this legislation, they didn’t feel that it really did much to support them in their industry. They said that there was a fear that by not including this wording, it would exclude them.

With that, Mr. Chair, based on stakeholder consultation, based on artists themselves that are members of IATSE requesting this wording, I would encourage all members of this House to vote in favour of amendment A3. Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, and thank you for reiterating that it was A3, because I think I failed to mention that.

I see the hon. the Minister of Culture has risen.

Mr. Orr: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Yes, it’s number 3. Thanks to the member for the amendment. You know what? I totally appreciate an amendment for the union language coming from the NDP. That’s totally within their right, probably totally to be expected. You know what? There’s nothing wrong with supporting your union friends. That’s your job, so that’s perfectly fine. But the reality is that we already do have a number of artists’ unions. As the member mentioned one, ACTRA here in Canada, too, represents 27,000 film and media artists. They have the right to unionize, and I would just suggest that any artist group that feels the need to unionize or the desire to do so – unionization has definitely got a legal foothold here, has every legal right to exist. There’s a process in place. It’s all there, and they can go ahead and do that.

But it’s not part of the intent of this bill. While I support my friends across the way for wanting to insert it into the bill, it’s not the intent of this bill. Like I said before, we’re trying to change culture. We’re trying to change the mood and the atmosphere and the conversation in Alberta, truly do want to support all our artists. They have the right to unionize if they want, but I would encourage all members to not support this amendment.

Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: Are there – I see the hon. Member for Chestermere-Strathmore.

Mrs. Aheer: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. I just wanted to also clarify that in terms of protections, again, if an organization, if musicians do choose to be part of the unions – and there are many of them, and I think the one that the member is mentioning started in 1893. IATSE has been around for that long. The protections of those unions are already there. That’s the entire purpose and why

they exist. They negotiate labour contracts regarding wages, work rules, grievance procedures. They administer even health and retirement funds for musicians under who they are as unions already, which is already represented by that.

9:40

To just add to what the minister had said, this bill actually enhances that. It does not take away. It does not exclude. If it was going to be exclusionary, it would have been listed as an excluded member from the legislation versus an inclusive piece of legislation, which includes everybody. I think we can quite humbly state in here that nobody is excluded from this legislation. It’s actually an elevating piece of legislation that brings to the forefront all artists from all backgrounds.

Like I said, you know, I’ve had options to join unions in the past as a musician, as a music teacher, and just in the way that my world worked out, it didn’t work out in my favour to do that because there were things that I wanted to do that were outside of the scope of the unions and it was counterintuitive to the way that I was running my business.

Having said that, there is nothing in this legislation to bring any concerns that unions would in any way be excluded. In fact, if anything, we are elevating all artists from all backgrounds.

Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you.

I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadows.

Mr. Deol: Thank you, Mr. Chair. It’s my pleasure to rise in the House and speak to amendment A3. I’m supporting amendment A3.

Before I actually add my comments, I would just like to read the report for the record. That report was published in 2014 in Hill Strategies under the title *The Value of Arts and Culture to People and Society – An Evidence Review*.

This English literature review was intended as a summary of “the strength of the evidence base between 2010-13 about the economic, social, health and wellbeing, education, lifelong learning and environmental impacts and outcomes of arts and culture in England.” Based on the 90 reports examined, the literature review found that the “arts and culture play an important role in promoting social and economic goals through local regeneration, attracting tourists, the development of talent and innovation, improving health and wellbeing, and delivering essential services.”

The report organized the findings of the literature review, which examined only instrumental impacts of the arts, under four main themes: economy; health and well-being; society; and education.

Regarding the economy, the report indicated that “there are five key ways that arts and culture can boost local economies: attracting visitors; creating jobs and developing skills; attracting and retaining businesses; revitalizing places; and developing talent.”

My purpose in reading this report was because I spoke to the original bill, and I’m listening to the debate on a number of amendments. It seems that the government is really, really out of touch exactly when it comes to the contributions of the artists in our provincial economy. I just wanted to say how much the artist community and cultural organizations contribute not only to society but also to the economy. When it comes to Capital EX, not only Edmontonians and Albertans but the small businesses or business communities anxiously wait for those events, whether it’s the Fringe Festival or heritage days.

When I was just, you know, thinking about the debate in this House on this bill and amendments on this bill, it also reminded me why this government is taking this position. I remembered, while it

was somewhere in 2008 or '10, when the federal government, where the Premier was a key person of the Executive Council the very first time, I believe, after a long time, declined and rejected the grant to the Fringe Festival in Edmonton.

I'm surprised to see how the government House members – their interpretations contradicted each other on all three amendments on this bill. Anything that the opposition is bringing forward to expand the protection of the artist or the definition of the artist, anything that the opposition is just coming – like, they are just not willing to listen and learn, look into their perspective, but their intent is to oppose anything coming from the opposition.

Once again I would just, you know, encourage and appeal to all the members that this doesn't harm anything. This actually completes the definition of the artist, who the artist community in the province is. I would ask all the House members to support this amendment A3 and vote for the amendment.

Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other members looking to join on A3?

Seeing none, I'm prepared to ask the question on amendment A3.

[Motion on amendment A3 lost]

The Deputy Chair: We are back on the main bill. I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs has risen.

Ms Goehring: Thank you, Mr. Chair. It's no surprise that I have another amendment. I would like to provide it, and I will speak to it once you have received it and reviewed it.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you.

Hon. members, this will be referred to as amendment A4. As is the regular course of the way things are done, there will be copies of the amendment on the tables, and if you would like a copy, please raise your hand and one will be delivered to you.

If the hon. Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs could please read it into the record, as well, and continue with any comments should she so choose.

Ms Goehring: Thank you. I'd like to move that Bill 75, Arts Professions Recognition Act, be amended in section 1(c)(iii)(D) by (a) striking out "traditional knowledge" and substituting "cultural knowledge or Indigenous traditional knowledge" and (b) in subparagraph (II) by striking out "cultural traditions" and substituting "cultural or Indigenous traditions".

Now, Mr. Chair, this is an amendment that – you know, it makes me emotional, thinking about the impacts of our Indigenous community and our culture here in the province. My great-grandmother, who was lovingly referred to as Grandma Gray by the community in the Onoway area, was an Indigenous woman and very well known for her hide work and her beadwork. I had the privilege of attending the Onoway Museum this summer. They had created a space for her work to be displayed, and when I think about that family impact of having my great-grandmother's art displayed in a museum, it was very powerful. I mean, it was something that our family grew up with, knowing that there was great pride in Grandma Gray and what she had contributed to the community. There were members of the community from Onoway that had donated their own boots and mukluks and mittens and jackets to be put on display.

9:50

I think that when it comes to including the words "Indigenous," "traditional knowledge," and "Indigenous traditions" into this legislation, it's straightforward; it's common sense. It will just

make it very clear that the Indigenous traditions that are steeped in Alberta are supported, acknowledged, and appreciated. This way, by including this language, there is no ambiguity. There is a way that we're showing direct respect and we show that we value the Indigenous arts contribution that has been made to our society here in the province of Alberta.

I'm a proud great-granddaughter of an Indigenous woman that was incredible in her contributions to art in our province, and I think that by including that language into this piece of legislation, it's just a way to show our Indigenous community and our artists that it's important that they're recognized. There's absolutely no harm in including this supportive language.

I would encourage all members of this Chamber to vote in support of amendment A4. Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you.

I see the hon. Minister of Culture.

Mr. Orr: Thank you. My sympathies to the member opposite. Yes, I acknowledge that we're voting down the amendments but not because I believe we're actually very far apart in what we think and believe in terms of wanting to support artists. The sentiment is good. I just don't think that the language is necessary. "Traditional knowledge" covers all of it, quite frankly. We want to be as absolutely inclusive and wide as possible here. We don't want to specify any one particular culture because we want to include every culture.

Just an hour ago I was with some Nigerian folks. One of the greatest actors of Africa is visiting here in Alberta, and I spent some time with him. We want to include everybody and traditional knowledge from all cultural traditions, so by keeping this as wide open as possible, as unrestrictive as possible, without identifying anyone, it also includes our traditional knowledge here from our Indigenous people, from the nations of Canada. There is in no way any sentiment at all that they are excluded from this; one hundred per cent included.

I love some of the traditional art of our native peoples. My wife has a little bit of a collection of some of their beadwork and moccasin work that she kind of treasures. This is wide open language meant to be as inclusive and as multicultural as possible without putting any special emphasis on anyone, because when you do that with anyone, then you imply by implication that you may be excluding or putting at a lesser value anyone else.

So while I appreciate the sentiment, I think it truly does cover it with "traditional knowledge." It's everybody's culture. It's as multicultural as you can get. It includes the Nigerians that I was with today, the South Americans. Everyone is part of this culture, and they're all included in this; fully open and fully included. Thank you. Because of that, I can't support the motion. I just feel that it's a little bit restrictive rather than making it completely welcoming to every culture and identity in Alberta.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. minister.

Are there any other members looking to join on amendment A4?

[The voice vote indicated that the motion on amendment A4 lost]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 9:54 p.m.]

[One minute having elapsed, the committee divided]

[Mr. Milliken in the chair]

For the motion:

Bilous

Eggen

Sabir

Carson	Ganley	Sweet
Deol	Goehring	
Against the motion:		
Aheer	Lovely	Rutherford
Armstrong-Homeniuk	Luan	Sawhney
Ellis	Madu	Schow
Frey	Neudorf	Schweitzer
Gotfried	Nixon, Jeremy	Sigurdson, R.J.
Guthrie	Orr	Smith
Hanson	Panda	Williams
Issik	Reid	Yao
LaGrange	Rowswell	
Totals:	For – 8	Against – 26

[Motion on amendment A4 lost]

The Deputy Chair: We are back on the bill, Bill 75. Are there any members wishing to debate?

If not, I am prepared to ask the question.

10:00

Thank you, hon. members. It's been a while since we've been in committee here. Are you ready for the question on Bill 75, Arts Professions Recognition Act?

[The remaining clauses of Bill 75 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

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

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Deputy Chair: Any opposed? Carried.

Bill 77

Municipal Government (Restoring Tax Accountability) Amendment Act, 2021

The Deputy Chair: Hon. members, are there any comments, questions, or amendments with respect to this bill? I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. It's my pleasure to rise and speak to Bill 77, the MG Amendment Act. You know what? The bill has several shortcomings that I'll attempt to highlight in my 15 minutes.

Listen, we have all heard from municipal leaders around the province that the issue of unpaid municipal taxes by industry has been growing over the last few years and is a significant issue. Now, I'll couch my comments by the fact that we know that industry has been hit significantly hard in the last couple of years. We know, you know, that over the last seven years the price of WTI has been hit significantly. We had a global collapse in the price of oil. In fact, in 2015 the price went from around \$127 per barrel down to \$27. That was the largest drop in the price per barrel of oil that we've seen, my understanding is, ever, Mr. Chair. But we know that the industry has been battered by a number of issues, with COVID, of course, being a significant issue.

Now, the challenge and the reason that this government once again has had to be dragged over the finish line, dragged to action is, well, because of their unwillingness to act. Where we're at, Mr. Chair, is that we're standing on a precipice where municipalities are on the verge of bankruptcy and cannot afford to remain solvent, in some cases because of the fact that industry, although battered, has

outstanding and in some municipalities significant outstanding balances.

Now, Mr. Chair, you'll know that municipalities, through the MGA, cannot run a deficit. The difference between a municipality and the provincial government or the federal government is that in an off year or a year where there might be more challenges than in another, the provincial and federal governments can weather that storm because of a number of tools at their disposal but, more importantly, because they can incur a deficit whereas municipalities can't. It's in the MGA.

[Mr. Reid in the chair]

The challenge with the timing of this bill – now, I'll admit that at least this bill is a positive step forward. However, it's about two years late. For some municipalities, they will not be able, even through and with this legislation should it pass through this Chamber, to recoup some of the taxes owed to them and likely will turn their keys in to government due to insolvency.

Now, we know that taxes and, for many municipalities, linear taxes are used to build and maintain infrastructure, which, of course, supports local economies, supports local residents but also supports industry. I would contest, Mr. Chair, that that's why industry is more than okay to pay their taxes to municipalities, because they know – I was going to say "happy," but I don't know if they're happy. They understand that by paying their taxes, it's going into a good that they're also benefiting from, and they recognize that their workers need to go to and from their work sites.

The challenge with the timing. Mr. Chair, one of the biggest issues I have with this current piece of legislation is the timing of it. I appreciate the fact of: will that affect the outcome of whether I vote in favour or against this bill? No. But it needs to be put on the record that the timing of this bill is two years too late. Municipalities have been struggling with this – and I'll be honest. Municipalities were struggling with this issue, when we were government, toward the end of our term, raising this as a concern. I know for a fact that municipalities raised this as a concern to the new government when they came in. So part of the challenge is that the solution has come long after, and I'll remind the Chamber that, again, this seems to be the pattern of behaviour with this current government.

Look at the issue of COVID and the response that this government has had to COVID. They have been trying to play catch-up from day one: deny, deny, deny, be forced to face the facts, and long afterwards be dragged over the finish line to actually take meaningful action. And there have been consequences, Mr. Chair. The Official Opposition has been pointing out these detrimental consequences for Albertans. In fact, 15,000 Albertans are still waiting for surgeries that were cancelled because of the inaction of this government, leading to the fourth wave, leading to the fact that they had to be cancelled.

So in this situation, on this bill, we've got an issue of unpaid taxes that are having a significant impact on our municipalities and their ability to deliver the services that their constituents, the residents of Alberta, rely on. But, again, our poor municipalities – I mean, I was chatting last week at the Alberta Municipalities convention about the fact that municipalities deliver 90 per cent of the services that Albertans rely on – 90 per cent, Mr. Chair – with 10 per cent of the budget, 10 per cent of the revenues that the provincial government has. That really begs the question: what the heck is the provincial government doing with all those revenues in not flowing them to municipalities?

I'll take a brief moment to highlight the fact that the Leader of the Official Opposition has made a commitment to every municipal leader and every Albertan in this province that our party, our caucus

will not only ensure that municipalities share in the revenues that the provincial government has, which is what they've been asking for for many years – in fact, long before I was elected in 2012, municipalities have been asking for stable, predictable funding. But the commitment is not only for municipalities, and it's not only a verbal commitment. A New Democratic government would enact legislation to ensure that municipalities have new revenue tools to be able to deliver services that Albertans rely on. This is a game changer, Mr. Chair.

10:10

I find it interesting that there are members from the government that are chirping right now with that comment. I think the Official Opposition would welcome an election call any day now, so if the government is that confident in their own legislation, by all means, let's let Albertans decide.

Now, this legislation, Mr. Chair, will provide additional burden on municipalities. Within the legislation as it's currently written, the administration and implementation costs for municipalities may in fact not be worth the costs for municipalities. At the end of the day, for those municipalities trying to recoup what is owed to them, it may in fact cost them the same or more than what they could recoup. So that's a challenge.

Now, Mr. Chair, I appreciate the fact that this legislation does provide municipalities with the ability to levy special liens on companies to recoup unpaid taxes, and that is one tool that municipalities have been asking for. However, where this bill falls short is that municipal leaders have been asking for several other tools to recoup what is owed to them, and this legislation falls far short of that.

For example, Mr. Chair, municipal leaders have been calling for the Alberta Energy Regulator to be able to prohibit the issuance of licences to bad actors who don't pay their taxes, which, you would think, seems like a fairly logical ask. If an actor follows a certain pattern of behaviour, not paying their municipal taxes, continuing to issue new licences when they say, "Oh, no, no, no; next time we're going to pay; just trust us" seems ridiculous.

I appreciate the fact that what we're talking about here – we're not talking about all companies. I mean, I know my friends on the other side love to jump up and down and say that the NDP hate industry, which couldn't be further from the truth. There are a few companies that have outstanding debts, and this is a way to ensure that they pay those debts, no different than when this Chamber brought in legislation to ensure that contractors were paid within a reasonable time frame. Those contractors, those subcontractors are small businesses that need to be paid. We all heard of example after example of months and months, more than six months, of not being paid, yet their debts accrue. This is the same thing. This is ensuring that industry pays its debts to municipalities. I wish that this government would listen more to municipal leaders and do more to overcome this paternalistic attitude that the government has toward municipalities.

In fact, Mr. Chair, I was chatting with municipal leaders last week at the Alberta Municipalities convention. I will be talking to rural municipalities this week about the same issue: what can we do to establish a relationship that is more egalitarian with our municipalities as opposed to the current relationship, where there is definitely a power over between the provincial government and municipalities? I believe that the former NDP government took meaningful action and strides toward achieving that whereas to date in all of my conversations with municipal leaders I have not heard a single one make reference or talk about how this government is taking meaningful action toward improving the relationship

between the province and municipalities and giving them the tools and the ability to be an autonomous order of government.

Now, my notes indicate that unpaid taxes currently amount to over \$200 million province-wide, and that amount, Mr. Chair, is growing every day. The disappointment that the Official Opposition have with this current piece of legislation is that it could have gone further. I honestly believe that industry would be not only open but that industry recognizes that municipalities also have debts to pay and that if they're not being paid, they can't make good on their word. With the legislation that is currently in front of us, I'm curious to know if the government has any estimate of how much municipalities will recoup through this legislation with the ability to levy liens. Has that number been tabled in this Chamber?

I'd also like to know why the government has chosen to only use a single tool where municipal leaders have outlined a number of tools that the government could have provided them with in order to ensure that they can remain viable and pay their bills. How did the government arrive at the decision that this solitary tool is the best one and that it can actually achieve what municipal leaders are asking for, disregarding the other asks? You see, Mr. Chair, we all want to bring forward the most robust legislation that we can, and when the government brings forward bills like this one and opens up acts like the MGA, there's incredible opportunity. So it's disappointing to see the government only amend certain sections and limit the opportunities that exist to provide municipalities with the tools to not only remain viable but to ensure they can deliver the services that all of our constituents deserve.

With that, Mr. Chair, I'll take my seat.

The Acting Chair: Hon. members, any other members wishing to speak to Bill 77? I see the hon. Member for Camrose.

10:20

Ms Lovely: Well, thank you, Mr. Chair. I rise to speak today in support of Bill 77. Many government and municipal services rely on taxes to fund community projects and services. These taxes fund everything from emergency services to city facilities, all the way to garbage collection. Our oil and gas industry makes up a large portion of the tax base of our cities and province. The oil and gas industry has been here for Alberta for a long time and will continue to be here for us. They invest heavily into our province and create jobs for all Albertans. But, sadly, there are some bad apples out there. They ignore the rules and refuse to pay taxes on time or at all.

Municipalities rely on these property taxes to pay for programs and projects. They should never be put in a situation where they must stop or cut funding because these companies won't pay their share. This places the burden on residents as they may experience tax hikes or cancellation of services. No Albertan wants to wake up one day just to find out that garbage collection is getting reduced or that property taxes are going up just to keep the city's budget from ballooning. These tax dollars go towards infrastructure like playgrounds, crosswalks, and city trails. I don't know about any of you, but I like going for a run and seeing our beautiful trails. In the wintertime many municipalities set up outdoor skating rinks, that are used by families and friends to learn how to skate or play hockey.

With over \$245 million in unpaid taxes owed to municipalities and a 42 per cent increase from 2020, more needs to be done to ensure these companies are paying their fair share. Bill 77 introduces new measures and tools that give municipalities the ability to recover what is owed to them. This bill will allow municipalities the ability to place these special liens against properties owned by companies behind on their taxes or refusing to pay them. The Municipal Government Act updates will ensure the owner can be held liable for the taxes owed, making it harder for

them to avoid taxes. It will also help define what assets have a lien placed on them by past and future nonpayment of taxes.

Back in 2015 the provincial education requisition credit program was created to help municipalities deal with shortages caused by uncollectable taxes from oil and gas companies. This program was set to expire but expanded until the 2023-24 fiscal calendar. It was also nice to see some changes made to the PERC program. Municipalities will no longer have to write off their outstanding property taxes they have yet to file.

[Mr. Milliken in the chair]

As we continue to have the most competitive tax system in Canada, we need to be making sure everyone is paying their fair share. Not paying your taxes is not fair to the municipalities, not fair to its residents. It's not fair to those who do pay their fair share. Those who pay their taxes will not be affected by this bill, but I recommend that those who have outstanding taxes reach out to their municipality to see what these liens mean for them. By ensuring Albertans are getting what they deserve and municipalities have the support they need, we are paving the way to recovery and their future success. Unpaid taxes also result in a loss of jobs or reduction of job creation and push back critical project planning and budget restrictions across the board. When budgets get cut, jobs get cut.

With Alberta's recovery plan rolling out in full force, Bill 77 is another great step in the plan. We are stepping up accountability and creating job opportunities by ensuring municipalities get the taxes they are owed. We are ensuring Albertans are getting the service they deserve. I encourage all of my colleagues to support Bill 77. We need to support our municipalities by giving them the tools that are needed to protect the jobs of Albertans. I'm here for my municipalities, and I'm here for families that rely on these services.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any members looking to join? I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-West Henday.

Mr. Carson: Well, thank you, Mr. Chair. It's an honour to rise to speak to Bill 77 again and this time in second reading. I have appreciated the comments that we've heard so far this evening. I just wanted to finally point out – and I think some of these comments have been made – that when we look at the RMA's release for Bill 77 when it came out on October 29 of this year, they were pretty clear that while they were pleased to see the introduction of this and that it was a good step in the right direction, the fact is that the special liens that are being offered through this legislation are not going to solve the ongoing unpaid property tax challenges faced by rural municipalities across the province. We've heard that from many members this evening and throughout the debate on Bill 77.

Just to mention a few of the things that we see in the list of concerns that they have with what is missing from this legislation, including the risks and liabilities assumed by municipalities that choose to seize oil and gas properties: the applicability of licence and regulatory requirements on municipalities that choose to seize these properties, the scope of assessable property that can be seized

from the liable person, and how information sharing between the AER and municipalities can be improved.

We have raised these concerns over and over again because within our discussions with stakeholders that are involved with this, the fact is that while this may be a step in the right direction, it is in many cases years too late, considering when this conversation started, and there is just so much missing from here in terms of being able to ensure that municipalities have the powers that they need and that the accountability is there and that they have the ability to see who, in the list form, is potentially going to be a problem as they are submitting these applications.

With that, Mr. Chair, I appreciate another opportunity to speak to Bill 77. I think that while there are some things to be potentially supportive of in here, there are also some real concerns about what's missing.

Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

We are on Bill 77. Are there any members looking to join?

I am prepared to ask the question.

[The clauses of Bill 77 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

The Deputy Chair: Shall the bill be reported?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Deputy Chair: Any opposed? Carried.

I see the hon. Deputy Government House Leader has risen.

Mr. Schow: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I move that the committee rise and report bills 75 and 77.

[Motion carried]

[Mr. Milliken in the chair]

The Acting Speaker: I see the hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake-St. Paul.

Mr. Hanson: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The Committee of the Whole has had under consideration certain bills. The committee reports the following bills: Bill 75 and Bill 77. I wish to table copies of all amendments considered by Committee of the Whole on this date for the official records of the Assembly.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Does the Assembly concur in the report? All those in favour, please say aye.

Hon. Members: Aye.

The Acting Speaker: Any opposed, please say no. Carried.

I see the Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Schow: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I move that the Assembly be adjourned until 10 a.m., Tuesday, November 23, 2021.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 10:29 p.m.]

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For inquiries contact:

Editor

Alberta Hansard

3rd Floor, 9820 – 107 St

EDMONTON, AB T5K 1E7

Telephone: 780.427.1875

E-mail: AlbertaHansard@assembly.ab.ca