



Province of Alberta

The 30th Legislature
Second Session

Alberta Hansard

Wednesday evening, December 1, 2021

Day 135

The Honourable Nathan M. Cooper, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta The 30th Legislature

Second Session

Cooper, Hon. Nathan M., Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills (UC), Speaker
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Milliken, Nicholas, Calgary-Currie (UC), Deputy Chair of Committees

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Barnes, Drew, Cypress-Medicine Hat (Ind)
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Carson, Jonathon, Edmonton-West Henday (NDP)
Ceci, Joe, Calgary-Buffalo (NDP)
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Dach, Lorne, Edmonton-McClung (NDP),
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Dang, Thomas, Edmonton-South (NDP),
Official Opposition Deputy House Leader
Deol, Jasvir, Edmonton-Meadows (NDP)
Dreeshen, Devin, Innisfail-Sylvan Lake (UC)
Eggen, David, Edmonton-North West (NDP),
Official Opposition Whip
Ellis, Hon. Mike, Calgary-West (UC)
Feehan, Richard, Edmonton-Rutherford (NDP)
Fir, Hon. Tanya, Calgary-Peigan (UC)
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Ganley, Kathleen T., Calgary-Mountain View (NDP)
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Glubish, Hon. Nate, Strathcona-Sherwood Park (UC)
Goehring, Nicole, Edmonton-Castle Downs (NDP)
Gotfried, Richard, Calgary-Fish Creek (UC)
Gray, Christina, Edmonton-Mill Woods (NDP),
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Hanson, David B., Bonnyville-Cold Lake-St. Paul (UC)
Hoffman, Sarah, Edmonton-Glenora (NDP)
Horner, Hon. Nate S., Drumheller-Stettler (UC)
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Irwin, Janis, Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood (NDP),
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Issik, Hon. Whitney, Calgary-Glenmore (UC),
Government Whip
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Kenney, Hon. Jason, PC, Calgary-Lougheed (UC),
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LaGrange, Hon. Adriana, Red Deer-North (UC)
Loewen, Todd, Central Peace-Notley (Ind)
Long, Martin M., West Yellowhead (UC)
Lovely, Jacqueline, Camrose (UC)
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Luan, Hon. Jason, Calgary-Foothills (UC)
Madu, Hon. Kaycee, QC, Edmonton-South West (UC)
McIver, Hon. Ric, Calgary-Hays (UC)
Nally, Hon. Dale, Morinville-St. Albert (UC)
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Nielsen, Christian E., Edmonton-Decore (NDP)
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Pon, Hon. Josephine, Calgary-Beddington (UC)
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Sawhney, Hon. Rajan, Calgary-North East (UC)
Schmidt, Marlin, Edmonton-Gold Bar (NDP)
Schow, Joseph R., Cardston-Siksika (UC),
Deputy Government House Leader
Schulz, Hon. Rebecca, Calgary-Shaw (UC)
Schweitzer, Hon. Doug, QC, Calgary-Elbow (UC)
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Sigurdson, R.J., Highwood (UC)
Singh, Peter, Calgary-East (UC)
Smith, Mark W., Drayton Valley-Devon (UC)
Stephan, Jason, Red Deer-South (UC)
Sweet, Heather, Edmonton-Manning (NDP)
Toews, Hon. Travis, Grande Prairie-Wapiti (UC)
Toor, Devinder, Calgary-Falconridge (UC)
Turton, Searle, Spruce Grove-Stony Plain (UC)
van Dijken, Glenn, Athabasca-Barrhead-Westlock (UC)
Walker, Jordan, Sherwood Park (UC)
Williams, Dan D.A., Peace River (UC)
Wilson, Hon. Rick D., Maskwacis-Wetaskiwin (UC)
Yao, Tany, Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo (UC)
Yaseen, Hon. Muhammad, Calgary-North (UC)
Vacant, Fort McMurray-Lac La Biche

Party standings:

United Conservative: 20

New Democrat: 24

Independent: 2

Vacant: 1

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Demetrios Nicolaides	Minister of Advanced Education
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Muhammad Yaseen	Associate Minister of Immigration and Multiculturalism

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Martin Long	Parliamentary Secretary for Small Business and Tourism
Jackie Lovely	Parliamentary Secretary to the Associate Minister of Status of Women
Nathan Neudorf	Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Environment and Parks for Water Stewardship
Jeremy Nixon	Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Community and Social Services for Civil Society
Searle Turton	Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Energy
Dan Williams	Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Culture and for la Francophonie

STANDING AND SPECIAL COMMITTEES OF THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ALBERTA

Standing Committee on the Alberta Heritage Savings Trust Fund

Chair: Mr. Rowswell
Deputy Chair: Mr. Jones

Allard
Eggen
Gray
Hunter
Phillips
Rehn
Singh

Standing Committee on Alberta's Economic Future

Chair: Mr. Neudorf
Deputy Chair: Ms Goehring

Armstrong-Homeniuk
Barnes
Bilous
Frey (formerly Glasgo)
Irwin
Rosin
Rowswell
Sweet
van Dijken
Walker

Select Special Child and Youth Advocate Search Committee

Chair: Mr. Schow
Deputy Chair: Mr. Jones

Goehring
Lovely
Nixon, Jeremy
Pancholi
Sabir
Smith
Turton

Standing Committee on Families and Communities

Chair: Ms Lovely
Deputy Chair: Ms Sigurdson

Amery
Carson
Frey (formerly Glasgo)
Gotfried
Hunter
Loewen
Pancholi
Reid
Sabir
Smith

Select Special Information and Privacy Commissioner Search Committee

Chair: Mr. Walker
Deputy Chair: Mr. Turton

Allard
Carson
Dang
Dreeshen
Ganley
Long
Stephan

Standing Committee on Legislative Offices

Chair: Mr. Rutherford
Deputy Chair: Mr. Milliken

Allard
Ceci
Long
Loyola
Rosin
Shepherd
Smith
Sweet
van Dijken

Special Standing Committee on Members' Services

Chair: Mr. Cooper
Deputy Chair: Mr. Schow

Allard
Dang
Deol
Goehring
Long
Neudorf
Sabir
Sigurdson, R.J.
Williams

Standing Committee on Private Bills and Private Members' Public Bills

Chair: Mr. Rutherford
Deputy Chair: Mr. Jeremy Nixon

Amery
Dang
Frey (formerly Glasgo)
Irwin
Long
Nielsen
Rehn
Rosin
Sigurdson, L.

Standing Committee on Privileges and Elections, Standing Orders and Printing

Chair: Mr. Smith
Deputy Chair: Mr. Reid

Aheer
Armstrong-Homeniuk
Deol
Ganley
Gotfried
Loyola
Neudorf
Renaud
Stephan
Williams

Standing Committee on Public Accounts

Chair: Ms Phillips
Deputy Chair: Mr. Reid

Armstrong-Homeniuk
Lovely
Pancholi
Renaud
Rowswell
Schmidt
Singh
Toor
Turton
Walker

Select Special Committee on Real Property Rights

Chair: Mr. Sigurdson
Deputy Chair: Mr. Rutherford

Frey (formerly Glasgo)
Ganley
Hanson
Milliken
Nielsen
Rowswell
Schmidt
Sweet
van Dijken
Yao

Standing Committee on Resource Stewardship

Chair: Mr. Hanson
Deputy Chair: Member Ceci

Dach
Feehan
Ganley
Getson
Guthrie
Lovely
Rehn
Singh
Turton
Yao

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

7:30 p.m.

Wednesday, December 1, 2021

[Mr. Milliken in the chair]

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

Government Motions

Adjournment of Fall Sitting

108. Mr. Jason Nixon moved:

Be it resolved that pursuant to Standing Order 3(9) the 2021 fall sitting of the Assembly be extended beyond the first Thursday in December until such time as or when the Government House Leader advises the Assembly that the business for the sitting is concluded, and at such time the Assembly stands adjourned.

[Government Motion 108 carried]

Government Bills and Orders

Second Reading

Bill 87

Electoral Divisions (Calgary-Bhullar-McCall) Amendment Act, 2021

The Acting Speaker: I see the hon. Government House Leader again.

Mr. Jason Nixon: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my honour to rise today to move second reading of Bill 87, the Electoral Divisions (Calgary-Bhullar-McCall) Amendment Act, 2021.

Our province, Mr. Speaker, has a long-standing tradition of naming constituencies after elected officials who have made extraordinary contributions to Alberta. Through Bill 87 we are proposing to honour the late Manmeet Singh Bhullar by adding his name to a constituency in northeast Calgary, specifically Calgary-Bhullar-McCall.

Manmeet, for my friends inside the Chamber that did not have the privilege of serving with him or knowing him, was a unique character of Alberta history. He served as the MLA for Calgary-Greenway from March 2008 until his untimely and tragic death in November 2015. He was 28 years old when he first came into office and was the youngest MLA elected to that particular Legislature. Through his time in elected life he served Alberta as the Minister of Service Alberta, the Minister of Infrastructure, and the minister of human services.

Mr. Speaker, during his six years working in this Chamber, he fought to better protect homeowners, was an advocate for vulnerable Albertans, defended visible minorities, and championed capital projects all across the province. At the time of his passing Manmeet was working on an international issue that was close and dear to his heart, aiding persecuted Sikhs and Hindus trying to flee Afghanistan.

Now, as we all know, Manmeet was a man of size, something, Mr. Speaker, I know a little bit about. He had a commanding presence, and he could quickly grab the full attention of any room that he stepped into. But it wasn't just his physical stature that made Manmeet a giant. He had a big sense of humour, he had a big personality, and, most importantly, he had a very big heart.

Let's not forget, as we honour his memory, that Manmeet was also a big-time competitor, a trait which no doubt led him to be a star defensive lineman while attending Lester B. Pearson high

school in Calgary. I had the privilege of playing football against Manmeet a few times, and I can tell you, Mr. Speaker, that each and every time I left sore, and I hope he did, too.

One of the reasons he thrived in the political arena and in this Chamber was because he loved to debate. He loved to compete, and, like all of us, he loved to win, but winning wasn't the most important thing to Manmeet, not by a long shot, Mr. Speaker. His family and his deep faith were what anchored him. Manmeet lived out his Sikh faith in his personal life and in his elected life. He believed that all people were created equally and should be treated as such.

As we know, Manmeet represented an area of northeast Calgary that is ethnically and economically diverse, the community that I grew up in. Manmeet's capacity for acceptance and his genuine care for his constituents meant he could represent everyone no matter their background.

On November 23, 2015, six years ago, Manmeet Bhullar was killed in a tragic vehicle accident. While this is terribly sad, Mr. Speaker, it is perhaps ironic, or perhaps more fitting, I should say, that Manmeet passed away carrying out two separate acts of service. Firstly, he was serving his constituents as he was travelling during a snowstorm from his home in Calgary to attend session here in Edmonton. Secondly, he was serving his fellow man as he stopped to help a stranded motorist on the QE II highway, where he was tragically struck by a semi that had lost control on slippery roads.

I will remember the days that followed in this Chamber as some of the darkest and most painful I've experienced inside the Legislative Assembly. The gravity of the loss to the Bhullar family was as enormous as the man himself, and the loss that his colleagues felt was also immense. His memory still looms large in this place, and his legacy within Alberta will never be erased.

As Opposition House Leader and as Government House Leader later the pain of that day remains with me and is a constant reminder of our responsibility as leadership in this Chamber to try and keep members safe as they go to and from this Chamber.

We all drive back and forth, Mr. Speaker, some of us from very far away every week as we come from our constituents, often in very, very bad weather. On Thursdays, as we adjourn, it is my greatest nightmare that the Legislature would ever experience a day like that again, and I always feel great relief when I know everybody has made it home.

Now, Mr. Speaker, some may ask why it's important to introduce this bill and take the steps of renaming a constituency after Manmeet. After all, this is a man whose name has been memorialized through the naming of a school, a park, various scholarships and awards, and a successful foundation that was created by his family. I would submit to you and to all members of this House that Manmeet's accomplishment as a legislator, as a minister, as a force within this Chamber, and as a beloved champion for his constituents deserves to be recognized with the renaming of a provincial constituency.

If this bill is passed, Calgary-McCall would be renamed Calgary-Bhullar-McCall. Calgary-Greenway, the constituency that Mr. Bhullar represented, was abolished in 2017. Calgary-McCall is currently named, though, after Frederick McCall, a decorated World War I veteran, fighter pilot, and pioneer in Canadian aviation. Renaming the electoral district to Calgary-Bhullar-McCall would honour both of those individuals. Both dedicated their lives, Mr. Speaker, to serving and protecting others. Both made contributions that we still benefit from today. Renaming this constituency is an appropriate recognition of both men's great life work.

With the support of Manmeet's family and in honour of and gratitude to our friend and former colleague Mr. Manmeet Singh Bhullar, I humbly ask all members to join me in moving second reading of Bill 87. [applause]

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

Are there any members wishing to join debate? I see the hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek.

Mr. Gotfried: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you for the honour and privilege of speaking in favour of Bill 87, Electoral Divisions (Calgary-Bhullar-McCall) Amendment Act, 2021. Thank you to the Government House Leader as well for his kind words.

As a colleague across one of these local aisles here back in the day I was honoured enough to sit beside Manmeet Singh Bhullar at the time of his death. It was a grave loss for all of us, and many will know that myself and Minister McIver, Minister Ellis were part of that small but mighty PC team that was, as noted . . .

The Acting Speaker: I'm so sorry. I understand the gravity of this debate, but we do still have to recognize that we cannot say names in the House, going forward, of current members.

Mr. Gotfried: My apologies. My apologies.

Other esteemed colleagues in this House were part of a small but mighty team of the Progressive Conservative caucus at that time and sat just a few seats down here. As was noted by the hon. member across, Manmeet was the youngest MLA to serve in this province when he was first elected. I know we've broken those barriers even further since then, but he subsequently served as Minister of Service Alberta, Minister of Infrastructure, and minister of human services throughout his eight eventful years as an MLA in this province.

His memory will serve us well as we go forward and his commitment and the honour that he brought to this role. Those of us that were lucky enough to serve with him and sit beside him know that he also had some quirks. I think that perhaps the Government House Leader will remember that he didn't like to heckle, but he let out these loud whoops every once in a while, and you could hear them across the floor. People would have a good chuckle because it was kind of a fairly deep and loud and large sound coming out of a man we called Mount Bhullar on many, many occasions. He was a mountain of a man as he came into the room, and we were so honoured to serve with him.

I think that for those that served with him in the past, it's an honour for us to see this bill brought forward for consideration. As was reflected by the Government House Leader, I think we have in Fred McCall and Manmeet Bhullar two people that deserve the respect and honour of this province. I think this is a very, very fitting way for us to achieve that. You know, there were a lot of different stories that went on, a lot of opportunities for us to work together, but I think it was reflected very much in the commitment that Manmeet Singh Bhullar had to his constituents, to the city of Calgary, to his community, and to the province, and that started for him at a very, very young age, as he was developing his passion for public service.

7:40

As was noted, he was always one who stood up for the minorities in this province, but he also was a significant bridge builder across all cultures. You'll see within Calgary that he was embraced not only among the Sikh-Punjabi community but in all the communities, particularly where he grew up, in the northeast of Calgary, and was a fierce football player, as we heard from the Government House Leader.

As was also noted, there is a history in this province of naming our constituencies after notable politicians and figures of the past. We're lucky to have those and recognize those to this day, and this is an opportunity we have to do so alongside, again, that honoured veteran of World War II.

So Manmeet was a young man, but he accomplished a lot in a short period of time. He was recognized as a leader not only within his community but here in the Legislature. Reflecting upon that day, which was six years and just over a week ago, for myself, his pictures and pictures of that and the commemoration of his memory at that time pop up on my social media and on my screens, and I know that happens for many of us in this room. Again, it reminds us of the service that he put in there.

I recall the morning of his passing. He was actually, I think, presenting a speech at a social services function in Calgary, had made that commitment to attend that. He called us, and we said: "Manmeet, don't worry about coming back. The weather is kind of bad. Don't worry about it." He insisted. He wanted to be back here shoulder to shoulder with his peers, with his teammates, and in this Legislature, with people of all political stripes, to be here, to represent the people of then Calgary-Greenway. So it's a great honour, again, for that crossover; the majority, of course, of this constituency will be reflected in that area as well. I think that's really key for us.

He was a scholar in his own right as well: a bachelor of arts from Athabasca University, Mount Royal University education, and then a bachelor of laws from the University of Windsor. I know he was very proud and his family was very proud of his academic achievements, which I think were just a foreshadowing of the fact that he was going to do great things in politics.

His community involvement was very early. He was involved with the founding of a youth organization called Inspire, and I think that that's a fitting word for a man that continues to inspire all of us, and hopefully in the legacy of the naming of this constituency will be something that can be remembered and inspire all of us going forward. Because of his community work he also received the Alberta centennial medallion and the Athabasca University leadership award. Of course, he was always a strong advocate for his own community as well as people across Alberta in the work that he had done.

Manmeet was a very, very committed man. In fact, before I entered politics myself, I had a situation where, to be honest here, I let my licence expire, and I was travelling. He was the Minister of Service Alberta at the time, and I went: "What do I do? I'm halfway across the country. My licence has expired." It was actually the day after my birthday, and I'd forgotten to renew it. I thought: who do I call? Manmeet Singh Bhullar. He's the Minister of Service Alberta. Maybe he can help me.

He put me in touch with one of his people in his department, and they said: "Yeah. There's a way to do this. It's going to take faxes back and forth and all kinds of things." You know what? Thirty-six hours later I had a temporary licence all the way in Halifax, Nova Scotia, and I was back driving a vehicle there. Otherwise – it was before Uber – I probably would have been walking everywhere for that time there. That's the kind of guy he was. One phone call – I knew him just through community events – and he just put me in touch with the right person that knew what to do.

You know what? When I called him to thank him, he said: "There's no thanks. This is just part of my job." He delivered that in spades, I think, to anybody who called him to ensure that he was representing Albertans and doing his best for Albertans through that period of time. Minister of Human Services, Minister of Infrastructure: so many things that we've seen.

I think that, above all, he was loved by his family. He was a family man. He always made sure he was there for his family: his parents, Baljinder and Sukhvir, and his wife, Namrita, who I knew, actually – her family owned a travel agency that I dealt with for many, many years in Calgary – and his siblings Tarjinder and Appy. He had the unwavering support of his family. They were so proud of him. They should have been. They still are proud of his memory and, in doing so, have invested their time and energy to make sure that his memory is not forgotten in the creation, as was noted, of the Manmeet Singh Bhullar Foundation.

That is a way for them to honour his memory, the great things that he was able to do. The greater things that they knew he was going to do: those will continue. Mr. Speaker, that's something I think we can all take heart from: a school named after him, a Calgary Parks Foundation park named after him, and so much other great work that's been going on since that time. I know that there are numerous scholarships in his honour that have been brought forward as well.

He was committed to community, he was committed to his faith, he was committed to his city, his province, and his country, and so much of that was reflected in who he was and how he acted and how he brought himself forward to Albertans to ensure that they could understand the kind of commitment that he had to the people of Alberta.

There is a Calgary board of education legacy award that's in his name. Mount Royal University: the Manmeet Singh Bhullar inspire award, using those words that were so important to him early in his career. Lester B. Pearson high school, where I think he probably competed on the football field with the Government House Leader, and I can imagine that that was probably quite a faceoff. It was a faceoff in here sometimes, and unfortunately he was not there when we were able to merge our two parties and to create that united conservatism that I believe he would have been a champion of to this day. The Manmeet Singh Bhullar memorial scholarship at that high school: extremely important to him.

So you can see, Mr. Speaker, a history, a life of service in a short life, an all too short life that was brought to a halt by, again, the reflection of the kind of man he was, the kind of service that he delivered to his family, to Albertans, to his constituents, to us as his peers. He was fierce but he was friendly. He was a happy guy to be around. He was somebody that we embraced, and when we saw him on a Monday morning at our caucus meetings, there was always a story to tell. There was always a friendship to embrace. There was always support. I was a brand new MLA at the time, and here he was, a young guy, and he spent time with me to make sure that I was able to understand some of the experience that he had at a very young age and brought forward to this role.

Mr. Speaker, this is a great opportunity. I thank my colleagues for bringing forward this bill, Bill 87. I'm very gratified to hear that we have members of Her Majesty's Official Opposition speaking in favour of this bill already and saying that they will embrace the support. In fact, one of our members who represents the area that will be renamed has spoken in support of this.

I think it would be very fitting for us in this House, this opportunity, just six years and a few days after the sad passing of a gentleman who we know was a great Albertan and would have been a greater Albertan had he had that opportunity. It's our chance and our opportunity to recognize that, and nothing would make him happier – I'm sure he's watching over us – to see that unanimously passed in this House, Mr. Speaker.

On that note, I would like to again encourage everyone to support this bill for us to get quick and happy and supportive passage of this through this House. I look forward to us seeing the name Calgary-Bhullar-McCall on that constituency from this day forward.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

The individual who did catch my eye was the hon. Member for Calgary-Falconridge.

Mr. Toor: Mr. Speaker, I stand here to congratulate and thank this House on this Bill 87 that proposes to enact change in the name of the Calgary-McCall constituency to Calgary-Bhullar-McCall. This bill says a lot about Albertans. We are known for being one of the most diverse provinces of Canada, and we are very proud of the fact. The renaming of the constituency of Calgary-McCall to Calgary-Bhullar-McCall will be etched in stone, speaking volumes to the future generations of Albertans about the commitment and dedication of the Sikh community towards his home in Calgary, Alberta, and Canada.

Manmeet Bhullar – I used to call him Meeta – was born on March 1, 1980, in Calgary. At a young age his family moved to Whitehorn, and he attended Chief Justice Milvain school and Annie Gale as his junior high. Then he attended, as the minister and my colleague said, Lester B. Pearson high school in Pineridge. He was a proud member of the football team, and I also heard – the minister of environment was telling me that he was a very strong player. A big man. Manmeet, I think, after high school attended Mount Royal University, earning his bachelor of arts and then his law degree from the University of Windsor.

7:50

He was the founder of a youth organization called Inspire. Manmeet co-ordinated the Walking Hunger Away Campaign in Calgary and led a team of volunteers to raise money on behalf of Calgary health research. He also worked with many other youth groups, and because of his community work he received the Alberta centennial medal, the centennial medallion, and the Athabasca University leadership award.

He was a strong advocate for the issues facing northeast Calgarians in the Alberta Legislature. He first sought public office in the 2008 provincial election in the constituency of Calgary-Montrose at the age of 28. He was the youngest member at that time, and it was the 27th Legislature. Then he was appointed as parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Advanced Education on March 12, 2008, making him the youngest politician to serve as a parliamentary assistant or secretary in Canada at the time.

On October 12, 2011, he was elevated to cabinet as Minister of Service Alberta, making him the first turbaned Sikh to hold a ministerial position. In this portfolio he oversaw the province's vast network of registry agents, led Alberta's open government initiative, and was the lead consumer advocate in the government. He's credited with finishing the final mile that connected 98 per cent of Albertans to high-speed Internet and for pushing the CRTC to implement a national wireless code to protect mobile phone users.

He also received accolades for his work to crack down on unscrupulous contractors taking advantage of Calgarians after the flooding in 2013 and for laying the groundwork for a stronger condominium act, including a new dispute resolution system for condominium owners.

On December 13, 2013, he was promoted to the position of minister of human services, putting him in charge of the third-largest ministry by expenditure in government and overseeing more than 4,000 employees.

Throughout his life he worked so hard. Mr. Speaker, in 2015 I ran against him from a different party. I thought that I was not a politician. I lost the election and he won, but that race, that political race, taught me to work hard, how to win. It's not win or lose but if you participate in this democratic process. He taught me the lesson

of why you are here and you need to do this. I think that's the reason I am here today, because he taught me how to be a member of a political party and run for a democratic process.

The advantage of – I remember him working so hard. He was in India for a trip, and then he met a few refugees from Afghanistan. He realized the pain they were in going through this, and he worked hard with the ministers and federal ministers to bring those refugees from Afghanistan to here. The recent trouble in Afghanistan I saw with my own eyes. His father and family were working so hard to bring people from Afghanistan to Calgary or to Canada. Day and night I saw that his father was phoning, even Indian embassies, and trying to get some connections because they were working with Afghanistan refugees for so long.

He's credited with fixing Alberta's child intervention system. He changed the law to empower families to speak up about their experiences with the system, made new investments in the mental health supports for families involved in child interventions, hosted the first-ever Alberta minister's forum on child sexual abuse, and began the campaign to find a mentor for every child in care in this province.

As I mentioned, in 2015 he was re-elected and sat on the opposition benches until his untimely and tragic death.

On the unfortunate day of November 23, 2015, Alberta lost Meeta – Manmeet – to a fatal motor vehicle collision just north of Red Deer while unselfishly trying to help a stranded driver in bad weather on highway 2. Today while we're thinking about the community he served, the work he carried out, the people he inspired, to all of them: we're sorry for your loss. You had a champion that was driven by his unwavering commitment and deep responsibility to making our community better. You had someone whose story was about more than him alone; it was about all of us.

Manmeet, simply by virtue of how he looked – he used to say things about his beard. He even had a campaign – I was just looking at it and his man-with-a-beard T-shirt – with a great vision, too. He always stood out and reminded us that a guy like him did not belong, first, on the football field, later in politics as a cabinet minister in the halls of power and influence. Armed with his family's lifelong philosophy of it is what it is, he kept moving forward and embraced his Sikh identity. He felt a responsibility to prove himself not only to those who made him feel unwelcome but to those who looked like him, affirming that if he could do it, they could do it, too.

Stemming from this, much of his work was centred on making others feel that they belonged. He encouraged both young and old to be engaged in their communities and in the political process even if at first that meant twisting their arms a bit. He reminded them that their votes and voices mattered and that when they used them, it wasn't just ethnic vote blocking; it was simply democracy at work. He encouraged the right people to put their names on the ballot so that Canada, Alberta was represented by those who understood their responsibility and would be able to uphold with their character. He saw their wins as a win for all of us regardless of the political stripe.

He not only celebrated the achievement of others; he championed their causes. He knew our most vulnerable needed to be seen and heard. He felt their pain but also their courage, oftentimes leaning into his own vulnerabilities. His empathy made him a better public servant. His compassion led him to make better decisions. The finest at the political game, he did not play to win at the cost of integrity. Instead, he looked for the win-win game. And when there was a cost to the politics, he paid it by being harder on himself than anyone else could be on him.

His presence screamed of the importance of diversity, inclusion, and equality. There were times these values were not spoken of as

openly as they are now. Like so many others, he experienced racism, but such instances were tolerated as battle scars and understood as a sign of the times. Through it all he considered it a profound privilege to be who he was, to be a Canadian. Years later he's going to be remembered for who he was.

He would spend his time meeting constituents, children, young adults, seniors, thought leaders, friends, family members as often as he could to nourish his mind and his heart. This became his sustenance, measured in time by cherished moments in what served as solace, knowing that his life was well lived if not long lived.

I'm sure that all Albertans join me today in saluting this selfless person. I'm humbled to stand here in this Assembly, where Manmeet voiced his concern for the people of northeast Calgary and indeed all of Alberta.

8:00

Today Bill 87 is a fitting tribute to Manmeet Bhullar and will prove once again to every Albertan that community service before self should be the motto of everyone in this Assembly. We Albertans value life and surely know how to respect those who live by the motto of community before self. Just standing in this Assembly, again I want to say that Meeta: I knew him for a long time, but I could spend more time with him. Surely I miss him. Thank you, Minister, for bringing this bill to honour that man that the coming generation will remember. I urge members of the House to support this bill and rename the constituency where he used to volunteer at the Dashmesh Culture Centre. He used to work tirelessly to feed hundreds, to support Dashmesh Culture, like we saw what they did in COVID. This is all the inspiration he gave to those young crowds. Mr. Speaker, last, I want to urge every member to please support it.

Thank you very much.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Next I see the hon. Member for Calgary-East has the call.

Mr. Singh: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I stand in this Chamber today to express my support for this remarkable legislation, Bill 87, the Electoral Divisions (Calgary-Bhullar-McCall) Amendment Act, 2021. Let me first provide my appreciation to the Minister of Environment and Parks for introducing this bill, which is not only aimed to change the name of an electoral division in Calgary but also to recognize and honour a reputable person who previously served as a member in this provincial Legislature with untiring effort to support his fellow Albertans until his last breath.

Mr. Speaker, I had the privilege to know him personally and get close with the late Manmeet Bhullar. He was born in the community of Penbrooke Meadows, which is part of Calgary-East constituency. He's from an immigrant family who came to this wonderful country and province to have a brighter future through hard work and dedication. He was first elected as a member of the Legislative Assembly for Calgary-Montrose in 2008 and was the youngest at the time. After the electoral division district was dissolved and redistributed to Calgary-East, Calgary-Greenway, and Calgary-Cross electoral districts, he won his second term during the 2012 provincial election as the Member for Calgary-Greenway, where he served until his untimely demise merely six months after elected for his third term in 2015. He was a member of the House for more than seven years and eight months.

In all his term as a member of this Legislature he was my MLA as I used to live in Monterey Park, where Manmeet also lived, which was part of Calgary-Montrose and later became part of the Calgary-Greenway electoral district as a result of dissolution and redistribution. I wanted to share that I lent a hand during his election

campaigns. Also, I had the opportunity to work with him as we expressed support for the leadership campaigns.

At his early age he was an active leader and participant in community building and works, and he worked in collaboration with different youth organizations. I had several chances to join him in community events and activities, including vision events, Mr. Speaker. During my engagement with Manmeet I noticed of him, aside from being very active in community work, that he's a good listener and stood with his constituents as he strongly advocated for all the issues and concerns raised before him.

In his time as a member of this Chamber he held several committee memberships, including Standing Committee on the Economy, Standing Committee on Legislative Offices, Standing Committee on Community Services, Special Standing Committee on Members' Services, Standing Committee on Public Accounts, and Select Special Chief Electoral Officer Search Committee.

Also, Mr. Speaker, upon election into office in March 2008 he held the position of parliamentary assistant for advanced education and technology. At that time he was the youngest politician in Canada to hold a parliamentary assistant or secretary. He held that position until January 2010, and right after he held the position as the parliamentary assistant for municipal affairs.

In October 2011 he was appointed to the Executive Council as the Minister of Service Alberta, which he held until December 2013. Immediately after that, he was appointed as the minister of human services, a position he held until September 2014, when he was appointed as the Minister of Infrastructure. During his term as the Minister of Service Alberta one significant project of the ministry was the final mile initiative in collaboration with the agriculture and rural development ministry. He announced in December 2013 that through the initiative about 98 per cent of Albertans had access to high-speed Internet, including many residents in rural and remote areas.

In his cabinet portfolios he also fought to better protect homeowners, advocated for vulnerable Albertans, defended visible minorities, and championed capital projects across the province. In the Second Session of the 27th Legislature Manmeet sponsored Bill 4, the Post-secondary Learning Amendment Act, 2009, which ensured further consistency with the roles and mandates policy framework for publicly funded postsecondary institutions. It allowed bachelor degree and applied studies institutions to have the option of applying for the use of the term "university" in their names. This bill paved the way for Mount Royal College to be named as the Mount Royal University and other educational institutions.

In mid-2016 the Calgary board of education named a school Manmeet Singh Bhullar, a K to 6 elementary school that could accommodate up to 600 students located near the community of Martindale in northeast Calgary. Also, in the same community the Dashmesh Culture Centre is located. This centre has served as one of the places where Manmeet had started his desire to help inspire others and molded him to advocate and instill optimism.

In the nearby community of Taradale a legacy park was built in 2018. It is a park which Calgary Parks Foundation has voted on and named the Manmeet Bhullar park in remembrance and tribute to one of Alberta's greatest supporters of community. The change is needed to honour a great young Alberta leader and a servant in who I saw service as his passion. He spent every opportunity he had to help and empower his fellow Albertans, whether in his capacity as a private citizen or as a public servant.

8:10

Mr. Speaker, Alberta has a long-standing tradition of renaming constituencies after elected officials who made outstanding

contributions to our province, including former Premiers Peter Lougheed, Ralph Klein, Ernest Manning, former NDP leader Grant Notley, and former Liberal leader Laurence Decore. Having said that, let me again express my deep appreciation to the minister for taking this initiative to introduce Bill 87, with the purpose to include the name of Manmeet Bhullar, a worthy Albertan, to an electoral division that he served during his lifetime. I encourage all the members of this Chamber to support this bill as we honour an Albertan that had no other business but to help others, advocate for and empower communities in his thoughts, in his words, in his deeds up to his last breath.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

The next member who has caught my eye is the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

Member Ceci: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's great to be listening to these tributes about Manmeet. I say "Manmeet" because he and I never stood on titles. We called each other Joe and Manmeet. Our times crossed, of course, in elected service, his at the Legislature starting in 2008 and mine starting at the city of Calgary. Towards the end of my time there I got to know Manmeet through functions that would be held between Calgary MLAs and city of Calgary officials and council.

Let me begin by saying, Mr. Speaker, that the Official Opposition supports renaming Calgary-McCall constituency to Calgary-Bhullar-McCall in honour of the late MLA Manmeet Bhullar. The Member for Calgary-McCall is honoured that the constituency he represents will now pay tribute to Manmeet's contribution to Calgary and to this province. I was, of course, very appreciative of the previous comments by the two speakers that I heard. Calgary-Greenway had a strong representative in Manmeet.

I was, of course, in government when the Calgary Parks Foundation CEO came to me and expressed her desire to complete the east side of Calgary with the Mattamy greenway and to enhance it after Manmeet's death with a park dedicated to him. You can see that park on the east side of Calgary as you're going up Stoney Trail on the east side of Calgary. It's there for everybody to enjoy, of course.

Manmeet was killed tragically in November 2015, when he was hit by an out of control semi while trying to help a stranded motorist on highway 2. I know that many of us drive that highway regularly, and you can't help but think about Manmeet when you get around Blackfalds.

He was known for his dedication to service and work as an MLA and minister. I certainly remember how impacted he was when he was the minister of human services by, unfortunately, often the tragedy that happens with children in the charge of government. I can remember his difficulty at different press conferences around specific tragedies. He showed a human side that sometimes doesn't get relayed by people in this Legislature when they're in situations like that. But you knew with Manmeet that when he was experiencing the difficulty of those situations, it went right down into him.

I also know that he was one of the youngest parliamentarians in this province, but you didn't – I didn't, anyway – see him as a young man, in a way, because of his stature and his big beard. He carried himself with a lot of experience. He seemed older when I knew him.

Today I was down in Calgary at the Jack Singer, and I was trying to remember: was this the place that there was a memorial for Manmeet, or was it the Jubilee?

Some Hon. Members: The Jubilee.

Member Ceci: It was the Jubilee.

At the Jack Singer I was thinking: boy, this is a big place. But, you know, the Jubilee is bigger than the Jack Singer, and it was packed to the rafters for that memorial. I remember the tributes. It was a very touching time to listen to many people and their reflections and, obviously, about the large hole he has left in his family, with his wife, with his community, that won't ever get filled. In a life cut tragically short like his, there's just so much that's going to be unrealized, and the way the Earth spins will not be the same as a result of him not being in it.

I'm very pleased to see that Frederick McCall's name will still be a part of this constituency's name. He was a celebrated world war veteran, as we know, known for his heroic contributions. He served in World War II. I think many of us, particularly those from Calgary and area, have visited the military museums and seen McCall's contribution highlighted there.

Certainly, this name change is positive in that it highlights the public service of two exemplary Calgarians. All members of this House should strive to dedicate ourselves to service of this province, to make sure we leave it in a far better condition than we have found it.

I'm honoured to speak on behalf of the Official Opposition and to let you know our position and to reflect on the legacy of Manmeet Bhullar for Calgary, for Alberta. Now that legacy will be forever entrenched in the constituency of Calgary-Bhullar-McCall. Again, my colleagues and I will be supporting this legislation, and we are happy to expedite its passing if that is required.

Thank you.

8:20

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other members on second reading looking to join debate?

Seeing none, I am prepared to ask the question.

[Motion carried unanimously; Bill 87 read a second time]

Government Bills and Orders Committee of the Whole

[Mr. Milliken in the chair]

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. members. I would like to call the committee to order.

Bill 79 Trails Act

The Deputy Chair: Are there any comments, questions, or amendments to be offered with respect to this bill at this time? I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar has the call.

Mr. Schmidt: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I'm pleased to rise and speak to Bill 79, the Trails Act. Now, before I bring forward amendments to this bill, let me just first set out, I guess, some hopes that I have for debate on this bill at this stage. I just want to make everybody aware that we have a number of amendments that we plan to bring forward as the Official Opposition.

I just want to state, first off, that these amendments are brought to this House in good faith. We all know that sometimes Official Opposition parties are guilty of bringing forward amendments with the intent to perhaps subvert the efficient functioning of a Legislature or to score cheap political points on a minister that we don't like, on a piece of legislation that we think is not in line with our vision for Alberta. However, the amendments that I'm bringing

forward during this stage of the debate are not of those natures. They are generated from extensive feedback that I and my colleagues have had with respect to Bill 79, the Trails Act, and they are brought forward with the intent to make this bill better.

One thing that's been clear, in talking to people about the Trails Act, is that many, many Albertans support the intent of this piece of legislation. The legislation is intended – and it's set out in the purposes of the act – “to recognize designated trails as a key component of sustainable outdoor recreation that contribute to positive environmental, economic and social outcomes and individual well-being.” I think, Mr. Chair, that you would be hard pressed to find an Albertan who would oppose that objective.

Certainly, we know that the state of the creation and maintenance of trails in Alberta is one that requires the attention of this Legislature. As the minister himself said when he introduced this piece of legislation, there are over 13,000 kilometres of trails, either designated or undesignated, traversing the entire province, and that is creating intense pressure on our landscape and putting significant segments of our environment at significant risk of permanent and irreversible damage.

However, many of the stakeholders that we've engaged with have had concerns with the actual structure of the bill, and it's the fact that there is so little here in the legislation that puts any detail or meat on the bones of the government's plans to designate and operate and maintain trails for the good of the public and the protection of the environment.

It is my hope as the Official Opposition to improve the bill so that the chances of achieving the objectives that the government has set out for this piece of legislation are improved. Certainly, it's my view, it's the view of my colleagues here in the Official Opposition, and it's the view of many of the stakeholders that we've spoken to that by adopting these amendments that we intend to bring forward, this piece of legislation would be significantly better than it is currently.

Let me just state my hopes for how this debate will play out, Mr. Chair. From time to time we have seen members of the government engage in thoughtful and meaningful debate in the Committee of the Whole stage on pieces of legislation. I certainly recall the then minister of labour, the now Minister of Health, engaging meaningfully with my colleague and friend from Edmonton-Mill Woods on some amendments that she brought forward to various pieces of labour legislation. I certainly would commend the Minister of Advanced Education for his thoughtful interventions in debate with respect to legislation that he's brought forward. And I think the best example that sticks out in my mind of a government cabinet minister engaging in thoughtful and meaningful debate occurred during the amendments to the Mobile Home Sites Tenancies Act, that we debated in the spring of 2020 in this House.

Now, I don't expect to agree with everything that the government will say in response to my amendments, but I certainly hope that they are given thoughtful consideration and that the minister or his colleagues on Executive Council engage in debate in a meaningful and thoughtful way.

Let me just also say that I don't think it's any secret that the relationship that I have with the minister of environment is fraught. I just want to say straight out that I'm setting aside my own personal feelings about the minister of the environment and bringing forward these amendments in the hope that he will give them serious consideration and, hopefully, adopt them, knowing that my intentions are good and in good faith, and I hope that he does so as well.

Let me just further add to this by offering a bit of an olive branch from the very beginning. I've had significant disagreements with

the minister of the environment over the course of this Legislature, but I have seen, Mr. Chair, that even the minister of the environment has been able to reach across the aisle and engage thoughtfully with political opponents when the occasion has called for it. I remember personally standing on the steps of this Legislature with him and members of the Common Ground Alliance when we were considering legislation to improve underground utility safety here in the province of Alberta. Unfortunately, we weren't able to get that legislation across the finish line before the election was called. But that is one example of the minister himself being open to laying down the swords for just a brief moment to try to achieve something constructive for the people of Alberta.

Let me also commend the minister for something that I think is worthy of commendation, and that is the creation of the Kitaskino Nuwenēné wildland provincial park in February 2021. That provincial park that he created set aside 143,000 hectares of boreal forest that will forever be protected and expands upon the creation of the world's largest contiguous protected boreal forest.

It is with those hopes and expectation, Mr. Chair, that I would like to bring forward my first amendment.

8:30

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

As always, there will copies at the tables by the doors. You can also raise your hand, and a copy will be delivered to you.

If the hon. member could please continue, with about 10:45 remaining. This will be referred to as A1.

Mr. Schmidt: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I'd just like to read the amendment into the record, if I may, before I continue. I move that Bill 79, the Trails Act, be amended by striking out section 10(1)(b).

Just to refresh all of my colleagues' memories on what 10(1)(b) says:

- 10(1) The Lieutenant Governor in Council may make regulations
- (b) remedying any confusion in the application of or any difficulty or impossibility in applying any provisions of this Act.

Now, Mr. Chair, I was grateful to have received a lot of feedback on the Trails Act, in particular this section. Many of the people who have examined this piece of legislation have expressed concerns about the amount of power that has been given to the minister as well as to cabinet with this piece of legislation. But I think Shaun Fluker, who is a professor of law at the University of Calgary and one of the contributors to the ABlawg – and forgive me; I haven't learned how to pronounce it since the last time I mentioned it in the Legislature – did an excellent job of summarizing the concerns. I'd actually like to quote him if I can. He said:

One of the more questionable provisions is section 10 which is given the heading "Deficiency regulations", and in particular section 10(1)(b),

which I've already read into the record. He said:

Regulations that remedy confusion or an impossibility in applying the Act? Are these not the sort of deficiencies that the Legislature itself should fix, or alternatively address in the legislative process before the Bill becomes a statute? This provision is a blatant abuse of delegated lawmaking.

[His] curiosity with section 10 led . . . to undertake a quick survey of legislation across Canada to see how often regulation-making power is granted to remedy confusion or an impossibility. A search of the term 'impossibility' within 10 words of 'regulations' produced only 61 hits in legislation on the national CanLII database. Interestingly, most of the legislation containing this sort of provision has been enacted by only two provinces: Alberta and Manitoba. Perhaps most noteworthy is the scope of this type of regulation-making power is almost always limited to

address one of two instances: (1) a difficulty or impossibility that arises in relation to a transition from repealed legislation to new legislation; or (2) a difficulty or impossibility that arises from the dissolution of a statutory entity. A search of the term 'confusion' within 10 words of 'regulations' produced only 17 hits in legislation on the national CanLII database, and Alberta was the only jurisdiction on our search results with legislation that delegates regulation-making power to the executive branch to remedy confusion.

I want to thank Professor Fluker for providing that extensive feedback on this section. I think he lays out quite well many of the concerns that we have with this piece of legislation.

Now, you know, Mr. Chair, if I were in a snarkier mood and not standing here in good faith with the hope that the government will consider these amendments thoughtfully, I would probably make some snide comment about the ability of this cabinet to remedy confusion instead of creating it, but I'm not going to say those kinds of snide comments because I know full well, having sat in cabinet myself for at least three years, that cabinets are particularly ill-fitted to remedying confusion.

My point is that this is the kind of undemocratic rule, by regulation and cabinet, that many of the members of the government, including the minister of environment himself, railed against when he was a member of the Wildrose opposition, but now it seems that the shoe is on the other foot. Now that he and his cabinet colleagues have the ability to give themselves these kinds of regulatory powers and shut people out of the democratic process of making these changes in the Legislature, where they should be, he seems to be fine with that.

At the very least, I hope that the minister of the environment and his former Wildrose Party Official Opposition members recall their time in the 29th Legislature and, you know, live up to the words that they spoke at that time. If the minister wants to beat up on us for making these kinds of regulatory powers when we were in government, that's fine, but I sincerely hope that he recognizes the truly undemocratic nature of this provision and accepts this amendment because, really, with the issues that this legislation may create, any kind of confusion or difficulty or impossibility in being applied, that needs to be done here in the Legislature, in the full light of the Legislature, where people can watch what we say and how we vote and understand what's going on, not in the privacy of the cabinet room.

I will say that one of the things that the stakeholders that we engaged with who are – a frequent thing that they were upset with was the government's lack of consultation on this particular piece of legislation. I don't want to get into the consultation on this particular piece of legislation, but I just want to highlight that consultation should be at the heart of what this government wants to do if it identifies any difficulties or impossibilities in applying provisions of this piece of legislation when it comes into conflict with other pieces of legislation.

I think that by adopting this amendment, we improve the nature of the legislation, we live up to the democratic ideals that we all profess to hold here and have professed to hold here for a number of years, and we also give the public the opportunity to see what changes are being considered with respect to the Trails Act, any other piece of legislation that it comes into conflict with and at least have their voice heard before those changes are being made. None of those things are guaranteed when cabinet gives itself the power to remedy these difficulties or impossibilities through regulation, Mr. Chair.

With that, I have said my piece, and I look forward to hearing the government's response to this amendment that we've proposed.

The Deputy Chair: I see the hon. Minister of Environment and Parks has risen.

Mr. Jason Nixon: Well, thank you, Mr. Chair. First of all, I didn't even know that there was a bad relationship between myself and the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar. Mr. Chair, through you to him, I want to assure him that I don't give him another thought when I leave this Chamber. I do know, though, that he is the member of this Legislature who has had to apologize the most inside this Chamber, but I have no concerns with that at all. I usually look at it with great humour as he does that.

Now, specifically on this amendment, Mr. Chair, and I do know there's – I've heard that there are a couple more coming. All of them seem to have a theme, which is to create significant red tape and to advance what has been the NDP's agenda when it comes to trail management in the province, and that is to create barriers for people being able to recreate on their own land inside the province and be able to ban them and sterilize landscapes, to not allow them to go onto those landscapes.

8:40

The member is mistaken about one thing. He said that there are 13,000 kilometres of trails inside the province of Alberta. There are 13,000 kilometres of designated trails inside the province of Alberta. There are hundreds of thousands of more trails all across the province that are not designated, everything from traplines to cutlines, other types of trails that are in use. In fact, one of my favourite trails – and I know the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar is very much anti-ATV. I don't spend much time on an ATV myself either although I am not anti people using off-highway vehicles in appropriate ways on our landscape. I'm a horse guy, as you know, and I spend a lot of time on my horse, Tank, out riding inside the eastern slopes. One of our favourite trails goes up a little bit behind Ya Ha Tinda, that I like to take with my wife and kids and go right up on the Banff national park boundary and move your way north from there, some of the most beautiful remote country that we have inside this province, Mr. Chair.

We use, to this day, rocks, different moose antlers that are on trees, some of those landmarks that have been used to identify those trails. Those landscapes have existed for a couple hundred years, either coming from traplines or different types of things that are taking place on that landscape. One of my favourites is actually a rock that was put in place and marked by David Thompson himself that shows where you turn, the great explorer that would found the town of Rocky Mountain House and play such a big role in the modern movement of the fur industry into the western portion of this country.

This amendment, though, in and of itself essentially – frankly, first of all, it's ridiculous. It would mean that for all of those trails we would have to come back to the Legislature to make any sort of the adjustment to regulations that we would do. That would be a massive amount of red tape. We have a situation here where, you know, you get through – we move pretty quick in this Legislature – sometimes upwards of 20 bills in a fall sitting, for example, Mr. Chair. Certainly, there is no way that the Legislature has the time to be able to work through that process on hundreds of thousands of kilometres of trail. Yet again that just shows that the main objective of that member and his party is to actually shut down people using trails. That's disappointing because organizations that work very hard, volunteer organizations that work to create things like cross-country ski trails, would not want to see us do that. Hiking organizations certainly would not want to see any more delays in some of the trail work that they're doing. I know the equestrian groups that I like to hang out with would be very, very upset by that.

Certainly, I would ask everybody in the House not to support this motion. It's just another attempt to add red tape, certainly, to the process and, I think, really at its core to try to block Albertans from being able to enjoy their backyard, something that we disagree with the Official Opposition on. That's their approach. That's not our approach, and we will do everything we can to be able to make sure that Albertans can continue to enjoy their backyard and that we can ultimately protect and respect these important trails for future years and make sure that our kids and our grandkids and others will be able to enjoy them.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. minister.

Are there any others? I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar has risen.

Mr. Schmidt: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I'm pleased to rise and respond to the comments from the minister of the environment. Well, I will say that I have had my expectations and hopes dashed straight away from the very beginning, but I do want to take issue with a couple of things that the minister of the environment said.

First of all, I want to reiterate that we have brought these amendments forward in good faith and that we think that this would be not only useful to improving the bill but also to achieving the objectives of trails management that the government has stated in the preamble of this piece of legislation and that the minister has stated a number of times. Unfortunately, the minister has responded with a couple of bad-faith arguments, Mr. Chair, that we've heard from the minister several times; first of all, that we want to somehow keep people from enjoying the outdoors. This amendment does not do that, and never has that ever been our objective.

I think that's really part of the problem here that we're facing with the Trails Act. You know, the minister is quick to air his grievances and search for grievances when it comes to outdoor recreation, but when it comes to actually finding solutions to the significant problems that we face on our landscape, he falls short in providing meaningful solutions. So here we have presented him with a solution to a problem that this piece of legislation has created, and he's responded with a bad-faith argument about our intent.

Then he's followed that up with another argument about so-called red tape, Mr. Chair. He seems to claim that by designating these trails, each individual trail is going to cause some kind of legislative impossibility or confusion. I would submit to members of the Executive Council that that's not the case. I highly doubt that it's going to be the designation of an individual trail that is going to create these kinds of impossibilities and difficulties, and certainly once the government embarks down the path of designating these trails and trail areas as is outlined, they'll quickly come to see where the difficulties and impossibilities arise and be able to come up with clever legislative solutions to this issue. He's generated two bad-faith arguments here, one about our intent and the other about the so-called creation of red tape. That is not going to happen if the government adopts this particular amendment.

The third thing that I want to highlight, Mr. Chair, is the minister's assertion that legislative time is precious and should be used to deal with legislation of profound import. Yet what have we seen this session so far? We've seen an infrastructure act that tells the minister that he has to do his job. My friend from Lethbridge-West refers to it as tabs-in-binders legislation – right? – that gives a job description to the bureaucracy when it comes to capital planning. That's hardly a useful way to spend the Legislature's time. We saw some amendments to advanced education statutes that did nothing. Earlier in this session we had some kind of financial transparency act. I don't even remember what it did

because it did so little, but that was dedicated a bill. Even the minister himself has used the precious legislative time that we're given here wastefully, in my view, by bringing forward an extended producer responsibility bill that doesn't actually do the thing that it says it does.

So it seems that we have plenty of time here in the Legislature to deal with frivolous pieces of legislation. It's hardly an argument to say that the impossibilities or difficulties that are created by designating trails aren't worthy of the Legislature's time. They certainly are, Mr. Chair, and certainly the stakeholders that I've heard from agree with me.

Mr. Chair, I just want to recap my arguments, my responses to the minister. He's mischaracterized our intent. Our intent is to improve this legislation and to improve the management and designation of trails in this province so that Albertans can get out there and enjoy them safely with a lens of environmental protection and conservation, which is the stated goal of this piece of legislation. We're not creating red tape. We are enhancing democratic accountability, which is desperately needed here in this place.

With that, Mr. Chair, I'll conclude my remarks and express my hope that perhaps the government will have a change of heart after giving this a second chance to consider. Thank you.

8:50

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview has risen on A1.

Ms Sigurdson: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. It's my pleasure to join the debate on this amendment to Bill 79, the Trails Act. I certainly, like my colleague from Edmonton-Gold Bar, encourage the members of this Assembly to vote in favour of this amendment because it goes a long way to strengthen this legislation, which, it certainly has just been established, is showing some profound weaknesses.

Certainly, I'm no legal expert – that's not my background – but I did do a bit of research to prepare for speaking to this bill, and actually this type of legislation that is in Bill 79 is called framework legislation. It's really a statute that exists almost entirely of permissive statements which authorize the minister to enact all substantive legal rules later, outside of the legislative process. It's this framework that is just sort of a skeleton, that then gives the authority to the minister and Executive Council to make the decisions behind closed doors. It is not transparent. From my understanding, certainly what the UCP likes to tell voters, likes to tell the citizens of Alberta is that they care very much about transparency and that they want to make sure that government is transparent. They want to have referendums. They want to encourage democracy. Yet on the other hand, they are creating legislation that actually takes away that transparency, and this framework legislation is certainly doing that.

I think it doesn't serve us here in Alberta and certainly doesn't serve the citizens of Alberta, and this isn't the only legislation that's framework legislation that the UCP has brought forward. They seem to have a penchant for this kind of legislation. Certainly, this is Bill 79. Well, Bill 78 does the same thing. That's the affordable housing act. It gives extraordinary powers to the Minister of Seniors and Housing to define affordable housing, to designate it, so very similar to this bill except in a different area.

Again, concerns about democracy, transparency are the same, and it is kind of incongruent, to put it politely, with what the UCP likes to tell Albertans, that they care very much and are making sure to create even more engagement, even more transparency. In this bill the minister is authorized to designate what trails are subject to

the act, establish management plans for designated trails, appoint a manager for designated trails, delegate management of designated trails by agreement. So he is enabled to do a whole swath of things out of the transparency of this Legislative Assembly. It's something that he can do behind closed doors.

The only thing that, actually, the bill does say is that the minister must post his decisions on his website. So after he's made the decisions – and we're not sure exactly how he'll make his decisions. We don't have any of those criteria. Like, what's the criteria for establishing a trail? What will be the environmental considerations that he looks at? Will he be doing Indigenous consultation? What will that look like? Does he understand the constitutional obligations he has regarding this when trails are designated? Will the cumulative impacts be considered of trail use? How will the trail managers be chosen? Who knows? We don't know any of this. This is all something that the minister has given himself the authority to do. If this bill passes in this Assembly, he'll be able to do all of that behind closed doors, and that's a considerable amount of power, to make decisions without the oversight of this legislative Chamber.

I do encourage all members to support this amendment A1. Again, you know, my hon. colleague from Edmonton-Gold Bar also referenced the Faculty of Law at the University of Calgary, that has written extensively on this. One of the things they say about this particular passage that the amendment addresses is that Alberta is the only jurisdiction in Canada with legislation that delegates regulation-making powers to the executive branch to remedy confusion. It's quite ridiculous, really. As the member said, legislation, hopefully, is improving things and not making things more complex and confused.

Then, of course, it is extraordinary. It seems that the UCP is giving themselves these powers to do this kind of legislative control, which gives a lot of power to the minister, and it seems to be quite unique to Alberta, you know. Other provincial governments or even the federal government have not taken such, perhaps, bold – I don't know – entitled action. So I do encourage my colleagues to vote in favour of this amendment.

You know, many matters in this House are before us because they're of a serious nature, and it's really so important that we as legislators make sure that we're thinking in the best interests of our province, our citizens, our society, the land that we are stewards for. Unfortunately, we're in a situation where there has already been extensive damage to many of the public lands. Many species of animals live in the lakes and rivers, where fish swim, and the extent of that linear disturbance has been for some time threatening Alberta wildlife and fish. Thus, we do need to reduce the trails, but unfortunately this is not anything that this legislation does.

The minister was quoted, clearly, when he spoke about this and very boldly and, I would say, gleefully said that what this bill will not do is close trails despite several studies coming from his own department saying how important it is to limit trails and not increase trails in our province because of the clear risk that many species are experiencing. There have been at least four peer-reviewed, government-funded studies that concluded that road and trail density are already impacting populations of animals such as the caribou, grizzly bears, and bull trout, that are already negatively impacted by this. We know that this is especially true on the eastern slopes of the Rockies in southern Alberta, where off-highway vehicle use is extensive in that area.

Sadly, I mean, what we would think that this Trails Act would be doing, it is not doing at all, and it is, as I said earlier, just giving the minister extraordinary power, this framework legislation, to do, really, what he wants and not be accountable to the citizens of

Alberta, not care for our animal species in this province at a time when there is serious concern and when the erosion and the difficulties in our trail system have already created so much difficulty and there may be damage that cannot be repaired because of it.

9:00

I certainly want to speak in favour of this amendment because it goes some way to actually helping the government be more accountable about this, and I would hope that members on both sides of the House would understand the importance of this. Certainly, as someone who has done a lot of hiking in our Rocky Mountains with my family and has a great and deep love for this province and its wide open spaces, I certainly stand in support of us making sure that we are caring for these public places. Sadly, I don't see this bill doing that, and I don't see that the extraordinary powers that the minister is granting himself in this legislation are helping, and therefore I do commend everyone to vote in favour of this amendment A1.

Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other members looking to join debate on amendment A1?

[Motion on amendment A1 lost]

The Deputy Chair: Are there any members looking to speak to the main bill, Bill 79? I see the hon. Member for Calgary-East caught my eye.

Mr. Singh: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I rise to express my support for this significant bill that introduces a modernized approach for recreation management on Alberta trails, Bill 79, the Trails Act. Let me first thank the minister for introducing this bill as there has been no substantive change to our existing legislation regarding recreation management on public land since 1979. That is more than 40 years ago.

Over the years the influx of outdoor recreational users and trailgoers has grown. It has been made a part of our regular routine for many Albertans. It is also a way for families and friends to celebrate special events or time for them to have fun and have bonding while enjoying outdoor recreational experiences. More and more parents have involved their kids in motorized outdoor recreation like minimotorcycle off-roading, and you could see their concentration and excitement.

I myself, Mr. Chair, love to go out and experience outdoor recreational sites in Alberta for a walk and a hike, and it is just so relaxing to see the breathtaking views of our outdoor landscape. Also, it is nice to see and hear different birds chirping and flying around, and there is a great chance to cross paths with different animals in the wild. Though some animals would immediately rush away when they see you coming, others would stay and stare at you as you walk your path through.

With the Canadian Rocky Mountains in Alberta we are able to have an abundance of water flowing from the upper parts of the mountains going to the rivers and lakes. Whenever this water flows near the trails, it is refreshing to feel its chilling temperature, and it is exciting to strike a pose to capture the moment. There are also numerous waterfalls high and low, which are so amazing to have a glimpse of, whether they are frozen during winter or fast-flowing in spring and summer.

By having these astonishing natural wonders, Alberta has countless trails and outdoor recreational sites in public lands. We have the eastern slopes in Alberta, the Kananaskis Country, and

many other trail-rich public lands all over the province. Also, we have five well-known national parks in Alberta. These are Banff, Jasper, Waterton, Elk Island, Wood Buffalo national parks. They, too, have different amazing trails although mostly managed and maintained by the federal government's Parks Canada. But it proves that Alberta is rich with trails and outdoor recreational environments.

Trails are a significant part of Alberta's heritage and identity as early transport and trading routes, offering Albertans and visitors to experience roots of the past while contributing to conversation, tourism, and well-being. Today trails are more popular than ever with Albertans. Mr. Chair, they are so popular that we needed updated tools to manage them.

A survey and study conducted by the Tourism Industry Association of Alberta on the impacts of the outdoor recreation economy revealed that Alberta's outdoor enthusiasts spend \$258 per day trip and \$757 per overnight trip while each year these consumers spend \$2.3 billion on trip-related expenditures and \$376 million in equipment and accessories. The consequential employment rate from this spending is 6.1 times higher than both the forest and logging industries. Also, around .8 per cent of Alberta's GDP is accounted for in recreational trips to public land. That is about a \$2.8 billion contribution to GDP, Mr. Chair.

There are about 13,000 kilometres of designated trails in Alberta, but many more kilometres of unmanaged trails also exist, which for the most part were the result of industrial use. These unintended and unplanned trails were the result of long years of industrial activities. Some are located on sensitive soils such as wetlands and do not have bridges or other appropriate watercourse crossings to protect critical aquatic habitat and surrounding location. Most of these trails are not formally managed by Environment and Parks.

Current legislation and regulations are inadequate when it comes to the recognition of the significance of public land use for outdoor recreation. Moreover, the existing legislation and regulations do not effectively provide the proper management needed for nonmotorized and motorized recreational sites. The outcomes of this lacking system are the unavoidable poor experiences for foreign and local visitors, confusion or sometimes conflict among users, inconsistent compliance, which would lead to public health and safety issues and environmental degradation.

We need a clear and solid foundation of rules that would allow for a timely, appropriate directive that ensures environmental impairment is diminished while partnerships with stakeholders thrive. We must advance meaningful partnerships with them. This is why the provincial government has committed in its platform to the creation of an Alberta Trails Act to increase awareness about the use of trails and encourage thereupon sustainability of the system, which will enhance trails and trail experiences while at the same time protecting trails for future generations.

Having said that, Mr. Chair, this bill embodies this commitment by establishing a framework to plan, designate, build, and maintain trails. Bill 79 also ensures the effective management of nonmotorized and motorized trails on public land as well as importing the protection of infrastructure investments while reasonably addressing liability and impact management. This bill is another example of our common-sense conservation plan, that takes a balanced approach to environmental stewardship, recognizing that recreation, economic use, and conservation can and should support each other.

9:10

The provincial government has conducted engagement with key stakeholders, Indigenous people, and the public, including 20 organizations, in working to improve Alberta outdoor recreation

and trails. They have voiced, Mr. Chair, that outdoor recreation on public lands should be elevated in government priorities, considering the benefit to health and well-being of any person wanting to enjoy their natural beauty and the responsibility to maintain and preserve our healthful environment and ecology. Stakeholder groups have also expressed willingness to partner in trail planning and evaluation on a regular basis. Industrial stakeholders want to minimize impacts on disposition processes. Additionally, the need for better trained recreation management had become more apparent to help promote well-being commercialized tourism opportunities.

Alberta Environment and Parks has also engaged with 51 First Nations and 39 Métis organizations in three phases from November 2020 to September this year, Mr. Chair. Indigenous people have an important historical and cultural connection to the land and its rich natural heritage. Alberta respects and supports the continued availability of public lands for the purpose of exercising First Nations treaty rights, Métis harvesting, First Nations and Métis traditional uses. Bill 79 can help locate and manage trails in a sustainable way that is sensitive and responsive to nearby communities.

That is why it is important for this legislation to pass, Mr. Chair, as it creates a sustainable recreation system into Alberta trails, which will provide a great opportunity for Albertans to enjoy their time and recreate on public lands. It would also establish a more robust structure that enables thorough trail planning, which would in turn facilitate a lasting and environmentally responsible enjoyment of our great outdoors. This bill will also promote the formation of partnerships with stakeholders and Indigenous people as their knowledge and experiences play an important factor in the evaluation, planning, maintenance, and management of our trails. By involving all the interested parties, our goal to modernize our rules around recreation can be easily achieved while at the same time maintaining the protection that is needed to the trails and the environment. The valuable work that these stakeholder groups can contribute for the advancement of our system must be maximized as they share the same vision, which is to bolster environmental stewardship and the promotion of proper usage of public lands outdoor recreation.

It is estimated that around \$4.5 million per year will be spent to implement the Trails Act. The funding will be distributed to recreation organizations and volunteer groups through partnership agreements to help build and maintain trails to communities to support emergency response. Bill 79 will enable an effective trail management system that meets the needs of everyone, which streamlines the ability to consistently oversee and enforce trails on public lands. It will also ensure that trails are managed in a way that creates a positive recreation experience and will remove trails that are not desirable or trails that have contributed to environmental damage. By doing that, the untoward environmental footprint will be minimized. It will also increase the quality of trails while making a sustainable contribution to our provincial economy in the promotion of local tourism and a first-class trail system.

Should this bill be passed, Mr. Chair, we will see wonderful changes and improvements in our trails and outdoor recreation sites. It will be helpful in bringing great value and benefits to all Albertans and our visitors. In other words, Bill 79 will make sure that the trails that are such an important part of our history and identity, that help us lead healthy lives and provide huge economic benefits through travel and tourism, can be enjoyed today and for years to come.

Having said that, let me again express my appreciation to the minister for introducing these needed changes that will make the outdoor recreation experience in Alberta meaningful to all users.

Also, I thank all the stakeholders, recreational organizations, First Nations, and Métis organizations in participating with the consultation and engagement. I encourage my colleagues here in this Chamber to support this bill that will modernize how Alberta's trails are managed while conserving the environment and improving the recreation experience for Albertans.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any members wishing to join on the bill? I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar has risen.

Mr. Schmidt: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I'm pleased to rise and offer another amendment.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member. This will be referred to as amendment A2 for the purposes of debate. There will be copies on the side tables close to the entrances should you want a copy. Also, you can get one delivered if you just put up your hand.

If the hon. member could please give us a summary just because I think that it might be a little on the long side to read in directly for the purposes of the amendment. Please. It's all yours.

Mr. Schmidt: Thank you, Mr. Chair. As tempting as your offer to just summarize the amendment is, I will say that my staff worked very diligently on this particular amendment, so I hope that the chair will allow me to read the amendment into the record in its entirety. I move that Bill 79, the Trails Act, be amended as follows: (a) in section 1 by adding the following in alphanumeric order:

- (a.01) "counterbalance" has the same meaning as in the Alberta Land Stewardship Act;
- (c.01) "endangered species" has the same meaning as in the Wildlife Act;
- (c.02) "impacted area", in respect of a trail or trail area, means
 - (i) the area that forms the trail or the trail area,
 - (ii) the area surrounding the trail or trail area that is subject to the regional plan that applies to the area referred to in subclause (i);
- (e.01) "regional plan" has the same meaning as in the Alberta Land Stewardship Act;
- (e.02) "species at risk" has the same meaning as in the Species at Risk Act (Canada);
- (h.01) "wildlife" has the same meaning as in the Wildlife Act;

9:20

(b) in section 2 by adding the following immediately after clause (a):

- (a.01) to ensure that before a decision is made to permanently establish a trail or trail area through designation under this Act, the Minister is adequately informed about the potential adverse impacts to the environment and wildlife and fish populations of, and Indigenous peoples rights and uses within, the impacted area,

(b) in section 4(1) by striking out "The Minister may" and substituting "Subject to section 4.1, the Minister may"; (b) by adding the following immediately after section 4:

Impact evaluation required prior to designation
 4.1(1) The Minister may not designate a trail or trail area under section 4(1) unless the Minister carries out each of the following in respect of the proposed designation:

- (a) an evaluation, in accordance with subsection (2), of the adverse impacts to each of the following that could reasonably be assumed to arise in relation to the impacted area if the trail or trail area is permanently established through designation under this Act:
 - (i) the environment forming the impacted area, specifically populations of flora that are

- endangered species or species at risk within the impacted area;
 - (ii) wildlife and fish populations within that environment, specifically populations of wildlife or fish that are endangered species or species at risk within the impacted area;
 - (iii) Indigenous peoples' rights and uses within the impacted area;
 - (b) on conclusion of the evaluation and for a period of not less than 90 days, conduct a public consultation on the proposed designation and the evaluation in accordance with subsection (3);
 - (c) within 60 days of the conclusion of the public consultation, make publicly available the Minister's decision whether to proceed with the proposed designation.
- (2) For the purpose of subsection (1)(a), the evaluation must, at a minimum, include an analysis of each of the following:
- (i) the direct adverse impacts on the matters referred to in that subsection;
 - (ii) the cumulative effects that could arise in relation to other existing developments within the impacted area if the trail or trail area is permanently established within that impacted area;
 - (iii) the counterbalancing measures that, if enacted or implemented, could sufficiently off-set the direct and cumulative adverse impacts referred to in subclauses (i) and (ii);
 - (iv) the potential alternatives to the proposed designation that could comparably achieve the Minister's intended objectives underlying the proposed designation and that would not result in the direct and cumulative adverse impacts referred to in subclauses (i) and (ii).
- (3) For the purpose of subsection (1)(b), the Minister must conduct a consultation in respect of a proposed designation that includes at least each of the following:
- (a) adequate written notice to the public of the consultation that specifies, at a minimum
 - (i) the Minister's rationale for proposing the designation, and
 - (ii) the means by which the public may provide comment to the Minister in respect of this rationale;
 - (b) direct consultation opportunities for any individual or community that may be directly and adversely affected, including
 - (i) local residents who reside within the impacted area, and
 - (ii) Indigenous governments and communities that use or have rights within the impacted area;
 - (c) direct consultation with individuals with expertise in respect of species at risk, cumulative effects assessment and water quality and monitoring.
- (4) For greater certainty, a designation that is made before the Minister meets each requirement under subsection (1) is of no force or effect.

[Mrs. Frey in the chair]

Madam Chair, I appreciate you indulging me in reading out this lengthy amendment. I think it's important to get it on the official transcript of the Legislature because, as we all know, when amendments are defeated, if they are defeated, they disappear down the memory hole, and there's no record on the Assembly website or anywhere else related to debate on this piece of legislation where it is. I just want anybody who is interested in what happened during debate on the Trails Act to be able to read this amendment and at

least understand our reasonings for bringing it forward and the government's reasons for responding, as I assume that they will.

Now, let me just take a few moments, if I may, and explain what the intent of these amendments is. The first part, in section 1, adds in a bunch of definitions that are key to operationalizing the other parts of the amendment, Madam Chair, as I understand it. Things like counterbalance, endangered species, impacted areas, regional plan, species at risk, wildlife are not found in the original bill. In order to do the things that we want to do with the amendment, we need to add these definitions in, so that's why these are there.

Now, (b) amends section 2 "to ensure that before a decision is made to permanently establish a trail area . . . the Minister is adequately informed about the . . . adverse impacts to the environment and wildlife and fish populations." Then further on in 4(1) it requires the minister to conduct such an evaluation of the adverse impacts that could reasonably result from designating a trail. Now, one of the top things that we heard from stakeholders who were interested in this act was the potential environmental consequences of allowing the minister to give himself the power to designate trails as he sees fit without any kind of constraints or requirements in the process. Certainly, people who were concerned about sustainable development and sustainable outdoor recreation raised this concern over and over again.

We know that linear disturbances such as trails have the potential to have adverse impacts on wildlife, on species at risk. My friend from Edmonton-Riverview highlighted a couple of species that could potentially be negatively impacted by improper management of trails: westslope cutthroat trout, for example, or caribou. Caribou in particular are very sensitive to linear disturbance densities in their habitats, Madam Chair. You know, I will say that the minister is working diligently to try to rehabilitate the caribou populations in the province, and I think that by adopting this amendment, this would strengthen the work that he is already undertaking to rehabilitate the caribou populations by making sure that the density of linear disturbances doesn't exceed the thresholds that the government needs to set to protect caribou habitat, for example.

Now, I will go on to say that the other important piece of this is the piece around consultation. Not only must the minister undergo an assessment of the potential environmental impacts of trails; he also has to conduct consultation with the public before he designates trails. That's one of the things that we've heard over and over again from people who are concerned about – what's the phrase? – the negative consequences of this bill. There doesn't seem to be a process set out for consulting with the public before designating a trail. They have many concerns that they won't be listened to or that one particular group will be favoured over others. Indigenous people want to know that their constitutional rights with respect to consultation will be upheld. Certainly, that's something that the government has needed some help with, I guess, in the past, and it is currently in court with a number of First Nations groups with respect to some of its actions in the past.

By adopting this amendment, the Trails Act will go a long way towards protecting and conserving the environment so that it can be used sustainably for trail users, and it will also set up a consultation framework so that the public will be able to have its say before trails are designated, something that they desperately want. You know, we know that there are a lot of good people out there on the landscape working to create and maintain trails, and all they're asking for, Madam Chair, is to have it written down in legislation that the minister is required to consult with them before he goes ahead and designates trails. I think that's a reasonable request.

It's certainly one that both we as the Official Opposition and the Wildrose, when they were the Official Opposition, talked about a lot, the need for consultation. In fact, I recall a couple of decisions about outdoor recreational use that the minister himself was very concerned that there was a lack of consultation about. By adopting this amendment, the minister will live up to his own aspirations to make sure that the government is conducting adequate consultations with the public before making these significant decisions that will affect so many people and their ability to enjoy Alberta's great outdoors.

9:30

The final thing is that this will be an iterative process as we've set it up, Madam Chair, so not only will the minister be required to consult with the public, but he will also have to report back to the public about what he's heard and then provide the public again with opportunities to have their feedback. That's one of the things that constantly frustrates Albertans with government, right? They hold so-called consultations to find out what the government intends to do, and their feedback is often ignored or politely accepted and then left to sit on a shelf somewhere. Then the minister or the cabinet does what they wanted to do from the very beginning. By setting up this kind of iterative process, where the minister has to report back on the results of his consultation and show that he or she has done their work with respect to listening to Albertans, that will create much more trust in the system that it's actually working for the benefit of the people of Alberta.

Madam Chair, that's quite a lengthy amendment, but I think that it does a number of very important things that, if adopted, will ensure that Albertans will be able to sustainably recreate on trails all across the province for generations to come. I sincerely hope that the minister and his government caucus colleagues decide to adopt this amendment.

Thank you.

The Acting Chair: Are there any other members wishing to speak to A2? The hon. Minister of Environment and Parks.

Mr. Jason Nixon: Well, thank you, Madam Chair. I'm happy to rise and discuss this amendment. Looking through it, it is basically an attempt to do the Bill C-69, the no-more-pipelines law, of trails, fitting, of course, for a political party, the NDP, who spent a lot of time trying to create red tape. I see the hon. the Associate Minister of Red Tape sitting there, and I know she doesn't like red tape, and certainly that is all that this is.

Madam Chair, a couple of things I'll address that were brought up by the hon. member. At the end of the day, this would create an unmanageable system, would keep in place some of the things that trail organizations have asked to be removed and that they have asked for the Trails Act to come into place to be able to prevent. Now, I don't think that anybody in the House, though, should be surprised to hear an amendment from the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar like this or from the NDP because this was a party that, when in government, saw Albertans waiting sometimes seven years for water licences, three years for grazing lease transfers, on and on like that. Absolutely ridiculous.

You know what, Madam Chair? They sometimes saw great volunteer organizations trying to do things like poker rallies or fundraisers for the trail networks inside the province not being able to actually do those fundraisers because they couldn't get through the red tape mess that was made by the NDP. One of the things that every trail organization – and the hon. member doesn't talk to trail organizations; that's pretty clear – asked for was to remove that

massive amount of red tape to be able make it so that you could function on trails easily.

Now, of course, you still have to have rules in place to be able to protect the environment and to address environmental impacts that could take place because of different activities that are taking place on the landscape. Some of that will be done through the Trails Act process. Much if it is already done through the land-use planning process, which would trump situations within the Trails Act. The fish and wildlife act, which the hon. member refers to, would be another piece of legislation that would be over top of how the Trails Act could be implemented.

He brought up caribou. He's right to bring up caribou. Caribou are being done through a subregional land-use planning process, and those subregional plans would be used as a lens and would become mandatory through a consultation. A very robust consultation process will be brought into place in the land-use designation within that area, and then certainly anything that was taking place on trail activity within those ranges would have to comply with what was already inside the subregional planning process.

What the hon. member is asking for would essentially be to do an environmental assessment every time that somebody from their local cross-country ski club in Bragg Creek or Kananaskis went out to be able to adjust a sign or to make a different adjustment to a bridge crossing or to do those types of things. Now, that's it. He's rolling his eyes over there right now, Madam Chair, because he's frustrated getting caught in it again. You've got an amendment that's three or four pages long trying to make more and more red tape on good, hard-working people that just want to make sure that they can protect the trails, which, again, shows their underlying goal. You see it every time that they rise to talk about anything to do with the backcountry. Their goal is to stop everybody from being able to access that landscape. They don't want to see trails built. They don't want to see ATV organizations, for example, work to put proper water crossings on to protect the westslope cutthroat or the bull trout because what they actually want is that they don't want them on the landscape at all. I know this by listening to the hon. member's comments.

Clearly, he's not talking to trail organizations because they've been asking for this legislation since about the '70s, so for decades they've asked for this. What this hon. member is proposing is exactly what they want to see stopped so that they could be able to make sure that the trails go forward. The only people that are proposing where he is headed are extreme environmental organizations dedicated to removing human beings from being able to access their backyard. I did listen to the hon. member's comments a little bit earlier, where he said that we are putting false motives on them when it comes to the landscape. Well, we're not, Madam Chair. Their actions speak for themselves.

When they were in government, they went out of their way, with certainly no consultation, no Indigenous consultation, and tried to put in land-use plans that shut Albertans out of their own backyard. They tried to use the parks act as a weapon to prevent people from being able to utilize the landscapes that they had for generations. You know what, Madam Chair? It's so rich to hear the hon. member talk about Indigenous consultation because at the time that they did that on the Bighorn plan, for example, they didn't bother to call the O'Chiese, they didn't bother to call the Sunchild, they didn't bother to call the Big Horn – they had the nerve to name the plan after their reserve, and they didn't even bother to call them – and they did not bother to call the Smallboy Camp. Those are the four First Nation communities that call that area home, and they were appalled and frustrated with that government.

In fact, I remember a rally that they held – it was so cold, Madam Chair – in the Home Hardware parking lot in Rocky Mountain House. You didn't see any NDP MLAs there. I've never seen an NDP MLA inside Rocky Mountain House, to be fair. I see the former minister of seniors' services. She was in Sundre, so she's confused. I remember her being there. Sundre is a great town, too, my hometown, actually, but Rocky Mountain House is a different place, further up on the highway.

The point is that all four of those First Nation communities were in the Home Hardware parking lot. It was about minus 35. You can still go online and see the speeches from every one of those chiefs. The Member for Drayton Valley-Devon was there, not an NDP MLA, certainly not the minister who was trying to shut down their backyard. Those chiefs stood up there and asked for the government to stop the ridiculous plan that they had not even bothered to talk to them about, that would impact the home that they have called home since the beginning of time. That's who we're going to trust with Indigenous consultation?

Now, at the same time, some of those members have traplines inside those areas. They certainly don't want us to have to come back to the Legislature every time that they have to make adjustments to that trail. In fact, maybe if the hon. member gets some time, we can arrange for him to spend some time on a trapline, and he could learn about that important part of much of my community's culture that has existed for centuries inside our communities.

At the end of the day, every time it is so transparent. Every time that you see the NDP talk about this, their goal is to stop humans from accessing the backcountry, that they have accessed for generations, and to force them to use the landscape only in ways that they feel that the landscape should be used. They have no interest in talking to anybody else.

9:40

I can tell you this, Madam Chair. The equestrian community is a big part of my community. There are some of the best trail-riding outfits around that operate out of places like west of Rocky Mountain House and Sundre. I know many members here go on vacation inside that constituency, have taken kids out with organizations inside my constituency to be able to go and enjoy that landscape. If we did what this member is asking, they wouldn't be able to get their trails approved anymore.

Instead, it would end up being, like underneath the old NDP regime, where it takes seven years – seven years, Madam Chair – to get a water licence. You know how long it is now? About 60 days, and the environment is still protected. We actually make sure that we can get approvals out and the process running. The NDP just couldn't do it. We got it fixed.

I really would encourage everybody not to vote for the Bill C-69 of the trails world. Instead, do what environmental organizations have been asking for for decades and make sure that we can create a sustainable framework that will allow trails to be built in environmentally appropriate ways, which will stand with partnership organizations that are working really, really hard in places like Kananaskis, Bragg Creek, and, of course, in the David Thompson corridor, which, by the way, is what you should have called your plan at least when you were trying to shut down my backyard. Stand with those organizations who are asking for this and stand up against the NDP, who are trying to kick them out of their own backyard. It's absolutely shameful.

The last thing is this. They want to, clearly, make everything as hard as possible on nonprofit organizations. We were talking about this the other night on another piece of legislation, but it's very, very similar to the same situation here. It's a pattern that you see

with the NDP. They don't like partnership organizations. They don't like particularly religious ones; I've noticed that. They really don't like to work with religious organizations. I think that's sad. I want to take a moment and thank the great religious organizations from all faiths who work very, very hard, frankly, to make the social safety net of our communities and provide exceptional service. We're proud to partner with them in the Alberta government.

They don't like volunteer conservation organizations either. Clearly, they go out of their way to stop everything. That member has spent a tremendous amount of the last two years attacking in this Chamber or allowing his party to attack inside this Chamber, Madam Chair, volunteer organizations that help us manage the parks system, organizations like the Friends of Kananaskis, the friends of Bragg Creek, the Friends of the Eastern Slopes, and the list goes on and on.

Ms Issik: The Friends of Fish Creek.

Mr. Jason Nixon: The Friends of Fish Creek, an excellent organization. Thank you to the chief government whip for that example.

That member has spent or allowed his party to spend their time going after those organizations and trying to stop them from being able to do their role. You know what, Madam Chair? We made sure not to let the NDP win that one. We've been able to continue to work with those organizations and provide some significant support for them in their important work when it comes to conservation.

Now, why don't they like those partnership organizations? I think we figured it out yesterday when we were talking about this. It appears that if you're not unionized and you're not part of the Gil McGowan crew, who's the boss of the NDP, the NDP will use their time in the Legislature to try to stop you, to advance their union agenda, Madam Chair. They do it every time, and you're seeing it yet again here on something as simple as trying to help volunteer organizations to be able to maintain a trail network that Albertans depend on for recreation, for health, that has a historical context for many communities. Even for something as simple as that, they will spend all of their energy – all of their energy – trying to stop those organizations because they're not unionized.

I bet you this. If we could convince the Friends of Fish Creek or the Friends of the Eastern Slopes to unionize, then all of a sudden the members would stop these ridiculous amendments that we see coming from the hon. member, and they would be up being the great champions of those organizations. Well, guess what? These aren't unionized organizations. They're volunteer organizations. We've heard them loud and clear, and we'll make sure to get this legislation passed through this House to be able to help protect them. Madam Chair, you know who we're protecting them from? We're protecting them from the NDP.

God forbid if they were ever to be the government again. We know from their last attempts that they will do everything they can to shut Albertans out of their backyard, destroy the hard work of the many volunteer organizations who have built the trail network in this province. We're going to do everything we can to make sure that they can never ever do that again to any community inside this province. We will always stand with conservation organizations.

Lastly, I wanted to go back and close again on the Indigenous side. Indigenous consultation is a constitutional right. It already is a process that is well established within government, and it has to continue. It has to continue through land-use planning and many other mechanisms on the landscape, but what I want to tonight, through you, Madam Chair, to Indigenous communities all across the province – I promise you that we will never do what the NDP

did to the Big Horn, the O'Chiese, the Sunchild, and the Smallboy Camp. We will never do that.

When the former minister at the time announced with the Premier of Alberta, the NDP Premier, that they were going to come into those First Nation communities and interrupt and disrupt their landscapes, where did they announce it? At the YMCA, with a fake mountain backdrop, here in Edmonton. Never again will we allow that to happen. Those First Nation communities: we heard them loud and clear. We stopped the NDP from doing that, and we will make sure that they don't get to do it again.

When is the first time that the department of environment went to meet with the community of the Big Horn on the First Nation, a beautiful place, by the way, on the shores of Abraham Lake on the extreme western portion of my constituency? I see one of the members from Red Deer, who I know frequents that area, a beautiful place. You know when the first time the department went to that community was? The day before the final announcement was to be made and only because I put tremendous pressure on them, that they send some bureaucrats there to meet with the First Nations community. They didn't even have the courage to go out and meet with that amazing community directly and talk about what's going to happen in their backyard. But don't worry. We stopped them. We heard them loud and clear. They stopped them. They're the ones who protested. They're the ones who stood up and protected their community, and we were proud to stand with them.

I can tell you, Madam Chair, that the community of Rocky Mountain House has been around since 1799. George Washington was President of the United States when it was founded. We've been around a long time back there, and our First Nation communities have been around a lot longer than that back there, and we will never ever let a member like the Member for Edmonton Gold-Bar come down and shut our backyard. It will never ever happen. We will always stand up for it.

So vote against this ridiculous amendment, which is just an attempt to shut down nonprofit organizations, which does nothing to be able to stand up for Indigenous communities that want to protect their trails. It completely and utterly ignores what trail organizations are asking and just goes out of his way to advance the extreme ideological agenda that is around the NDP when it comes to things like the backcountry or access to the backcountry.

You see it as well with the Coastal GasLink just recently, you know, 85 per cent of that member's party voting to go out and illegally break the law, block a legal pipeline. I haven't seen him stand up inside this Chamber and reject that yet. He's too busy trying to shut down nonprofit organizations who are trying to make nice trails for people to go cross-country skiing, fighting against legislation to stop the occupation of bridges and other pieces of infrastructure that are critical. That's where they're at. Don't worry. We won't let it happen.

With that, Madam Chair, I'd like to adjourn debate.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Bill 80

Red Tape Reduction Implementation Act, 2021 (No. 2)

The Acting Chair: Are there any other members wishing to speak to Bill 80, on the main bill? I see the hon. Member for Lethbridge-West.

Ms Phillips: Thank you, Madam Chair. I rise at this committee stage to speak to Bill 80, the Red Tape Reduction Implementation Act, 2021 (No. 2). Of course, a number of the items in this bill could be this sort of omnibus exercise. It could in fact have been under

miscellaneous statutes. That's how sort of random they are, and, you know, I think that fact has been well canvassed. We've got a lot of evidence here.

I noticed a fairly light legislative agenda. I was just observing to my friend from Edmonton-South a few minutes ago the lightness of the legislative agenda. There are a few nuggets of things that are not fantastic, which I will get to. There's a piece in Bill 80 that has certainly got nothing to do with red tape but everything to do with how we understand help for people seeking higher education. But other than that, you know, it's a very light agenda. As my hon. friend for Edmonton-Gold Bar points out, this infrastructure act is a simple job description for bureaucrats, so not exactly pressing matters of state, if you will, Madam Chair.

9:50

I was observing to my friend from Edmonton-South that a possible explanation for the relative levity, if you will, of the government agenda, with few notable exceptions, could be that, you know, it wouldn't have broken the Executive Council's heart if they had to make haste and leave the Chamber by maybe the end of November or in and around, say, the timing of the AGM if that went south. Alas, we find ourselves in the Premier's happy place, whereby he is pulling the levers behind the scenes and putting his thumb on the scale of an internal party process. That is certainly where he has demonstrated his political talents, not elsewhere.

So, you know, that is a possible explanation for the fact that this bill seems to exhibit quite a lot of sort of slap-dashery and be an amalgam of all sorts of random items except for one, Madam Chair. Except for one. In fact, this bill contains significant changes to income support. It is our clearly stated position that the changes that have been made already to various income support programs, of which income support is one – of course, we have seen across the board a number of different ways in which government provides supports in the form of income to various groups of Albertans, one of whom is people who are recipients of the assured income for the severely handicapped program. Others, of course, receive the seniors' benefit if they are in a low- or middle-income sort of situation postretirement. Other programs are ways that government provides support in the form of income or, for example, the subsidized amounts for long-term care or assisted living.

Now, in all of these instances I mention them, Madam Chair, because they have all been reduced, effectively, by not being indexed to inflation. Now, this wasn't necessarily such a noticeable thing. Certainly, I think it was for AISH recipients, but maybe some others were not as noticeable when inflation was around 1 per cent or so. Those times have changed due to a number of international factors. Inflation is affecting economies around the industrialized world to greater or lesser degrees, depending on their trading relationships, the status of their currency export, imports, and so on. Certainly, this is a message that we have heard loud and clear from your friends, Madam Chair, not mine, in the Conservative Party of Canada, who have really taken up . . .

The Acting Chair: Hon. member, I don't know if it's ever appropriate to bring the chair into debate, so I would just caution you on doing so going forward. Thank you.

Ms Phillips: The government's friends, then. The government's friends, not mine, in the form of the Conservative Party of Canada.

Now, there is no question that they have been discussing inflation at some length, and there's no question that we have, too. The reason for that is not necessarily that the government controls the price of, you know, ground beef, that is up 11.6 per cent, as Statistics Canada shows us, year over year, tomatoes, which are up

year over year, October to October, 12 per cent, or bacon, which, regrettably – I regret to inform the House – is up 13 per cent. A travesty indeed, Madam Chair. However, not that that is necessarily the fault of a provincial or a federal government or a municipal government or any government, really. There are certain market forces at work here around the world.

However, where government does have an influence is their response to inflation. This is why, Madam Chair, benefits of various kinds and programs of various kinds are designed to respond to inflation and the reduction in purchasing power that then visits upon people who are otherwise on what is described as a fixed income. In fact, for fixed income recipients it is – at least it was heretofore – not precisely fixed because it was at least indexed to a rise in the cost of living. That is certainly no more with income support programs: AISH, the long-term care and assisted living subsidy certainly, and the personal income tax code. That means that, obviously, we are all going to be paying more income tax.

However, this bill then takes that situation, which has been compounded by the challenge of the pandemic, which is the decline in purchasing power, and makes it worse for people who, I would argue, are in the most vulnerable, frankly, position of anyone who benefits from a support for income of various kinds.

People on income support in Alberta: there are fewer of them than in some other provinces, and certainly our AISH benefits are demonstrably more generous than many other provinces, a fact that the government and the Premier just the other day reminded us of as if we should be ashamed of it. I think that we should be proud of it, personally, and I think it should be something that the government holds up as an example of the best of us as Albertans. Those were benefits that certainly were hard fought for during the Klein years. Disability activists across the province made the case for those benefits, and amazingly they prevailed. I think that's a good thing.

The people on income support do not benefit from those same levels of benefits at all, and if one finds oneself on income support – you know, I can describe for you, Madam Chair, those constituents who come to my office. I don't want to make any generalizations for other people's constituents, but I know who comes to my office, people who find themselves on income support. Nobody particularly wants to. I think that's the first piece there, that all work is valuable and most people want to participate in the workforce, the vast, vast majority.

Generally speaking, you find that folks on income support, particularly those with dependants, are there because they are looking for ways to transition off those arrangements. Oftentimes we find that people are finding ways to transition into more stable housing, that maybe their housing background was more precarious and had so much instability in it that securing the necessary transportation and workforce attachment was just simply too difficult. You find people who are leaving either abusive households, youth who were in abusive situations, or oftentimes women in abusive situations. You will find this, Madam Chair.

You will find that oftentimes people on income support are looking for stabilization in their income because that's the one piece that the government has policy that they can stabilize so that they can deal with the other aspects of their lives, whether it's chronic medical conditions, whether it is houselessness or housing precarity or the inability to find the funds to be able to keep up, or other things that happen. Sometimes, you know, people just get into a car accident and can't work for six or eight months, and there's no CPP disability for them and there's no insurance payout, and there's just a set of circumstances that people find themselves in in these cases.

But often folks on income support are also looking for that next step in their lives once they solve some of those other issues having to do with precarious housing and other challenges, and that means some kind of training or school. What this means is that there will be changes to income support, and the government has not clearly stated if the money that is taken out of income support will equal what is placed in advanced education. They simply haven't. Taking these benefits out of legislation and moving them towards regulation allows the minister to cut those benefits at the government's discretion.

10:00

There have been too many of these types of changes already, and during a pandemic I believe that, you know, that's really not the time. I don't know if it is ever actually the time to take away these benefits that, quite frankly, a relatively small number of Albertans actually benefit from. They provide, I think, an outsized benefit to all of us when we provide them because, as I said, Madam Chair, they provide that ladder out of poverty often, and they provide that stabilization so that people can get their feet under them.

Now, in our view, if the government believes that there are problems with income support and providing those learner benefits, then instead of moving the benefit, the government should bring forward reforms to income support, and that's a straightforward fix here. And I think it would prove that if the government is not in fact planning to cut funding from income support, then they should vote in favour of this amendment.

It simplifies this. It restores that public trust that I believe has not necessarily been upheld to the greatest of the government's ability given the deindexation and some of the other housing benefit changes. It is my strongly held view that newcomers and adult learners deserve clear and consistent funding to access education. I know that one of the things that ends up happening . . .

The Acting Chair: Hon. member, I hesitate to interrupt you. I noticed that you said "amendment." Are you – oh. I see. Never mind. Proceed. Sorry about that. Go ahead.

Ms Phillips: Yes. I'm getting there. We took a journey together, Madam Chair, but here we are now.

With that, Madam Chair, I would like to move an amendment to Bill 80 on these grounds, that if the cuts are not intended, then there should be no problem with this amendment. The amendment is, then, moved that would strike out section 10 of the bill. I will provide the copies.

The Acting Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

This amendment shall be known as A1.

If the hon. member would like to proceed, she may.

Ms Phillips: Thank you, Madam Chair. Now, there's no question that within this bill the government claims that section 10, which phases out part-time and full-time learner income support by April 1, 2022 – the government's claim is that this will be replaced by regulation in the Department of Advanced Education . . .

The Acting Chair: Hon. member, I hesitate to interrupt you again. I've just been told that I need you to make sure that you clearly state that you're moving it on behalf of the member. Thank you.

Ms Phillips: Oh. Yes. Pardon me for that omission on my part. I am moving this amendment on behalf of the hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore.

The Acting Chair: Thank you. Proceed.

Ms Phillips: Thank you.

The bill would allow these programs to be administered over in the foundational learning assistance program. You know, the UCP or the government is claiming that the new program will streamline processes and expand eligibility, but these changes could still be made by amending the Income and Employment Supports Act instead of taking away advantages and certainties of having it in legislation, as it currently is.

What we have proposed here, Madam Chair – and I think it's fair to at least say: okay; if we amend this piece of legislation in this fashion, then there's no question that the Income and Employment Supports Act could be amended to include the government's intention, and we would work with them to move that through very expeditiously.

In the alternative, Madam Chair, what advocates, nonprofits, people who work with people trying to ensure that people have the income supports that they need are left with is the impression that there will be behind-the-scenes tinkering with these forms of support, and quite frankly, you know, there is a lot of trust that has to be re-earned. Let's put it that way. So that is not the kind of uncertainty that people need right now, not during a pandemic, and, quite frankly, not ever.

With that, I will conclude my comments on the subject of this amendment, Madam Chair. Thank you to the hon. members for considering it.

The Acting Chair: Are there any other members wishing to speak to amendment A1? I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-Whitemud.

Ms Pancholi: Well, thank you, Madam Chair. It's a pleasure to rise in committee and speak to Bill 80, the Red Tape Reduction Implementation Act, 2021 (No. 2), and specifically speak to the amendment that was just brought forward by the Member for Lethbridge-West on behalf of the Member for Edmonton-Decore. I've had the opportunity to speak a few times. Maybe this is my third time speaking, I believe, to this bill. Actually, no. Correction: it's my second time speaking to this bill. You know, the amendment that's brought forward is actually deeply important, I believe.

The members on this side have spoken quite at length about the fact that, you know, these red tape reduction acts seem to contain a lot of various somewhat inane and minor changes, often that could be handled through a miscellaneous statutes act. Then sometimes tucked in there seems to be what appear to be minor changes that actually have profound and deep impacts on Albertans' lives. I believe the amendment that's brought forward today is meant to address one of those proposed changes by the government.

You know, we know that Bill 80 amends a number of different pieces of legislation, much of which we don't take much issue with, Madam Chair. The Alberta Health Care Insurance Act. I am intrigued by the changes for the Alberta Human Rights Act because I know, given some of the work that I've done on behalf of school boards and others prior to entering into life in the Legislative Assembly, that that process can be very time consuming. It does not move with great pace. It leaves the parties to those complaints, both the people who bring them and are responding to them, in limbo for quite some time. Of course, it means the delayed adjudication of Albertans' human rights. Certainly, any proposed changes that would, you know, I guess, alleviate or speed up those processes are good, but I would love a little bit more information about how those specific changes were reached, who was consulted.

There are a number of other changes in Bill 80, Madam Chair, to other pieces of legislation: the Credit Union Act, the Ensuring

Fiscal Sustainability Act, 2019. I won't list them all. The change that is of concern is the change that is being made to the Income and Employment Supports Act. These are deeply important. I spoke about my own experience, having somebody close to my family who relied on these income supports as an adult learner and how deeply important they were to his journey to complete his high school diploma and to potentially be eligible to take on more meaningful work. I know how critically important that is for so many Albertans.

Every time we have spoken in this Chamber, Madam Chair, about the changes, specifically the changes that this amendment seeks to address, there seems to be this level of sort of incredulity from the members opposite. We've seen it from the Minister of Advanced Education; we've seen it from a number of the members who seem to be shocked. I recall the Minister of Justice speaking at length that the changes that we were discussing were not being made, so I think it's worthy of some consideration in this Assembly to point out exactly what this bill is changing and why we have deep concerns about it on the opposition side.

So, as has been laid out, you know, Bill 80 does make amendments to the Income and Employment Supports Act. Specifically, the concern in Bill 80 is the section that amends section 10 of the Income and Employment Supports Act – sorry; it amends section 6 and section 10. So section 6 and section 10: what they've done is that they've added a provision into the act which says that a household unit or an individual who is seeking to apply for income supports as an adult learner for part-time training benefits is only eligible for those supports if they "have been accepted in an approved training program referred to in Part 3 that commences before April 1, 2022."

So, by virtue of this section, it says that anybody who's applying for these income supports as an adult learner is only eligible if the program has started before April 1 of next year. Anybody seeking to enrol in a program after April 1 is no longer eligible in the Income and Employment Supports Act. Let's be very clear that that's clearly what's happening in this bill. It is saying that an individual or a household unit is no longer eligible for the support after April 1 regardless of if they're enrolled in a program. That's what the bill does.

10:10

Now, we have heard the Minister of Advanced Education and we've heard members opposite say: but it's being addressed in Advanced Education; it's just simply moving over; this is not the end of the program; it is simply moving over. This is the part that I'd like to delve into a little bit if I can, Madam Chair, because this is deeply important. Under the Income and Employment Supports Act, if an individual or a household meets those criteria as they're set out now in the act, they are entitled to that support. There are requirements around age, around barriers for employment, being eligible to work, about income level, but it's set out in the act and the regulations that if you meet those requirements, you will get those supports. That's the way it's set out in the Income and Employment Supports Act.

What is set out under the Student Financial Assistance Act is different. It's different than what is set out in this act. Under the student financial assistance regulation, which is made pursuant to the act, it very clearly states that eligibility for any of the financial assistance under Advanced Education for student financial assistance is dependent upon there being money available for that assistance. Specifically, because I know that there have been some questions asked and there has been some, I guess, refusal to accept what we're saying here, this is set out in section 6 of schedule 2, part 1 of the student financial assistance regulation. Section 6 states

clearly – Availability of Money is the title of the section – “Notwithstanding anything in this Schedule, the Minister may award financial assistance only if money is available for the financial assistance.”

This might seem like a minor change, but it is critical because, as I mentioned, when these supports were provided to adult learners under the Income and Employment Supports Act, it was a right, an entitlement that that individual had as long as they met those criteria. Now it is being moved over into student financial assistance under Advanced Education, and there’s a huge caveat, Madam Chair, over an individual’s eligibility for this program. Now it doesn’t matter; even if a person meets all the requirements set out in the regulation in detail, meets all those eligibility requirements, there’s still this huge caveat that they still may not be entitled to that support because it’s dependent upon whether or not there is money available for that assistance.

That may not seem like a big thing to a lot of people over there on the other side of the House. They may see that as a legal technicality. I understand that. It’s convenient and comfortable and more comfortable to think about it that way, that this is just a technicality. But if you are a person who is low income, who is facing many barriers to employment, who’s seeking, as my colleague the Member for Lethbridge-West very aptly described, trying to look for that next step to get off some of these supports, to find meaningful work, to get the skills they require, whether that be language skills, basic training skills, their high school diploma to be able to get a better job, to earn more, to take care of their family, to take care of themselves, this is not just a technicality.

It’s the difference between getting that support and not, because now it is completely dependent upon – this is the scary part for Albertans – this government’s fiscal management, and we should all be deeply concerned about that, as most Albertans are, because the track record to date of this government when it comes to fiscal management is atrocious, Madam Chair. It is absolutely the gambles that have been made and lost by this government, the willingness to cut people who are the most vulnerable off supports, to save dollars here and there off the most vulnerable, whether they be young people aging out of care, whether they be people on AISH, whether they’re people on rental supports; their ability to get training, to go back to school, to get a decent job is now dependent on this government’s ability to manage their own finances.

Member Irwin: Oh, dear.

Ms Pancholi: Yes. As my colleague from Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood says: oh, dear. It is not appropriate to place the future and fortunes and survival of some of these individuals on this government’s ability to manage their books.

I am profoundly in support of this amendment because if this is simply a technicality, there should be no problem in this government agreeing to it. This is what’s critically important, I think, for Albertans, that issue of trust. I think that just a mere couple of days ago in this Legislature we heard the government members once again talking about how they didn’t cut AISH. They like to stick to these very technical arguments that are completely detached from the lived experience of most Albertans.

I think we could ask anybody on AISH – and we’ve heard from many of them – who will say: “Guess what? My AISH payments did not go up.” This government, many members of this government when they were in opposition, supported and called for the indexing of AISH, for people who face the largest barriers to active employment. Many are employed, which is fantastic, but they face significant barriers to full participation. It’s already not a

significant amount of money to expect people to live off. The least we can do is to ensure that those individuals continue to have their supports indexed with the cost of living.

That is even more profoundly true right now, when we see how the cost of everything has gone up. To say that, you know, \$1,600 in December 2021 does not get you nearly as far as it did in 2019: that is a cut. It means less food they’re able to purchase. Note that food is more expensive, a lot more expensive. Their utility bills are a lot more expensive. If they have a car, their car insurance is a lot more expensive. To tell those individuals that they haven’t had their supports cut is an insult. It’s an insult to their lived experience.

Similarly, to tell people who are adult learners who are on income support who have currently, under the legislation as it’s drafted right now, a legal entitlement to those supports if they meet the eligibility requirements, “Don’t worry; it’s just being moved over here to another department, and you no longer have a legal right to it; you’ve just got to hope that we know how to balance our budget or we know how to manage our money,” well, I think that’s an insult as well. It’s an insult to those individuals. It’s an insult to all of us for this government to stand there and look surprised when we say that this is going to hurt people, that we don’t trust you when you say that you’re going to make sure these people are still getting the same level of support, that they’ll still have access to those benefits when the regulation very clearly states that their ability to access those supports is only if the money is available.

Of course, who gets to determine if the money is available? Well, the government does, right? They get to determine what their budget is, how much they’re putting into student financial assistance. So they can determine: “Oh, we’re just going to lower that even more, so fewer and fewer people are eligible. Sorry. There’s just no more money available.”

This isn’t just a technicality; it’s the reason why we’re still talking about this bill. It’s buried in a bill that for – frankly, most of us probably, you know, don’t care too much about a lot of these changes. They are minor. They could be merely procedural. But it is important because this will absolutely have an impact on people’s lives. I should see that there would be no reason for the members of this government – if they’re absolutely committed to ensuring that these individuals, who are adult learners, who are seeking income supports, will still have access to this benefit, they should accept this amendment.

I do not want to presuppose the outcome of any vote, Madam Chair, but I do believe that I know how this is going to go. I’m sure I will not be surprised. This government has not surprised me once in the last two years. Actually, there have been a few surprises but not on this, not on something like this. I think that speaks to the motives, right? It speaks to truly understanding why they’re doing this. They do want to have the flexibility to cut these adult learners off these supports. That’s why they will likely not support this amendment. We shall see.

10:20

But I will continue to be proud to stand with the members of my caucus to say that we don’t think that people’s entitlement to support should be a technicality. We don’t think it should be subject to the whim of this government’s fiscal management or what they’re going to allocate for supports. We think taking away a legislated entitlement to a program that actually makes a significant difference in people’s lives is important to preserve, and it shouldn’t be done lightly to take it away.

Madam Chair, I certainly hope that members on all sides of this House will vote in favour of this amendment, and I think it will better serve all Albertans if they do.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Acting Chair: Any other hon. members wishing to speak? I see the hon. Minister of Advanced Education.

Mr. Nicolaides: Well, thanks so much, Madam Chair, and apologies. I was chuckling through a lot of the previous commentary because so much of it was wrong. I hope members do their diligence and have a strong understanding of how some of the important, foundational programs that exist in this province actually work. I think that would be a good place to start.

I heard the member opposite go on at length about: well, these changes are going to give the government flexibility, and they can determine at a future time if they want to provide these programs or not. I think that's the essence of what they said, or it depends – sorry. It's in the hands of our financial management as to whether or not these programs and financial assistance and foundational learning would continue to be available: that is completely wrong, Madam Chair. Over \$95 million that the government Alberta provides to foundational learners comes from LMTA funding. It comes from the federal government, so I guess the members opposite want to leave the decisions in the hands of the fiscal management of the Trudeau Liberals. I definitely don't want to do that. I'd prefer to leave the financial management of these programs in the hands of the government of Alberta rather than the Trudeau Liberals.

For the members opposite to suggest that we can just somehow turn off the taps to these foundational learning programs doesn't make any sense. We have an agreement through the LMTA with the federal government that specifically states how these funds are to be used and what the nature of these programs should look like and how they should be provided and supported to learners in Alberta, but somehow they can just magically disappear. I'm not quite certain how the members opposite are suggesting that we could just turn off these programs if we make these changes.

Furthermore, the members opposite should know that the process of streamlining learner and income supports began in 2016. It began under 2016 to streamline learner and income supports, which makes sense, which is . . .

Ms Pancholi: Are we in 2016 right now?

Mr. Nicolaides: Now, the member opposite can't help herself. I know I had sat and listened quietly and patiently to her arguments and rationale, but I can't get two seconds out until that member heckles, Madam Chair. But, you know . . .

Ms Pancholi: You didn't listen very well, did you?

Mr. Nicolaides: Again, there they go. But you know what? That's fine. I'll just continue to make my points here.

The process of integration began in 2016 of transitioning the authority between learner income supports and student assistance under one authority. That process began a long time ago, and it makes sense for that transition to occur because Albertans and learners should not have to navigate through a complex web of bureaucratic processes and forms and applications to get the benefits and services that they need for income support or for financial assistance. That's bureaucratic. That's red tape. That's exactly the premise that our government was elected to improve, to clean up red tape to make life better for Albertans. That's exactly what we're doing in this bill through these changes, but the members don't want to do that.

Making these changes in this section of the bill here will provide a more streamlined process for learners to be able to access the benefits. That's what's happening. This amendment as well – I mean, the member opposite and other members have talked about

this specific section and have raised some concerns, and their response, their amendment: strike it all out. Nothing substantive, Madam Chair. No detail, nothing substantive in terms of actual amendments to improve the bill or to strengthen it. Just strike out the whole section. I can't understand. How is this an effective amendment by any stretch of any capacity, just to strike out an entire section?

I will remind the House that in passing this amendment that they have and striking out the entire section, this is what it will mean. It will mean that learners in Alberta will continue to have to navigate through complex forms, access services through different government bureaucracies, different government departments, and continue to live through struggles and challenges of red tape. That's what their amendment wants to continue to provide. But on this side we want to remove red tape and make life easier for Albertans.

Furthermore, by making these changes as well and by finalizing the transfer of authority from the Income and Employment Supports Act to the Student Financial Assistance Act . . . [interjections]

The Acting Chair: Sorry, Minister. Hon. members, there are many opportunities to speak in Committee of the Whole. In fact, you can speak as many times as you would like. Let's try to direct our comments through the chair. Let's try to raise the level of decorum. It's been a peaceful evening up until now. I would like to keep it that way.

Minister, you have the floor.

Mr. Nicolaides: Thank you so much, Madam Chair. As I was mentioning, here's what the changes will actually mean, and here's what we're going to transition from. Again, by finalizing the transfer of authority for these programs from under the Income and Employment Supports Act to the Student Financial Assistance Act, we will be able to dramatically shift the model as well from one of income support to one of effective student financial assistance to help Albertans get the skills, training, and competency that they need in order to succeed. We will move to a model of programming that will provide greater focus on skill development, again, to help ensure that Albertans are able to access the programs that they need for career and life effectiveness.

We will move from program complexity, which I talked about a moment ago, to a more streamlined process and a more streamlined system, again, not just for learners and students and individuals accessing these benefits but, as well, for administrators who work on our postsecondary campuses to assist learners in processing these applications. They have, typical of government bureaucracy, one set of forms for the one act and one set of forms for the other act. I don't understand why we shouldn't take advantage of the opportunity to streamline those processes, provide additional flexibility and support to learners so that they can they can take advantage of the supports that are available.

Any notion that these amendments are being made so that we can shut off funding to foundational learning is just utter nonsense, Madam Chair. As I mentioned earlier, over \$95 million is provided to the government of Alberta to support foundational learning from the federal government through LMTA agreements. I don't know how, if you have an agreement in place with the federal government, you can just one day turn around and decide to not distribute the funds. I mean, you have an agreement in place. I can't understand the logic that the members opposite are using.

Again, it's just very typical. We just see an opportunity where – again, just coming back to the amendment here – rather than putting something substantive on the floor or something that will make some meaningful changes to the act, just an amendment to scrap the

whole thing, keep red tape in place, keep complexity for learners, keep complexity for administrators. I don't think that that's the way to go at all, Madam Chair.

You know, with that – I don't know. I probably have more to say. We'll see where the debate takes us the rest of the evening. I just wanted to provide my commentary as it relates to some of these really bizarre amendments that we continue to see from the members opposite and, of course, encourage all members to vote against the proposed amendment here.

Thank you.

The Acting Chair: Any other members wishing to speak to amendment A1? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. Schmidt: Thank you, Madam Chair. Let me, first of all, offer my profound disappointment with the comments that were made by the Minister of Advanced Education.

Mr. Jason Nixon: Shocking.

Mr. Schmidt: I know the minister of the environment and the Member for Red Deer-South are shocked. I am sure that their hearts will take some time to recover from the news, yes, that I'm disappointed with the minister's statements. It's amazing, Madam Chair, to hear the Minister of Advanced Education get up and say how upset he was by the comments that my friend from Edmonton-Whitemud made, because they were all wrong, and then proceed to make nothing but wrong statements about what's going on with income supports for learners. I see him shaking his head, Madam Chair, but he has not argued this matter correctly.

10:30

Now, he rightly stated that income supports for learners were transferred to the Department of Advanced Education in 2016. I happen to have been the minister at that time, and he implied that when that move was made in 2016, this was just the start of the process that's being ended here today, and that is completely false. Never at any time when I was Minister of Advanced Education did we consider phasing out income supports for learners. Never. Not once. The minister stood up and said that this was just the end of the plan that we put into place, and that is completely wrong. I don't want anybody who is paying attention to this debate to think that I ever had any intentions to phase out income support for learners, because I never did, and no one in our government intended to phase out income support for learners.

The second thing that the minister mentioned was, you know, the fact that this is eliminating red tape and that we'll just simply turn it over to student financial aid. He hasn't clearly stated what financial supports are going to be available for these learners. As we have said many times in debate, the income support for learners is guaranteed by legislation, and by passing this amendment, we will continue to guarantee that kind of income support for learners. By striking this out, by sunseting the income support for learners, he's transitioning learners who would otherwise be eligible for income support into programs that don't have a legislative requirement to support them.

Madam Chair, I hope the Minister of Advanced Education can tell me where it says in any of the acts that govern student financial assistance or student grants or any of the scholarships or bursaries that it guarantees that if you meet certain criteria, you're eligible for income support. They're not there. Those legislative requirements are nowhere to be found in any of the other pieces of legislation related to student financial aid that the minister is responsible for administering. So to say that this is simply a matter of reducing the number of forms for people who want income support is completely

ridiculous. Learners who are applying for income support won't have any forms to fill out because there will be no program for them. That's why we're proposing this amendment.

You know, the third thing that the minister complained about was – he's learning from, I guess, the less palatable members on the executive benches, of Executive Council, that he works with – in talking about federal interference in the administration of adult learning programs. Well, if the minister didn't want to accept that money from the federal government, he's completely within his rights to tell the federal government, "No; thank you" and come up with all of the provincial money himself.

Those labour mobility agreements have been in place for a really long time and have helped the province of Alberta deliver meaningful training to adult learners without depleting the treasury of the province of Alberta. I'm grateful for that. The minister should be grateful for that. All Albertans should be grateful that we have this kind of co-operative relationship with the federal government in this regard.

But that money goes to support the people who deliver the programs. The minister knows full well that none of that money goes to this kind of income support. The money that provides income support for learners comes entirely from the province of Alberta's treasury. When he's saying that he doesn't want Justin Trudeau to be interfering in the delivery of adult learning programs here, he's effectively saying that nobody should be providing income support for adult learners.

To recap, income support as it's currently structured is guaranteed by the legislation. There are clearly set out eligibility requirements where, if you meet those, you qualify for the benefit. You can engage in the approved training programs that the Ministry of Advanced Education has set out. By keeping this section in the act, we're kicking those people off the system that's there to support them and essentially throwing them to the wolves, hoping that by the good graces of the Ministry of Advanced Education some program somewhere will pick up the pieces, and they won't.

If the minister disagrees with that, if he is thinking about removing this income support, this legislative requirement to provide income support, and transferring them over to these voluntary programs that have limited budgets with no guarantee of support, then he should make that argument. Tell us why transferring them over to the system will help support learners, and I hope that he's got a better argument than that they have fewer forms to fill out, because if he doesn't like the income support for learners forms, boy, will he be surprised when he has to fill out a form for student loans.

[Mr. Milliken in the chair]

I expect better from the Minister of Advanced Education, frankly. Come and tell us why he thinks that this is a good idea. Don't make up these ridiculous arguments that what we're saying isn't true. He knows full well that what we're saying is completely true. Just own up to the fact that this is what he's doing. That tells me, Mr. Chair, that he's not particularly proud of this piece of legislation, that he can't even defend it on its own merits. He has to throw sand in the eyes of people who are trying to point out the true intent of this section of the bill.

I'm proud of the work that my friends here in the Official Opposition and I are doing to try to support learners on income supports. We need to make sure that more Albertans have the opportunity to go back to school and improve their skills and that they have the financial means to do so. I encourage all members to disregard what the Minister of Advanced Education has had to say about this matter. Listen to what my friends and I are saying about

what will happen to income supports for learners, vote in favour of this amendment, and keep the legislation intact so that learners will have the supports that they need.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

10:40

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other members wishing to join? I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-South.

Mr. Dang: Thank you, Mr. Chair. It's a pleasure to rise and speak to the amendment on Bill 80, the Red Tape Reduction Implementation Act, 2021 (No. 2). I want to thank my hon. colleague from Edmonton-Gold Bar for some of his very insightful comments that he's made tonight already. Certainly, it has been enlightening to hear him correct the record on how this Advanced Education minister has seemingly failed, I think, so many Albertans.

Mr. Chair, to be clear, if we look at this amendment and then we look at this bill and then we look at the intent of the red tape reduction ministry as well as the intent of the Red Tape Reduction Implementation Act, it becomes very clear that the government appears to be a little bit lost. The minister perhaps appears to be a little bit lost as well. This is a substantive change, right? We're talking about a change that will lead to cuts, a change that will lead to Albertans losing benefits, a change that will lead to Albertans that will no longer have services. That's the plain and simple truth. That is not the intent of the red tape reduction ministry, but it seems that the government has been unable to figure out what that intent should be, because the rest of the bill – and I think my colleague from Edmonton-Whitemud mentioned earlier that most of the bill is inoffensive. Most of the bill is, frankly, boring. That's because most of the bill is fixing up things like typos and fixing up things that should typically be in a miscellaneous statutes amendment act.

If the red tape reduction minister's whole job appears to be to bring forward miscellaneous statutes amendment acts, then that is an interesting job description for a minister. However, I think that certainly in this case, being a substantive change, it should be struck from this bill, and it would be very beneficial for Albertans for this to be struck from the bill because it would allow the Advanced Education minister, if he actually wanted this change to go forward, to come back to this House and bring it as its own bill so it could be debated on its merits. The minister could actually go and do his work, could actually go and consult with stakeholders, could actually go and have the proper engagement with Albertans and bring this back as its own substantive piece of legislation, because that is what we're talking about here.

This isn't something that should be hand-waved through. This isn't something that should be in a giant omnibus piece of legislation being introduced by a minister who has nothing to do with this advanced education system. It shouldn't be introduced as basically part of a miscellaneous statutes omnibus piece of legislation, and that is what is so offensive about this. That is what is so insulting about this to Albertans. The government is trying to underhandedly sneak through these huge changes, that are going to affect thousands of people, without even doing the work required, without even doing the consultation, without even doing the engagement that Albertans expect of any government.

Mr. Chair, it really is disappointing. They should have done their homework. Now that they're being called out, they're laughing and heckling, and that's typical of this government, right? They can't face the truth. They can't face the truth that Albertans think they're the least trustworthy government in the entire country, that Albertans believe that this Premier has the lowest trustworthiness rating in the entire country, that the Canadian Association of Journalists declared

this government the most secretive government in the entire country. They actually won an award for that. This is the type of thing that is why the government continues to have this low trustworthiness rating. This government continues to have these awards for being the most secretive government in the country. It's because they bring in these substantive changes, that should be their own bills, hidden under this red tape reduction ministry.

Again, Mr. Chair, it's very clear to me that this government doesn't know what they're doing with the red tape reduction ministry, they don't know what they're doing when they fail to engage with Albertans, and they don't know what they're doing when they're trying to cut so many Albertans off supports in secret and in the cover of darkness, and that's just so disappointing. It's so disappointing to so many Albertans. It's so disappointing to us in the opposition, and we're going to continue to stand up for that. We're going to continue to stand and fight against these measures because we know that Albertans deserve better, that Albertans expect better, and they're going to say that. They're going to say that at the polls. They're going to say that in our inboxes up until then.

But, Mr. Chair, at this time I'd like to adjourn debate.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Bill 87
Electoral Divisions (Calgary-Bhullar-McCall)
Amendment Act, 2021

The Deputy Chair: Are there any members looking to join debate?

Seeing none, I am prepared to ask the question.

[The clauses of Bill 87 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

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

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Deputy Chair: Any opposed? Carried.

I honestly believe that I see the hon. Minister of Environment and Parks has risen.

Mr. Jason Nixon: Well, thank you, Mr. Chair. You are correct. I move to rise and report Bill 87 and progress on 79 and 80.

[Motion carried]

[Mr. Milliken in the chair]

The Acting Speaker: I see the hon. Member for Calgary-East has risen.

Mr. Singh: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Committee of the Whole has had under consideration certain bills. The committee reports the following bill: Bill 87. The committee reports progress on the following bills: Bill 79 and Bill 80. I wish to table copies of all amendments considered by Committee of the Whole on this date for the official records of the Assembly.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

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

Hon. Members: Aye.

The Acting Speaker: Any opposed, please say no. That is carried and so ordered.

Government Motions

(continued)

Oil and Gas Pipeline Opposition

104. Mr. Jason Nixon moved:

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly

1. condemn David Suzuki's comments on pipelines as reported by the *National Post*,
2. condemn any comments made calling for the intentional destruction of energy infrastructure, and
3. unequivocally condemn incitements of violent eco terrorism.

Mr. Turton moved that Government Motion 104 be amended by (a) striking out "and" at the end of section 2 and (b) adding the following immediately after section 3:

4. express solidarity with the 20 First Nations band councils and their communities situated along the approved route of the Coastal GasLink pipeline project, including those representing Wet'suwet'en people, in their negotiations for project agreements that would support those communities,
5. express its support for the Coastal GasLink pipeline project and the LNG Canada project, and
6. express its opposition to illegal activities that seek to disrupt the construction of the Coastal GasLink pipeline project.

[Adjourned debate on the amendment November 30: Mr. Turton]

The Acting Speaker: I see the hon. Associate Minister of Natural Gas and Electricity has risen. We are on amendment A1 as well for everybody's benefit.

Mr. Nally: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to speak in support of Motion 104. The illegal blockade along the Coastal GasLink pipeline in B.C., jeopardizing the safety and livelihoods of hundreds of workers, has been endorsed by the Alberta NDP. Not only are these blockades putting the safety of hard-working people at risk; they also show a complete lack of respect and consideration for the decision made by all 20 First Nation governments along the route. These 20 nations have all democratically elected leaders to represent their interests, and all 20 of those chiefs indisputably support the Coastal GasLink pipeline and the generational prosperity that it will bring to their people. All 20 have now had their authority, power, and knowledge of their land and people disrespected by the NDP.

Thankfully, this government does not agree with the members opposite. We agree with democracy and due process. Alberta government supports the unanimous decision made by the elected chiefs. In this government we know that these elected chiefs know what is best for their nations. As their people chose them to lead, we will work to ensure their decisions are respected. It is also necessary to point out that several of the 20 elected chiefs are women, women fighting for the well-being and economic prosperity of their people and standing against those who are trying to dismiss their authority. I want to send the message loud and clear to these chiefs that we support them, that we respect their authority, and that we will do our part to ensure that their choice on the Coastal GasLink project is upheld.

10:50

That is what government supports: equal opportunity for people all across Canada to provide for their families and work to support the life they want to live. Indigenous people are employed in the oil and gas industry at twice the rate of any other industry in Canada,

7 per cent compared to 3 per cent, and this number is even higher when you just look at Alberta and B.C. alone. These jobs have an average income of \$144,000 a year, mortgage-paying jobs, Mr. Speaker. We want to see every inch of this opportunity seized by these communities because that is what we are all about in Alberta: lifting up the people around us and sharing our prosperity. This government wants to share the wealth of the western Canadian basin's abundant natural resources with the world and with the First Nations along the Coastal GasLink route.

I would like to know why the NDP does not and instead chooses to side with Extinction Rebellion. By siding with the foreign-funded activists and the radical left, the NDP is playing a direct role in seeing jobs and economic opportunities be stolen from thousands of Indigenous people. What do the members opposite have to say to the everyday men and women who just want to feed their families or buy a house or send their kids to college? What do the members opposite have to say to the Indigenous people who see this project as an opportunity for their communities to share in the prosperity that energy brings? What do the members opposite have to say to the 20 elected chiefs who chose to support the project for the benefit of their people? Mr. Speaker, the NDP are all looking at their shoes right now. They can't even look me in the eye because they're embarrassed. Well, I've got their attention now, but they shouldn't be looking at me. They should be looking at that camera right there and apologizing to Indigenous people for their disrespect.

The fact is that the NDP support First Nations as long as it aligns with their socialist and ideological agenda, as long as it lines up with their identity politics. When a chance arises for the NDP to show that they support economic reconciliation with Indigenous communities, what do they do? Well, I'll tell you what the NDP does, Mr. Speaker. They turtle. That's right. They turtle. They crawl back up into their shell, and they hide. Why? At the end of the day they side with the foreign-funded organizations and leftist extremists. They side with the likes of David Suzuki. They are so desperate to show the world how virtuous they are that they side with anti-Alberta entities all while ignoring the ESG efforts and the social investments made by the Alberta energy sector, work they should be incredibly proud of, as this government is.

If they truly cared about the hard-working and highly skilled people in the energy sector, they would acknowledge the authority and expertise of the 20 elected chiefs who met with TC Energy to make an informed decision for their people. TC Energy put in the work to earn the support of every single one of these leaders, Mr. Speaker. Since the Coastal GasLink project was announced in June of 2012, they had over 15,000 interactions and engagements with Indigenous groups. Fifteen thousand. I can't help but wonder how many interactions the Alberta NDP had before they chose to disregard the authority of 20 elected leaders, how many hours they spent speaking with the impacted communities or proposing an alternative path for them to get such a massive economic opportunity for their people. My guess is that they didn't speak to any of the First Nations, but I know who they did speak with: Extinction Rebellion.

The Coastal GasLink project would mean thousands of jobs, both here in Alberta and for our neighbours in B.C. It would mean millions of dollars in annual tax revenues for local communities, First Nations to build schools, roads, and hospitals. It means local spending and demand for construction, maintenance equipment, food services, and accommodation. Above all else, it means economic reconciliation. To date TC and Coastal GasLink have awarded \$825 million in contracts to Indigenous and local businesses. There has been a billion dollars in employment and contract opportunities for local and Indigenous communities.

TC and Coastal GasLink have also invested in education and training for local and Indigenous communities focused on the environment, safety, and community. Since 2012 they've spent over 8 and a half million dollars in community investments and sponsorships in northern B.C. Since 2014 TC has sponsored over 850 classroom seats, scholarships, and bursaries for B.C. students to invest in a skilled workforce for not just the Coastal GasLink but future projects as well, Mr. Speaker. To date more than one-third of the work completed on the project has been conducted by Indigenous workers. As of January 2020 more than 350 Indigenous men and women are working on the project. These numbers speak for themselves. As the Premier put it a few weeks ago, helping First Nations become not just participants but owners of major resource projects, to move their people from poverty to prosperity is the great moral cause of our time.

Our government will achieve that by working with First Nations, starting with the ones right here in Alberta. In 2019 we established the Alberta Indigenous Opportunities Corporation to create loan guarantees that support Indigenous co-ownership and financial participation in major resource development. The Alberta Indigenous Opportunities Corporation has backed three major Indigenous investments to date, involving 10 nations and five Métis communities. These three projects will create thousands of jobs and hundreds of millions of dollars in investment projects.

I ask you, Mr. Speaker: aside from tone-deaf virtue signalling and empty platitudes, what has the NDP done for First Nations in this province? Alberta is on the cusp of one of the greatest economic recoveries that our province has ever seen, and we are ready and willing to share that opportunity with our fellow Canadians and with First Nations. That is reconciliation, giving equal opportunity for Indigenous people to benefit from our shared resources and respecting the authority of the elected chiefs. Unlike the members opposite, we are not touting empty platitudes that do nothing to actually help everyday men and women in these communities. This is a historic opportunity for these First Nations, a chance for massive economic gain that can improve their communities and support their people for generations, all of this while supporting Alberta's responsible energy sector and its dedicated and skilled workforce.

The very idea, Mr. Speaker, that a member of this House could so actively work against the interests of 20 elected chiefs, quite frankly, is nothing less than shameful. This government supports the elected chiefs. This government supports responsible energy development. This government supports Alberta energy and Coastal GasLink.

I thank you for your time, Mr. Speaker, and I move to adjourn debate.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Government Bills and Orders

Second Reading

(continued)

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.

[Debate adjourned on the amendment December 1: Ms Hoffman speaking]

The Acting Speaker: Hon. members, are there any members looking to join debate on RA1?

[Motion on amendment RA1 lost]

The Acting Speaker: Back to the main bill. I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-South has risen.

Mr. Dang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise and speak to Bill 81, a bill, I think, that makes elections much less fair in Alberta. As the Official Opposition critic for democracy and ethics I think it is incumbent upon all of us to speak out against the changes to the election laws proposed because it simply does the opposite of what this minister is saying. It creates a system that allows large donors to get involved and unduly and unfairly influence provincial parties in provincial elections. To be very clear, Bill 81 will absolutely open the floodgates to big money. It will allow basically illegal fund raising by removing any limits on donations to nomination contests and then funnel those contributions into party coffers.

11:00

Mr. Speaker, it is absolutely shameful that we would see this type of legislation in this place. It is absolutely shameful that the government would try to manipulate party processes in this way and would try to funnel big money back into politics in this way. It is simply this government abusing their power, rewriting election laws to allow big donors to dump cash into parties. It's extremely cynical. It's a huge step back for democracy in our province. Frankly, it would allow the leader, the Premier in this case, to try and undermine the democratic system in his own party and in the government's own party. It would allow the government to try and manipulate nomination contests through these large donations since the cap would be completely removed.

For a number of reasons, which I'll get into in a moment, Mr. Speaker, I'd like to move an amendment at this time.

Uh-oh, I missed it by one minute.

The Acting Speaker: You happen to just be at that magical hour where I think there's a – it's 11 o'clock.

Mr. Dang: Maybe I'll continue while I wait for . . .

The Acting Speaker: You know what? I will allow a little bit of leeway. How about we start by having you read it into the record?

Mr. Dang: Sure. I'll read it into the record, and then hopefully I'll have some help in a minute or two here.

I would move on behalf of my colleague the Member for Edmonton-Glenora 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 but that it be read a second time this day six months hence."

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

That will be referred to as HA1. It is a hoist amendment, by my understanding from you reading it into the record. If the hon. member could – I'll sit down and allow this so that it can come to the table.

Thank you, hon. member. As mentioned, this will be referred to as HA1, or honestly HA will do as well because there can be only one of them. Hon. member, you've already read it into the record, which I thank you for. There will be copies at the tables should

anybody want to grab one there by the entrances. As well, if you'd like a copy, please raise your hand, and one will be delivered.

If the hon. member could please continue, with about 11 minutes and 20 seconds should he take it.

Mr. Dang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to speak to this hoist amendment. I think that certainly this is the opportunity for the government to stop and correct their horrible mistake. Frankly, this bill is going to have long-lasting impacts on our democratic process. Like I have already mentioned, it's rife with issues. It allows for this undue influence on our nomination contests and undue influence and impact on our donation system, where we can have potentially tens if not hundreds of thousands of dollars moving through nomination contests.

On top of that, it allows for the buying of votes on behalf of others. It allows for and creates a massive loophole that allows somebody to buy memberships on behalf of another individual, something that would perhaps in, let's say, a leadership review allow an individual to purchase votes, I guess, for their review, maybe a review that would happen in the spring of next year. That would be something that I think would be an unfair action in our democratic process. Mr. Speaker, it effectively changes these rules in a way that seems to benefit this government and particularly this Premier, right? We're talking about a bill that is frankly abusing the authority of this Legislature, abusing a majority of the government to try and rewrite the rules right before what may be a very influential vote in the spring of next year.

Mr. Speaker, it doesn't stop there. It sets up that any organization, any individual who is not already a political party – somebody who decides to advertise against a party, a member, or a leader is now prohibited from participating in political advertising. It essentially muzzles anybody who wants to be a critic of the government, right?

We're looking at a system that is going to have calculated changes. We're looking at a bill that is bringing in these very specific, targeted measures to try and rewrite our election laws right before this Premier's leadership review. That's, frankly, where we're at in this province. That's, frankly, what this government is doing, and it's something that I think is absolutely shameful.

Anybody who's watching right now, anybody who is watching in Alberta and concerned about the democratic process, concerned about ethics, concerned about accountability in this province should be extraordinarily concerned. Anybody who's a member of the UCP should be extraordinarily concerned. Anybody who's a member of any political party should be extraordinarily concerned. Nobody was consulted on these changes. Nobody asked for this. Indeed, what we're going to see is undue influence being put in through the leader's office, through the Premier's office, into political parties.

Mr. Speaker, we've been talking about this for many, many hours now in this place over many, many days, and I think it's become very clear that this government is more interested in obfuscating. This government is more interested in trying to pivot to speaking points instead of actually talking about what the implications of this bill will be, instead of actually talking about how this bill will affect party operations, will affect democracy in this province, will affect elections in this province.

We know, Mr. Speaker, that when we change elections statutes, when we talk about the actual process of elections, when we do these types of bills, we are writing laws that are going to impact what the next election looks like. Of course, I'm not, but if I were a member of the least trustworthy government in the entire country, if I was a member of the most secretive government in the entire country, which happens to be the UCP government that is sitting across from me today, which happens to be the members of the front

bench and the Premier, who are sitting across from me today – maybe they are concerned about how election laws are going to impact them, and maybe they would be interested in rewriting the rules to their benefit.

Mr. Speaker, I think that's a bad thing. I think it's a bad thing when politicians try to change the game to their benefit, when they try to change the rules so that they're going to have a substantial benefit in the next election, whether that's in two years or after a spring leadership race. I think it's a bad thing when politicians have this undue influence brought in through one Premier's office.

Mr. Speaker, I think that we have the opportunity today through this hoist amendment to say: let's take a step back; let's actually think about the implications. We're at least two years away or one and a half years away from the legislated election period. Let's take a step back. If we want to bring back some of these changes, we can do that. We can do that in six months after we review this legislation, after we actually sit down and think about this legislation, and this hoist would give us the opportunity to do that, right? This would give us the opportunity to actually think about it.

It is extraordinarily dangerous to set a precedent in this place that any government that is flailing in the polls, any government that is flailing and has lost direction and lost the support of many of its members would be able to simply change the rules so that they could have unlimited donations come into their party, that they could suddenly buy memberships on behalf of their leader, that they could suddenly try and change all of these rules to hold on to power. I think it's a terrible precedent to set in this place, and it's terrible for democracy in our province. It's terrible for anybody who cares about the function of this Legislature and who cares about the function of elections.

Mr. Speaker, these are changes that nobody asked for, right? These are changes that are surprising. If we look at the memorandum issued by Elections Alberta just last week, it states things like that you are unable to purchase memberships on behalf of individuals or are unable to pay administrative functions on behalf of other individuals. We then saw reporting or heard reporting that was happening at the UCP AGM, and now we see in Bill 81, well, that individuals are allowed to purchase memberships on behalf of other individuals. That was something which the elections office, Elections Alberta, had just issued a memorandum about last week, saying that would have been against the rules.

We're seeing these changes of what was reported to have happened at the AGM. We see a response from Elections Alberta saying that that would have been illegal, and then in the same week we see a bill that now makes it legal, right? What is happening here? We're seeing changes that are actually actively being already broken, it seems like. Laws, it already seems like, may not have been followed, and now we're going to remove those restrictions that would have been broken or are being broken.

11:10

It is really clear to Albertans, I believe, that this is a subverting of our democratic process, that this is clearly and transparently an attempt to undermine the democratic process. I think Albertans will see very clearly that this is a Premier's office that is floundering, a Premier's office that is desperately trying to cling to power, desperately trying to maintain control of the party. These are the types of changes that you would expect from a Premier trying to do these things, right? These are the types of changes that you would expect when you see these changes coming forward.

Mr. Speaker, I mean, I wish I could say that I was surprised. I wish I could say that I was disappointed. But, frankly, it's something that I think the Premier has been signalling for a long time. We know that the Premier's leadership campaign continues to

be under RCMP investigation for fraud, for bribery, for corruption. We know members in this place have actually been fined upwards of \$30,000 in relation to fraud, bribery, and corruption, and we know that indeed members of this place even had their businesses raided in relation to voter fraud, right?

When we see this pattern of behaviour from the government caucus, when we see this pattern of behaviour from the party the Premier is the leader of, when we see this pattern of behaviour, we know that we're going to – now we see these election changes that remove many of the safeguards that were in place, that remove so many of the safeguards that would prevent this subverting of the democratic process, the rules that would have prevented this type of work. Then we saw the government, of course, right after the election in 2019 fire the Election Commissioner, right?

Even if the rules are in place, the government does not think that's a big deal, and that's what I'm very concerned about. I'm very concerned that even when there are rules, the government doesn't care about them, and now that the rules are being removed, they'll care about them even less, right? We're talking about a system that really needs to be – we really need to think about putting the brakes on this. We really need to say: are these changes actually fair? Are these changes actually improving democracy in our province? Are these changes actually something that anybody was interested in? Spoiler alert, Mr. Speaker: of course, they're not.

We had a democratic review committee propose some changes. We had Elections Alberta propose some changes. These substantive things around donations, these substantive things around memberships, these substantive things around organizations getting involved in political advertising were not recommended by the democratic review committee, were not recommended by Elections Alberta, were not recommended during consultations. So when we look at this, it's very clear that these loopholes are being created by the government for exploitation, right? It's very clear that this is something that's untoward that's going on. Now we see a government trying to create more and more loopholes as they continue to hold the least trustworthy rating in the entire country, as they continue to be the least popular government in the entire country.

Mr. Speaker, I think Albertans are going to see right through it. I think Albertans can see very clearly what is happening here. Albertans can see very clearly that this government is not serious about protecting democracy, is not serious about accountability, and continues to be investigated by so many different organizations, including Elections Alberta, including the RCMP, and we're going to see that continue into the future. We know that this government has many problems in regard to their leadership. We know that this government has many problems in regard to the organization of that leadership. I think that this bill only shows Albertans more, right?

Albertans are watching. Albertans are listening. Let me be very clear, Mr. Speaker. Albertans can see through this. There is no hiding from this. There is no hiding from the investigations. There is no hiding from the accountability. Albertans will see what is going on. Albertans will understand that this government is trying to do something untoward and trying to subvert our democratic process. They will understand that this government continues to be investigated for fraud, for bribery, for corruption, and voter fraud.

It is abundantly clear to everybody in this Chamber what is happening here, and I encourage every member to vote in favour of this hoist.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Just prior to seeing the next member who has indicated that they would like to speak, I just want to thank the hon. Member for

Edmonton-South for bringing this hoist amendment HA1 on behalf of the Member for Edmonton-Glenora. I wasn't sure if that was on the record, so I just wanted to clear that up.

I see the hon. Government House Leader has risen to debate on HA1.

Mr. Jason Nixon: Correct. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise on the hoist amendment. Well, that was interesting to listen to that tirade there. Let's talk about transparency, about what's taking place in the Assembly. There are a lot of members who would not have been here in the 29th Legislature, that watched, actually, what the former New Democratic government did as they attacked our democracy and our legislative system over and over. In fact, they would bring so many democratic reform bills to this Chamber that every session of the 29th Legislature the NDP passed a piece of legislation, as far as I'm aware. There may have been one that maybe they did not, but it was certainly almost all. They brought a democratic reform bill to this House with the sole purpose of trying to destroy the conservative movement and often to attack the volunteers that make our political system work.

There is a clear difference between the New Democratic Party and the free-enterprise parties inside our province. One is that we do have a grassroots system in our party. I'm proud of that. It's based often on local volunteers, who do everything from the books – your local CFO would do that – to people that are out door-knocking to our democratic nomination process, something the NDP does not have. They appoint their candidates. They don't have anything like that. And they also don't fund raise locally. It's all done by the central party, something kind of common with the socialist movement. That's fine. That's how they structure their party, but they often would bring legislation to directly try to attack and impact those volunteers across the province.

The number one reason, though, why they kept bringing those democratic reform bills to this Assembly, Mr. Speaker. [interjections] No. We're going to talk about Gil McGowan in a minute, hon. members, because that is the point of this bill. But the number one reason why the NDP always tried to change the democracy laws inside our province was to stop the merger of the free-enterprise parties inside this province. You want to talk about abuse of power? They would bring legislation actually into this Chamber and try to stop the Wildrose Party and the PC Party from merging because they knew it ultimately would be their demise, and it was their demise. They actually were willing to go that far. That member was part of that government that did that each and every time inside this Chamber. It's just, frankly, comical now to watch them rise and forget about the fact that repeatedly they tried to use this Chamber to the benefit of them politically and to try to stop their political opponents.

Now, you have to ask yourself, though, why we have a hoist amendment happening from the NDP on second reading right now. A hoist amendment, to be clear, will take this bill, will remove it from the Chamber. It will mean, essentially, that the bill will die. The bill will no longer be here. Finished. Now, why would the NDP do that and not go to Committee of the Whole and try to change the bill in a way that they think would make the legislation better? I don't know. Maybe they would have a good amendment. I haven't seen one come from the NDP in a long time, but it's possible. It would seem to me that if you truly want to strengthen the bill, you would go to Committee of the Whole. In fact, we listened to a few of the members today in Committee of the Whole go on at length that they believed it was their job to bring amendments and strengthen legislation. I do actually agree that that is their job. I just wish they'd bring good amendments and actually spend some time

thinking about it instead of ridiculous amendments. But that would be the role.

Why would they want to hoist and kill it? Because at the end of the day they're scared. Why are they scared? Because the core of this legislation, while there may be some stuff that the Chamber will decide later to change to strengthen the legislation – I look forward to that debate in Committee, where it should happen – is to fulfill a platform commitment. The hon. member, the Deputy Opposition House Leader, went on at length that nobody asked for this. Well, that's not true. It was asked for by Albertans, committed to by the United Conservative Party, that if we were government, we would be closing the AFL loophole by prohibiting groups formally affiliated with political parties from running PACs. That's the big part of this bill.

If we were to support a hoist amendment to kill the bill, we would be essentially breaking the promise that we made to Albertans to stop the AFL loophole. We certainly would not be listening to the people that asked us to come and make sure that happened. That's very important to lots of people. I heard lots about it in the last election. I've heard about it a lot recently, lots of correspondence on it asking us to continue with that direction and deal with the AFL loophole once and for all. I do not support the hoist amendment because what that will mean is that the AFL loophole can stay open, which is what that hon. member wants.

You have to remember that the AFL is affiliated with the New Democratic Party. That's a fact. They are right there. You can't argue with it. They're there. They can't even deny it. They know it. Gil McGowan has a seat on their board and has to. He's their boss, Mr. Speaker. He's their boss.

11:20

I think I've said this before in the Chamber, but I got to be an observer at an NDP convention a couple of years ago. You know, we let the NDP come and observe our convention. We do it a little different. We reserve a pass, and they can come to the bar and have a drink and go to speeches and see what's going on. When you're a Conservative and you go to observe the NDP convention, it's a little different. They put you in the middle of the room with a rope all around you, and you have to sit there the entire time. It was a new experience for me. I had never been to a socialist party convention. I've never seen so much union activity from big union bosses. They were all over the floor. They were definitely in control. There was no doubt about it. You could see where they were making the decisions and organizing votes, and that's how it worked there.

In our party what would happen is that – as we all know, we just had a great convention a couple of weekends ago and watched a very fulsome debate on the floor of the convention talking about policy, where grassroots members of our party voted to give feedback to the party on different policies that we want to proceed, voted for governance measures and bylaw measures in our party. That's how we do it.

They don't do it that way. They've got the union delegates who tell the leader of the party and the leadership what to do. One of the big parts of that, of course, is the AFL, the Alberta Federation of Labour, who is legally associated with the NDP. With this law passed, Mr. Speaker, they won't be able to give a back door for big money in politics to the New Democratic Party, which is what's happening right now, where they can spend millions of dollars trying to influence campaigns, often with misinformation and often directly attacking the things that matter to Albertans, like the oil and gas industry, and other things that help advance the socialist ideology that the NDP want to advance inside this province.

So while I think it's important when we go into places like Committee of the Whole to always strengthen legislation – and I

actually think on this legislation, I expect that I'm probably going to see from some of my government colleagues some strong amendments on other areas where we can strengthen this bill. But what I can tell you is that I suspect – and I don't want to speak for all of the government colleagues in the room – that none of them are going to vote to kill a bill that's going to allow the AFL loophole to stay open, Mr. Speaker. We will fulfill our platform commitment to Albertans.

The other thing, Mr. Speaker. We will never, ever go down the road that the New Democratic Party has in their time in power in this province, which was to directly manipulate the election system to try to keep their party in power. They did it. They did it. I have lots of *Hansard* that you can go check in the 29th Legislature, when I sat on that side of the aisle, where we constructively went through in great detail showing how they did it.

They went out of their way to mess with democracy to stop the merger of the conservative movement inside the province to try to keep themselves over here. That's why they did it, and that's why you see them stand up in the Chamber and say ridiculous accusations about people and make up fake things constantly, Mr. Speaker. You know what? Partially they actually think it's true because that's what they did. When you see them talking like that, it's a reflection that they actually think that that's what a party in power would do because that's what they did, but that's not what we're doing.

We will continue to protect democracy. We will continue to fulfill the promise that we made to Albertans to stop their big union bosses from having control of what happens inside our province, to stop their big union bosses from manipulating Albertans and spending millions of dollars of union members' money on stuff that they don't want to have it spent on, to try to manipulate elections to advance their socialist ideology and continue to damage the great province of Alberta. We won't let that happen, Mr. Speaker, and I urge every member to vote down this ridiculous amendment and make sure that we can wreck Gil McGowan's Christmas and close the AFL loophole once and for all.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you.

Hon. members looking to join on this hoist? I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-Whitemud.

Ms Pancholi: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise. I actually have not had the opportunity yet to speak to Bill 81, the Election Statutes Amendment Act, 2021 (No. 2), so I look forward to this opportunity to do so now and in particular to speak in support of the hoist amendment that has been brought forward by the Member for Edmonton-South on behalf of the Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

You know, Mr. Speaker, I had the opportunity as a member of this Legislature to sit on the Select Special Democratic Accountability Committee, which was comprised of members from both sides of the House. During that process we looked at a number of potential changes to the Election Act, the Election Finances and Contributions Disclosure Act. We looked at all of those pieces. We brought in experts. We brought in experts from, actually, around the world. We had experts from England and from the United States and from Canada here to speak about some of the proposed changes. We heard from the Chief Electoral Officer. We also, of course, heard from members of the public on various pieces of changes to election statutes.

What was interesting, Mr. Speaker, is that it was a very intense committee experience. We had many meetings. We read a lot of materials. We focused on presenting some recommendations, very detailed. But what's remarkable is that what we're seeing before us

now was not even discussed at that committee. There were a number of changes that, yes, the members of the opposition even went on that committee and did not support, and they came forward in legislation last year and earlier this year, which we, you know, had some concerns with. We proposed amendments and had recommendations and all of that.

Interestingly enough, we had this entire exercise within this Legislature of having this committee to go through and talk about proposed changes to elections laws in this province, yet not once was it suggested at any time that, for example, there would be the contribution limit for donations that would not apply to nomination contests. That never came up. That would have been a fantastic opportunity to discuss this and then to see what the rationale was for it, what the basis, what the evidence suggests. So the very fact that that never was brought up by the government members, who clearly had some clear direction that they wanted to go in during that committee, came forward with a very clear mandate, and it was evident which way they wanted to go on certain things but never once brought up this idea of having no contribution limits for nomination contests. So forgive Albertans and myself, as a member who was on that committee, for now being deeply suspicious as to the reason why this is now coming forward despite ample opportunity to discuss it in that forum. You know, I think we know the reasons why.

In fact, one of the experts, Mr. Speaker, who came and provided some insight and input on to that committee was Dr. Lisa Young, who is a professor of political science at the University of Calgary. She spoke about a number of different suggestions. What was really evident from a lot of the information she provided to the committee was how clearly she was focused on, which is something that I believe we should all be focused on, about the fairness and equity of the democratic process and ensuring that all people have access to not only participate by running for office but that we're encouraging greater diversity and equity in candidates. I mean, that's really what should be an objective of all the members of this Chamber. She spoke very passionately about that on a number of topics, but I certainly appreciated Dr. Young's focus on that issue, yet we see now that this is a bill before us, Bill 81, that actually would profoundly make the process much more unfair and lean more heavily towards those individuals who can get a lot of money and have big pockets.

I see the Associate Minister of Status of Women is shaking her head, and I'm just confused by that. It appears that she has not actually perhaps read the bill, but the bill clearly states on page 120, section 5(23)(a) of the bill – and I know I tend to get a lot of people worked up when I read from the legislation. [interjection] Nope. It does indicate here that it is repealing subsection 1(d) of section 17 of the act, which is the section which allows for the limit on contributions, the annual limit, to apply to registered nomination contestants. This is deleted by this act, and Dr. Young, an expert, a political scientist expert, on this issue, spoke out about this. She said: what does it mean to remove the contribution limit from nomination contestants? As she said, you know, quote: this absolutely creates a back door to solicit contributions above the minimum and then transfer them into the campaign. This would effectively circumvent the limit on donations to the campaign of a party's nominated candidate. Quote from Dr. Young: it makes it meaningless to say that you can only give about \$4,000 to a candidate who is running for election if you can give an unlimited amount to that candidate in the nomination and then they transfer that over to the election.

11:30

If this is an unintended loophole, I look forward to not only the government members supporting this amendment to hoist this so

that we can have that debate and discussion about how to improve this bill. It's clear that the experts, who understand this legislation very clearly, believe that this has created a loophole. I want to talk a little bit about what that kind of a loophole – actually, it's not a loophole because it's intended; we have no evidence to suggest otherwise – means.

Now, I know that a number of members in this Assembly – myself and the Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood, for example – are very adamant and active supporters of getting more women involved in politics but also getting gender-diverse and racialized and Indigenous and disabled candidates to run. When we allow big money back into elections, we are effectively shutting the door on those candidates.

Now, I know that the Premier of this province doesn't believe that women are, quote, as good at tactical politics as men are. That is a quote from the Premier, and I imagine a number of the members on the government side are deeply offended by that statement since many of them are here today in this House. Apparently, the Premier doesn't believe they're as good at politics as some of their male colleagues, but I believe they are.

We do know, from the evidence and the facts, that women candidates, gender-diverse candidates, disabled candidates, all kinds of diverse candidates, may have more challenges to raise money because they are often not as connected to those with deep pockets. Therefore, it absolutely can be a barrier to women, the issue of fundraising. I would be shocked if any members on the other side disagreed with that because it's actually supported by fact and evidence, and I'd be happy to table later on some of the research that supports that. But it's also common sense. We know that.

Certainly, there are challenges, and one of them is the deep pockets of more established candidates. This process would actually tip their hands in their favour profoundly. I mean, when you look at the changes of lifting any contribution limits in nomination contests, it's really going to be the candidate who can raise the most money. You can get a lot of money, far more than the current limit of \$4,232 or \$4,223. I can never remember.

Ms Phillips: Forty-two.

Ms Pancholi: Forty-two. There we go. Thank you to the Member Lethbridge-West.

Those candidates, those nomination candidates, can basically have an unlimited amount of funding to run in a campaign. And not only that, but you combine that with another one of the changes in Bill 81, which actually allows for another person to purchase memberships on behalf of an individual. What that effectively means – just let me play out a scenario here. Maybe you've heard this scenario already. It means that a person could buy 420 memberships for various people and just get them to show up. Somebody who's got the money could easily do that, could buy 420 memberships on behalf of other people, get them to vote in a nomination contest. Then that person who's bought all of those memberships can contribute to the nomination contest because their annual limit doesn't apply to nomination contests.

These are absurd results, Mr. Speaker, and they are results that clearly must be intended by this government, but they were not brought forward when we actually had a fulsome consultation and discussion as a committee of this Legislature on proposed changes to the Election Finances and Contributions Disclosure Act and to the Election Act. None of this was discussed.

Therefore, I have to stand in complete support of my colleague's amendment to hoist this bill. This is profoundly undemocratic. It is bringing big money back into politics because that nomination contest, well, can raise as much money as they want. As much

money as they want to. Guess what? When that contest is over, where does that money go? It goes back to the party. It goes maybe to that candidate's election campaign. Nothing in this bill prevents that from happening. In fact, it seems to be the deliberate outcome of the changes in this bill. It's meant to do that.

We should all be concerned about it because there is nothing in this bill that says what happens to those funds after that nomination contest is over. I actually think that several members of the government caucus should be worried about it because I suspect that many of you will be facing contested nominations in the next election.

Member Irwin: Will there be people wanting to run for that party, though?

Ms Pancholi: I'm not sure. It'll be unclear, you know.

It's also, you know, not clear how well they'll be able to raise funds, but it does mean that even in nomination contests many of the current sitting UCP MLAs may . . . [interjection] Oh, I see the Member for Edmonton-South has risen.

Mr. Dang: Thank you. I know some of the members opposite are a little bit confused, a little bit unclear on what their own bill is going to do. I've heard some heckles to that regard. They don't think it's going to allow memberships to be purchased on behalf of. So maybe I'll just help out my friend here a little bit. If they'd just flip to page 123 in Bill 81, they'll see under (26) that section 25 is amended in clause (c) by adding the following after subsection (1):

(2) An annual membership fee paid by a person on behalf of another person for that person's membership in a political party or in a constituency association of that party, or in both, is a contribution by the person who paid the fee for the purposes of this Act.

I know that my hon. friend has been doing quite a great job of explaining the flaws in this bill, but for every government member who is confused about where the facts are coming from, just read the bill. It's on page 123 for this one in particular. We pointed out the nomination one. If you want, just send me an e-mail or text me. I'm happy to point out exactly where in your own legislation these changes are. This is stuff that is simple facts.

Ms Pancholi: Well, thank you to the Member for Edmonton-South. I appreciate that. Now, I actually have that page in the bill. Not to use it as a prop, Mr. Speaker, but I have that page in the bill tabbed because I have read that section.

I realize that this is actually one of the few bills that this government has brought forward that is this big. Normally we just get two-page bills that don't do much of anything. But, then, you always have to be a little bit alert when the UCP brings forward a big one because they try to bury things in there, and clearly they've even buried them from their own members, who are not aware that, yes, Bill 81 now allows another person to purchase a membership on behalf of other people.

I continue to see the Associate Minister of Status of Women shake her head. I don't know how much clearer it can be than that it's in writing in the bill that her government presented. You would think that a member of cabinet would read the legislation that's brought before them. But it is right there. It is right there, Mr. Speaker. I'm simply shocked that the Associate Minister of Status of Women is acknowledging that she doesn't read the legislation that comes before her.

It's right there, as is the section that removes nomination contestants from the annual contribution limit. The scenario I just laid out, Mr. Speaker, is actually completely factual and completely possible because that is what this bill will allow.

So if we are truly – well, I know that on this side of the House we are truly committed to not opening the floodgates for dark money, but we know that that seems to be the calling card of this government. [interjections] Oh, I'm glad to see that the Associate Minister of Status of Women has a sense of humour. I'm glad to see that. I'm glad to see that. I really am. She should have a good lighthearted laugh before she goes and reads the bill that she hasn't read.

In any event, Mr. Speaker, this government seems intent on undermining democracy in every way. [interjections]

The Acting Speaker: I hesitate to interrupt the hon. member. However, I just want to reiterate for all those members in here that the only member with the call at this time is the hon. Member for Edmonton-Whitemud.

Ms Pancholi: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate that.

To the extent that this bill opens the floodgates for lots of money to flood into nomination contests, that it would allow individuals to purchase memberships for other people, and for the reason that we did not ever – ever – discuss this in a committee that was struck for the very purpose of looking at changes to elections law, of looking at changes to the election contributions act, that this was never brought up when we had the opportunity to discuss these issues, to run them by experts like Dr. Lisa Young, who was at that committee and provided remarkable insight, this goes to show that this bill must not be heard right now.

There should be a hoist, Mr. Speaker. This is an undemocratic piece of legislation that's undermining our system and that I think Albertans have a right to hear about and know about before this government tries to ram it through this Legislature. For that reason, I hope all members will take the time to read the bill and to also consider whether or not this is truly the message they want to send Albertans about democracy and vote in favour of this amendment.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

11:40

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

We are on HA1. I see the hon. Associate Minister of Status of Women has risen.

Ms Issik: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. You know, I find it a little rich that the opposite members want to give this side of the House advice or lecture us on how nominations ought to be run. They come from a party who scarcely has nominations. They claim they have nominations. I'll tell you that the Member for Edmonton-Glenora the other day . . . [interjections]

The Acting Speaker: I hesitate to interrupt the hon. associate minister. However, when the previous member was speaking, I think we all remember that I made a point of telling the whole House that it was the previous member who was the only person with the call, because I felt like it was becoming difficult to hear the hon. member. I am now faced with the exact same scenario, only in reverse, so I would ask that all members realize that the only person with the call at this time is the hon. Associate Minister of Status of Women.

Ms Issik: Mr. Speaker, thank you for that. As I said, the Member for Edmonton-Glenora the other night indicated that she had just been through a nomination process, so I looked it up, and I'll tell you that I found the nomination notice. The nomination was held on Zoom, and she was the only candidate. I'll tell you what, though. I know that they do have contested nominations. I know that they have contested nominations because in my own riding for the last

election there was a contested nomination where the former Member for Calgary-Glenmore, who sat with that party in government, was contested, basically piled on by members of her own party, with cabinet ministers out there working against their own member. They had a contested nomination, for sure. I think there were about 52 votes cast at that nomination. There were three cabinet ministers there, though, and none of them were the candidate in that riding.

I'm just going to say that the members opposite probably have less experience with contested nominations than the members on this side, many of whom knocked on doors for months, eight months, I think, over a year in some cases, signing up... [interjections]

The Acting Speaker: Hon. members, I have to do this one more time. I cannot hear the hon. member who has the call right now. Sometimes within debates coming from one side or the other side, the other side listening to the debate may not like the things that are stated, but that doesn't necessarily mean that they have to make it so that the Speaker, who the hon. member who has the call is speaking to, cannot hear the member. The associate minister is the only one with the call at this time.

Please continue, with 11 minutes, 38 seconds, if you should choose to take it.

Ms Issik: Many of the members sitting on this side had contested nominations – I think almost all did – and many sold thousands of memberships door to door to door to door, knocking on doors and selling memberships one at a time.

Now, interestingly, one of the issues the members opposite seem to have with this bill is that they claim there's a provision that allows for memberships to be purchased by somebody for somebody else. I have to tell you that I've read the bill – and I didn't really particularly appreciate being demeaned by the member across as if she'd been the only person capable of reading the bill in this House. However, I've read the bill carefully, and I'll tell you what I know. That bill is about financing and contributions, and that bill outlines that should somebody buy a membership for another person, it would be a contribution. That's what it says.

I'll tell you what. I went through the constitutions of three political parties last night. Three. There are more political parties in this province. This bill is about more than one political party. It is about all political parties. I have to tell you... [interjections]

The Acting Speaker: Hon. members, again, this is now the third time. There are, obviously, many opportunities to speak on this hoist. There are also many opportunities, in fact three still potentially remaining, with regard to interventions. If the hon. members from the opposition would like to join debate, as it so very dearly sounds like they would, then perhaps they could choose one of those options, which are greatly available to them.

The only person with the call at this time is the Associate Minister of Status of Women. Please continue.

Ms Issik: As I was saying, of the three constitutions that I went through – the NDP, the UCP, and the Alberta Party – guess what; there's one constitution that actually states that you can't buy a membership for other people other than your spouse or your kid. All of the other constitutions, including the NDP's, are completely silent on it. The NDP constitution allows for members to pay a fee. They also have affiliated members, which I presume is how the AFL becomes a member, with thousands of union members. So, hmm, they have lifetime members.

You know, this bill is about elections financing and contributions. That's what this bill is about. That section is only dealing with how a contribution goes against somebody's \$4,230 limit.

So then let's go to the next issue, Mr. Speaker. This bill also deals with many other issues. Some of them are cleaning up language. They seem to have been able to read nefarious motives into just about everything. I can only surmise that they're doing that simply because they don't actually understand nominations very well because they don't really have them themselves.

Ms Pancholi: We understand the law.

Ms Fir: She's a lawyer if you don't know.

Ms Issik: Oh, that's right. I remember.

Ms Fir: She's a lawyer in case it's never been mentioned.

Ms Issik: Perfect. Yeah. Got it.

The members across want to talk about how women and cultural communities are less advantaged in terms of being able to run in a nomination because of the donation limit. One of the biggest issues when you're trying to become a candidate is being able to have name recognition. It's about being able to have brochures, very simple things. Twelve thousand and five hundred dollars will be the new limit, which for candidates who run for months and months and months to become a candidate can result in maybe being able to spend, like, possibly less than \$1,000 a month. I can tell you that you can go through that much literature pretty darn fast, can't you? How much does a website cost? How much does all of that cost?

You know what? That spending limit is there for a reason, to make the playing field level. I'll tell you what. The one thing that astonishes me is how the party across consistently wants to take money out of the hands of candidates. It is astonishing to me. You know, if a candidate wanted to self-fund, under their bill they couldn't. They could not self-fund a \$12,500 campaign. Self-funding a campaign is a legitimate way for a candidate to run for \$1,000 a month, for somebody who's dedicated. They want to take the money away from that candidate and not let them even self-fund their campaign.

The other piece of this is the bill that they put into play had a contribution limit of \$4,230 – back then it was \$4,000. The \$4,000: I'm just going to point out that you could raise \$4,000 from one guy, two guys, third woman, fifth woman, seventh woman. You could raise a whole bunch of money way above the \$10,000 spending limit, couldn't you? You could do it \$4,000 at a time. You could do it \$500 at a time. You would still have a surplus. This was in the bill that we're amending.

11:50

The people across, that think that they're so brilliant at finding some nefarious motive here, actually produced a bill that would allow you to raise far more than your spending limit. Far more. I think that they need to recognize that the legislation they put in place actually allows you to raise more money than you can possibly spend. Why don't we leave that one alone altogether? They certainly put legislation through that allowed for that.

I can go on for much longer, but honestly my throat is starting to dry out, and it's getting late into the night, and we've got more work to do on this bill in committee. I think I'll leave it at that, Mr. Speaker.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member. [interjection] Pardon me?

Mr. Dang: With a request . . .

The Acting Speaker: With a request? I don't think that I can see you right now because you've spoken to the hoist. I'll allow it.

Mr. Dang: Maybe with the help of the Assembly here – it's getting pretty late in the night here, and I know there is going to be a lot of work to do in the next few days and weeks. Maybe I would request unanimous consent of the House for one-minute bells.

[Unanimous consent granted]

The Acting Speaker: Are there any members wishing to join on HA1?

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

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 11:53 p.m.]

[One minute having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

[Mr. Milliken in the chair]

For the motion:

Ceci	Pancholi	Schmidt
Dang	Phillips	Sigurdson, L.
Irwin		

Against the motion:

Allard	Jones	Smith
Amery	LaGrange	Stephan
Copping	Long	Toews
Dreeshen	Nally	Toor
Fir	Nicolaides	Turton
Frey	Nixon, Jason	van Dijken
Getson	Orr	Walker
Hunter	Schulz	Yaseen
Issik	Singh	

Totals:	For – 7	Against – 26
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[Motion on amendment HA1 lost]

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Minister of Justice and Solicitor General has moved second reading of Bill 81, Election Statutes Amendment Act, 2021 (No. 2).

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

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

[One minute having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

[Mr. Milliken in the chair]

For the motion:

Allard	Jones	Smith
Amery	LaGrange	Stephan
Copping	Long	Toews
Dreeshen	Nally	Toor
Fir	Nicolaides	Turton
Frey	Nixon, Jason	van Dijken
Getson	Orr	Walker
Hunter	Schulz	Yaseen
Issik	Singh	

12:00

Against the motion:

Ceci	Pancholi	Schmidt
Dang	Phillips	Sigurdson, L.
Irwin		

Totals:	For – 26	Against – 7
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[Motion carried; Bill 81 read a second time]

The Acting Speaker: The Government House Leader.

Mr. Jason Nixon: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I move that we adjourn the Assembly until tomorrow at 9 o'clock a.m.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 12:02 a.m. on Thursday]

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