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The 30th Legislature
Second Session

Alberta Hansard

Wednesday afternoon, December 1, 2021

Day 135

The Honourable Nathan M. Cooper, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta The 30th Legislature

Second Session

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New Democrat: 24

Independent: 2

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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Wednesday, December 1, 2021

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

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

Members' Statements

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Highwood.

Affordable Housing

Mr. Sigurdson: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Last Friday a new innovative affordable housing model completed construction right here in the city of Edmonton. The new Londonderry project will provide 240 new affordable housing units, replacing 80 units that were built in 1971. Those units had reached the end of their life cycle and were demolished in 2016. These affordable homes offer comfort and security for the new residents along with a range of services and amenities. These new units range from one- to five-bedroom units, which will help stabilize larger families.

The innovative mixed-income operating model allows Cvida to offer both near market and market rates based on household income. This flexible model allows tenants to seek higher paying jobs without fear of losing their homes as their rent amount will continue to align with their income. Another innovative idea is Cvida's building careers that fit program that was used on this project. Tenants interested in working on the Londonderry project applied through Cvida. It helped these individuals gain employment and build their skills for the future.

The stability provided through innovative affordable housing models such as this is the foundation of an inclusive and thriving society. Londonderry community housing is a good example of what we are working toward with Stronger Foundations. The Stronger Foundations 10-year housing strategy will help us meet Alberta's diverse needs now and in the future. It is community driven and focused for better community results. More partners, more innovative funding and delivery models, and of course listening to the voices of the community and people who live here are critical.

Our government will continue to build upon and expand these types of innovative housing models through Stronger Foundations to house an additional 25,000 households while reducing wait-lists by 30 per cent. We will continue to work to ensure our housing system is fair, flexible, and inclusive.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Education Policies

Ms Hoffman: This week the Minister of Education accused the opposition of personally attacking her with our calls for this government to improve education. Well, I have some news for the minister and for the UCP government. Albertans send us here to do a job, and during a pandemic like the one we are fighting, our jobs are all the more important. The UCP has failed time and time again to keep schools safe, forcing schools to close repeatedly, forcing kids to switch from in-person to online learning. They inflicted chaos and stress on students by firing tens of thousands of support workers. They allowed contact tracing to collapse. They abandoned school boards as COVID cases grew in schools. It will take years for students, staff, and families to get over the stress and pain that this government inflicted on them.

While the government refused to act and allowed the danger of this pandemic to hit our schools again and again and again, we proposed sensible policies to protect schools, things like in-school vaccinations to make it as easy as possible for kids to get vaccinated, reversing the cruel funding cuts for disabled students, updating ventilation in schools that the chief medical officer of health has recommended, hiring more teachers and support staff to help the thousands of new students going to school. We proposed mental health therapists in each school to help students cope with the difficulties of the pandemic and what it's placed on them. Albertans are calling on the UCP to scrap their racist, backwards, and inaccurate curriculum.

These are the education priorities of Albertans. It's not a personal attack to stand up for students. In fact, it's my job, and it's the minister's job, too. If the current government thinks standing up for students is a personal attack, then they should call the election and let Albertans decide who's up for the job.

Bow Valley Rugby Club

Mr. Guthrie: Madam Speaker, I'd like to take this opportunity to recognize the great work and accomplishments of the Bow Valley Rugby Club, an organization based in Cochrane. The Grizzlies have been operating since 2005 and have established a tradition of competitive excellence. At the same time they have also cultivated a reputation for openness and community. The club offers programs for adults, juniors, and even minis, children under 11, with the goal of making rugby as open as possible for anyone wishing to play.

But, Madam Speaker, their on-field work is just the tip of the iceberg. While the club works tirelessly to teach children and adults skills like ball handling, passing, and tackling, their mandate also emphasizes a culture that instills important life skills such as teamwork, respect, and integrity. The club prides itself on its fun and supportive environment just as much as it does its on-field success. This has been a staple of the Grizzlies' philosophy since day one.

The Bow Valley Rugby Club is also actively involved in the community. They've supported local charities, led youth leadership events, and hosted several community-wide sport days. Last summer, Madam Speaker, the club hosted a Try Rugby Day at Mitford park. The event was meant to introduce as many people as possible to the game that they all love.

On the field the Grizzlies have produced several high-end athletes who have gone on to play professionally. Among those Grizzlies alum: Connor Gilbert, Ian Shoultz, and Tyler Hawes, who have all competed for the Prairie Wolf Pack in Canada's top rugby league.

Madam Speaker, the work that this organization has done deserves to be recognized, and I'm honoured to be able to bring their accomplishments to the attention of this House. Go Grizzlies.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Government Policies and Cost of Living

Ms Gray: Yesterday this government celebrated and bragged. They cheered, and the Premier claimed that Alberta is back. But much like his boasts about the best summer ever, he ignores reality and leaves Albertans behind to face the consequences of UCP incompetence and cruelty. Thanks to this Premier, my constituents in Edmonton-Mill Woods are paying higher property taxes, higher insurance premiums, higher utility bills, higher park fees, and more. The Premier has even turned his back on his own words by allowing bracket creep to take more of Albertans' income in a sneaky way that he used to denounce.

In response to the very real concerns about how this government plans to address skyrocketing cost-of-living increases as winter sets

in, the associate minister of electricity proudly told this Assembly that their government plans to do nothing, leaving Albertans out in the cold literally. While this Premier celebrates, my constituents are seeing fewer services, higher costs, and less support. This government cut AISH payments for disabled Albertans. They're planning to sell off affordable housing, all during a global pandemic, when we should be supporting the most vulnerable, not forcing Albertans onto the streets.

While the Premier and his cabinet celebrate, they should know exactly who they're ignoring, including 15,000 Albertans suffering from surgery delays because this government put their politics before protecting the health care system. I hear daily concerns from constituents who are waiting to have their life-saving surgeries and procedures booked. Hundreds of families are grieving the loss of friends and families, thousands more are trying to recover, and every day I get a heartbreaking message from someone who wants to know why this government was so slow to act on something so important.

So while this UCP government celebrates and tries to turn the page from their failures that cost so much, I will continue to speak up for my constituents and every single Albertan that has been left behind by this UCP government. The members opposite still haven't learned that good governance is about balancing competing interests, not picking and choosing winners. Until the UCP learns that, Albertans will keep paying more and getting less. Fortunately, Albertans will have a chance to replace this government in 2023, because many Albertans can no longer afford life under the UCP.

Environmental Pollution Sources

Mr. Yao: Madam Speaker, Greta Thunberg was right. The biggest threats to the environment are hypocrisy and virtue signalling, and Canada's Prime Minister and federal environment minister are the best in the world at this. While they try to focus the world on Alberta, they obscure the view from across the rest of our nation, ignoring Canada's pollution of the oceans, the reliance on oil from the Middle East, and B.C.'s number one export commodity, coal.

For example, maybe she should go and visit Tofino and Vancouver, where they are pumping raw sewage out into the Pacific Ocean. This sewage contains a host of toxic chemicals that can kill fish and threaten human health, causing generational damage and cancer in ocean wildlife. Prime Minister Harper gave B.C. money a decade ago to resolve this. Instead, British Columbia spent it on roads, supporting the use of carbon-burning automobiles. In Montreal sewage treatment consists of removing solids but leaves behind bacteria, viruses, pharmaceuticals, and other contaminants. Heaven forbid it actually rains in Montreal because the collection system can't handle that extra volume, resulting in raw sewage being pumped out.

In B.C. Greta could guide the green mercenary radicals blockading the Wet'suwet'en gas pipeline to the ports where massive amounts of coal are exported. Approximately 36 million tonnes of coal leave the port of Vancouver annually. When this product is processed, it creates approximately 17 megatonnes of pollution. Prime Minister Trudeau would be dumbfounded by the numbers, but math is difficult.

Let's turn to burning oil from the Middle East. Did you know that there are about 200,000 households burning oil in Quebec alone? This amounts to the same emissions as 300,000 light vehicles. We must also not forget the thousands of homes in Ontario, New Brunswick, Newfoundland, P.E.I., and Nova Scotia that use these same industrial home heaters burning oil.

1:40

Not only that, but for every drop burned east of Manitoba, an oil tanker has to cross the ocean, burning the dirtiest of fuels in international waters, fuel disallowed by all nations, and they dump contaminated water from their bilge wells into the St. Lawrence Seaway. Hypocrisy and virtue signalling are in full force here in Canada, and, Greta, we need your help.

University of Alberta Funding

Ms Sigurdson: The University of Alberta is one of the greatest educational institutions in our country and is in Edmonton-Riverview, the riding I'm grateful to represent. I'm a proud alumni, as are two of my three sons. I recently met the representatives of the university students' union. They identified three specific concerns: the astronomical increase in tuition, the devastating cuts to funding, and the mental health challenges faced by many students, especially during the pandemic.

Back in 2015 the NDP government signed a two-year tuition freeze in this province in support of students. Today the UCP are standing idle while a significant increase in tuition is overwhelming students. Since the UCP were elected, tuition fees at the U of A have increased dramatically; in some programs it will rise 109 per cent. Law, commerce, pharmacy, engineering, radiation therapy, and many other programs are going to be severely impacted by higher tuition. The UCP is doing nothing to stop skyrocketing tuition. With some of the lowest university enrolments in the country the UCP should be doing all they can to encourage enrolment and not put up greater barriers to it.

Another concern the students presented was the disproportionate decrease in provincial grant this year to the university's budget. Almost half of the total cut from all the postsecondary institutions was given to the U of A. Of the \$126 million cut, almost 50 per cent came from the U of A's budget. How is this fair? Why is the U of A being singled out?

Finally, as many Albertans have, students are struggling with their mental health during the pandemic. Long wait times for services means students are not receiving the needed help. Students have a specific request that the UCP fund mental health services at \$165 per full-time equivalent. This will go a long way towards alleviating the challenges they face.

It's time for the UCP to step up and support students as they are the future of our great province. Let's help the leaders of tomorrow by supporting students at the University of Alberta.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Lac Ste. Anne-Parkland.

Vaccines for Children and Masking on School Buses

Mr. Getson: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Principled and cohesive family units are the building blocks of free society. The shared responsibilities and bond between parents and their children ought to be valued, respected, and protected. In short, this is the foundation on which our nation has been built and must be maintained if we are to continue to live in a free society.

This is why I feel so strongly in ensuring that parents have the right to choice in education and, in the case of COVID-19, the sole responsibility to choose if COVID-19 vaccinations are right for themselves and their children. I'm grateful for and relieved by the statement from the Minister of Education that the government will not have vaccine mandates for kids in schools and that school authorities cannot deny education for students based on their vaccine status.

Kids have had to bear the brunt of restrictions in the last few years, having little to no say in the changes that are taking place around them. They've been sent home from school, denied social activities, and lost valuable time connecting with other kids and their grandparents. Kids should not be bullied into or by accident receiving a vaccination that their parents do not endorse.

I'm also pleading with the government to rescind the masking policy for kids on school buses, considering them to be a cohort. Having been a rural school bus kid myself, I know full well that there's no relevant difference between kids on a rural school bus and kids in a classroom. They're both cohorts, and they spend long times and durations with each other in close proximity.

Madam Speaker, common sense has to prevail, and hearing about that little fellow down in Lloydminster, as a father, made my heart break. All of these policies need to be put back in the bottle sooner than later. Nothing so permanent as temporary when it comes to a government policy. In regard to the new normal these policies may be new, but they're by no means normal.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls

Mr. Feehan: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Nearly three years ago the final report of the missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls inquiry and its 231 calls to justice, to government, institutions, social service providers, and all Canadians was issued. The report is composed of the truths of more than 2,380 family members, survivors of violence, experts, and knowledge keepers. In those two-plus years we have largely had silence from the UCP on implementing these calls to justice. The need for this government to take these calls to justice seriously has never been more important. Any delay on these critical initiatives is a betrayal to the Indigenous communities that deserve and rightly expect action from Alberta's government. The silence from this government on implementing these calls to justice leave many fearing that it is just not a priority to the UCP.

A working group was appointed in March of 2020 with a one-year mandate. The government's website says that the timeline has not progressed beyond the first stage, with no timeline in place to determine when it will be met. Important calls are not being acted upon.

Recommendation 5.6 calls for the provincial government "to develop an enhanced, holistic, comprehensive approach for . . . support to Indigenous victims of crime and families and friends of Indigenous murdered or missing persons." This recommendation is especially critical as we still hear tragic stories of Indigenous women and children and two-spirited people being victimized and even revictimized and needing support. I have heard from community leaders who have been calling and advocating for this specifically only to get silence from the government.

Each and every one of these recommendations needs to be fulfilled if we as a Legislature are to meet our commitments to the Indigenous people in Alberta. I urge this government to take the time and listen to what Indigenous leaders, communities, and families are saying and act. The wait has been too long. Many have been waiting for these changes their entire lives and do not deserve to wait even longer for this government to prioritize this. I hope this government is listening.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Devon.

Government Policies and Economic Recovery

Mr. Smith: Thank you, Madam Speaker. When I was first elected in 2015, I had a number of oil and gas companies come to my office. They said: we can spend our money anywhere in the world, but the policies of the NDP are telling us not to spend in Alberta. Over the next few years Albertans struggled to overcome the negative impact the NDP policies had on the Alberta economy. The NDP increased corporate tax rates. They implemented a carbon tax, appointed anti-oil activists to key energy committees, refused to fight for pipelines, resulting in the inability to break through to tidewater. They increased spending and racked up debt and deficits, resulting in the downgrading of Alberta's credit rating. We had difficulty in raising capital. We could not attract badly needed projects, and we saw existing projects shelved.

Contrast this with the actions of the United Conservative government. We lowered taxes and reduced red tape, saving businesses millions. We got rid of the carbon tax, and we introduced the TIER program, encouraging environmentally responsible investment. We introduced the AIOC, making Alberta's First Nations partners in our economic prosperity. We are investing millions into irrigation, increasing farm acreage, and we've attracted agrifood businesses to Alberta. We created Invest Alberta and the investment and growth fund to attract business investment into Alberta.

The result has been an increase of around \$12.4 billion of capital investment into the Alberta economy. The hydrogen road map, the passing of geothermal legislation and regulations, all of these actions have resulted in an Alberta economy with economic recovery that has resulted in the *Financial Post* declaring that Alberta has got its swagger back.

The NDP argued that these actions would only result in economic oppression and that there would be no trickle-down benefits to Albertans. The facts speak otherwise. This UCP government has created many thousands of good paying jobs, and we have laid an economic foundation for an Alberta recovery that will bring prosperity and a high quality of living to Albertans.

Tabling Returns and Reports

The Deputy Speaker: Are there any tablings to be made? We are making great time here today, so I apologize for the quick notice. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

Ms Hoffman: Happy to comply, Madam Speaker. I have a tabling that I promised the *Hansard* staff last night during bill debate when we were discussing trails. It is an image of two signs in the K Country, where we were promised to have great signage, and it talks about "West Col Decent" rather than descent. I guess it's nice that the government is giving reviews for their own trails.

Member Loyola: Madam Speaker, I have a tabling, the five requisite copies of an article that I made reference to last night during the trails debate. It's just called Scientists Say New Alberta Trails Act Threatens Already-stressed Environment, by Bob Weber.

1:50

Oral Question Period

The Deputy Speaker: The Leader of the Official Opposition is first.

Surgery and Nonsurgical Health Care Wait Times

Ms Notley: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Scott Whynott had his first heart attack at work. The second one stopped his heart for 3,000 beats. He underwent a quintuple bypass last fall: incisions from his

neck to his naval down to his legs. In the following months he needed rehab and wound care, and he couldn't get it. The second wave, made worse by UCP inaction, saw to that. His wounds became infected and later septic. Today he may never walk again, let alone work. Will the Premier stand and apologize to Albertans like Scott who have suffered such terrible consequences because of his failure to act?

Mr. Copping: Madam Speaker, my heart goes out to all Albertans and all families who have suffered through COVID-19 and who have had their surgeries postponed. This was incredibly challenging for the first three waves, where over 30,000 procedures were postponed, and then into the fourth wave we've also postponed 15,000. That number was given a number of weeks ago, and that number has continued to increase, but good news: we are catching up in terms of our surgeries. We are exceeding over 80 per cent in terms of catch-up, and I'm looking forward to us hitting 100 per cent so we can provide the services to individuals as the hon. member mentioned and all Albertans. Then we'll present a plan to not only get to 100 per cent but to catch up on all the surgeries and ensure that we are providing for the needs of Albertans.

Ms Notley: Well, Madam Speaker, Scott's story is just one example of how delayed treatment can severely impact a person's life. Today because of the UCP's repeated failures, especially in the fourth wave, there are tens of thousands of stories like Scott's. The CMA reports that across Canada last fall deferred care led to in excess of 4,000 deaths, let alone severe outcomes. Can the Premier tell us how many Albertans are experiencing those kinds of severe outcomes from deferred care today? Not just surgery but all kinds of delayed care outcomes.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health.

Mr. Copping: Thank you, Madam Speaker, and again thanks to the hon. member for the question. This is a serious issue, and this is why I'd like to thank all Albertans for following the guidance of our chief medical officer of health and getting vaccinated. What that does is that that has eased the pressure on our health care system, and it helps protect us in future waves so we can focus on getting back to 100 per cent and then exceeding that to be able to catch up on surgeries.

Ms Notley: Well, Madam Speaker, people like Scott deserve to know what the plan is. In order to do that, we also need to know how big the problem is. Yesterday the Premier once again said that the number of surgeries that were cancelled was 15,000. Again, the Health minister acknowledged what he actually acknowledged several weeks ago, that the number 15,000 has been growing every day. To the Health minister: do you know yet what is the number of surgeries that have been cancelled in Alberta since the fourth wave as of December 1?

Mr. Copping: As indicated by the Premier and as I indicated already, Madam Speaker, the last count that we had was 15,000, and that number continues to increase. We're not at 100 per cent yet, so the number of postponements continues to increase. What our focus is on and what AHS's focus is on is moving resources from the ICU looking after COVID patients into surgeries. Getting those surgeries to happen is incredibly important, that we increase the numbers. We're over 80 per cent, and that number is continuing to increase. We are working on a plan, but what's more important before we actually present the plan here is that we actually convert surgeries.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition with her second question.

Surgery Wait Times

Ms Notley: Well, Madam Speaker, I'll try again on this issue of the number of cancelled surgeries, because once again the Health minister has acknowledged that that number grows every day and that, in fact, the number was about 15,000 cancelled surgeries impacting people like Scott. That number was 15,000 weeks ago. Once again, Albertans deserve to know: as of today, December 1, how many Albertans have had their surgeries cancelled during the fourth wave of COVID? How can we fix the problem if the minister doesn't know how big the problem is?

Mr. Copping: Madam Speaker, as I already indicated, our focus is actually getting the surgeries completed. We are providing support for AHS to be able to increase capacity while at the same time converting the resources that were dedicated to dealing with the fourth wave of the COVID spike, to address that, which actually resulted in a reduction of surgeries, and moving those over to be able to get surgeries done. That's our focus. That's what I continue to do. I'd like to point out that these are incredibly challenging times. Our government and other governments across the entire country have faced challenges with this, but we did catch up for the first and third waves, and we will on the fourth wave.

Ms Notley: Well, Madam Speaker, I don't exactly know how the minister over there can tell us that they caught up in the first and the third waves because he can't tell us how many surgeries have been cancelled thus far in the fourth wave. Apparently the Health minister doesn't have access to numbers. Apparently he doesn't know the issue that he's been asked to manage. He doesn't know how bad the problem is. One more time. Mr. Minister, how many Albertans had their surgeries cancelled in the fourth wave as of December 1, 2021? Can you tell us?

Mr. Copping: Madam Speaker, I've already given the answer to that question. Our focus is not on the increasing number, because we know that the number is increasing. Our focus is actually getting the surgeries done, increasing capacity within the system to 100 per cent and putting in place a plan not only to get to 100 per cent but to exceed 100 per cent. We know that this is a challenge that is before us right now, and we know that we need to increase capacity. That is why the Premier gave me the mandate to focus on increasing capacity, to focus on increasing surgeries, and to implement the Alberta surgical initiative, which will actually increase our capacity.

Ms Notley: Well, Madam Speaker, I will try just one more time. The minister did not give us the answer. The minister is on record in *Hansard* a couple of weeks ago, two and a half, three weeks ago, saying that the number is 15,000 cancelled surgeries and that it grows every day that we're not at 100 per cent capacity. Guess what? We're not at 100 per cent capacity. Now, I don't know how the minister can talk about getting us back to capacity if he doesn't know how much capacity we need, which is because we need to know how many cancelled surgeries there are. Once again, Minister, stop hiding. Tell Albertans how many surgeries . . .

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health.

Mr. Copping: Madam Speaker, we are not hiding. We are actually focusing on solving the problem. That focus is actually transferring the resources that are in ICU right now to be able to provide surgeries, to get up to 100 per cent capacity. We are heading in that

direction, which is the good news. It's also implementing the Alberta surgical initiative, which will create greater capacity within the system, plus identifying how we can use our current resources to increase capacity within the current surgical system within our hospitals. We are doing that work. We will deliver on that promise.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

Workplace Conduct of Ministers and Staff

Member Irwin: The Premier told this House he was aware of allegations of sexual harassment against Ivan Bernardo, the Health minister's senior adviser, in the fall of 2020 and that Mr. Bernardo's contract with the government ended shortly after that, but in last week's government of Alberta expense disclosure Alberta Health reported payments of more than \$28,000 to Bernardo months after he was supposedly shown the door. To the Premier: why did the government of Alberta pay tens of thousands of dollars to this disgraced former UCP staffer?

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health.

Mr. Copping: Thank you, Madam Speaker. As I said previously in this House, sexual harassment in the workplace or any place is wrong. Mr. Bernardo has not been employed with the government of Alberta since December of 2020, nor did he receive any severance payment when he left government. The monetary payment to which the hon. member is referring: these were reimbursements for expenses incurred during Mr. Bernardo's previous period of employment. They were approved under Treasury Board directive and under the rules and process, and they were first publicly disclosed in spring 2021 through the minister's office expenses.

Member Irwin: Yesterday the minister said Bernardo was doing consulting work. Today he claims that Bernardo racked up more than \$28,000 in travel and hotel costs during a pandemic, yet somehow these expenses weren't paid out for months after he left, not until the next fiscal year. We know that Bernardo was the right-hand man for the Member for Calgary-Acadia. So again to the Premier: is the UCP really that sloppy with Albertans' money, or did Bernardo continue to work for the Health minister in 2021 and his apparent exit from this UCP government was all just for show?
2:00

Mr. Copping: Madam Speaker, that simply isn't correct. As I stated, this was not additional payment for additional work. These were reimbursements for expenses. This was approved under Treasury Board policy through the normal process.

Member Irwin: Well, let's go back to the survivor, then. The woman who filed the complaint against Bernardo was fired from this UCP government in February 2021, but it's clear that the government continued its relationship with Bernardo beyond April 2021, paid him to work for AHS, and paid him another \$28,000. To the Premier: why was the woman who raised the alarm on the toxic, unsafe workplace here in this Legislature fired while one of the men named in her harassment complaint continued to work and continued to get paid?

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Minister of Justice.

Mr. Madu: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I do want to echo the comment made by the Minister of Health that, on this side, this government takes issues and complaints of sexual harassment seriously. I do believe that the government is working through those

issues. But let me say this: this is a matter that is the subject of an active summative complaint before the Court of Queen's Bench. It would be inappropriate for any member of government to delve into those matters at this point in time because the matter is sub judice.

Photoradar Guidelines

Mr. Dach: The photoradar cash cow lives as this UCP government continues to pick the pockets of drivers. After two years of dithering and despite a detailed 170-page study showing that photoradar is a cash grab that punishes Albertans and only reduces collisions by 1.4 per cent, the Minister of Transportation held a press conference and said that nothing would change, nothing except that she loves the cash cow and loves punishing the driving public. To the Premier. This government grabbed a bigger share of photoradar revenues in 2020, and drivers are paying the price. Is gouging Alberta drivers really the best this government can offer? UCP . . .

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Minister of Transportation.

Mrs. Sawhney: Madam Speaker, we have introduced additional clarification in the guidelines that will ensure that fishing holes and speed traps are eliminated. The outright ban has safety implications, and I'm sure that's not what the hon. member wants to see happen.

Mr. Dach: Today's announcement on photoradar was a quintessential example of ragging the puck. Nothing is changing. The cash cow lives, and Alberta drivers are paying the price. We know nothing is changing because in a fit of transparency the minister said that there would be no real impact on revenues. To the Premier. Rick Bell wrote in 2019 that photoradar was "on its last legs," but those legs are looking mighty sturdy. Why is this government so addicted to punishing drivers with skyrocketing insurance rates, forcing people to pay more for a driver's licence, and now continuing the pain of unfair photoradar? UCP? UC photoradar.

Mrs. Sawhney: Madam Speaker, the data does indicate that photoradar does decrease severe collisions by 32 per cent. While photoradar will still generate revenue, Albertans can be confident that the new guidelines will ensure it is used to improve traffic safety.

Mr. Dach: This government had two years to kill the photoradar cash cow and did nothing but rake in the cash. Now they're saying that municipalities will have to report quarterly, but they already have to do that. Now they're saying that they need more data, but they've got more comprehensive data than they need, reams of it. Now they're promising to end photoradar fishing holes, but in the same breath the minister is saying that there will be virtually no impact on revenues. To the Premier: how can this government claim to be making any meaningful changes when the cash cow is going to be producing the same amount of revenues and drivers are going to continue to get hosed at the same rate? UCP? UC photoradar.

Mrs. Sawhney: Madam Speaker, my number one priority is safety on the roads. Alberta Transportation and Justice and Solicitor General will work directly with municipalities and law enforcement agencies on the new requirements. Municipalities have approximately one year to enact the changes, including those with budgetary implications. The temporary freeze on new and expanded photoradar locations and equipment will be extended until December 1, 2022.

Ms Armstrong-Homeniuk: Madam Speaker, the use of photoradar is a hot-button issue for many Albertans. While many Albertans

view the use of photoradar as a cash cow, others believe that we have too few devices catching lead-footed drivers. Earlier today the Minister of Transportation and the Minister of Justice and Solicitor General announced changes to automated traffic enforcement. To the Minister of Transportation: can you inform all Albertans what is changing with photoradar programs?

Mrs. Sawhney: Thank you to the member for that question. Madam Speaker, Alberta's government is restricting the use of photoradar, putting the onus on municipalities to provide data to justify each location where photoradar is used. These changes would ensure that fishing holes or speed traps are eliminated. While photoradar will still generate revenue, Albertans can be confident that the new guidelines will ensure that it is used to ensure traffic safety.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville.

Ms Armstrong-Homeniuk: Thank you, Madam Speaker, and thank you to the minister. Given that there are far too many accidents on Alberta's roads and that, as the minister mentioned, safety on our roads has to be our highest priority, despite photoradar's detractors the program has proven to be successful in making our roads safer. Can the Minister of Transportation please provide this House with specific examples of how the changes to automatic traffic enforcement announced today will improve accountability and transparency amongst municipalities?

Mrs. Sawhney: Madam Speaker, changes coming in 2022 that will help everyday Albertans include restrictions on photoradar use in transition zones and on residential roads with less than 50-kilometre-an-hour speed limits. This does not include school, playground, and construction zones. We will eliminate double ticketing within five minutes, and all enforcement vehicles must be clearly visible.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville.

Ms Armstrong-Homeniuk: Thank you, Madam Speaker, and thank you, Minister. Given that currently there are 26 municipalities that use photoradar in their traffic enforcement efforts, these municipalities now have a lot of work to do in the months ahead to implement the changes to automatic traffic enforcement announced today, but it is important to mention that they do not need to accomplish this overnight. Can the Minister of Transportation advise the House of the next steps of this process?

Mrs. Sawhney: Madam Speaker, Alberta Transportation and Justice and Solicitor General will work directly with municipalities and law enforcement agencies on the new requirements. Municipalities have approximately one year to enact the changes, including those with budgetary implications. The temporary freeze on new and expanded photoradar locations and equipment will be extended until December 1, 2022. Again, the number one priority is safety on the roads.

Rural Emergency Medical Services

Ms Gray: Madam Speaker, this week the Premier had the audacity to defend his response to the fourth wave. He actually tried to convince people that our system was not near collapse despite the fact that thousands died of COVID-19, tens of thousands were sick with the virus, and well over 15,000 vital surgeries have been cancelled. Albertans are left to pay for this government's deadly

failures. The people of McLennan went 24 hours without emergency care on Monday. The nearest hospital was 50 kilometres away in High Prairie. Will the Premier tell these Albertans why his glaring incompetence robbed them of the health care they needed and deserved for a full day?

Mr. Copping: Madam Speaker, COVID has been challenging for all provinces and for our health care systems. Our focus continues to be on providing health care equitably across the entire province. We invested further money in terms of EMS to be able to support transferring patients to where we can provide the services. We also have invested over \$90 million for rural physicians to be able to ensure that the services can be provided where they're at. We understand that there are challenges, but we're focused on fixing that and getting through this pandemic.

Ms Gray: Given that it gets much worse and that this government has no plan to bring in more workers or even mend fences with the ones we hope to keep and given that in Elk Point the emergency department is now closed every Tuesday and Thursday – that's right; if you have a medical emergency in that town, you better pray it happens on a Wednesday because a little earlier or later you will be forced to go to St. Paul before you can get the care you need – can the Premier explain to the people of Elk Point why he has failed so badly, why his government has faced issues with health care services since the spring at least and still has produced no plan to attract more front-line workers or support the ones you have?

2:10

Mr. Copping: Madam Speaker, as the hon. member knows, our focus through the fourth wave is to be able to provide the critical services for individuals who had COVID. You know, that involved pulling resources from various locations to be able to provide those services. Now we are actually putting those resources back into place as the numbers come down. Again, thankful to all Albertans for following the advice of the chief medical officer of health and for getting vaccinated. We also know this has been a long-standing problem in terms of resources in rural communities, and we are focused on that – \$90 million for physicians – and we continue to be able to look at other methods so that we can actually get other health care professionals.

Ms Gray: Given that the people of Barrhead were informed by AHS yesterday that for 12 hours they would have no physician coverage in their emergency department and told that in the event of a medical emergency they should go to Whitecourt, 100 full kilometres away, in the winter, to the Health minister: please explain to the people of Barrhead why this government is doing nothing to address massive, cascading failures in rural health care. Why is the government willing to sit back while Albertans experiencing medical emergencies are forced to travel 100 kilometres in the snow to try and get life-saving care?

Mr. Copping: Madam Speaker, we are actively working on this problem. We dedicated over \$90 million in 2021, this year alone, to address the issues with physicians: the rural, remote, northern program; the rural medical education program; the rural integrated community clerkship program; the rural health professions action plan. We are working with professionals to be able to ensure that we have the health care resources that we need across the province. This is a challenging problem. It existed pre-COVID. COVID has made it worse. It still exists today, but we are going to focus on fixing it.

Government Policies and Cost Increases

Ms Phillips: While the Finance minister claims that Albertans are dancing all the way to the bank, their bills and the cost of living say otherwise. We hear from Albertans every day who can't afford to put food on the table, pay the bills, and are looking hard at what they're going to spend over Christmas because their utility bills have spiked. Now, the UCP doesn't control every cost downloaded onto families, but what they do control they have piled on, like their car insurance, where they made a decision after considerable lobbying by the Premier's friends. Can the minister for the record tell the House just how much automobile insurance has increased, on average, since he came into office and tell us whether he's okay with that increase?

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Minister of Finance and President of Treasury Board.

Mr. Toews: Well, thank you, Madam Speaker. I will acknowledge that right now there are inflation pressures within the province of Alberta, certainly across the country, brought on by federal monetary policy and fiscal policy and also brought on by supply chain disruptions.

With respect to insurance the members opposite, when they were in government, did nothing to deal with the systemic issues of rising insurance rates. We brought in Bill 41. Bill 41 and the related regulation changes have stabilized insurance premiums and in some cases have actually brought them down.

Ms Phillips: Well, given, Madam Speaker, that the answer to my question is actually 30 per cent as of last reporting and that it's likely to get worse and given that analysts also anticipate that utility prices will continue to rise, can the Minister of Finance tell Alberta families just how much their electricity portion has gone up in the last two years and how much more he expects they will pay for utilities this winter and tell us, again, if he's okay with that?

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Minister of Finance.

Mr. Toews: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I find it incredibly rich coming from the member opposite, who was part of a government who brought in the largest cost increase in the form of a carbon tax levied on all Albertans. It affected every utility bill, every household, every business, every senior in this province.

Ms Phillips: Well, given that the answer is that the electricity portion of people's bills has more than doubled since the UCP took office and given that they lifted the cap on that electricity portion and given that small businesses also run vehicles and need to keep the lights on and given that small businesses are also facing such skyrocketing insurance and utility bills, is the minister tracking exactly how many Alberta small businesses have closed for good? Will he tell us that number, and is he okay with the fact that the decisions that he has made on insurance and utilities have forced many small businesses to close?

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Minister of Finance.

Mr. Toews: Well, thank you, Madam Speaker. When did the members opposite ever care about businesses in this province? When they were in office, they pushed up corporate tax rates by 20 per cent, drove investment out by the tens of billions of dollars. Businesses failed because of the members opposite's policies. We're positioning this province for investment attraction and growth. It's attracting investment by the billions, creating opportunities for small businesses from corner to corner in this province.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Lesser Slave Lake.

Highway Maintenance and Safety

Mr. Rehn: Thank you, Madam Speaker. There are parts of highways 2 and 88 in my constituency of Lesser Slave Lake that have fallen into disrepair. The conditions of these highways are important to those travelling within the constituency of Lesser Slave Lake. To the Minister of Transportation: since the reason why they fell into such disrepair was lack of maintenance, what steps can be taken to ensure proper maintenance when these repair projects are completed to avoid other costly projects like this?

Mrs. Sawhney: Safe, drivable roads are of the utmost importance. The highway 2 paving project began with some intersection improvements in August of 2021. It is currently 25 per cent complete. However, due to the risk of inclement weather the contractor has deferred paving to June of 2022. There are currently no rehabilitation projects for this section of the highway in question, but ongoing maintenance will continue.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Lesser Slave Lake.

Mr. Rehn: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Given that these highways are in such disrepair that they cause unintended damage to vehicles that travel on these roads and given that these vehicles that have been damaged include residents and first responder vehicles, causing alternate routes to be used to reduce damage on vehicles and machinery, to the Minister of Health: how has the increased caution in travel by first responders affected response times, and if they have been affected, are there any plans to help with the change?

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health.

Mr. Copping: Thank you, Madam Speaker, and thank you to the hon. member for the question. We know our EMS providers spend a significant amount of time on the road, particularly in rural areas like Slave Lake. Thankfully, the spike in demand for the summer is starting to decline, but we are responding at the same time. AHS added an extra \$8.3 million to EMS in August, and we increased paramedic staff by 9 per cent over the last two years. We are also supporting EMS providers with the hours of work project to study the impact of shifts and how we can increase safety and sustainability as well as looking at options to treat without transporting patients to ERs. Albertans know that when they call 911 . . .

The Deputy Speaker: The Member for Lesser Slave Lake.

Mr. Rehn: Thanks, Minister. Given that they were told that these highways were not top priority due to other highways being more urgent to complete and given that they have been told many times now that the highway project will be delayed yet again, to the Minister of Transportation: is it possible to put together a list of high-priority projects to be completed so that they and other municipalities across Alberta know when these projects will likely be finished?

Mrs. Sawhney: Madam Speaker, in spring of 2020 Alberta's government announced a \$2 billion investment in the job-creating capital maintenance and renewal program. Alberta Transportation reviews several factors when determining road paving projects, like traffic volumes, pavement quality, and visual inspections. Data is used to prioritize rehab projects across the province.

Government Policies

Mr. Eggen: Madam Speaker, more young adults are leaving Alberta right now than any other point since the mid-1980s. Our brightest minds, our future leaders are fleeing at a time when we need them most to help build Alberta's future. It's so sad and entirely preventable. This UCP government has jacked up costs for tuition, school fees, car insurance, utilities. They've cut funding for the vulnerable, forced people from their homes, attacked doctors, attacked teachers, tried to sell off our parks, and the list goes on and on. Will the Minister of Finance tell this House which of the UCP's most terrible policy decisions he believes is most responsible for this mass exodus of young Albertans?

2:20

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Finance.

Mr. Toews: Well, thank you, Madam Speaker. I reject the premise in that question categorically. What we're doing in this province is positioning this province for investment attraction. We're working with postsecondary institutions to ensure that they have the positions available, the capacity to train up the next generation, and we're seeing investment flood into this province by the billions of dollars, petrochemical, tech, aviation . . . [interjections]

The Deputy Speaker: Order. A little bit of heckling is appropriate but yelling is not.

Mr. Toews: Madam Speaker, we're seeing billions of dollars flow into this province in aviation, tech, petrochemical, and ag manufacturing. This will create great job opportunities, great career opportunities for future Albertans.

Mr. Eggen: Madam Speaker, given that Alexa, a 24-year-old Calgarian, said that she's considered leaving this province that she's called home for her entire life and given that Alexa asked, "Why is this government refusing to support the current energy sector and also invest in renewable energy?" and given that she's quite appalled on a daily basis by the blatant disregard this UCP government shows towards mental health, particularly with youth, will anyone on that bench explain to Alexa why this government refuses to support renewable energy and refuses to invest in mental health supports?

Mr. Schweitzer: Mr. Speaker, I'll gladly inform Alexa that Alberta is leading the entire country in renewable power investment. Mr. Speaker, I have to resurrect the NDP legacy tour bus, but I've never described the NDP legacy tour bus. It was a beat-up, broken-down bus. Thankfully, Alberta voters sent it to the scrapyard, and Alberta is now leading the country in growth, Mr. Speaker. We're leading in job creation. Alberta has a bright future ahead. [interjections]

The Deputy Speaker: Order. Order.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-North West.

Mr. Eggen: Well, thank you. And I believe it's Madam Speaker. Yes, indeed.

Given that a Sherwood Park native, Margaret Sproule, fled the province after saying that this government repeatedly demonstrated how little she meant to them, saying that this government – and I quote – “eliminated the provincial tuition tax credit, literally stripping thousands of dollars from my hands. They showed their disregard and disrespect for LGBTQ-plus people like myself time and time again both inside and outside this Legislature. They showed how little they cared for the welfare of seniors by handing my mother's

hard-earned pension over to AIMCo, and that's just the tip of the iceberg.” can anyone on the government side explain to Margaret . . .

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Minister of Finance.

Mr. Toews: Madam Speaker, I really don't know if there was a question embedded there, but what I can say today, based on the fiscal update we provided yesterday, is that our plan is working. The economic recovery in this province is taking shape. We're moving from recovery to growth. [interjections]

The Deputy Speaker: We heard the question; we will hear the answer. Please stop yelling.

Mr. Toews: Madam Speaker, we're moving from recovery to growth. In fact, just two weeks ago we had a \$7 billion week with the announcement of the Northern Petrochemical Corporation planned investment in Grande Prairie, with Amazon's announcement to create a web services hub in the province. Our plan is working.

Alberta Serious Incident Response Team

Mr. Sabir: In August of 2019 and February of 2021 the executive director of ASIRT stated that they needed additional resources. This need is apparently lost on this government, who would, rather than invest in police accountability, make deep cuts to ASIRT and impair its ability to do its critical work. The pressures on ASIRT have hit a crisis point, and ASIRT doesn't have the resources it needs to do its job. That is a fact. Will the minister commit here and right now to reverse his cruel cuts to ASIRT so that ASIRT can . . .

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Minister of Justice.

Mr. Madu: Thank you, Madam Speaker. The blunt truth is that many of the problems that this government is trying to solve right now were indeed created by the previous government. ASIRT's manpower and resource problems have been in place since the NDP were in office. Right now I can commit to the members of this Assembly that since becoming Minister of Justice, indeed prior to my getting that particular office, we've been working with my department to ensure that ASIRT has the resources that they need.

Mr. Sabir: Given that yesterday the executive director of ASIRT resigned, months after saying that the agency was at a critical breaking point, and given that despite his claim the Justice minister cut the funding for ASIRT by 3 per cent while our government invested in addressing the workload demand of ASIRT and given that these cuts will mean that investigations that have been ongoing for two or three years will take even longer, can the minister tell this House how long he wants people to wait to have their serious complaints addressed? Two years? Three years? Is that what he calls accountability?

Mr. Madu: Madam Speaker, I am confident that ASIRT has got the resources that they need to continue to do the important work that they do on behalf of Albertans. I am also confident that I am working with the department to make sure that if additional resources are required, those resources, manpower, and tax dollars will be there to fund the services of ASIRT.

Mr. Sabir: Given that in June the assistant executive director of ASIRT left the organization and given that the executive director, who resigned yesterday, warned about this and said, and I quote, that ASIRT was grossly underresourced and struggling with an unmanageable workload and given that in the budget debate the

Minister of Justice claimed that he was confident that ASIRT had the budget it needed to meet its mandate, a claim he made again today, does the minister think that losing the executive director and other staff is sustainable? How does he plan to address that, or does he think collapsing ASIRT helps his case for an Alberta provincial police . . .

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Minister of Justice.

Mr. Madu: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Again, as I indicated before the floor of the Assembly yesterday, ASIRT's executive director's departure was planned, and I stand by that. I do have a CBC article here that says that in a brief statement Hughson confirmed to Postmedia that she did in fact resign as head of ASIRT on Tuesday to accept – to accept – a permanent position with Alberta Crown prosecution service.

Grande Cache Roads and Health Care Services

Mr. Long: Grande Cache is a rural hamlet along the scenic route to Alaska, highway 40, nearly two hours from both Hinton and Grande Prairie. Surrounded by mountains, lakes, rivers, and forests, every view is breathtaking. It is a true hidden gem of our province. Due to its remote location the community feels that its needs have not been priorities of provincial governments over the years. Major upgrading to highway 40 is crucial to the community's survival. To the Minister of Transportation: are there plans for further upgrades to highway 40?

Mrs. Sawhney: Madam Speaker, highway 40 is an important corridor for tourism and recreation, transporting goods to communities north of the Yellowhead highway and supporting natural gas developments in the area. Alberta Transportation is committed to widening highway 40 between Hinton and just south of Grande Cache. Design work is under way, and the department is in the process of obtaining necessary environmental permits. No firm date has been set for construction, but the project is a provincial priority.

Mr. Long: Thank you, Minister. Given that uncertainty around health care is stressful for an entire community, particularly when having to drive long distances on narrow roads for appointments, and given that to retain and attract community members so the hamlet can thrive and grow, medical certainty is a must and given that our government has announced initiatives to expand rural health services across Alberta, to the Minister of Health: is there a plan to replace the physicians who are leaving Grande Cache and maintain the current level of care?

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health.

Mr. Copping: Thank you, Madam Speaker, for the question, and thank you to the hon. Member for West Yellowhead. Alberta's government is committing to making sure that no matter where Albertans live, they can get access to the health care they deserve. That's why we've invested over \$90 million this year alone to address rural doctor recruitment and retention. In Grande Cache AHS is working diligently to address quality and patient safety and also focus on issues of community growth. In particular, I understand that two physicians are being interviewed for positions in Grande Cache right now while we're recruiting for another four positions as we speak.

Mr. Long: Thank you, Minister. Given that communities don't simply need access – they need services – in order to survive and given that rural and remote communities always seem to have issues

accessing health care and given that Grande Cache has industry and institutions and is expanding seniors' services and given that the community is concerned due to physicians either leaving, retiring, going back to school, or changing the scope of their practice, to the Minister of Health: is the future provision of health care for Grande Cache a priority for our government?

2:30

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health.

Mr. Copping: Thanks again, Madam Speaker, and thanks again to the hon. member for the question. We also recognize that rural health care spaces are in need of renovation and replacement. That is why in Budget 2021 we announced \$50 million to modernize and improve rural health facilities across rural Alberta. In the hon. member's community of Grande Cache we're working with community leaders to discuss additional clinic space and support. I understand the town is working to set up new clinic space in a separate building and will be renovating the space over the next six months. Our government will ensure quality health care is available in Grande Cache and throughout our province.

COVID-19 Vaccination Incentives

Mr. Deol: Madam Speaker, after weeks in hiding, the Premier promised a \$100 incentive to encourage people to get vaccinated against COVID-19 during the fourth wave. He said, I quote: I wish we wouldn't have to do this. So it's not a big surprise that he hasn't. Dozens of parties have reached out to the NDP caucus claiming that although they were vaccinated after the incentive was announced and registered for the incentive, they still have not received the money. Can the minister tell us how many Albertans haven't received their cash, and can the minister tell us why it is taking so long?

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health.

Mr. Copping: Thank you, Madam Speaker, and thank you to the hon. member for the question. I'm very pleased that vaccination rates have continued to increase. Since September we've had an incredible increase in terms of from the low 70s to nearly 89 per cent for first doses; 84 per cent – also, I'm excited. We'll be making an announcement later today to expand third doses to more Albertans because we know that vaccines are the best way that we can protect Albertans, not only getting us out of the fourth wave but protecting us against potential future waves.

Mr. Deol: Given that the cash incentive that is now delayed was part of the deliberate effort to stall on introducing vaccine passports, which are far more effective in encouraging vaccine uptake, and given that the Alberta NDP has questioned this cash incentive from the start and called on this government to introduce vaccine passports, but the government instead fund raised off their opposition to them, can the minister inform the House how many people got vaccinated between the vaccine incentive and when passports got introduced? Will he admit the vaccine passports are far more effective than the Premier's \$100 . . .

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health.

Mr. Copping: Madam Speaker, the vaccinations increased significantly, as I indicated in my earlier answer, from September to now. They continue to increase, and, quite frankly, that is one of the key items of focus for my ministry and for our government. When we look at the number of incentives we put in place – we looked at the lottery; we looked at the \$100 payment, all of these added

together. Plus one of the side benefits of the REP was that it actually highlighted the need for individuals to get vaccinated. All of that put together drove up vaccinations, and I want to thank . . .

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadows.

Mr. Deol: Given the UCP failed to get the money out the door during the pandemic and the \$100 incentive is just one instance – small businesses and farmers have waited for eight months or more for promised spending; workers are still waiting for promised paid sick leave – and given that the UCP introduced a broken vaccine passport then a broken vaccine passport website then a broken international vaccine passport and given these errors are bad for our economic recovery and people of Alberta, does this Premier realize that Albertans don't trust him to manage this pandemic and . . .

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health.

Mr. Copping: Madam Speaker, as indicated previously in this House, we responded in the fourth wave by putting in measures from the chief medical officer of health and putting in the REP program. The REP program allowed us to enable businesses to continue to operate while at the same time reducing the spread of transmission. That program has worked. The numbers are continuing to come down week over week. ICU numbers are coming down. Hospitalization numbers are coming down. We also see vaccinations increasing. Once again, I'd like to thank all Albertans for getting vaccinated, and I'm looking forward to making an announcement this afternoon about increasing the opportunity for vaccinations for third doses.

Hotel and Tourism Industry Supports

Mr. Bilous: Madam Speaker, we know that the COVID-19 pandemic has hit the tourism sector harder than any other. Over the past two years Alberta hotels have been slammed with lockdowns and border closures, forcing far too many to consider closing their doors for good, and now it's worse as they're seeing no end in sight with border closures due to the omicron variant. To the Minister of Jobs, Economy and Innovation. We've heard from many hotel leaders, and their ask is simple. Will this government commit to reinstating the tourism levy abatement, and if not, why not?

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

Mr. Schweitzer: Thank you, Madam Speaker, and also really appreciate that thoughtful question. The tourism industry, as we know, has been impacted the most throughout this pandemic, and we want to make sure that we continue to make sure that we drive ahead and encourage them to do that. We have our project bootstrapped to support them. We've compiled an additional \$20 million to the tourism industry to make sure that they are resilient. We've had the tourism levy abatement extended a couple of times, and we're reviewing that right now.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you for that answer. Given that the UCP government has been ignoring the tourism sector's plea to extend the previous levy abatement for six months, given that the Calgary Hotel Association has been calling on this government to take action because the UCP's open-for-summer plan failed to increase revenue, given that most hotels in Calgary are struggling to reach 50 per cent occupancy or were during the Stampede – these calls have been ignored for far too long – will the minister finally act to support Alberta hotels and the tourism sector specifically, or is he willing to continue to watch more businesses go under?

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Schweitzer: Thank you, Madam Speaker. We've met with the tourism industry almost on a weekly basis between myself and our parliamentary secretary to make sure that we deal with their issues in real time. We've provided supports to destination management organizations, provided further resources to Travel Alberta. We've put in place the tourism levy abatement numerous times, and, in addition to that, we've expanded the recovery launch. Making sure that we're there for them in the tourism industry is critical. There are thousands of jobs at stake. We want to make sure they're successful long-term as we get through this pandemic.

Mr. Bilous: Given that the tourism levy abatement expired exactly six months ago and given that travel and tourism are still down with little signs of improving with recent travel restrictions from South Africa and other potential countries if the omicron variant continues to spread, can the minister tell us how many hotels, tourism operators, and small businesses we have lost and have closed permanently during this pandemic? Please be specific, Minister. They're listening.

Mr. Schweitzer: Madam Speaker, we're going to continue to support the tourism industry. We also want to make sure that we highlight how important it is to have a successful airline industry for the success of our tourism industry. We've got Flair airlines that's growing. We've got Lynx Air that's established a new headquarters, a brand new company in Calgary. WestJet is establishing new routes. That's critical. That's why we provided additional resources to Travel Alberta to help route development. We're going to continue to be there to support the tourism industry, support our hotels as we hopefully get through this pandemic in the next little while.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster-Wainwright.

Tax Revenues

Mr. Rowswell: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Given that the NDP increased the corporate tax rate to 12 per cent in 2015, leading to a decrease in actual tax revenues and given that the current government's mid-year fiscal update shows corporate tax revenues increasing by 19 per cent a year despite having cut the tax rate to 8 per cent, can the Minister of Finance explain to the House how increasing the corporate tax rate brought in less revenue under the NDP while lowering the tax rate is bringing in more revenue now?

Mr. Toews: Well, yes, I can, Madam Speaker. In fact, I'm pleased to because our corporate tax rate, business tax rate is a key ingredient in our total business environment. We're creating a very, very competitive business environment in Alberta, and as a result of that, we're expanding our economic capacity and fiscal capacity. When that happens, we actually collect more tax revenue then we would have otherwise. The members opposite jacked the corporate tax rate up by 20 per cent; they collected less revenue. [interjections]

The Deputy Speaker: Order. Order.

Mr. Rowswell: Given that the government's mid-year fiscal update shows that total personal income tax revenue is forecast to grow by \$1.8 billion over last year and given the fact that the government has not increased personal income tax rates, can the Finance minister explain to the House the reasons for the growth in personal income tax revenues?

2:40

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Toews: Well, thank you, Madam Speaker. We have not and will not raise personal taxes. Personal income taxes are rising, not because we've raised the tax rate but because of economic growth. Personal household income is projected to grow by over 6 per cent this year. That will result in higher personal tax income for the province of Alberta. [interjections]

The Deputy Speaker: Order. Order.

Mr. Rowswell: Given that personal income tax revenues are increasing by \$1.8 billion more than 2020-21 and given that accusations have been made that the government is taking more money out of the pockets of working Albertans, can the Finance minister explain to the House how middle and lower income families are being treated under the current tax regime? Who is paying the tax to account for these increased revenues?

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Toews: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Albertans enjoy the lowest tax burden in the country. Unlike other provinces, we do not have a provincial sales tax. We do not have a provincial payroll tax. Albertans also have the highest level of personal exemptions by far in the country. In fact, nearly 40 per cent of Albertans don't pay any personal income tax at all. The vast majority of the personal tax burden is supported by those in this province who make higher income levels. That's why tax income is going up for the province of Alberta. Wages are rising. The economy is improving. [interjections]

The Deputy Speaker: Order.

Tabling Returns and Reports

(continued)

The Deputy Speaker: I believe the hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat has one.

Mr. Barnes: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I'm tabling a report, an article written about David Suzuki: David Suzuki's Carbon Footprint is Immense. From the four or five houses he owns, including the one in Australia, to his cross-Canada 20-stop tour, his carbon footprint is immense.

Thank you.

Orders of the Day

Government Bills and Orders Committee of the Whole

[Mr. Hanson in the chair]

The Acting Chair: Thank you, members. I'd like to call the committee to order.

Bill 73

Infrastructure Accountability Act

The Acting Chair: Are there any comments, questions, or amendments to be offered with respect to this bill? I recognize the Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

Mr. Feehan: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I appreciate the opportunity to speak to Bill 73. I know it's our last little chance to speak to this at

this time. Again, I think it's important that we take a little bit of time to talk about the fact that there have been numerous requests for there to be changes in this bill that will actually bring some substantive work to the bill. Unfortunately, so far we have not seen any movement on the part of the government.

This is one of their vast collection of bills that is less than a few pages long. The actual working part of the bill in this case is essentially one paragraph, as it has been in so many other bills, and really begs the question: what is it the government is trying to do when they bring bills forward that do not actually take action but, rather, at best indicate that action may or may not be taken at some point in the future? I think it's time that we get a little bit farther on this and try to actually govern and not just create bills so that we can wave a piece of paper around and pretend that there's something inside there when there is not something inside there.

I certainly would like to have seen some more specific additions to section 4, which, you know, we certainly have addressed in the past. It's not that I disagree with section 4 – and I think I've said this in the past – it's that you simply didn't go far enough. You didn't do the work that was required to ensure that section 4 adequately defined the work that needed to happen to move forward. Ostensibly, this is simply a list of the things that the department will do in terms of making its considerations in terms of planning for capital infrastructure in the next little while.

First of all, the law does not require that there be a bill that organizes this. It could actually have just been a set of criteria that was established for practice within the department, a protocol that would be followed by the department and issued to people seeking to know what it is that the department is considering when they make a decision, but for some reason the government decided that they would actually put it into a bill. I accept that they've done that. Perhaps they're worried that they wouldn't follow any kind of consistent protocol if they didn't do that, and that's very concerning. I think that, you know, what we should have is a government that is actually making decisions to move legislation ahead and not simply to reiterate things that are practices within the department.

Now, we've had some very particular kinds of things that have been suggested as inclusions in here, and I hope that the government will actually take some time to think about actually including them. For example, there is absolutely no reference in this section, section 4, which I've read both extensively, you know, on my own and into the record in part in the House, to the municipal governments' infrastructure priority plans, which are actually part of legislation at this time. They are a requirement that is put on municipalities, and therefore they already exist. If the government is by legislation asking municipalities to create an infrastructure priority plan and to submit that plan in a required period of time and to use certain criteria in order to be able to validate and reinforce that plan, then why are those plans not being considered in the ultimate choice of what infrastructure is actually going to be built in this province?

It seems to me that it's very inconsistent to ask other governments in this province to engage in some substantive work that is going to cost the government a significant amount of money and then not actually use that or not identify in this list of criteria that you're going to use that in order to make decisions. Now, I know that, you know, the municipalities feel that they put a lot of energy into those plans, that they spent a lot of money on those plans, and they certainly try to make sure that the things that are important in their own communities are brought forward and highlighted for the provincial government so that they can move forward and do those kind of things. I don't see any reference to them at all, and it's just disappointing. It's certainly something that the government could include.

2:50

I also have indicated that there are a number of communities and groups that are not being included in this plan. I've spoken previously about the fact that there is no GBA plus analysis that indicates how infrastructure may be important in terms of creating equity in our province and how it may differentially affect people in different organizations and groups who are part of the community but are not always prioritized by the community. I would certainly have loved to have seen that. I know that when we were in government, we included that routinely in our reports to cabinet, and it helped us to identify times when we didn't understand that there was an infrastructure difference that had an effect on people.

As such, I think it's important that we actually bring that forward to ensure that those things that sometimes are surprising and sometimes are not obvious on the surface are given an opportunity to be brought forward. Certainly, we know that there's a differential use of different types of infrastructure even based on gender because, of course, so many other factors in society have resulted in a lack of equity between genders. As a result, some people depend on public infrastructure and public transportation more than others. Typically what we find in the analysis is that women are underrepresented in the places where money is often spent and overrepresented in places where money is not spent. Now, I've talked about that a number of times in the past.

I'd like to also go further and to include my concerns about the consultation with Indigenous communities around infrastructure. Now, we have a very significant problem – and I don't lay this all at the feet of this provincial government – in our country in terms of providing equitable services and infrastructure both on and off First Nations. Part of that is the problem that we have, a sort of jurisdictional divide between the federal government and the provincial government. However, in almost every other area such as in health care, for example, we have developed principles such as Jordan's principle that indicate that we will ignore jurisdictional divides where they are harmful to the people and that we will move forward on projects because they are good for Albertans and not worry about whether or not there is a jurisdictional divide between federal and provincial lands with regard to these kinds of issues.

I think that this is particularly of concern when it comes to First Nations communities. Anyone who travels in the First Nations communities can tell you that the infrastructure on the nations is of a much lower quality than it is off the First Nations, that roads suddenly stop when you arrive at the border and go from paved roads to gravel roads all the time, and that maintenance of roads on First Nations is not up to snuff. Sometimes it's not even roads that are actually on the nation, so the jurisdictional divide isn't the problem.

I'm going to give you a specific example. Recently speaking with the chief of the Dene Tha' in northwestern Alberta and talking about the access road that leads from the highway coming in from High Level to their community – in the wintertime, because the road that presently exists is so steep, they often have to bring ambulances to the top of the road and stop and wait while somebody who is requiring the ambulance is brought up from the community on that road to the ambulance because of fear that the ambulance will not be able to return on icy and slick roads should they go down into the community. Now, this is a very serious concern. I'm just identifying that it's actually stopping ambulances from getting into the Dene Tha' Chateh community.

In this case the access road isn't even on-reserve, but because it is in the public area outside of the reserve, all they can do is wait for the local municipality to come and do something about the road.

But it's extremely expensive and is only used by people going in and out of the Dene Tha' community, so of course it doesn't rise to the highest level of infrastructure priority in the larger community, because people from High Level almost never use that road unless they happen to have business with the Dene Tha', which, of course, is only a small portion of the citizens. They will never reach the level of high priority on the municipal priority list because of the sheer number of people that, you know, live in the community versus High Level, yet it is a fundamentally important issue. The alternative road is already in the plans. We know how they can fix this. The land is sitting there waiting to be used, yet it's not being used.

If this was in this particular bill, if they were saying that we will actually consult with First Nations about priority infrastructure that does not meet the list of municipal priority plans, then we would be able to resolve issues like this. Right now, though, we have a standstill. There's no way the nation can actually move this forward and try to get more attention put on this and actually have it resolved. The provincial government has to take a stand and has to actually do something about this road. If they wait for the municipality, it is not likely ever to happen, and that is a tragedy because people in the Dene Tha' have every right to expect that they will be able to access ambulance services as much as anyone else. The only thing that is preventing them from having full and complete access to ambulance services at this time is one road, which needs to be resolved with government intervention because it's not going to happen any other way.

This bill was a perfect opportunity to not only address that one example that I've given but to understand the underlying principle that has resulted in First Nations having poorer infrastructure than non First Nations. The same can be said as well about Métis settlements. I had a very similar kind of experience when I've travelled around talking to the settlements and talking about the needs that they have in order to have basic things such as roads paved and roads cleared in the wintertime and maintained and upgraded on a regular basis. The issues are the same.

There is an underlying principle that could be actually understood and can be translated into appropriate action on the part of the government by putting it into a bill of this nature. There's a section that would most appropriately receive it, and that is section 4, simply by adding a subsection (h) and indicating that there will be a separate set of asks from First Nations and Métis settlements for their infrastructure needs and setting a certain priority for those to be addressed. I really think that this is something that could be still slipped into this bill at this particular time if the government chose to do it. We know that once we actually support infrastructure on First Nations and Métis settlements, they are typically widely used by people who are even not part of the communities, that they become part of the access that all Albertans enjoy.

Another example, of course, would be the highway from the Little Red River Cree community into Wood Buffalo national park. We do not have a paved road into Wood Buffalo national park in this province. A national park, the largest national park that we have in this province, does not have a paved road entering into it, yet there's a community, Garden River community, at the end of that road. If we were to pave the road in, not only would it help all the members of the Little Red community, which involves three communities right now – that is, John D'Or Prairie and Fox Lake and Garden River – but it would help all the people who would use a national park for tourism.

And that's something, of course, that we even heard the minister today stand up and say that they want to increase and to support. So if we actually did this, not only would we be working together with First Nations to improve their infrastructure and therefore their

safety, because in the wintertime trying to drive on a gravel road for over an hour to get from Garden River into High Level is a dangerous proposition – we'd be able to help people in terms of improving their safety, but we would also be able to create a whole new area of tourism.

We know that having built up tourism in both Jasper and Banff national parks has been very beneficial for this province. We have people coming from around the world to enjoy these great national parks, and we all benefit from them with those tourism dollars.

3:00

If we want to take advantage of the fact that we are known as a beautiful place to come to, why wouldn't we also want to include our largest national park in our tourism plan? That would require an infrastructure build, but the only way that that infrastructure build is going to be done is if we stop waiting for the municipalities to ask for it to be done and start to have the province actually include it in their own legislation. In their legislation that says that these are the things that we will consider when we build infrastructure, it could say: consultation with First Nations and Métis communities right here.

I know, Mr. Chair, that you have examples in your own community. Saddle Lake First Nations, for example, has a road that goes right through the nation that is a provincial roadway, and it is used, as I'm sure you know, by members all around the community, not just the First Nations. If we build good infrastructure, it doesn't just help First Nations; it actually helps all of the citizens of the province. I think this is truly one of those times when we can say: if you build it, they will come. Good infrastructure invites use. Poor infrastructure invites disuse and creates problems for the future. Ultimately, we pay for it. We pay for it when there are terrible accidents, we pay for it when people don't make it to the hospital on time, and we pay for it when we have declining or a lack of tourism in the community because of the difficulties with access.

All of these things could have been addressed by simply including in this bill a section under section 4, perhaps calling it 4(h), saying: we will include consultations for transportation priority from First Nations and Métis settlements. That's the kind of thing that I'd like to see happening. I'd like to see this government take this bill and put some effort into making a substantive change and ensuring the well-being of all Albertans, not simply the few who have the louder voice because they have larger communities.

This is something that I would hope that all of the MLAs outside of the big city centres would be paying some attention to because they are your communities. If you represent outside of Edmonton, Calgary, Red Deer, Lethbridge, Medicine Hat, Grande Prairie, Fort McMurray, if you live outside of those communities, these are the people you represent, and you should be standing up in this House and asking for these people to be considered in the decision-making of priority infrastructure and transportation in this province.

I certainly would like to work with the government to bring some changes to this kind of bill. I'd be happy to have conversations with the minister at any time with regard to the implications of making a change to this bill. I can certainly provide connections in the community to talk about the types of things that I've been talking about today, and I've just given, you know, two or three examples of the ones that I know. I could go on and on and on. As you know, I've spent a great deal of time visiting First Nations and, as a result, have actually seen these problems first-hand and believe that we would do well by the citizens of the province of Alberta if we looked at these problems and actually made appropriate changes that would provide for the well-being of all of the citizens of this province.

You know, as I wrap up my words, I just want to say: come on, Minister; come on, government. You can go farther. You can do

more. You can get there. It's a matter of putting in the time and ensuring that the well-being of Albertans is first and foremost in your decision-making.

Thank you.

The Acting Chair: Thank you, Member.

Are there any other members wishing to speak to Bill 73 in Committee of the Whole? I will recognize the Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. It's my pleasure to rise and engage in debate on Bill 73, the Infrastructure Accountability Act, here in committee. I have to say that I was hoping we'd see something much more robust and much more partnership focused. Typically as newly elected municipal councillors come to Edmonton for the first meeting of it is now called Alberta Municipalities and then also the Rural Municipalities Association, the government likes to have usually some kind of piece of legislation that speaks to the relationship or speaks to the commitment to work together with these newly elected councillors.

When I went through this bill – there was another bill earlier that I thought was thin, but this one is thinner, Mr. Chair. This one is only six pages, and that's counting the fact that every other page is showing what's – oh, this is a brand new bill. Okay. Six pages. It doesn't have things that are struck. When I went through and I did a quick count, the word "municipal" shows up zero times. The words "education" or "school" show up zero times. These are core partners for us to be working with when it comes to building infrastructure and communities across our province.

Regularly I know that we'll say that, you know, the people closest to the ground are the ones who are engaged in these discussions and have expert knowledge about what's most needed in their local communities. When we had PSBAA, ACSTA, ASBA, Alberta Municipalities, the Rural Municipalities association all here over the last few weeks, locally elected representatives that we share constituents with, that we share capital needs with, that we share opportunities to build better partnerships with, I had sincerely hoped and expected that we'd see something in this bill related to municipalities or education or schools. We don't. Instead, we see – I tallied 12 references to assets, 41 references to capital, and no references to the partners that we should all be working with, including municipalities, Indigenous folks, local First Nations and Métis representatives as well as school board partners.

I think that this bill is absolutely a lost opportunity given where we are in this current government's election cycle, about 500 days from a writ drop if they follow their own laws. We just had municipal elections, and we have this opportunity to build relationships and to state our commitment to work together on infrastructure in a collaborative way. Instead, we have a government that's more focused on talking about assets than it is on partnerships. Of course, these partnerships can result in great assets and facilities, roads, buildings to help ensure that the delivery of essential services is available throughout the province. That can't be done in isolation, Mr. Chair. That needs to be done in an effective way with partners.

The really nice thing that we have leading into this bill is that there was some consultation, and it was published through a What We Heard document. What's most surprising to me – I'm glad the government released that feedback, but the government didn't listen to the feedback. There are three key areas that were outlined through the What We Heard document that have been overlooked, clearly, in this bill. I'm going to read one quote that comes from that consultation from the What We Heard document. It says, "The criteria used to evaluate capital projects should be... defined,

consistent, and in alignment with regional and municipal planning.” That’s one of the key quotes that was referenced there. Again, Mr. Chair, there are no references to municipalities at all in this six-page bill that we are here considering at this point. In fact, there’s a complete exclusion or lack of consideration of the fact that government can’t do anything without partners.

We’ve seen time and time again by this current government an effort to ignore and to show disrespect to local decision-makers, including the very one-handed decision for the government to unilaterally make the decision that they were only going to pay half their taxes for municipal buildings. They took this time in government to cut the grants that are given to municipalities by more than half, I think. It was half in the first tranche and, I think, even more after that, Mr. Chair. Imagine being that entitled where you would say that, you know, you’re only going to pay half of the bill when the bill comes for the services that you have the benefit of enjoying through your partnership with municipalities. The government did that, and now in this bill they’re refusing to say that they’re going to work in partnership with these local governments to make the best decisions possible regarding future infrastructure projects.

3:10

I want to highlight sort of the three areas that were acquired through this What We Heard document that I think should be addressed in this bill that currently in its form today aren’t. Hopefully, we’ll have an opportunity to consider some amendments to help close those gaps. First, one of the points that the quote references was that this government was told that they must prioritize regional and municipal plans, that that should be something that’s being taken into consideration. That isn’t mapped out in this bill at all.

Second, they were told that they should consider Indigenous reconciliation when it comes to capital planning. Absolutely, Mr. Chair. This should be a guiding frame for all of us in the decisions that we make in this place and outside as we continue to live our lives. You know, reconciliation isn’t highlighted, and the commitment to work with elected and hereditary chiefs when it comes to making these decisions also has been overlooked in the formation of this bill. We’ve seen how meaningful it can be to actually engage in putting your commitment to building something together instead of working unilaterally, which we continue to see in this Legislature.

Third, I want to reiterate the calls in the What We Heard document that talked about a need to address climate change and climate change mitigation. This needs to be taken incredibly seriously. I know that we’ve heard speeches recently from members of the UCP questioning the science around climate change. I will say that the families in northeast Calgary who two years in a row had their homes hammered by hail: I think many of them are well aware of the impacts of climate change. The families in Calgary and High River who experienced such significant flooding: they are well aware of the impacts of climate change. The communities in and around Fort McMurray as well as Slave Lake who were impacted by huge wildfires: they are well aware of the impacts of human contributions to climate change.

The good news, Mr. Chair, is that we can actually do something. While the government has refused to attend international talks to move forward on addressing these very serious impacts, a lot of other Albertans are taking them very seriously, including folks like the Insurance Bureau of Canada, that are saying that we need to focus more on climate change mitigation and emissions reductions to reduce some of their liabilities when it comes to claims. Why wouldn’t we take the opportunity, when we’re considering infrastructure projects, to acknowledge the contributions of humans that

have resulted in impacting climate change, finding ways to build more projects that are going to be net zero or energy emission reducing, and also for infrastructure builds to help address and mitigate against the impacts of extreme weather conditions as a result of climate change as well?

Mr. Chair, it seems clear that these three areas are big, glaring gaps in the current formation of this bill. Let’s, hopefully, use committee for some good and find a way to take a bill that’s meh and make it much more effective in addressing the things that citizens gave feedback on already through consultation. That feedback typically should drive the decisions around the drafting of bills. It appears that this bill is far short of what the feedback was through the What We Heard document and, I would say, is far short of what we need in terms of a road map for infrastructure.

We heard earlier today in question period members from within the government’s own ranks asking: “Where is the clarity on project lists? Where is the clarity on moving forward with infrastructure that’s going to meet the needs in our local communities?” We heard a lot of nice words, and then we heard no commitment to timelines. Those words were actually uttered by members of the cabinet here representing the Crown in terms of responding to serious questions asked about highway maintenance and infrastructure, hospital maintenance and infrastructure in communities around our province. You know, Mr. Chair, that’s not good enough, and if those are the kinds of answers that they’re giving to their own colleagues within their own governing caucus, it certainly says a lot about how this government is taking every Albertan and the opportunity that they were awarded through the last election for granted.

Mr. Chair, I do hope that we take our opportunity here in committee to do something to move this bill to a better position, something that can actually address those three key drivers that folks shared in the what-we-heard feedback, and that we can create something that’s much better than where we’re at today in terms of this bill.

With that, I’ll cede the remainder of my time at this point and look forward to hearing how the conversation evolves this afternoon. Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

The Acting Chair: I will recognize the Minister of Labour.

Mr. Shandro: Well, thank you, Mr. Chair. I’m going to talk a little bit about municipalities, because we heard from my colleague opposite, as is usual with the NDP, saying stuff that was completely incorrect, in particular when it comes to municipalities, their involvement and the role of this legislation here.

I want to tell a little bit of a story. Let’s go back to the summer of 2020. During that time, for seven weeks, my colleague the hon. Minister of Infrastructure heard from over 60 municipalities over seven weeks and, as well, written submissions from municipal organizations, who all voiced their support for the act and its objectives. This includes the Rural Municipalities of Alberta. They said, “Rural Municipalities of Alberta supports the Government of Alberta’s efforts to formalize and legislate capital planning governance processes through legislation.” He also heard from stakeholders during the public input opportunity who welcomed the goals, who welcomed the proposed criteria for the act and provided positive feedback.

I also want to talk about, because we’re talking, again, about municipalities, and respond to some of the incorrect information we heard from those opposite. I want to again quote somebody else who provided their feedback. This is from Mary Moran, who is the president and CEO of the Calgary Economic Development organization. Quote: planning and prioritizing infrastructure investments is

key to long-term growth and health of the economy, and we congratulate your government for taking a leadership position in capital planning.

Now, there's feedback from the University of Calgary, from Horizon Housing, from Consulting Architects of Alberta, and through all of these submissions the hon. Minister of Infrastructure was provided positive feedback that was supporting the way that postsecondaries, municipalities, school boards, and other organizations could continue with their own decision-making authority for their own capital planning and was congratulating the work that this hon. Minister of Infrastructure was doing to be able to come forward with this Bill 73 and their support for it.

Mr. Speaker, I want to assure as well, as we know, that my other colleague the hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs continues to work with municipalities closely on many different fronts and has many opportunities to bring forward the perspectives of municipalities in terms of their needs for capital. Again, municipalities aren't bound by this legislation and should follow their own capital planning processes to meet their own unique priorities, but they are supporting this amazing work that the Minister of Infrastructure has brought forward to this Chamber.

With that in mind, Mr. Chair, thank you for the opportunity, and I encourage all members to support this legislation.

The Acting Chair: Thank you, Minister.

Any other members wishing to speak? I see the Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

Member Loyola: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair, and I want to thank the minister for actually getting up in the House and, you know, giving us his perspective on this particular bill that we have before us, because when the members from the other side of the House actually get up and debate, then it actually becomes a debate rather than just us getting up time and time again and speaking to the same issues over and over again and getting absolutely no response from the other side. I really appreciate the fact that the minister got up.

Now, the minister was saying that they actually consulted with stakeholders and whatnot, and he actually introduced into the record some quotes by organizations, which were very lovely. And it's true; they did consult, Mr. Chair. They did consult. However, when they actually released the bill and all the information on the bill, they didn't actually listen to what people were saying in the consultation. I quote out of the government's own What We Heard document: "The criteria used to evaluate capital projects should be... defined, consistent, and in alignment with regional and municipal planning." That's what it actually said in What We Heard. This is actually feedback from an organization.

3:20

The organization thought: well, this is the feedback we're providing to the government. But then there is no co-operation. There is no incorporating the regional and municipal plans with the bill that this government chose to actually introduce into the House.

Now, based on that, I would like to introduce an amendment, Mr. Chair. I will wait for your direction.

The Acting Chair: I'll let you read it in once we receive the original copy.

Member Loyola: Just go ahead, Mr. Chair?

The Acting Chair: No. Just give me a minute.

Member Loyola: Okay.

The Acting Chair: Hon. members, this will be referred to as amendment A1.

Please proceed.

Member Loyola: Okay. Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. I'll just read it into the record for the benefit of all here in the House. I move on behalf of the Member for Edmonton-South that Bill 73, the Infrastructure Accountability Act, be amended in section 4(f) as follows: (a) in clause (iv) by deleting "and"; (b) in clause (v) by adding "and" after "the community and local conditions generally"; and (c) by adding the following immediately after clause (v):

(vi) being a project or program that complies with or is included in either of the following:

- (A) a statutory plan or growth plan, as each of those expressions is defined in the Municipal Government Act, that applies to that community;
- (B) the regional plan, as defined in the Alberta Land Stewardship Act, that applies to that community.

Do you have it, Mr. Chair? That is the amendment.

I hope that the members on the other side actually get a copy of that as I'm sure the pages are providing it to all of the members. Of course, this particular amendment is designed specifically to provide this government the opportunity to get back on track with their own What We Heard document and the feedback of actual stakeholder organizations as the minister actually offered quotes and provided them on *Hansard* saying that that's what they were going to do, right? It gives me such pleasure to do this because, of course, in fact, here we are listening to Albertans.

Now, unfortunately – I don't know why – the government decided to turn their back on Albertans on this particular issue and did not include it in the bill. For what reason I'm not sure. It's a mystery, because none of the members on the other side of the House have actually gotten up to speak about this particular point although we've brought it up time and time again during second reading of the bill. It wasn't addressed then by any member on the other side. So here we are now in Committee of the Whole, Mr. Chair, providing an opportunity for this government or members of the government and private members from the government caucus to actually get up and address this issue.

We have the amendment before us now, and I think it's important that we bring this debate into the House so that Albertans can hear for themselves what this government is going to do regarding this particular amendment, because it's what they asked for. As I stated, it's in the government's own What We Heard document.

Following consultation on this piece of legislation, we released a paper as part of our Alberta's future project. It was an honest and good-faith effort to listen to Albertans and make the legislation better. While there are some good elements in this legislation, it indeed has a few gaps, and they are, unfortunately, some pretty big gaps. One of those gaps is related to further reconciliation with Indigenous people. As members know well, this legislation seeks to enshrine the exclusive criteria that the – pardon me. Following consultation with municipal leaders, we heard that they were dismayed that consideration of their plans would not be a factor that the government would consider.

Of course, as I explained, that is not right. We know this is true because consideration of regional and municipal plans and how important they are comes straight out of the consultations that this government undertook over the summer. It's right there in the What We Heard document, as I stated before. Members opposite can see what the Official Opposition heard as we released a short, nine-page paper as part of our Alberta's future project on this particular legislation.

As members know well, this government, along with previous governments, requires that regional and municipal capital plans are produced and submitted to the Ministry of Municipal Affairs. I would like to understand if the government thinks that it's important enough to compel the production of these plans. With all the cost, time, and energy involved, why would they not include these plans as at least one of the factors that should be considered when prioritizing and selecting individual projects?

It's true that Ontario has similar legislation. In fact, the legislation that we are debating was modelled off Ontario, which is one of the lines from the government. But Ontario requires consideration of regional and municipal plans, and it's actually in the Ontario legislation. So while the government gets up and actually speaks to the fact that they're basically copying what Ontario is doing, the truth is that they're not, because they're not including the regional and municipal plans. I don't understand why the government has decided to exclude that important factor if they're saying that they're copying the Ontario legislation.

In good faith we are proposing this amendment, an amendment that simply includes regional and municipal plans as one of the factors that the government should consider when selecting the projects. All members have municipalities in their constituencies. How can you go to your local mayor or reeve or council and say, "We don't care what your priorities are; in fact, the Legislature is going to pass a bill that legally prevents consideration of your plans and priorities"? I don't think any member would actually say that publicly. It would be pretty damaging if they were to say something like that, of course.

So here's the opportunity. Here's the opportunity for the private members of the government caucus to do what's right, to truly represent their constituents, to represent the mayors, the reeves, and councils of the communities that they are in this House to work alongside to make sure that the much-needed infrastructure projects, that are required by those communities, are actually going to be legally – now, this is the key, Mr. Chair, because we want to include it in the legislation, just like the Ontario legislation. And this goes for all representatives in this House. It's absolutely imperative that the members on the other side of this House actually vote for this amendment. If they're not going to vote for it, I want to hear what their arguments are for not supporting this amendment. I'm sure that their constituents, the mayors, reeves, and councils of the communities that they represent are truly going to be interested in what they have to say or perhaps are even going to be interested in the silence when their responsibility is actually to represent their constituents and those stakeholders and the associated organizations of their communities when it comes to this particular bill.

3:30

In that spirit, Mr. Chair, I am going to encourage that all members support this amendment. Thank you very much.

The Acting Chair: Thank you.

Any other members wishing to speak to amendment A1? I'll recognize the Member for Edmonton-Decore.

Mr. Nielsen: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I appreciate the opportunity here to add some further comments to Bill 73 and, of course, the amendment A1 that's before us right now, which I'm appreciative of my friend from Edmonton-Ellerslie bringing forward on behalf of the Member for Edmonton-South.

You know, Mr. Chair, I have to be honest. To say that my frustration is growing might be a little bit of an understatement. It seems like the government is consistently and persistently saying

one thing while their legislation says something else. I keep calling it out, and there isn't even an attempt to try and change that. The whole purpose of this amendment is to add the ability for the plans that municipalities put together around their infrastructure to be included in the decision by the province when putting their plan together for infrastructure.

Now, I know that here in the Official Opposition we've gone on and on and on accusing the government that they never consult. As my friend from Edmonton-Ellerslie has said, they brought forward a What We Heard. So I'm willing to concede this time that consultation happened. The government went out and listened to municipalities. But here's the catch. They didn't hear them. They listened but they didn't hear, because they asked very clearly to have their plans included.

Now, why is that important? Well, as was mentioned, municipalities spend a lot of time, energy, effort, and money to put together their capital infrastructure plans. It seems pretty rich. I remember back when the former Minister of Municipal Affairs, who happens to be the current Minister of Justice, lectured municipalities about getting their fiscal houses in order. Here we have the municipalities spending all this time, spending all this energy, effort, and money to put together plans so that the province can just take them and throw them out, into the garbage, because we're not going to look at them.

That almost actually seems like red tape, Mr. Chair. I wonder what the associate minister of red tape might like to say on that subject. The whole premise of that ministry, which, of course, I'm the critic for, is built around reducing red tape in government. Yet if you're going to put municipalities through the exercise of creating their infrastructure plans and then not even consider them, that sounds like red tape. It seems that the two, as I've said over and over again, which is why I'm frustrated, are butting up against each other every single time.

One other thing that I want to point out, and I can appreciate that the minister of labour was quoting, I should say, the former CEO of Calgary Economic Development, who left the position – and, of course, if she's listening today, I'm wishing her all the best in the next segment of her adventure; whatever she's doing, I'm sure she's going to do amazing at it – but that happened back in May. That information now is six months plus old.

We need to put this information into the bill. We need to consider all the hard work and money that municipalities are spending and actually recognize the work they're doing, or that means it's red tape, which means that I expect the associate minister to be doing something about that.

I'm certainly going to support this amendment. I would encourage others to support this amendment as well. Let's start hearing municipalities, not just listening to them.

The Acting Chair: Thank you, Member.

Are there any other members wishing to speak to amendment A1? Seeing none.

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

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 3:37 p.m.]

[Fifteen minutes having elapsed, the committee divided]

[Mr. Hanson in the chair]

For the motion:

Dach	Gray	Loyola
Feehan	Hoffman	Nielsen

Against the motion:

Aheer	Lovely	Sawhney
Allard	Luan	Schulz
Amery	Madu	Shandro
Armstrong-Homeniuk	Nally	Sigurdson, R.J.
Ellis	Nixon, Jeremy	Smith
Glubish	Orr	Stephan
Gotfried	Pon	Toews
Guthrie	Rehn	Williams
Issik	Reid	Wilson
LaGrange	Rowswell	Yao
Totals:	For – 6	Against – 30

[Motion on amendment A1 lost]

The Acting Chair: We are back on the main bill, Bill 73, Infrastructure Accountability Act. Any members wishing to speak to the bill? I recognize the Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

Mr. Feehan: Thank you. I'll just give a moment for people to exit the House.

I am happy to be spending a bit more time on this bill because there certainly are a number of things that can be done to improve the bill. As many people will know, the NDP, under our incredibly successful project called albertasfuture.ca, which is open to all citizens of the province of Alberta and has had over 55,000 unique individuals participate in consultations, has had before it some consideration of infrastructure and has recently had the opportunity to post a document that came from our consultations on infrastructure called Building Better Infrastructure, released on November 19, 2021. It's available to anyone who wants to go to albertasfuture.ca to see that.

The second part of that is relevant to our bill today. Well, all parts of it are, but we've already spoken to one and just voted on one section. The second one is the criteria for furthering reconciliation with Indigenous peoples. I've had an opportunity, talking at the main bill, to talk about some of the thoughts I have about that, providing some examples about how we could develop a better relationship and, you know, include both Infrastructure and Transportation. I know they're separate entities but certainly work very closely together. We could develop good practices moving forward to recognize reconciliation and to develop a new principle very similar to the Jordan's principle in health care, which essentially ignores jurisdictional divides in order to ensure the well-being of all people.

I'll just read one small section from this release, and then, of course, I will print it out and file it in the House in due course. The section reads:

Indigenous communities must have a direct voice and be considered in infrastructure priorities that affect their communities and populations. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission's Calls to Action highlight many important areas where infrastructure will play a vital and supportive role – from appropriate economic and resource investments to educational infrastructure, to environmental protections for communities feeling the effects of climate change, to social investments in appropriate housing and health and wellness infrastructure and in cultural and ceremonial space.

These are necessary considerations for Alberta's future.

I will submit that to the House later, Mr. Chair. I'm just pointing out that many people around the province of Alberta had the chance to participate in this project, and this is one of the criteria that they brought forward.

Having spoken to this already when speaking to the main bill, I would like to now introduce an amendment.

The Acting Chair: Thank you, Member. We're going to wait until we get the original copy, and then you can proceed.

Any members wishing to have a copy of the amendment, just raise your hand so the pages can recognize you.

Thank you. Please proceed. This will be recognized as amendment A2.

Mr. Feehan: Thank you, Mr. Chair. This amendment is being introduced on behalf of the Member for Edmonton-South. That is, the Member for Edmonton-South to move that Bill 73, Infrastructure Accountability Act, be amended in section 4(f) as follows: (a) in clause (iv) by deleting "and"; (b) in clause (v) by adding "and" after "the community and local conditions generally"; (c) by adding the following immediately after clause (v):

(vi) furthering reconciliation between the community and Indigenous peoples and their communities.

It's pretty straightforward. It does not hamper the decisions of the government in any negative way. It just simply opens a door for consultations. It simply asks that when decisions are being made by the government, they consider further reconciliation between the community and Indigenous peoples. It's not overly prescriptive. It certainly is in line with the declared values, of course, of our party, but I believe the government side has said that they wish to seek reconciliation and have suggested they're prepared to take action on reconciliation. As such, there really can't be much of a conflict here. I'll be somewhat disappointed if the government chooses not to include this amendment given that they have had various members stand up in the House at different times saying that they are in favour of reconciliation.

4:00

Certainly, I would love to see any government member, whether it be the Minister of Indigenous Relations or anyone else because I do believe that reconciliation is a pangovernmental concern that can be addressed by any minister or any member of the House, you know, put your money where your mouth is, as they say, and stand up and vote in favour of including reconciliation as a part of this infrastructure bill, as indeed we should be including basically in every bill that we come forward with, that some consideration be given to, whatever the bill happens to be: how does this bill affect Indigenous people, and does this provide us with an opportunity to move forward on that which we have already committed to on the level of values?

Here it is. This is the chance to stand up, show yourself, be on the record, and be able to go back to the Indigenous communities that we work with and say to them: when the time came, I, too, stood up and participated in the process of ensuring that concerns of Indigenous peoples are considered deeply in the decisions made by this government.

I'm hoping at this time that we might hear from someone on the government side about their thoughts about this. I certainly welcome any kind of discussion. If a subamendment is required, I'd be open to a discussion about that. But basically I would hope and anticipate that the government would be agreeing with the idea of furthering reconciliation and using this particular bill to demonstrate that to the community.

Thank you, and I look forward to other people's comments on this amendment.

The Acting Chair: Thank you, member.

Any other members wishing to speak to amendment A2? I'll recognize the Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair and to the Member for Edmonton-Rutherford as well as to the Member for Edmonton-South for bringing forward this fair and reasonable amendment that, I think, gives the government the opportunity to put their vote where

their words are. I think that the government has had a lot of nice words about reconciliation and about working with Indigenous communities and leaders, and I think that this bill gives them an absolute opportunity to demonstrate a commitment to that through legislation. Specifically I'm referring to the addition of item (vi), "furthering reconciliation between the community and Indigenous peoples and their communities."

I think that that addition is broad enough that the government should be able to find a way to achieve their goals within the guidelines that this Assembly is attempting to give them. I think it reflects well on the feedback of the What We Heard document and the consultation that happened in the lead-up to this bill, and I think it is very enabling, but it's also saying that this is one of the additional goals of this bill. It should be one of the goals of probably every bill we consider in this House, so let's put it into writing in this Infrastructure Accountability Act specifically. Again, I mentioned earlier that there's no mention of municipalities or education or school boards, but let's at least add the addition of Indigenous peoples and their communities to this legislation to show a commitment to that.

If the government were to reject this amendment, I think it would send a really bad message to the people that we are all here to work for and to represent. I think that this is a very simple amendment, and I think that the government would be wise to take the members' advice and act upon it. I think that the Minister of Indigenous Relations would probably have an opportunity to go around and bring a bill around and do some positive outreach and engagement with this specific amendment being added to the bill. I worry about what the message would be if the government rejected it.

I think that this is very appropriate. I think that this is very clear and clean. It's a simple amendment. We've kept it to as few words as possible. Thank you to Parliamentary Counsel for their assistance with the drafting of it. I think that I don't want to talk for too, too long, but I certainly welcome any members of the government to provide clarity about how they'll be voting and hope that everyone takes this opportunity to vote where our words have led us in conversation in this place previously. This is actually an opportunity for us to test our commitment to those words and to actually put it into law in a really positive, proactive way.

Probably one of my shortest speeches for the day, Mr. Chair, but I think it doesn't need to be long, like the amendment says. I think it's a very positive step, I think it's enabling, and I hope that all members of this House take the good idea being brought forward and act upon it. I hope the minister then can take this bill around and say to people that he's tasked with working with Indigenous communities, including First Nations as well as Métis communities, that he is bringing forward and acting on their recommendations and this House as well.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Acting Chair: Thank you.

Any other members wishing to speak to amendment A2?

Seeing none – oh. I'm sorry. The Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

Ms Gray: No; thank you. I had paused a moment because generally the practice in this House and what we've seen on so, so many bills is that as the opposition is introducing amendments, the government will often respond, so I did pause for a moment, thinking that perhaps a government member might speak to this important amendment given how significant the subject matter is. We are talking about a piece of legislation that is going to legally prescribe the exclusive criteria government will use when determining what projects to fund, and we must include Indigenous reconciliation. To

have a government put forward a 20-year strategic capital plan enshrined in legislation that will prioritize projects and does not include reconciliation is shameful and short-sighted, but there may be reasons why the government is perhaps not supportive of this amendment. Or perhaps the government is completely supportive of this amendment.

So I popped up at the last moment, Mr. Chair, because I would hope that the government would speak to this amendment one way or the other, not only to inform Albertans what their thoughts are but to let the opposition know the reasoning behind to support or not support this amendment and possibly to provide guidance even to government members who might be wondering: should they be supporting this amendment or not? As the members who spoke before me have made clear, it's an incredibly straightforward amendment that simply says, "furthering reconciliation between the community and Indigenous peoples and their communities." It's significant yet so simple and straightforward. It echoes the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's call to actions, and it echoes the words this government has used.

Prior to voting on this amendment, I seriously hope that a government member or minister will share the government's thoughts on an amendment such as this given that we have been talking about the need for Indigenous consultation since we first started talking about Bill 73 at second reading. This cannot be a surprise to anyone. This has been one of our more significant concerns with this piece of legislation, and we have an amendment here that would resolve this concern and one that I truly hope all members in this Chamber will be voting to support. It is straightforward, it echoes the values that this government has purported to hold, and I haven't heard any reasons why it may not be legislatively sound or any other potential excuse not to support it.

I popped up, Mr. Chair, just to enthusiastically share my support for this particular amendment. Thank you for the time.

The Acting Chair: Thank you, Member.

Any other members wishing to speak to amendment A2? I see the Associate Minister of Status of Women.

Ms Issik: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I think this amendment is made in good faith, and I respect where the members opposite are coming from. In terms of how Indigenous perspectives are considered from a capital planning perspective, the criteria that speaks to resilient communities comes immediately to my mind. The focus on resilient communities considers

- (f) the extent to which the project or program is expected to enhance the resiliency of a community, including by
 - (i) enhancing the resiliency of existing infrastructure relied on by members of the community,
 - (ii) protecting community members and assets from natural disasters,
 - (iii) providing a remote community with core infrastructure,
 - (iv) preserving or enhancing the community's culture and heritage, and
 - (v) improving social and environmental circumstances in the community and local conditions generally.

4:10

From the perspective of the 20-year strategic capital plan one of the guiding strategies for the document is about maximizing partnerships. Now, these are partnerships with not only municipal and federal governments but also with Indigenous communities. The government of Alberta is committed to continuous partnering with Indigenous communities. We've shown that over and over again. We've done it on projects that improve their communities' conditions, economic security, access to digital services and

broadband, and access to commerce. We're going to continue to prioritize projects aimed at improving the infrastructure that contributes to improved education, health, safety, and economic opportunity.

You know, Mr. Chair, I think that this amendment is a welcome idea, but I think it's actually already addressed in both the legislation and in the 20-year strategic capital plan, which speaks quite a bit about Indigenous communities and addressing their needs.

Thank you.

The Acting Chair: Thank you, Associate Minister.

Any other members wishing to speak to amendment A2?

Ms Hoffman: The first part I really appreciated from what the comments were of the last speaker. The last part I think is completely disrespectful and tone deaf. If it's a redundancy, then put it in, Minister, through you, Mr. Chair. If it's a redundancy to actually name specifically "furthering reconciliation" – I don't think it is. Reconciliation isn't in this bill anywhere. If it's a redundancy to say "between community and Indigenous peoples and their communities," if this is simply redundant, then put it in.

If this is going to duplicate things but still is consistent with the intent of the bill, then what's the harm in adding redundant language? The issue is that we don't believe it's redundant and many people we've heard from don't believe it's redundant. They think that specifically naming reconciliation in relation to legislation is an important step. If this government doesn't believe it, then they should own that, but they shouldn't say that it's redundant because nowhere in this bill is there reference to reconciliation, Mr. Chair. I have to say that I appreciate all the stuff that was said right until the end, where there was the shot taken that this was redundant. I don't believe it is. I believe it's important that we're very clear with our intent and with our language, and if the government truly does believe that this isn't necessary because it's already a part of the bill, then what's the harm in adding it?

I am hoping that the government is taking this opportunity to reflect on how they're about to vote because I think the message that the vote will tell Indigenous peoples will be louder than any nice words that can be said in this place, Mr. Chair. So here's another plea for the government to add these simple words that the government themselves says are already part of the intention of the bill. Well, if they're part of the intention of the bill, then add them. There is no harm in adding them and being crystal clear about reconciliation, which is not mentioned in the bill, or about working between community and Indigenous peoples and their communities.

There's a final plea before everyone is called to stand and actually take a position on whether or not they support reconciliation efforts and Indigenous peoples in this House.

The Acting Chair: Thank you, Member.

Any other members wishing to speak to amendment A2? Seeing none.

[The voice vote indicated that motion on amendment A2 lost]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 4:14 p.m.]

[One minute having elapsed, the committee divided]

[Mr. Hanson in the chair]

For the motion:

Dach	Gray	Loyola
Feehan	Hoffman	Nielsen

Against the motion:

Aheer	Lovely	Rowswell
Allard	Luan	Sawhney
Amery	Madu	Schulz
Armstrong-Homeniuk	McIver	Shandro
Ellis	Nally	Sigurdson, R.J.
Fir	Nixon, Jeremy	Smith
Glubish	Orr	Stephan
Gotfried	Pon	Toews
Guthrie	Rehn	Williams
Issik	Reid	Yao
LaGrange		

Totals: For – 6 Against – 31

[Motion on amendment A2 lost]

The Acting Chair: We're back on the main bill, Bill 73. Any members wishing to speak to the main bill? I will recognize the Member for Edmonton-McClung.

Mr. Dach: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. Pleasure to speak to the main Bill 73, Infrastructure Accountability Act. Given a background in real estate and project development, somewhat intersecting with that of the Minister of Infrastructure, it gives me pleasure particularly to rise on this topic today and speak about infrastructure, because what goes into our infrastructure is critically important.

I think the evidence is no more clear about that than the sight we see when we walk out the front door of our Legislature right now, to witness the bite-by-bite destruction of the Annex building, which was a building that has a lengthy history. Of course, both our government and this one contemplated what to do with that building. It had components in it that were dangerous to health and probably on second thought wouldn't have been included, but given the thinking of the day there was a lot of insulation material that went in there that was toxic. Ultimately, this government made the decision to tear the building down rather than do anything else with it, which was consistent with the performance of the government so far during their two years or so reign, where they delight in tearing things down rather than building things up and bringing people together. Nonetheless, the point with respect to the Annex building, Mr. Chair, was that a lot more thought, in all probability, should have gone into the components of that building so that in the long term it didn't end up having a life cycle as short as it did and ultimately get torn down.

4:20

In building our infrastructure, we have to take a look at a lot of things this generation that perhaps others didn't, and that includes the efficiency of the building envelope. I know that very recently on CBC News there was an example brought forward – it was on *The National*, CBC television news – of a building in Toronto, a high-rise apartment building that was built about 30, 40 years ago and, of course, built to the standard at that time. There was a lot of thought about just tearing it down, as is the case with a lot of buildings that are of that age, but what was done, as said by the developer, Mr. Chair, was that they completely changed the building envelope inside and out, windows and inside and outside sheathing, using new technology, and the efficiency of the heating system was improved by 90 per cent – it was a huge, huge increase – and therefore set an example as to what can be done by making sure that components that go into a building using new technology are implemented. We achieve not only the economic savings but the

greenhouse gas emissions savings by properly insulating a building, just as one example, whether it be insulation or windows themselves.

Of course, there are other elements that will reduce the greenhouse gas footprint of our building or infrastructure. It goes into the construction techniques. It also goes into the heating and the lighting systems as well as the insulation. There is a whole complex universe of new technologies that we are beginning to implement into our building envelopes and construction techniques that weren't contemplated when my father was a construction superintendent and on the jobs that I attended. He would be startled at the number of different colours the outside of a building envelope seems to be dressed in as it goes through the various construction stages. You'll see pink and green and blue as the various layers of external cladding and insulation get added to a building.

This is definitely something that needs to be kept in mind and contemplated as we talk about Bill 73, Infrastructure Accountability Act, because this act has to contemplate the greenhouse gas emissions and footprint of the building. You do that, Mr. Chair, by making sure in the planning and design stages that all elements of the components as well as the mechanical – the situation of the building relative to the sun, in fact, will have a bearing on its greenhouse gas footprint. All of that has to be taken into effect in the planning stages and should be incorporated into the Infrastructure Accountability Act, and of course it's not one of the components that must be considered.

Therefore, Mr. Chair, what I'd like to do is introduce an amendment to accomplish just that if I may.

The Acting Chair: Okay. Thank you, Member. We'll wait until we have the original copy, then you can proceed.

Any members wishing to have a copy of the amendment, please raise your hand so the pages can address you.

This will be known as amendment A3.

Please carry on.

Mr. Dach: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I'm pleased to carry on and speak about amendment A3 to the Infrastructure Accountability Act, or Bill 73. I'll read into the record the actual amendment if I may. Moved by the Member for Edmonton-South – I move on his behalf – that Bill 73, the Infrastructure Accountability Act, be amended in section 4(f) as follows: (a) in clause (iv) by deleting "and"; (b) in clause (v) by adding "and" after "the community and local conditions generally"; and (c) by adding the following immediately after clause (v):

- (vi) improving the community's sustainability through reducing its overall greenhouse gas emissions.

This speaks, Mr. Chair, to the wide-ranging issue of greenhouse gas emissions and the carbon footprint of our infrastructure. It's an incredibly important facet of the legislation that should be taken into account in the Infrastructure Accountability Act – thus the importance of the amendment – to make sure that it is brought into the fold and is fully considered by our infrastructure planning process. It must be brought into the thinking of everybody involved in creating infrastructure projects at every step of the way as an overarching consideration and as a criterion that must be followed.

I'm at a loss to explain why indeed this was not included in the original drafting of the act, but I thought it important enough to bring forward the amendment that we have before us. I would think that all Albertans who care about the environment and realize that we are at a point in time where greenhouse gas emissions are critically important to reduce would hope to see their government lead the way by its own infrastructure policies in ensuring that buildings, which are a large component of our greenhouse gas footprint, contribute as little as possible to that footprint going

forward by ensuring that the greenhouse gas emissions of any infrastructure project are a critical element of the criteria that have to be considered in developing and actually building infrastructure that the provincial government is responsible for.

I know that when Albertans watch the news on a nightly basis, it's almost cross your fingers and hope that the Lower Mainland doesn't flood again. I'm sure they're doing more than crossing their fingers in Abbotsford and Merritt right now because it seems as though there is some major infrastructure there that is at risk of being overwhelmed once again. In the same way, Mr. Chair, here in Alberta we need to consider the long-term effects of greenhouse gases when we look to make sure that the buildings that get built and the infrastructure that gets built in this province adhere to a strict regimen of consideration of the carbon footprint that a building over its life cycle will generate. That doesn't just mean the components that go into it; it means a whole lot more, and it's a developing science as well.

I know that many people in this province started – well, I know they did because I've sold houses like this. Wood chips used to be the insulation of choice. In almost all Alberta farmhouses that couldn't get a hold of wood chips, if it was possible, when they started building with wood-frame construction beyond a log home – and those didn't have a very good insulation R-value; that's for sure. That, of course, was replaced by other elements and man-made elements over time, some of which, of course, caused health concerns, asbestos being one of them, of course, that we ended up having to remove out of many, many buildings and decided to tear down the Annex as a result of that building having a lot of asbestos in it. It was one of the decision-making factors.

Over time technological improvements have been made to various components of buildings, including the insulation of them, but every facet of construction has changed. I know, Mr. Chair, that you've got some experience in that area as well, and every member of this Legislature will attest to the changes in construction that are visible as you go through any downtown or any town or city in the province or even in rural areas.

4:30

Looking at how a farm building is constructed now, Mr. Chair, it doesn't resemble what took place even 10 or 15 years ago because there are considerations of savings, not only in greenhouse gas emissions but in terms of the value that you find in spending the dollars needed to properly insulate and properly heat and light a building to minimize the footprint that the building will have. This amendment to Bill 73 is an important one that recognizes a pretty well-known fact in the Alberta public, that the provincial government should be leading the way when it comes to provincial infrastructure projects and greenhouse gas emissions that they generate over the life cycle of a building. I would venture to say that should this legislation pass and this amendment isn't part of it, the government would hear loud and clear, as I have from my constituents, that greenhouse gas emissions have to be considered when the province is building infrastructure.

Without going into huge detail, you know, there are other things that we can look at as well in not only the construction of new buildings but in retrofitting building envelopes throughout the province. Now, we've seen a lot of buildings get torn down here in this province, and there are a lot of people who wonder if indeed retrofitting would be a better answer. Some buildings, like the Annex perhaps, are beyond hope, but there is a great economic opportunity and a great business opportunity in retrofitting building envelopes rather than tearing them down. I think one of the best examples was one that was retrofitted by our very great and well-respected engineering firm Stantec on Jasper Avenue and 111th

Street, just across the street from the General hospital, where they reduced a building similar in size to the Annex to its metal skeleton and completely rebuilt the building but managed to save the skeleton and didn't have to reduce it to complete rubble.

That was an example, I thought, of what we need to be looking at in this province in terms of our greenhouse gas footprint, or GHG footprint, in that not tearing down that skeleton left that building intact, to be reconstructed using modern technology. You know, the energy it would have taken to tear it down, to do something else with the steel, to remelt it: all of that was saved by not tearing it completely down. There may be other examples as well, but this is the one that sticks in my mind as something that I was really proud to see. Our local engineering company Stantec demonstrated how a building could be saved and re-engineered and reoutfitted to modern standards to, obviously, make it work for their purposes but also to incorporate all of the savings from greenhouse gas emissions that doing better insulation, new windows, new flooring – the whole thing would have been thought through right from square one to incorporate new technology.

It would be a very interesting analysis to see if Stantec could ever present publicly the numbers on what the building cost and how much in greenhouse gases it produced before they acquired it and retrofitted it versus what it was generating as greenhouse gases and what their costs were for heating and electricity and so forth after it. I'll bet you dollars to doughnuts, knowing Stantec and their commitment to efficiency and good technique, that they would probably be happy to bring those numbers forward and demonstrate what indeed a good investment this type of construction is.

Showing the greenhouse gas footprint and making it a criterion in the Infrastructure Accountability Act is something that we definitely should have seen in the act itself, but given that it wasn't, I thought it prudent to bring forward this amendment to recommend to the Legislature that it be included as part of the act. I hope that members opposite will find the wisdom of the amendment and see their way fit to accepting it as a part of the legislation that should have been there in the first place. By opposing such an amendment, it makes a statement to the province that indeed perhaps the Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster-Wainwright is correct and, you know, that the greenhouse gas emissions don't matter and the science of climate change doesn't exist, but I think that the better part of wisdom will prevail and the majority of the caucus on the government side will see their way through to supporting the amendment and will let the chips fall where they may.

With that, I'll go ahead and let somebody else speak to it and, hopefully, add to the conversation.

The Acting Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Any other members wishing to speak to amendment A3? I recognize the Member for Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville.

Ms Armstrong-Homeniuk: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I appreciate the sentiment driving this amendment around sustainability and resilience. It is unnecessary and poor legislative practice to put technical design requirements into a bill. These requirements have existed for years and are under perpetual review, revision, and refinement in response to industry best practices. Technical Design Requirements for Alberta Infrastructure Facilities provide architects, engineers, contractors, client groups, facility administrators, and operators involved in designing and building facilities with a comprehensive set of requirements. The requirements are intended as a minimum for planning new facilities and renovating and operating existing facilities.

I won't read into the record the entire technical design requirements but will highlight a few elements. The requirements outline

flood risk management guidelines, guidelines for wildfire protection of institutional buildings in forested areas of Alberta, the green building standards that address minimum standards for sustainability and rely on third-party certification for new construction and major renovations. The requirements state:

The Province endeavours to promote the health, productivity, and safety of Albertans through the design and maintenance of the built environment. Each new project should promote all aspects of sustainability that includes measures to increase efficiency, use of renewable resources, considers future adaptations/expansions and a decrease in production of waste and hazardous materials . . .

The Province requires a number of LEED v4 credits to be mandatory credits for its projects. For the mandatory LEED v4 credits, the focus is to reduce CO2 emissions through optimizing energy performance with commissioning and metering, to track and monitor this energy reduction/performance, as well as further reduce CO2 emissions by sourcing regional and environmentally responsible materials.

Mandatory sustainability requirements include the use of commissioning for energy systems and building envelope systems that verify the building meets the original owner's requirements, the implementation of meters to measure future use, and minimum thresholds for environmental product transparency. Third-party certification provides measurement and reporting functions.

Finally, the department continues to evaluate the technical design requirements for resilience to a range of future climate scenarios and immediately updates the standards as necessary. Findings to date confirm that the technical design requirements of Alberta infrastructure facilities help deliver facilities that are durable and robust enough to manage many expected changes in future weather patterns.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Acting Chair: Thank you, Member.

Any other members wishing to speak to amendment A3? The Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

Ms Gray: Thank you very much. I will be relatively brief, but I did want to just speak in favour of the amendment that we have in front of us because I think that enshrining in legislation the overarching goals and priorities for this government, especially for something as important as building infrastructure, is really, really important given that our largest industry is committed to being net carbon neutral by 2050 and this legislation creates a 20-year strategic infrastructure plan, taking us to the 2040s. Given that over the past eight years we as a province have averaged over \$7 billion a year in infrastructure spending, the highest of which was under the former NDP government – but, to be honest, both governments in the last eight years have been spending a lot – we're talking about a lot and a lot of spending.

4:40

We're not saying that emissions reduction should be the only criteria to prioritize, but I think that putting it in the legislation and making it very clear that emissions reduction needs to be part of the criteria will help position ourselves as environmentally responsible, especially given what we're seeing in the world around us, the floods and fires in B.C., the impacts that we're seeing there. The opportunity that we have, given how reducing GHG emissions is such a priority for this particular industry and they've been making such good strides towards that – because the building sector is one of the largest sources of greenhouse gas emissions in Alberta and they are looking to innovate and reduce emissions, it just seems like a glaring gap in Bill 73, talking about the strategic plan yet ignoring emissions reduction.

I speak in support of this amendment and, with that, will conclude my remarks. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Acting Chair: Thank you, Member.

Any other members wishing to speak to amendment A3?

[The voice vote indicated that the motion on amendment A3 lost]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 4:42 p.m.]

[One minute having elapsed, the committee divided]

[Mr. Hanson in the chair]

For the motion:

Dach	Gray	Nielsen
Feehan	Loyola	

Against the motion:

Aheer	LaGrange	Rowswell
Allard	Loewen	Sawhney
Amery	Lovely	Schulz
Armstrong-Homeniuk	Luan	Shandro
Copping	Madu	Sigurdson, R.J.
Ellis	Nally	Smith
Fir	Nixon, Jeremy	Stephan
Glubish	Orr	Toews
Gotfried	Pon	Williams
Guthrie	Rehn	Wilson
Issik	Reid	Yao

Totals: For – 5 Against – 33

[Motion on amendment A3 lost]

The Acting Chair: We are back on the main bill, Bill 73. Are there any members wishing to speak to the main bill? I recognize the Member for Central Peace-Notley.

Mr. Loewen: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. This Bill 73 is obviously a very interesting bill. There's been lots of discussion on this already. I guess, why not discuss something that does, quote, increase transparency on public infrastructure projects? End quote. Now, I know Albertans want this. I know my constituents want this.

But there is a problem. Everyone in this House needs to take a really close look at section 4, where the bill outlines the criteria. The bill reads in section 4, which are the criteria for capital planning submissions:

4 When evaluating a capital planning submission, other than a capital maintenance and renewal submission, for the purpose of making recommendations to the Treasury Board, the Responsible Minister shall consider the following criteria.

I guess the word to pay attention to is the word "consider." Obviously, the criteria that are listed here are only consideration.

You know, some of these criteria are good, some are definitely a little soft, but let's just go through those criteria.

- (a) whether the project or program is expected to decrease risks to the health and safety or security of Albertans or increase compliance with health and safety and other applicable legislation.

This is good. It seems perfectly reasonable. Reduce risks to the health and safety or for security reasons: I think those are good criteria to have.

- (b) the extent to which the project or program aligns with the government's strategic objectives, as identified in the government's strategic and business plans, and other government priorities.

Now, of course, that's obviously extremely broad. It says: "aligns with . . . other government priorities." That basically opens it up to anything that the government or the party of the day has an interest in.

- (c) the extent to which the project or program is expected to result in positive economic impacts, including direct or indirect job creation and economic development and activity.

It's another pretty broad criterion. No requirement for a cost benefit to net out in favour of the benefit, which I think would be helpful, to have that. It's just simply a requirement for "positive economic impacts." The minister could have taken this a bit further, I think, but obviously opted not to.

- (d) the extent to which the project or program is expected to result in the improved delivery of programs and services.

Of course, that's great. That seems reasonable. Again, very broad, but I think that's something we would like to see, improved delivery of programs and services.

We go to (e):

- (e) the full life-cycle cost of the project or program and whether the project or program will generate a return on investment.

Now, this is good. Obviously, there are no complaints about the inclusion of a clear life cycle analysis. But it's too bad, of course, again, that this is just a consideration.

Then we get to (f), and this is where it gets maybe a little more interesting.

- (f) the extent to which the project or program is expected to enhance the resiliency of a community, including by
 - (i) enhancing the resiliency of existing infrastructure relied on by members of the community,
 - (ii) protecting community members and assets from natural disasters,
 - (iii) providing a remote community with core infrastructure,
 - (iv) preserving or enhancing the community's culture and heritage, and
 - (v) improving social and environmental circumstances in the community and local conditions generally.

These, again, are some extremely broad criteria.

There are a lot of projects that will fit into these criteria. Some, even seemingly with little merit, may actually fit these criteria, too, as there is no requirement that the project serves as a true public good. Now, I guess that's the end of what we'll call the pertinent criteria. The ones with substance, though: in many cases that substance could be considered fairly weak, I guess.

Now we have the real question here: why would we undermine all of the criteria requirements with (g)?

- (g) other criteria as determined by the Responsible Minister from time to time.

At this point I will be bringing forward an amendment.

4:50

The Acting Chair: Thank you, Member. Just wait until we have the original copy in hand, and then you can proceed.

Any members wishing to receive a copy of the amendment, please raise your hand so the pages can address you. Members, this will be referred to as amendment A4.

You may proceed.

Mr. Loewen: Okay. Thank you. I move that Bill 73, Infrastructure Accountability Act, be amended (a) in section 3(c) by striking out

“and other criteria the Responsible Minister considers appropriate” and (b) by striking out section 4(g).

Obviously, these two sections, section 4(g) and the other phrase taken out of 3(c), are where basically this whole bill gets undermined by allowing the minister complete control over the criteria. I think that if this bill is supposed to be about accountability and about transparency in infrastructure approvals, I’m not sure why we would undermine all those criteria that I just went through and then just say at the end: “other criteria as determined by the Responsible Minister from time to time.” I think, obviously, this amendment is a good amendment. I think it’s something that we should all support here. I think that if we want to talk about accountability, if we want to talk about transparency, if we want to have these infrastructure projects be looked at by the criteria that are listed in the bill, then I don’t know why we would undermine it by having these two phrases in there.

Now, of course, while we’re asking for all of this analysis with these criteria, they’re not binding in any way, and the projects meet these criteria rather than disclose their status. It seems like here once again, you know, this bill has a lot of talk, but I just would like to see a little bit more action, something a little more definitive in this bill. It’s a partial step in the right direction, but when it comes right down to it, it could have been so much more.

Again, this amendment will help the transparency, will help accountability, and will – again, we’ve got a bill that lists the criteria in it that these projects should be judged against, and I think that having a phrase in there that just allows the minister to do whatever the minister wants takes away from the transparency and the accountability in it.

Thank you very much.

The Acting Chair: Thank you.

Are there any other members wishing to speak to amendment A4?

[Motion on amendment A4 lost]

The Acting Chair: We are back on the main bill, Bill 73. Are there any other members wishing to speak to the bill? I’ll recognize the Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, and I appreciate the opportunity at Committee of the Whole on Bill 73. We’ve now had the opportunity to talk about a number of amendments to this important piece of legislation, the Infrastructure Accountability Act. We’ve seen so far at Committee of the Whole amendments to talk about Indigenous reconciliation, amendments to talk about working with municipalities as well as amendments to talk about emissions reduction as well as responsible governance. Certainly, the debate on Bill 73, the Infrastructure Accountability Act, really shows how important this particular piece of legislation can be.

One of the things I’ve appreciated in the debate so far was the inclusion of some of the results from the What We Heard document that didn’t necessarily make their way into the bill that we have before us. But certainly what we do have is a bill that needs further consideration and potential further amendments, and I look forward, as we continue to talk about Bill 73 in Committee of the Whole, to the opportunity to continue to do that.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Acting Chair: Thank you.

Any other members wishing to speak to Bill 73?

Ms Issik: I move that the committee rise and report progress on Bill 73.

[Motion carried]

[Mr. Hanson in the chair]

Mr. Gotfried: Mr. Speaker, the Committee of the Whole has had under consideration a certain bill. The committee reports progress on the following bill: Bill 73. I wish to table copies of all amendments considered by the Committee of the Whole on this date for the official records of the Assembly.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, Member.

Having heard the report as presented by the hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek, all those in favour please say aye.

Hon. Members: Aye.

The Acting Speaker: Any opposed? Thank you. That is carried.

Government Bills and Orders Second Reading

Bill 81

Election Statutes Amendment Act, 2021 (No. 2)

Ms Gray moved that the motion for second reading of Bill 81, Election Statutes Amendment Act, 2021 (No. 2), be amended by deleting all of the words after “that” and substituting the following:

Bill 81, Election Statutes Amendment Act, 2021 (No. 2), be not now read a second time because the Assembly is of the view that consultation with stakeholders and Albertans on the proposed legislative amendments is required.

[Adjourned debate on the amendment November 30: Member Loyola]

The Acting Speaker: Any members wishing to speak to Bill 81? I’ll recognize the Member for Edmonton-Decore.

Mr. Nielsen: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I was expecting a lot of people to just jump up ahead of me, but I’m glad that you were able to pick me out of the crowd to get an opportunity here this afternoon to speak a little bit more on Bill 81, the Election Statutes Amendment Act, 2021 (No. 2), and, of course, the amendment that’s before us as proposed by my friend from Edmonton-Mill Woods, to move that, you know, Bill 81 not be read a second time because we’re of the view that consultation with stakeholders and Albertans on the proposed legislative amendments needs some work, to say the least.

There’s a lot here, Mr. Speaker. You know, I’ve been listening intently to debate through this . . .

The Acting Speaker: Member, just before you continue, I’d just remind the House that we are on an amendment. We’re speaking to RA1.

Thank you.

5:00

Mr. Nielsen: Sorry. I guess I probably could have mentioned that to assist that a little bit. All I said was “amendment.”

There are some significant challenges with this bill. Some of my opening remarks – and I think I’ll repeat them again because I think it very, very clearly shows where we may be headed, Mr. Speaker, should we decide to enact this bill. I would certainly never presuppose the decision of the House.

Alberta used to have a very, very auspicious title way back when. When it came to elections financing, we were considered the wild, wild west of elections financing. That was a title that was given to

the province because a lot of money was able to be injected into elections, quite honestly, in almost a ridiculous way. You know, an individual could donate up to \$15,000 every single year and then during the actual election period donate up to another \$15,000, allowing for one individual to donate as much as \$105,000 in an entire election cycle. I don't know about you, Mr. Speaker. I don't have a lot of individuals in Edmonton-Decore that have the capability to do that. That kind of reminds me again of that story where we had a very prestigious Edmontonian cut a check for \$450,000 to cover himself, his wife, his gardener, his maid's cousin, the dog walker's sister three times removed, and needless to say that created a little bit of a hubbub around that.

So when I'm looking at Bill 81, the reason we have to just put the breaks on this – stop – is because in the entire time I've had the great honour to represent the constituents of Edmonton-Decore and to listen to Albertans in general, I have not once heard somebody say: let's make it possible for nomination candidates to bring in absolutely as much money as humanly possible. [interjection] I do see my friend from Edmonton-Mill Woods, and I'm happy to take that interjection.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

Ms Gray: Thank you so much to my colleague. For my interjection I really just want to echo what I'm hearing you talk about because with Alberta having been the wild west, unfortunately, big amounts of money were unduly influencing the process. When it comes to procedural electoral fairness, we need to ensure equality of each citizen in the elections. Albertans reacted super negatively towards someone super rich coming in and throwing a lot of money into the electoral system because it's not seen as fair.

Steps that move us back in that direction, I believe, don't have the support of Albertans. Fairness and making sure that each citizen is treated equally and that every citizen has the opportunity to engage in the democratic process and that you don't need to be rich, I think, are fundamental to our democracy. In Bill 81 I see a lot of challenges. You were talking about the nomination meetings, which I think are important.

Mr. Nielsen: No, I highly agree; hence why you probably brought forth this amendment to begin with, to put the breaks on this entire thing. You know, Madam Speaker, I think if an individual has to cut a ridiculously huge cheque to be able to get the attention of either a nomination contestant, an actual nominated candidate, or even an MLA, I can tell you right now that that person is doing something wrong. If somebody wants my attention, you just have to ask. You don't need to cut a really big cheque.

Now, some of the comments that I heard about this during debate: you know, nomination contests, that's internal. That's internal party business and should not be messed with right up until it overflows and starts going into external political business. If you have ridiculously large amounts of money coming into a nomination contest where the nomination contestant can only spend \$12,500, based on the proposed legislation here in Bill 81, where is the rest of this money going? It's going into that particular party, which then goes to the external political business. In essence by creating this language, you say that it's internal party business, but you've made it external by allowing that back door to be created.

Quite honestly, if you're that sure about it, there should be no problems halting this process, going back to Albertans, hearing what they say, and we know you can do it. We've seen it. We've just finished talking about a bill where the government brought that out, you know: what did we hear in our consultation process? So I know it's possible. If you're that confident, you go through the

process. As I've said before in other bills that I've debated in the House, Madam Speaker, if it's true, then I'm going to have no choice but to sit down and shut up about it, but until I see that, I have to keep bringing these things up.

I'm sure a lot of my other colleagues are going to want to talk on this, so I'm not going to belabour that any further around that.

I'd actually like to move towards the restrictions on third-party advertisers. Let's call this what it is. I know members opposite get just full of the heebies and the jeebies when I say this word. This is about silencing unions, unions that represent a significant number of Albertans, and I'm going to point out that this language that's proposed in Bill 81 is going to prevent those unions from being able to do their jobs that they are required to do. Okay? You've heard of that position of duty to fair representation. Okay? I'm not going to go into that. Hopefully, everybody knows what that is. But there is a responsibility that a union can be held accountable if they are not advocating on behalf of their membership to improve the situation. [interjection] I see my friend from Edmonton-Mill Woods, who, of course, happens to be the former labour minister. I might have sparked some ideas that I'd like to hear.

Ms Gray: Well, I thank my colleague because, absolutely, Bill 81, especially when it comes to the sections around third-party advertising, not only seems to infringe on Charter rights – and we've seen many experts say that they'll be challenging it – but you were talking about the importance of labour unions in advocating for their members. The additional point that I know you were getting to – but I just leapt up with enthusiasm – is because so often labour unions and labour advocates are advocating not only for their own members but for all workers and running campaigns to support public health care or running campaigns to support child care based on the will of their membership because these are democratically elected organizations that are driven by the will of their membership.

I think this is something that maybe not all Albertans understand when it comes to these third-party advertising campaigns, because the \$15 minimum wage, improved health and safety conditions . . .

Mr. Nielsen: I thank my friend from Edmonton-Mill Woods for bringing that up. Yeah. You know, labour unions have long advocated for a minimum wage of \$15 an hour because they know that there's an economic benefit to people having money in their pockets, to be able to freely take it out and spend it in the economy – that's what makes things go around – not just on the stuff that they need to survive but on the stuff that they want as well. But based on the language in Bill 81, that is going to prevent those kinds of things. That's going to interfere with those kinds of things, and that creates a significant problem.

5:10

So is this potentially – and I'll use a favourite word that, you know, members who served in the 29th Legislature used to bring up all the time – the unintended consequences, that you are going to interfere and prevent labour unions from being able to discharge their duties? Was that the intention? I have a feeling, Madam Speaker, that that one's going to lose big time in the courts.

I remember, you know, being a part of the Ethics and Accountability Committee back in the 29th Legislature, talking about third-party advertisers. Part of the debate was some of the changes that we were thinking about: "Oh, well, we're going to get sued. We're absolutely going to get sued." Perhaps my friend from Edmonton-Mill Woods might be able to correct me on this at some point in time, but I actually don't remember that happening, because we looked at the other jurisdictions that had made changes around third-party advertising that did get challenged in the courts and, I

believe, lost as well. Again, maybe my friend can correct me if I'm wrong on that.

So here I am, through this amendment, trying to encourage the government to not go down this road and prevent getting sued, because you're going to lose. [interjection] I expected my friend to jump up, and I'm happy to hear what you'll have to say.

Ms Gray: My hon. colleague from Decore is totally correct. When making changes to elections finance law, particularly when it comes to third-party advertising, ensuring that the freedom of speech is a protected right and is not negatively impacted by this type of legislation is incredibly important, and when governments have gone too far, when they have not protected that freedom of speech, then courts have struck these pieces of legislation as unconstitutional.

In my view and the view of a number of different experts, Bill 81 does go too far. It limits that freedom of speech and that right to participate as well as seems to prioritize it for those who have a lot of money to be able to contribute to third-party advertising campaigns. Walking that line of trying to make sure that elections are fair and make sure that the voices who want to be raised during an election are balanced with those of the political parties is really important.

Mr. Nielsen: Thanks to my friend from Edmonton-Mill Woods for adding that. Certainly, she's able to, you know, give us those kinds of details very, very eloquently, and I appreciate that.

Unintended consequences. Do you really want to set it up so that the province gets sued? You're going to have to defend, which is going to cost Albertans their money. You know, is that the definition of fiscal responsibility? I'm telling you that other jurisdictions have already lost this, and it wasn't quite as egregious as what's proposed here. If we don't halt this process right now, which is what the amendment proposes to do so that we can go back out and check with these stakeholders – perhaps we can get some useful information to prevent the wasteful money on a lawsuit that will ultimately cost Albertan taxpayers their hard-earned dollars. I think we have an opportunity to do better here.

You know, one of the other things here that I know I have a rather big problem with is this whole change around allowing somebody else to purchase a party membership on their behalf. This just makes the hairs on the back of my neck stand up, Madam Speaker. This is all kinds of a problem just waiting to happen. I can remember a certain leadership race that got embroiled in a bunch of controversy around voting and memberships and PINs going out to these people that supposedly had memberships and didn't even know. There already was our example of what not to do. I can't help but wonder, Madam Speaker: are the changes that are being proposed around that so that kind of behaviour can continue, or are you changing it so that when it does continue, now it won't be a problem?

You put in these kinds of changes, and it's no wonder that when a politician shows up on the doorstep of an Albertan, they say: well, you're just a bunch of – I probably can't say that language because it's unparliamentary. Hopefully, people will get the idea. It's very, very negative. It's so hard when you're trying to convey ideas to people and tell them how we can do things differently or better but they're already coming from a place of negativity and don't trust the person standing in front of them no matter what their background is, no matter what they've done in the past. It's because of changes like this to nomination contests, to buying party memberships for somebody else, to silencing organizations that are trying to create better lives for Albertans, better working conditions for Albertans. That's what makes our province so much better.

I guess I just can't stress enough to members in the Chamber today how important this amendment is. We have to slow down and rethink this because it's just going to fuel that perception that Albertans and, frankly, Canadians have. I started my comments, to begin with, about Alberta being called the wild, wild west of elections financing. We have to change that narrative, and we're heading in the wrong direction with this. We have the ability now to hit the pause button, to re-examine this, talk to stakeholders, talk to Albertans. I know we can do it – we've already seen, like I said, the What We Heard document in a previous bill debate – actually bring in some confidence of Albertans in their electoral system so that people like all of us, the 87 that try to very proudly serve our constituents, don't end up standing in front of them being accused of all kinds of nefarious things and that we make politics in this province about big ideas, not big money.

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

Mr. Dach: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I'm pleased to rise on the amendment to Bill 81, Election Statutes Amendment Act, 2021, to insist, through the amendment, that the bill receive proper consultation with stakeholders and Albertans on the proposed legislation. Now, I have nothing good to say about this piece of legislation, and certainly I'm a strong supporter of this amendment because I am confident, absolutely confident, that since the inception and introduction of this Bill 81, every day that passes more and more Albertans are becoming aware of what the content is and what the consequences of this piece of legislation will be.

5:20

Madam Speaker, in my view, this bill is a vile – vile – embarrassment to all Albertans. Of the members opposite some of them, I'm sure, are ashamed of what's actually being proposed, and those who don't feel that shame should. It is a return to some of the most cynical days we've ever seen in this province, that I've lived through and that many members of the same age may have as well.

Madam Speaker, I'm almost 64. I've lived through the Social Credit government, lived through the Lougheed PC government and subsequent PC versions after that, and finally a ray of sunshine occurred in 2015. We actually had reason brought to our election statutes act, and some measures of control that would protect democracy were introduced. Of course, this legislation, this bill, which we seek to amend by sending it to further consultation with stakeholders and having all Albertans really get a hold of exactly what it's aiming to do, is the most diabolical thing a government can do to its own democracy in its own interest, because that is exactly what indeed this government is up to.

They're looking to change the fundamental rules of our democracy to benefit themselves for reasons that one can only speculate about. Perhaps they don't feel they can win an election if it's done fairly. Maybe that's indeed part of the reason that you saw the hegemony of Conservative governments in this province for 70-some years. Perhaps that's part of it, that election laws, election financing laws were tilted in favour of the ruling party.

Certainly, Madam Speaker, this is what this legislation hopes to do so transparently and so cynically as to be an abomination to anyone who treats democracy as a value that they hold true. I am absolutely incensed that this government would see fit to bring forward such a horrific piece of legislation that goes back to the old boys' network way of running elections in this province, where it was "Yuk, yuk" and slap you on the back and "Don't worry; we've got this in the bag." Conservative parties of the day, whether it was

Social Credit or the Progressive Conservatives, now the UCP, seek to put an election in the bag by outspending everybody else, and they do so by making the election financing act favour them.

The rules will favour the re-election of a Conservative government every time when indeed the laws are tilted to make sure that massive amounts of money can be funnelled to the main party, in this particular case of the elections financing act, by – I would say that they're nefarious means, but they're so blatantly obvious about it that they take Albertans as stupid. I am just totally flabbergasted. [interjection] I will yield.

Ms Gray: Thank you. As you're speaking, I'm thinking about the various passages within this bill that I find offensive, practically, and I would note that in an interpretation bulletin that the Chief Electoral Officer put out on November 19, he makes it really clear that section 25 of this act prohibits individuals from paying for annual membership fees for political parties and constituency associations on behalf of others. In short, only individuals can buy an annual political party and constituency association membership, and individuals can only buy memberships for themselves.

But this bill, on page 123, adds in new language to section 25 of "an annual membership fee paid by a person on behalf of another person" and introduces somebody buying memberships, buying bulk memberships, for influencing nomination contests and potentially leadership contests. It will now be allowed. When you're talking about all the various things they're doing to allow big money back into politics, page 123 is one of my concerns.

Mr. Dach: Thank you to the Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods for bringing up page 123. I could go on – and we may go on quite a bit at length, I think, in this Chamber – talking about Bill 81 and bringing forward amendments to probably not make the bill into anything that could be palatable to members on this side of the House but at least, Madam Speaker, to try to spread the word to Albertans far and wide about the contents of this legislation and exactly what it purports to do, because it has nothing to do with democracy. It has everything to do with tilting the scale in favour of the party in power, in favour of the Conservatives, as the elections financing act had been tilted for a couple of generations beforehand through Socred and PC hegemonies. They brazenly seek to do it again.

I can only imagine that there have to be a few members of the government caucus, perhaps some of the younger members, perhaps the new generation of members, who were part of a family that has had other elected members throughout periods of time in this province and that some of those members must in their conversations with each other, perhaps on the way to the Legislature if they drive together in a vehicle, maybe in an evening meal shared together, quietly talk about Bill 81 and ask themselves: "What in the name of heaven are we doing? This is what my dad talked about and it's what my grandfather talked about when they talked about raising money to ensure the Conservative government maintained power, to ensure that the table was tilted in favour of making sure that nobody else had an opportunity." They must cringe as they hold their tongues in this Legislature. I hope to goodness that some of them are upset enough that they will bring forward their concerns to the Legislature. [interjection] Yes. I'll yield to the hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

Ms Gray: Thank you very much to my colleague. When I think about those conversations that might be happening given the debate that's happening in this Legislature, I wonder about, on page 120, the section that removes registered nomination contestants from being part of the donation cap for all Albertans. Currently Albertans

have essentially \$4,243, which is a lot, to donate to the political process through nominations, through candidates, through constituency associations, parties, or leadership contests, yet Bill 81 actually removes nomination contests as one of those things that falls under the cap, essentially removing the cap and making it unlimited amounts of money that can come in through a nomination contest and be funnelled directly to the political party. The impacts that that could potentially have, the influence that that could have on who wins nomination contests as well as on who the party seeks to invite to be part of their nomination contests – now, if there's a candidate who can bring in \$100,000, that must be appealing.

Mr. Dach: Thank you, Madam Speaker and to the Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods for bringing yet another critical element of this piece of legislation to bear here in the Legislature. Page 120 certainly deals with nomination of candidates in provincial elections or in contests for party candidate nominations. One could go on for days on each of these elements of this piece of legislation, and frankly if it meant that this bill would not pass, if we could prevent this legislation from taking place, I would debate in the Legislature till next Christmas if indeed that was a result that could be obtained. This is so abominable that it will affect the political landscape for generations to come if indeed it passes.

Indeed, it hopes to turn back the clock, hopes to put that blue pickup truck in reverse and drive backwards into the ditch, the ditch where the Conservative party lay after 2015 and where we hope to see them spinning their wheels after the next election. That ditch is where this piece of legislation belongs because it is really a despicable piece of legislation that would only be brought forward by somebody belonging to a government where they thought they had no other choice, who thought they could not win an election if indeed they didn't do everything possible to turn the rules to favour themselves. That's the terrible background to this piece of legislation, and I can't see that every member of the government party is willing to let it go without bringing their voices to this Legislature in opposition to the legislation, perhaps by supporting this amendment. [interjection] I'll give way.

5:30

Ms Gray: Thank you very much to the hon. member. I just find myself nodding along in agreement with the remarks that you are giving on this recent amendment and the reason why we need more consultation with Albertans. The other thing as well is it looking like it's being used to benefit the governing party by allowing no limits on nomination contests, reduced transparency, letting people buy party memberships on behalf of another, reducing some of the reporting. Also, the changes to third-party advertising and the restriction on freedom of speech to civil society, the language that specifically says that if someone has spoken out against this government, they would potentially not be allowed to be a third-party advertiser really seems designed to silence critics of this government.

It specifically reaches out and says that if somebody has been critical of the government, then they should not be able to talk in a third-party advertising campaign around an election. That impact to freedom of speech is devastating to our democracy and certainly counter to principles of fairness.

Thank you.

Mr. Dach: Thank you to the Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods for bringing once again another critical element of this legislation to light. There are so many elements which are abhorrent to anybody who was a lover of democracy and of course neutralizing your opposition is something that perhaps in parliamentary terms

might be a good concept to follow if indeed you're in the Legislature making an argument. But to neutralize your opposition, Madam Speaker, by adopting legislation which changes the election financing act to favour your party is indeed a despicable thing to do.

To go further than that, Madam Speaker, to not only neutralize it in terms of the ability to raise funds or to make it easier and favour a party that has a greater ability to raise funds, that end of it, the financial part of it, but also the democratic participation part of it, the audacity of the government to come forward and say that if you have spoken out against the government, positive or negative, you therefore nullify your eligibility to come out and form a third-party political entity that could participate in the election campaign and raise money, now how indeed in a democracy such as ours could we ever put up with something so audacious as this?

It is something one would expect to find in a third-world economy in some nether regions of the world where democracy is a fledgling institute, not in a parliamentary democracy that is supposedly robust and supposedly is an offshoot of the mother of parliamentary democracies whereby we uphold the foundation and the principles of Westminster Parliament and the reverence that we're supposed to have for how we get here, Madam Speaker, for how we form government, for how we elect people, how people enter the electoral process, and one of those processes, of course, is through the nomination process with your own political party.

To have repeatedly members of the Conservative Party and former members of the PC Party I think of, in particular – and I think as a former member one can name the individual who had been serving. The individual used to serve as a member of the Progressive Conservative Party for Vermilion-Lloydminster and he described himself as the last of Lougheed's privateers, I think, one who was last known as a member of the Progressive Conservative Party in this House. I went to high school with him, and of course his name was Richard Starke – we all know that – and I was absolutely shocked and disappointed that he held firmly on to the belief that a political party in Alberta is a private club.

Like he, in a committee, was just rife with anger when I deigned to suggest that a political party should have rules on its nomination procedure in terms of the amount of money you could donate to a nomination procedure, and he practically jumped out of his seat in the committee room saying: no; it's a private club.

Well, I'll tell you what, Madam Speaker, it's not a private club. A political party is an entry point for our democratic political process. That club needs to have the light of day shed upon it because a political party can't use the nomination process – should not be able to. This legislation will allow them to do it, but a political party must not, in my view, be allowed to shuttle certain individuals into the political process and shutter others out by the nomination amounts that they're able to donate, and not only that; to subvert the intent of the nomination process by using it as a vehicle to clandestinely or rather openly clandestinely, as ironic as that is, make sure that any extra amount of money that's donated through a nomination process can get funnelled to the party itself. Unlimited amounts. We're not quibbling about a certain amount here, whether it should be bigger or smaller. The legislation would allow an unlimited amount.

The piece of legislation is a fairly thick piece of legislation. It goes into detail about a number of things. One of them it talks about, of course, is the fact that, sure, a candidate can only spend \$12,500 on a nomination, but they can generate unlimited donations. The excess, the overage, will be then forwarded to the political party. This is a gaping hole. It's a gaping hole that is allowed by this legislation for money to be funnelled in unlimited amounts to the party, therefore giving it a huge advantage if it's a Conservative

party with deep-pocketed individuals able to come up with huge amounts and tilt the scale in favour of their re-election, as we've seen over generations that they've done in the past. This is a blatant example of Conservatives looking to tilt the balance in their favour.

Madam Speaker, as I speak, I hope that Albertans are looking forward to the opportunity offered to them by this amendment to not read this bill a second time and allow Albertans and stakeholders to be consulted in depth so that their voices can be heard by this Legislature. And they can tell everybody, including the government members who are thinking about passing this legislation and voting for it, that, yes, indeed, there may be a bridge too far gone here.

It may be that, you know, they've sat and they've endured a lot of legislation that they really didn't feel tasted very good to them, and this is as far as they're willing to go. In their conversations with each other, in their hallways or in their cars or at dinner with each other, I'm suspecting, I'm hoping, I fervently hope that there are those who really cannot stomach what's going on, and they will say: look, we thought we'd joined something different, that we had actually changed, that we weren't going to rely upon the blatant hypocrisy of playing with the election finance rules to do our best to guarantee our re-election as opposed to anybody else who didn't have the benefit of perhaps a large, deep-pocketed group of individuals who would support us. Those conversations, Madam Speaker, I hope are happening now and today and tomorrow and that some of those individual members might come forward and just express themselves to this House and perhaps to the rest of their caucus and say: this is too much; this is not something I accept.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. Would it be possible to have the amendment read in to the record just so I make sure I'm focused on the referral properly?

The Deputy Speaker: Yes. It's a reasoned amendment, and I will get a copy as quickly as possible and read it into the record for you.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you so much. I really appreciate that.

5:40

The Deputy Speaker: All right. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods moves that the motion for second reading of Bill 81, the Election Statutes Amendment Act, 2021 (No. 2), be amended by deleting all of the words after "that" and substituting the following:

Bill 81, Election Statutes Amendment Act, 2021 (No. 2), be not now read a second time because the Assembly is of the view that consultation with stakeholders and Albertans on the proposed legislative amendments is required.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. That's very helpful. I really appreciate that indulgence. I want to say thank you as well to the Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods for bringing this forward. This is literally the biggest bill that we have before us in this place for this session and the one that I believe has had the least amount of consultation and has incredibly far-reaching potential impacts. We're going to highlight a few more of the negative impacts today during debate, I'm sure. I think it could also potentially have positive impacts.

Actually, in consulting with members about what the barriers are to political engagement for them, we know that there are many groups in this province that are underrepresented in both of our parties and other parties. There are certain demographics that engage far less frequently in party politics, so I think having an opportunity to do thoughtful, thorough engagement about what those barriers

are and how parties can be more welcoming and more inclusive would be a really good use of this committee's time.

I also think that we have seen in the past what happens when certain folks try to manipulate the rules to create opportunities for themselves to be the successful candidate, particularly through nomination contests. I want to highlight a couple of things on nomination contests. One, I'm referring to the amendment for section 41.4. It's amended by striking out "registered nomination contestant" wherever it occurs and substituting "nomination contestant", and the other piece is striking out "20%" and substituting "25%". That's specifically with regard to the amount of money people can spend as nomination contestants seeking their nomination in each individual riding in relation to what the spending cap is for that riding.

We know that the spending cap for the province is changing with the new formula that's being proposed. That's definitely going to hike up the amount of central spending for parties, an interesting choice for the government, but also this change increases the amount. So the amount that nomination contestants will be able to spend in their individual nominations is 12 and a half thousand dollars according to the new 25 per cent formula based on local riding limits, and it was highlighted for me that that's very close to the amount that one specific member of this House received recently for a pay raise, and wasn't that interesting math, and it was interesting math, Madam Speaker.

One of the reasons why I think this probably warrants referral is that consultation around that pay increase certainly wasn't done in a public way, and there wasn't any consultation, as I understand it, on this section around increasing spending limits during nomination contests.

Probably the piece that I have the most frustration with – well, there are two. One has been very well articulated by my colleague the Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods, but maybe I'll try from a slightly different angle and see if I can make an impact on folks who maybe haven't had a chance to give it as thorough consideration as I hope they are, and that is that there is a spending cap for those nomination contests per contestant of 12 and a half thousand dollars in the new formula that's being proposed under section 41.4, but there is no cap on the donations. It would make sense to me and to most that if you're going to cap expenditure, you'd also put a cap in on individual revenues that individuals can contribute, but that's not being done anywhere in this bill.

Currently we do have a contribution cap. It's \$4,243 per annum, and that would include whether somebody was contributing to a nomination contest or contributing to a central party or contributing to a local riding association. But by allowing for people to contribute to nomination meetings outside of that spending cap, it means that individuals can contribute far more than that, which is still already a lot of money for most Alberta families, let's be frank, but they could contribute far more than that to one specific nomination contestant in one riding and to another nomination contestant in another riding and another nomination contestant in another riding. Once those nominations happen – and each individual contestant is only allowed to spend \$12,500, which is already quite a bit for a nomination contest – any additional surplus gets funnelled towards the central party.

What it seems that the Premier and executive cabinet have created here, in reading the legislation – and I won't say what the motives are; I'll just say what the consequences of the legislation are – is a massive opportunity for big fundraising contestants to enter nomination contest in ridings throughout the province, to fund raise huge amounts from the deepest, biggest pockets to be found anywhere, and to take that money through the nomination process and then channel that back towards the Premier's pursuit for a

general election or even to be funnelled towards other riding associations. [interjection] Happy to welcome the interjection from my colleague from Edmonton-Mill Woods.

Ms Gray: Well, thank you so much. I mean, Madam Speaker, we can call what the member is describing dark money coming back into our political process, big dollars, big donors. It moves us away from the principle of having fairness and equality of each citizen in an election. Instead, those who have large amounts of money, the very wealthy, will be able to influence the political party and future governments and influence the political process by injecting hundreds of thousands of dollars of dark money through nomination contests. The exclusion of nomination contests from that overall donation limit just defies those principles of fairness and trust in our election. I think this could be very damaging for Albertans' trust when it comes to our political process, especially as this proceeds to be used the way the Official Opposition sees that it can and is likely to be used, perhaps not by every nomination contestant because not every nomination contestant can bring in \$100,000 of dark money. That's not going to be each and every one, but there are going to be some contestants who can.

The Deputy Speaker: The bell didn't go off, but the intervention is over.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, and thank you to my colleague from Edmonton-Mill Woods for highlighting that absolute opportunity for – already we know that there have been some questionable behaviours by people seeking leadership contests for the UCP, for example, or people seeking nomination contests for the UCP. I'm not speaking about particulars, but obviously, if you look at a newspaper, you can find a lot of times where the RCMP has had to be called in to do investigations. What we're saying is that that's already under the current rules, that there have been all these investigations.

Now we've got a Premier and Executive Council bringing forward a bill to change the rules so that – well, I guess they wouldn't be doing anything illegal, but definitely those types of changes would be highly immoral. I think everyone – we used to talk about, you know, one member, one vote. We used to talk about large-number engagement and everyone having an opportunity to engage in democracy in a fair and equal way. Then we see correspondence going out from large corporations to their employees saying: "Hey, we don't love the Premier, but if we can get his approval numbers all right, then maybe we'll be owed some inside favours." "Hey, we need to get a lot of people to show up to conventions; it'd be really great if you helped us out with this."

Now, the other big piece that I have very big concerns about is allowing people to pay for somebody else's membership. Each party can determine how much their memberships are. Some parties have said: pay what you can. Some parties have said: free memberships. Some parties have said: \$10. I think that's basically where we're at right now, about a \$10 membership for both of our parties. But definitely you can make memberships free if you so choose. Parties have done that in the past. That was an interesting experiment that led to Raj Sherman leading the Alberta Liberals. But there is no good reason, in my mind, that we should ever allow somebody else to pay for somebody else's membership, Madam Speaker. [interjection] Happy to welcome the interjection.

Ms Gray: Thank you to my colleague. I really want to just emphasize, because there's been some confusion about this in the debate, with members of the government suggesting that today individuals can buy memberships for someone else, that that is not correct. The Chief Electoral Officer put out a bulletin on November

19, where he says completely clearly that section 25 prohibits an individual from paying an annual membership fee for a political party or constituency association on behalf of another. He says, in short, that only individuals can buy annual political party and constituency association memberships, and individuals can only buy memberships for themselves.

The problem is that on page 123, I'm fairly sure it was, it adds in new language that allows for someone to have a "fee paid by a person on behalf of another person." That is going to change how it works in our province. That is something I really wanted to emphasize because I know government members have said: oh, this is just clarifying whether it's a donation or a membership. That's not true. The Chief Electoral Officer says that you cannot do it now. You will be able to after this bill.

5:50

Ms Hoffman: Thank you so much for that clarification, to my colleague from Edmonton-Mill Woods. That's the absolute point, I think, that the government is creating an opportunity for people, again, with deep pockets to be able to make a contribution that will result in somebody else getting a membership.

We know that we have seen investigations of fraud, forgery, and bribery related to nomination contests and the sale of memberships already under the current rules, and now the government through this bill is attempting essentially to make that legal. For somebody to end up with a membership that they didn't fill out the form for or that they didn't consent to in writing, that they didn't pay for – it's very clear to say: that was an illegal sale of a membership; that wasn't done in an appropriate way. Basically, what the Premier and Executive Council are creating in this bill is an opportunity for people to come in and buy up a slew of memberships on behalf of a bunch of individuals, but it's actually the co-ordinators of those membership sales that are the contributors to the party.

Why is that such a big problem? Well, for a few reasons. Number one, I don't think that you should ever be signed up for a membership to an organization against your own personal free will. Of course, when you say to somebody that the way you demonstrate your will is by filling out this form and giving us 10 bucks, it creates that level of seriousness and accountability. When others come in and buy mass memberships on somebody's behalf – again, it's easy to extrapolate that e-mails like the one that was leaked to the *Calgary Herald* could very well translate into memberships, on top of the piece around: let us register you for the convention, and that would be really great, and then you can follow how we're telling you to vote and support the Premier.

It would be very easy for somebody with incredibly deep pockets to come in and buy up hundreds of memberships, even thousands, to move for somebody to be in a nomination contest in a riding where maybe somebody in a leadership position within the party has a preferred candidate. That, of course, would be highly unethical but, according to this legislation, would not be illegal. They would be able to be considered a donation even though they are buying memberships for somebody else. Why would somebody want to buy a membership for somebody else? Well, because they're trying to curry favour and they're trying to get a specific outcome, Madam Speaker, and that is absolutely against every democratic principle that I can think of.

If the party thinks that having lower cost entry options to participate in the party – then the party can reduce the cost of membership. The party can create categories for people to get free memberships even if that's what the party chooses to do within their own constitution. But what's being done through this bill is that it's saying that somebody else can pay that money on your behalf.

Maybe it's an attempt to have less fraud, forgery, and bribery investigations into PC nomination and leadership contests. Maybe it's an attempt to keep the RCMP out of internal party matters, but I will say that internal party matters that influence the outcome of democracy and the decisions that are made in this place are absolutely in the public interest and deserve to have proper and fair oversight and consistent rules and checks and balances.

So I have many concerns with this bill, and I am very grateful that we have the reasoned amendment that focuses on consultation because I think that if we only consult on those two issues that I've highlighted here tonight, the first issue being allowing people who contribute to nomination contests to not count as political contributions even though that money absolutely would be transferred over to the party after the nomination contest is over – not having a cap on the amount of money anyone can donate to a nomination contest, I think, is very dangerous for democracy, so I think that deserves full and fair canvassing of the public. I think this requirement for consultation as the reason for the amendment makes very good, clear sense.

Then the other one, of course, that again is a big threat to our democracy, is the piece around allowing wealthy or unwealthy, allowing anyone to pay for the membership of somebody else. We know that has been written into this bill. Obviously, I think it's fair for us to think about what the intentions are because we know what the consequences are. The consequences are that there will be people who step up and buy hundreds or even thousands of memberships on behalf of somebody else. [interjection]

The Deputy Speaker: Third interjection.

Ms Gray: Third? Thank you. I couldn't remember if I had done two or three.

When we're talking about consequences, a point that I've had the opportunity to make through this bill debate but I cannot emphasize enough, Madam Speaker, is that the real consequence may be Albertans losing faith in their democracy and trust in the election process. If Albertans feel that dark money, big money is coming back in, that the wealthy are having a bigger influence, that the quality of each individual citizen to participate is being jeopardized through the changes that we've talked about, people start to distrust and lose faith. The consequences of that are devastating. I think each one of us as representatives of our constituents believes in the democratic system, and we want our constituents to have that same faith, and I worry that Bill 81 is going to undermine that. There are changes here that I have not heard the government provide any good rationale for that we have serious concerns about and will have serious impacts going forward.

Ms Hoffman: I am confident that my 10-year-old nephew Elliott would say: you know, this is super sus. This is creating opportunities for imposters to enter into the political process by buying memberships for other folks on their behalf. Impastas, as he would also probably say. Not the kind of democracy that I think we all signed up for. At least it's not what I know I was taught when I was in grade 6. I know there's talk of changing the curriculum, but democracy and democratic engagement are currently a big focus of the grade 6 curriculum. Fair and equal elections are a big part of that.

When we see the kinds of threats that happen to democracy and the kind of undermining of fair and equal elections in places around the world, some not too far from here, some within our own province, when people are accused of stealing leadership races and selling hundreds of fake memberships or even thousands of fake memberships – here is what this bill does. It makes it not fake

because it actually legalizes the processes that have been under investigation already for years in this province, particularly when it comes to the UCP leadership campaigns.

Way to create an 81-page bill – not an 81-page bill; Bill 81, which is 159 pages. But it is super sus that these additions have been incorporated around funnelling money from large, profitable organizations or individuals who can exceed the annual donation limit through a nomination contest and then that money being funnelled towards a central party. The other piece, of course, around buying memberships on behalf of somebody else, is just – imagine voting on behalf of somebody else. I would hope we would all light our hair on fire if we heard about that.

That is essentially what the government is creating, a massive opportunity for – I won't even call it a loophole because it's pretty clear, in black and white, that that's exactly what's happening, especially with the note that we received from the Election Commissioner to highlight the significant change between what is the case now, which is that each individual must buy their own membership, and what is being proposed in this bill, which is that

somebody can step in and buy hundreds or even more memberships on behalf of other people. Of course, those memberships translate to local contests. If somebody is an imposter in a local contest for a nomination, it could have a direct impact on any sitting member but also anyone who chooses to seek a nomination anywhere in this province for any party.

This is a very serious concern, Madam Speaker. I think that that's why this referral makes so much sense. Let's at least talk to Albertans about what the government is trying to ram through in this bill. If at the end of the day Albertans say, "You know what? Go for it. Let people come in and buy a whole bunch of memberships themselves. Let people funnel money through nomination contests that then gets routed towards a central party," then let Albertans have their say.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. member, I hesitate to interrupt, but the clock strikes 6 p.m. The House is adjourned until 7:30 this evening.

[The Assembly adjourned at 6 p.m.]

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