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The 30th Legislature
Second Session

Alberta Hansard

Monday evening, December 6, 2021

Day 137

The Honourable Nathan M. Cooper, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta The 30th Legislature

Second Session

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New Democrat: 24

Independent: 2

Vacant: 1

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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

7:30 p.m.

Monday, December 6, 2021

[Mr. Milliken in the chair]

The Acting Speaker: Please be seated.

I see the Government House Leader.

Mr. Jason Nixon: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to seek unanimous consent of the Chamber for one-minute bells for the remainder of the evening, including the first bells in Committee of the Whole.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

[Unanimous consent denied]

Government Motions

Time Allocation on Bill 78

109. Mr. Jason Nixon moved:

Be it resolved that when further consideration of Bill 78, Alberta Housing Amendment Act, 2021, is resumed, not more than one hour shall be allotted to any further consideration of the bill in Committee of the Whole, at which time every question necessary for the disposal of the bill at this stage shall be put forthwith.

Mr. Jason Nixon: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. We've had nine hours of debate so far on this bill. The NDP hasn't had anything new to say since 15 minutes into the debate, so for about eight hours and 45 minutes we've heard the same rhetoric from the Official Opposition. It appears that they will continue to focus on derailing the business of the Legislature with ridiculous arguments.

As such, we will continue to get the Legislature flowing and back to work on behalf of the people of Alberta, though I do not – unfortunately, Mr. Speaker, I can't get it to go any faster than one-hour time allocation, so we'll have to just go with the one hour. Unfortunately for the members elsewhere inside the Chamber, they're going to have to listen to another hour of the same talking points from the NDP. After that, we'll get this legislation moving through the House and passed so that the government can focus on creating affordable housing for Albertans. Why the NDP are trying to block that, I don't understand at all.

The Acting Speaker: I see the hon. Member for Calgary-Bhullar-McCall to respond.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I think it's shameful that the government is now resorting to time allocation and such undemocratic means to pass a piece of legislation that impacts the lives of thousands upon thousands of Albertans.

The government leader said that we have had eight hours of debate, and not a single question was answered by this government. The government wants to claim that somehow their bill will create 25,000 more spaces for houseless Albertans. When asked how, nobody was able to answer. The minister is just reading some talking points that don't make sense. Then when we ask how privatizing existing inventory adds housing in Alberta, no answer. When we asked if that money coming from the sale of existing inventory will go towards creating new housing, no answer. I think the government is just privatizing, on ideological grounds, the existing housing stock, which will make this issue worse.

I think using or resorting to closure motions is undemocratic. It's unfair to Albertans that we are all here to represent. We are hearing from Albertans, we are hearing from housing bodies, we are hearing from stakeholders, nonprofit organizations that this bill will make the housing crisis even worse, that this will make the homelessness crisis even worse. I guess that if this bill was that good, the government didn't need to announce funding for mat programs just a few days ago. The housing crisis in Alberta is such that government is investing in mats so that people can be housed during the winter.

It's an important bill we wanted to debate, we are still here to debate, that impacts many lives, and government did not get it right. Using a closure motion is a disservice to all those Albertans that we are here to represent, all those Albertans who don't have a place to call home. We will be opposing this motion.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

[Government Motion 109 carried]

The Acting Speaker: A division has been called – almost but possibly not. I'm going to go with no on that one. We're moving forward.

Government Bills and Orders Committee of the Whole

[Mr. Milliken in the chair]

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

Bill 78

Alberta Housing Amendment Act, 2021

The Deputy Chair: Are there any comments or questions to be offered with respect to amendment A1 of this bill? I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-North West.

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I appreciate the opportunity to speak to the amendment on Bill 78. Contrary to the Government House Leader's incendiary and very, I think, reductive and, you know, really quite ill-informed comments in regard to this bill, in fact, we do have many informed and very focused ways by which to try to reverse this very dangerous bill. Here we have the government seeking to sell off public housing and to privatize it, quite frankly.

You know, we've seen the folly of this approach in many places around the country and indeed around the world as well. What this bill does and what our amendment is trying to do is to more clearly define what the first principle of affordable housing is, which is a service by which working people can have a roof over their heads and enjoy a productive life without spending half of their income on rent. The property crisis, the real estate crisis, that we see not just in Alberta but around the world, is compromising that basic notion, and it's becoming less affordable for regular working families to have a decent place to live. This notion, this first principle, that you must apply when you're talking about affordable housing, is in fact undermined by Bill 78.

I mean, the most egregious issue that I think that I've heard – and it's become abundantly clear in debate around this bill – is that there seems to be in this bill no legislative requirement for the proceeds of a sale of affordable housing from the public to private hands to be reinvested specifically in affordable housing. I mean, I think that not only undermines that first principle that I was talking about, but it lays bare what the actual intention of this UCP government is, which is to take these assets off the books – right? – that maybe they consider to be a liability, to make a couple of bucks off them and to

pass off a great deal to some private developers, who would be able to take advantage of this sale of affordable housing.

At the very least, I'm trying to do some harm reduction here. I know this UCP government, again, has a serious problem with those two words – right? In regard to if they're going to go through with this egregious notion of selling off affordable public housing to private hands, at least that money should go to building more affordable housing in the market in a direct sort of way.

I mean, with that, Mr. Chair, alone that's a reason to be looking to amend this bill. You know, obviously, if we have the minister sort of swearing up and down that, oh, well, they'll probably do that for sure – I don't trust them. Quite frankly, I do not trust this minister nor this government to do any such thing. I think that's an absolutely essential element of this, number one. [interjection] Yeah. Just wait for him till I'm done, right? I'm sure he's seen the rules in the House before. You know, I'm just getting started. Actually, I had a lovely dinner. I'm just going to reiterate once again that the amendment that we need is absolutely necessary for affordable housing as we move forward.

With that, thank you.

7:40

The Deputy Chair: I see the hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Jason Nixon: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I move that we adjourn debate.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Bill 81

Election Statutes Amendment Act, 2021 (No. 2)

The Deputy Chair: Are there any comments, questions, or amendments to be offered with respect to this bill? I see the hon. Minister of Justice.

Mr. Madu: Thank you, Mr. Chair. It is my pleasure to rise to speak to Bill 81, the Election Statutes Amendment Act, 2021 (No. 2). I am deeply encouraged by the lively debate we've had on this important piece of legislation. This government knows the deep importance of elections legislation, and it's listening to the needs of this province as we carefully make the changes necessary to safeguard Albertan democracy. I'd like to give a brief overview of the legislation and will then talk about the few House amendments.

The Election Statutes Amendment Act is about strengthening our democracy in this province. It is about getting foreign money and influence out of Alberta politics and making voting easier for Albertans. It would also establish a set election date, something this government committed to doing when we were elected. Bill 81 would make significant amendments to the Election Act and the Election Finances and Contributions Disclosure Act and make a significant amendment to the Alberta Personal Income Tax Act. The Election Statutes Amendment Act would also make amendments to the Alberta Senate Election Act, the Recall Act, the Citizen Initiative Act, the Legislative Assembly Act, and the Local Authorities Election Act. This amendment would ensure the language in the act is consistent throughout all electoral legislation.

Bill 81, Mr. Chair, would help increase transparency and trust in the democratic process by establishing a set election date. The last Monday in May would become the day Albertans would go to the polls to elect the provincial government. This would level the playing field for all political parties and eliminate any potential advantage the ruling party may have. As a result of this set election date, Bill 81 will also set the start of the campaign period as the day the writ is issued instead of February 1.

Bill 81, Mr. Chair, would make early voting easier for Albertans by allowing for more advance voting stations where needed. Amendments in Bill 81 would improve how voting stations are run by allowing election officers to perform a wider range of duties instead of being restricted to specialized roles.

Mr. Chair, this important legislation would also ban foreign money and influence from Alberta elections. It would allow only those who live in our province to make election advertising contributions during an election period. It would also ban people living outside of Canada and non-Canadian corporations or organizations from making political advertising contributions. Albertans do not want foreign money or politics influencing their elections.

Bill 81 would also impose an annual \$30,000 limit for donations to third parties or political action committees, otherwise known as PACs. It would also keep political parties, candidates, and constituency associations from making political advertising contributions to third parties.

This legislation would also set out a formula for determining the amount political parties can spend on elections, which is currently a flat limit of \$2 million, which does not reflect the actual cost for campaign expenses today. The new limit, Mr. Chair, would be \$1.16 per registered voter, which would be just over \$3 million. Removing a flat cap on party election expenses would align Alberta with almost every other jurisdiction in Canada.

Bill 81 would also increase the expense limit for nomination contestants from 20 per cent to 25 per cent of a candidate's limit and make it so contributions to nomination contestants are not part of a donor's maximum contribution limit. In addition, these contributions would no longer be tax deductible. I will talk about nomination contests more when I introduce the House amendment.

The Election Statutes Amendment Act would also modernize the wording in election legislation; for example, changing "polling day" to "election day" and "poll book" to "voting record." Bill 81, Mr. Chair, would also make minor amendments to other acts to ensure that words and phrases are consistent throughout all election legislation. It would also add references to the Recall Act and the Citizen Initiative Act to election-related legislation.

Mr. Chair, I previously alluded to some House amendments that I would like to bring forward. At this time I would like to introduce a few amendments to Bill 81, which will further reinforce the intent of this legislation and strengthen democracy in Alberta.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. minister.

This will be referred to as amendment A1 going forward. There will be copies at the tables at the entrances. If you would like a copy, please raise your hand, and one will be delivered to you.

If the hon. minister could please – you have the option to read it into the record for everybody's benefit.

Mr. Madu: Thank you, Mr. Chair. You know, I have carefully listened to the debate on second reading of this legislation. This bill has always been about getting foreign money and influence out of Alberta politics and making voting easier for Albertans, and we are ensuring that our legislation does that in the most effective way possible. This amendment will correct a typo in section 1(2)(b) of the bill by adding a missing word, narrow the criteria used to determine whether a third party is affiliated with the registered party, add a limit to the amount an individual can contribute to nomination contestants, allow nomination contestants to contribute to their own campaign up to their election expense limit, and ensure that constituency associations would be required to report contributions on an annual basis.

The first proposed House amendment corrects an error by adding the word "or" back in, so section 24(2.1) and (3) of the Alberta

Personal Income Tax Act will include the phrase “registered candidate or registered leadership contestant.”

Section 5 is amended in subsection (11)(c) in the proposed subsection (5.2) by striking out clauses (d) and (e). Bill 81 would prohibit third-party advertisers who are affiliated with political parties from running political action committees. The Chief Electoral Officer could refuse to register a third party if the third party is affiliated with a registered political party. Several criteria are listed for the Chief Electoral Officer to consider as he makes his determination. Upon reflection, Mr. Chair, the criteria for determining if a party is affiliated with a political party were unnecessarily drafted as too broad.

7:50

We propose to amend the proposed section 9.1(5.2). Under Bill 81 the Chief Electoral Officer would still be required to consider the organization of the third party, including whether a person who is the chief financial officer, signing officer, or a principal of the third party holds a similar position in the political party; interactions or agreements between the third party and the registered party, including those that indicate that the third party is under the control of the registered party; the extent to which the third party participates in the decision-making process of the registered party pursuant to the constitution or founding documents of the registered party.

Mr. Chair, Bill 81 would make it so contributions to nomination contestants are not part of a donor’s maximum contribution limit. Through debate in the House we discovered that it would be possible for Albertans to donate an unlimited amount to nomination contests, and any amount over what is used in the campaign could potentially be turned over to political parties or constituency associations. We propose to amend section 17 of the EFCDA to allow an individual resident of Alberta to donate a maximum of \$4,000 to a nomination contest or a combination of nomination contests and would ensure that unlimited donations are not possible.

A number of House amendments are needed to make this change. This change requires that we make the following changes: adding a new section 5(21.1), which amends section 15.1 to reflect that there is a new limit on contributions to nomination contestants. The proposed new section 5(23)(a.1) amends section 17 of the act to add the new limit on contributions to nomination contestants and provides that a nomination contestant may contribute to their own campaign. The proposed new section 5(23)(i.1) also amends section 17 of the act to reflect this new limit. In addition, Mr. Chair, section 5(24) is struck out and replaced to reflect that a new limit is added.

If a nomination contestant were unsuccessful, they would still be able to return the funds to contributors or transfer surplus funds to the constituency association of their party. Successful nomination contestants will be able to spend funds on their general election campaign up to their election expense limit and will transfer surplus funds to their constituency association or party.

To be clear, Mr. Chair, an individual Albertan could donate up to \$4,000 to any nomination contestant or a combination of nomination contestants, and I again emphasize that only an individual Albertan is eligible to donate. In other words, we are creating a new limit for contributions to nomination contestants, with a cap of \$4,000. This limit will be adjusted for inflation, as are other limits under the act. However, no tax receipts will be issued for contributions to nomination contestants. These contributions would not be tax deductible.

This amendment will also allow those running for nomination to contribute to their own campaign up to their expense limit. Under the current act a nomination contestant’s election expense limit is 20 per cent of a candidate’s election expense limit. Under Bill 81

this limit would be increased to 25 per cent from 20 per cent. The nomination contestant election expense limit would be increased from \$10,000 to \$12,500 as adjusted for inflation.

Amendments in Bill 81 would eliminate the need for constituency associations to report on contributions quarterly. A drafting oversight led to the removal of all reporting requirements from the legislation. I want to be clear that we are maintaining oversight but simply easing the burden on hard-working volunteers. This amendment would make it so that constituency associations will report annually on the contributions they receive. To make this change, Mr. Chair, a new section 5(29)(c.1) is proposed. This House amendment amends section 32 of the act. The remaining House amendments are needed to reflect that new limits are added.

Mr. Chair, Bill 81 is about strengthening democracy in Alberta. This province belongs to its people, and elections must remain a time for Albertans to discuss and determine the future of their province. Through this bill we are taking action to make Alberta’s elections fairer and more modern – and the amendments I have listed today will only further reinforce the intended outcomes of this legislation, in keeping with some of the concerns that I heard during debate on second reading – by helping to ensure there is no undue influence on Alberta’s elections.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. minister.

Are there any other members wishing to join on A1? I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair, and thank you to the minister for listening closely to the debate that has been taking place in this House and attempting to respond. I’m still looking through, as my colleagues and I are, the content of this amendment, so at this point I will keep my comments initially broad because we do hope to find out more going forward.

First off, the very first change, section 1(2)(b), a word missing: that change seems reasonable, and I think all members could support the addition of the word “or.”

On section 5, striking out the subclauses (d) and (e) is a significant change that recognizes that the government had included overly broad, overly vague definitions. Specifically, I know there’s been a great deal of debate talking about the Chief Electoral Officer using the language, that any public statements made “in support of or in opposition to the registered political party” could discount or discontinue someone from being able to register as a third-party advertiser, so I think that that is a reasonable removal given the concerns we’ve heard from constitutional experts, from lawyers, and from so many of the civil society, who were very concerned that these sections could be ill used to counter their freedom of speech.

Now, I’m still working to understand the changes in section 5(23), and I wonder if the minister would help me to understand. Certainly, in the bill debate it has been the position of our caucus and certainly one that I believe in, having a single donation limit of what is currently \$4,243. This amendment appears to add in a new contribution limit of \$4,000 only for nomination contestants, and given that it is such a similar number to the overall donation limit, I’m curious if the minister can help me to understand, rather than the concept of an Albertan having \$4,000 to donate politically across all of the different potential places to donate, why there is \$4,000 to leadership contests, to parties, to CAs, to candidates, and then another \$4,000 to nomination contests within a single year, because I don’t think – and I did listen to the minister’s remarks, but I’m not clear on the intent and why there are now two donation limits. I’d be curious if the minister has more information about that.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

We are on A1. Do I see any members? I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning.

8:00

Ms Sweet: Well, thank you, Mr. Chair. Again, I mean, we just received this amendment in front of us a few minutes ago, so we're trying to wrap our heads around it. I think my colleague had a good point in that that is the language that's being used around the \$4,000. The language in here, too, speaks to a nomination contestant or a combination of nomination contestants.

Now, I'm just wondering. I mean, it may be rare; it may not be rare. If someone decided to donate to the hon. Member for, let's say, Calgary-Bhullar-McCall but then also decided to donate to the hon. Member for Chestermere-Strathmore, two different political parties – you never know; it could happen – is that \$4,000 cap per political party, or is it the actual overarching \$4,000 for an individual? It doesn't matter – it could be an Alberta Party member, it could be a UCP member, or it could be an NDP – as long as it's not \$4,000?

I think that you did indicate inflation, so it actually will be \$4,243 if we're looking at the inflation unless we're not counting inflation today and it starts at \$4,000 this year and inflation continues once the bill is passed. I mean, that would be a question that I also would have, whether or not it will match, so therefore the inflation will start the day that the bill comes into force, or if we're going to be matching it completely to \$4,243. In fairness to Albertans, they may not recognize, because it's \$4,243 typically, that all of a sudden it's only \$4,000 for a different reason. I'm fine with not matching them, but I guess I'm just curious from an administrative perspective. It might be a little confusing for some individuals.

The other thing is that I think, you know, I am getting a little bit concerned around the consistency, I guess, that I keep seeing through different pieces of legislation. In one area an individual can donate here. In one area an individual can donate over here. We saw this with the Senate bill, where it started to become \$5,000 here, and then it was \$5,000 over here. Depending on who you were donating it to and what the advertising costs could be, the numbers kept adding up and adding up and adding up.

Now we see again another piece that impacts our elections, that is now adding another piece of another fundraising mechanism for getting involved in our election process. Again, when I keep seeing these different pieces of legislation that keep getting introduced that have to do with the structure of our election system and these opportunities with each different piece of legislation for more fundraising to happen and more donations to occur, I start to wonder what the intent here is. The government continuously says, "Well, we're not trying to put money back into politics," yet when an election bill gets introduced into this Chamber, there is another opportunity for people to start fundraising and donating to different individuals.

We know that in other pieces of legislation such as the Senate bill there is party affiliation, and if we were to, say, have another election during a provincial election with a Senate election on top of that, we're now going to see people fundraising for Senate. We're now going to see another \$4,000 introduced for a nomination contest. Like, the numbers just keep adding up.

What if, let's just say, maybe – you know, actually, here would be another example – we have a Senate election coming up. An individual decides to run for Senate. They fund raise. They get a whole bunch of money from their fundraising in that compacity. Then that same individual who may not be successful in that race decides to become a candidate and seek the nomination for a

political party. Then they fund raise again: another \$4,000, another \$4,000, another \$4,000. That's a lot of opportunity and a lot of money to then decide: well, maybe I don't actually want to be the candidate; maybe I'm going to withdraw my nomination. Does that money then get transferred to the party? Is there an opportunity here for people to seek nominations, fund raise a whole bunch of money, withdraw their name, and then that money just automatically gets donated to the constituency association? I feel like that's how this is written. Maybe I'm wrong – I just got it; it's been five minutes – but I do believe that it does create an opportunity for quite a few individuals to start seeking nominations for different riding associations, who may then decide not to actually follow through with that. There is nothing in here that prevents that from happening, so I guess, you know, I'm curious about that.

I'm curious, again, why it is that this would be introduced when the whole intention of having the initial \$4,000 cap – plus inflation, \$4,243 – put in place was so that these sorts of situations would be prevented and that we wouldn't see a flood of money going into constituency associations for people seeking nominations that may not actually have the full intent to be the candidate. The intent behind the original cap was to ensure that once you had a candidate, that fundraising was directed with the intention of what it was for, not to create opportunity for other fundraising opportunities. If the intention was that the money would be returned back to the people that donated, that's one thing, but again, in my five-minute scan of this, that does not actually mandate the individual who is seeking the nomination to have to return that money to the people that donated it. In fact, they could donate it to a constituency association or a party, depending on how the structure of your party works, I guess.

I won't say that I understand or know the ins and outs of the UCP and how that structure works, but I do think that there is a weird opportunity here and a concerning opportunity here that doesn't have a clear definition within this amendment to deter a group of individuals to seek nominations to be candidates to a political party when they may not actually have that intention. I would be very curious to hear from the minister as to how we could ensure that that is not a tool that would be used in the future.

Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

I see the hon. Minister of Justice has risen on A1.

Mr. Madu: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I have listened to the initial comment on amendment A1 by the Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods and now the Member for Edmonton-Manning. You know, the Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods talked about the rationale for introducing a new limit. The rationale is quite simple. The current Bill 81 has got an unlimited limit of contributions to nomination contests. I heard concerns from this Assembly about that and to make sure that Bill 81 reflects our commitment to keeping big money out of politics. I think Albertans understand that it costs money to run elections, whether Senate elections, municipal elections, provincial elections, or recall or referendum. It costs money to run those elections.

That brings me to the comment made by the Member for Edmonton-Manning. First and foremost, there is a global – yes, adjusted for inflation – aggregate of \$4,000 that you can donate to any nomination contestant. It doesn't matter if you choose to donate to four nomination contestants; you have \$4,000 to spend. If you choose to donate to 10, you have \$4,000 to spend. Yes, there is no restriction on whether or not you donate to the Member for Edmonton-Manning or the Member for Chestermere-Strathmore. There are no restrictions on that. You can choose. You've got a

global aggregate of \$4,000 to spend. That reflects the fact that every single one of those elections costs money, and the people of our province understand that.

The second question and comment made by the Member for Edmonton-Manning was: what happens to the balance of the expense, you know, noting that we will now have an expense limit of \$12,500 from the previous \$10,000? Now, the current EFCDA dealt with that particular issue, and I am not seeking to amend that. Section 12 of the current legislation deals with what happens if you are unsuccessful with a nomination contest, and you can take a look at section 12 of the EFCDA, that I have not amended in this particular bill, to determine how you can deal with those funds.

8:10

Number one, it says that you have the option to transfer the money to the party, to the CA, or to the actual donors under the guidance and direction of the Chief Electoral Officer. I have not sought to change that. That remains in the current ELCA. If you are the successful nomination contestant, section 12 of the same act, which, again, I have not sought to change, directs how excess funds can be disbursed. It speaks to you being able to use that money, the excess, for your general election campaign. That is current law. I haven't changed that in Bill 81, nor in this amendment A1. Number two, you could also choose to transfer that money to your party or to your CA. Again, those are the current provisions of the eFax, and there is nothing in Bill 81 or this amendment that will change that.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. minister.

Are there any members wishing to join on A1? I see the hon. Member for Calgary-Bhullar-McCall.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I also rise to speak to this, and I think I will begin by saying that when the minister brought forward this piece of legislation, we certainly pointed out that there are a number of flaws in this piece of legislation. Albertans pointed that out, that this bill allows big money, dark money to flow back into politics, and this minister insisted, the government insisted that, no, this 300-some page bill is all about closing one loophole, the AFL loophole. That was the messaging that the government delivered, and I guess they were unable to convince Albertans that it will take 300 pages to close one loophole.

Certainly, there were many loopholes, and this amendment deals with some of them. When we look at these changes, if I understood the minister correctly, in subsection (21.1) section 15.1 is amended by striking out this and (c) in subsection (23) by adding the following after clause (a):

Subject to subsection (1.2), contributions by a person ordinarily resident in Alberta shall not exceed in any year \$4000, as adjusted in accordance with section 41.5, in aggregate to any nomination contestant or combination of nomination contestants.

If I understood the minister correctly, it's a global \$4,000 limit that any Albertan can donate to any nomination contestant either within one riding or multiple ridings, but the donation limit remains \$4,000.

The second thing that I think is a bit confusing is that, aside from this, a nomination contestant will be able to donate that \$4,000 and still be able to contribute to his or her own campaign as well, which is in the next section following that.

Contributions by a nomination contestant to the nomination contestant's campaign from the nomination contestant's own funds shall not exceed an amount equivalent to the amount referred to in section 41.4(1).

There is one global limit of \$4,000, and then in this subsection 1.2 there is another \$4,000, I believe. That's \$8,000. Then we are seeing changes that an aggregate limit of \$10,000, a 20 per cent limit, is

moved to 25 per cent. That's still a lot of money that this bill is trying to bring into these nomination contests.

Essentially, in some changes the minister suggests he's trying to fix that. I think I'm not fully understanding these provisions because we just got them, but the way I'm reading it is that that's still the way nominations were dealt with before this significant change contained in this legislation. Now these amendments are not changing a whole lot because there is a \$4,000 net global limit, and nomination contestants can use their own funds, and the aggregate limit has changed from 20 to 25 per cent. There's still more money that is available for these nomination contests.

I think nominations are important. Nominations, I guess, ensure at a grassroots level how democracy works, and instead of making them fair, instead of making sure that every Albertan has the opportunity to be able to participate in the democratic process, the changes that are proposed in this piece of legislation are somewhat allowing more money to flow into these contests. It's not as much about grassroots democracy, but government is more concerned about how much money they should allow and changing the limits so that more money can flow in these contests.

I think further explanation from the government side and the minister will help us understand how these three provisions, three changes, work and why it's important for this government. What's the rationale for this government to allow more money? There are some funds that nomination contestants may be able to spend which are not even tax deductible. They're flowing in, and there is a change in the overall limit as well.

Then there are some other changes as well. Mostly, I think, at this point we are asking for clarifications. With this change in subsections (2.1) and (3) by striking out "registered leadership contestant or registered nomination contestant" and substituting "or registered leadership contestant", these are those – and let me ask this, how these changes will impact leadership contestants. If the minister could expand on that, that will help as well.

Then I see changes with respect to constituency association filings with the Chief Electoral Officer, and now these returns will be filed yearly and for the entire amount; if it's less than \$50, then the aggregate amount, and if it's more than \$50, with the name and addresses. Again, we'll start going through these changes.

8:20

In short, I think if the minister could explain, first, those changes, that one about the global limit – I think the minister has clarified that. Why it's important for this government to think that a nomination contestant should spend another \$4,000 that is not subject to any tax credits or any other limits, how that works: that will help us understand these changes better.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any members? I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-North West.

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I appreciate an opportunity to speak briefly to the government's amendment to Bill 81, which is, I presume, A1, the amendment. Yes. Yeah, I mean, it's interesting to see. You know, sometimes we are quite pugilistic and it doesn't seem like people are listening to each other in this Chamber, but then sometimes democracy emerges – right? – from the ground. Having people from many different voices from different places, including our independents and the general public, of course, and our own Official Opposition here, we voiced concern from the beginning around not having limits for contributions in any shape or form.

I see this as part of an evolution as well because, of course, the first bill that we brought forward, when we formed the government, was to try to get big money out of politics, right? We kind of started that movement along the way, and you can see that, Mr. Chair, legislation around elections is always an evolutionary process. It's not like you set up with your five, 10 commandments, or whatever, and then away you go.

I mean, technology changes, you know, expectations change, but one thing that I've seen that seems to have taken root here, in this province anyway, is that people do want to see big money out of politics. They know that the consequences of it can be quite dire. We only have to, like I said before, look to the most expensive democracy on Earth to the south, in the United States of America, to see how money has destroyed the democratic process. At the very least we can say: well, we sure don't want that here.

I see this amendment, quite frankly, Mr. Chair, as quite positive; you know, the process of looking to make sure we don't have a backdoor way by which people can make unlimited contributions and to make sure that the nomination process is relatively accessible, right? If you put a price tag that's too high on a nomination race or anything, really, then a certain sector of the society gets excluded. They say: well, hey, I'd love to be part of running for elected office, but I just can't afford it.

I think that this amendment kind of speaks to that, and, you know, I do commend the minister for bringing this forward. We have to be constructively critical. I think that you guys have figured that out. That's an ideal that I aspire to always – right? – and try to remind myself of sometimes when we get worked up and whatnot. I think this is a good example of constructive criticism that has led to an improvement of this particular bill.

This bill, you know, can use some help in other ways, and we will apply – maybe this is just the night to get lucky, right? Having constructive engagement and amendments that do move forward – and there are other areas in this bill that we would like to point out some room for improvement as well.

You know, one part of this bill – maybe the minister, when he gets a chance, can just describe it – that kind of caught my eye, that no one has mentioned before, takes in subsections (2.1) and (3), in the first part of the change in the amendment here. It says, “registered leadership contestant or registered nomination contestant” and then substituting “or registered leadership contestant.” I'm just wondering what that small change entails or what it means. Are we – and excuse my ignorance – imposing these spending and contribution limits to leadership races other than a constituency nomination race? Of course, you have party leadership and so forth that would be in a different category of expenditure and responsibility and scope – right? – than individual constituency nomination. I'm just curious to know how that changes that part of the bill.

Otherwise, yeah. I mean, there you go. You know, we see some constructive engagement here early this evening. Hopefully, that bodes well for the rest of the evening as well.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you.

Next I see the hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake-St. Paul has risen.

Mr. Hanson: Yeah. Yes. Thank you very much, Chair. Just a clarification. I know we've had some discussion on this. So the \$4,000 is aggregate, but it's only for the nomination contest? So it wouldn't count against – like, if there was an election that year, it wouldn't count against that aggregate. The reason I'm asking that question is that if there's money left over in the nomination account and then you transfer that over to your campaign account, how does

that count against that person's aggregate if they – if you know what I'm saying. Like, if they donate to your nomination campaign and then you're successful and then you're running and they donate to you again, how do we reconcile that as part of it, or is it combined?

Mr. Madu: I'm not sure I fully understand your question, but what I understand that you mean is this, whether the \$4,000 in aggregate limit, a nomination contestant – how is the leftover dealt with if you are the successful nomination contestant, meaning you now are the official party candidate? Section 12 deals with that particular issue. Again, as I indicated, I have not amended section 12 in Bill 81 or in this amendment A1. Section 12 says that if you are the nomination contestant, if you are the successful contestant, you can use that excess towards your candidate election expense limit, and you could also choose to transfer that money to the party or the CA. That is how that excess surplus fund is dealt with following the successful conclusion of nomination. I hope that answers your question

The Deputy Chair: I see that the hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview caught my eye.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. I will keep my comments brief. I do want to begin my comments by saying, you know, that it is appreciated when government recognizes the fact that the opposition plays an absolutely critical role in providing oversight, amendments, feedback to pieces of legislation. Now, as every member in this Chamber knows, I believe I'm one of the first to give credit where credit is due when government listens. So I will thank the minister for listening to feedback by bringing forward this amendment and these positive changes to Bill 81.

Now, I will say, Mr. Chair, that I still have a number of concerns with this piece of legislation. Yes, this amendment does improve the legislation as a whole. However, what I do recall on initial debate on this bill are a number of concerns that my colleagues and I raised from the get-go. I think it would be accurate to characterize the response of government as being fairly dismissive to the concerns that were raised from the opposition and other members in this Chamber.

Now, again, I am appreciative that there has been a collar placed around the limit or a ceiling on how much candidates in their nominations can receive, which does align with what the Official Opposition has been calling for, and that's to ensure that whether we're talking about a general election or a nomination race, the winner is not going to be determined by how much they're financed but, hopefully, Mr. Chair, by the quality of their character. When there aren't limits to nominations to general elections, that gets called into question, quite frankly. I mean, there are numerous examples around the globe of democracies where there is no limit on how much a candidate can raise, and it brings into question whether candidates have a fair footing in their bid to be the elected official for their jurisdiction or whether large sums of money are unduly influencing voters.

8:30

As I mentioned, Mr. Chair, this is positive, although I will ask the question, and no one in this Chamber has. I've heard, well, many things in my time in this place, but I have heard of a number of UCP members unhappy with the original bill, the way it was written, and how there can be unlimited amounts of dollars funnelled into their nomination races, either for them or to replace them. It does beg the question of whether this amendment has been introduced primarily because the government is listening to feedback from the opposition or if it's because the government is trying to keep their own party together. Now, that's a question to which I don't expect a response,

but it is a question that has entered my mind as far as the reasons behind this amendment, of putting a limitation on the nomination of candidates, of which, up until this amendment, there wasn't one.

You know, I think there were several members in this Chamber, whether they've spoken on the record about it or spoken off the record to it, where there were significant questions, and legitimately so. "Why was it written the way it was from the beginning?" I think that is an interesting question, Mr. Chair. Maybe that was an oversight, or maybe that was a signal sent to dissenting members of the current government caucus. Regardless of the motive behind this amendment, it does improve the bill, and it does move it in a direction that I can support.

Often we hear in this place comments made around improving democracy and, you know, levelling the playing field. I fear, Mr. Chair, that there are times where those comments are just speaking points and that they're not reflected in the substance of legislation, in the substance of motions even though motions are nonbinding, which is a whole other issue that I'm sure we're going to talk about a lot in the coming days. But it's important that we as legislators do everything that we can to ensure that we are levelling the playing field for all Albertans.

I'm proud to have been part of a caucus whose first bill, when we formed government, was to take big money out of politics. It wasn't just a talking point. I know that many of the members in this Chamber were not members at that time, but I encourage them to go back and look at Bill 1 from the 2015 first sitting. It removed all corporate and union donations to allow individual citizens to have their say, and there was a limit on how much individuals could donate. It exists today, Mr. Chair. I think that that helps to foster a much more democratic system, because we know that large sums of money can influence, whether it's elections or campaigns or causes or whichever. I think it's in the best interests of all Albertans to ensure that not only are their voices heard but that their voices can't be drowned out by those who are in a position to be able to do that.

Mr. Chair, for those reasons, I will be supporting this amendment. I'll leave my comments there. Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any – I see the Minister of Justice.

Mr. Madu: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I do want to, you know, offer my thanks to the Member for Edmonton-North West and the Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview for their comments on amendment A1. I do share those comments as well.

I think one of the questions that he had asked, the Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview, was looking at the motive for doing things. That, I think, is quite simple. There were a few changes in this amendment that are not necessarily monetary or donations that were – you know, some concerns were expressed in this Assembly that have been considered in amendment A1; for example, the removal of subsection (5.2)(d) and (e). Those were concerns that I heard in this Assembly.

Again, you know, I think it's important to also remind ourselves that the purpose of this Bill 81 from the get-go here is in keeping with the platform commitment of this United Conservative Party to remove big money from Alberta politics and to ensure that monies flowing out of other provinces or countries do not come here to determine the outcome of our elections and that no one single PAC is able to unduly influence our elections.

It is on that particular point that I disagree a little bit with the hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview. In referring to their Bill 1 in 2015, yes, it is true that Bill 1 banned corporations and unions from making direct contributions, but they also created a loophole that would allow the Alberta Federation of Labour to funnel more

money, multimillions of dollars, than any individual could have contributed to influence our elections. We made a commitment that we were going to end that loophole so that third-party advertisers, or PACs as they are commonly referred to, would be limited to \$30,000. Write that down: multimillions of dollars. We saw in the last municipal election whereby in Calgary alone one union – one union – spent \$1.8 million on campaigning against candidates that they did not support or align with.

Those are the types of commitments that we made to Alberta, to the people of our province, that if given the opportunity, we would indeed get rid of big money from unduly influencing our politics. I think this amendment, you know, as noted by the Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview and the Member for Edmonton-North West, achieves those goals.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. minister.

The next member who caught my eye was the hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek.

Mr. Gotfried: Great. Thank you, Mr. Chair, and thank you to the minister for this amendment, which I will be supporting. Certainly, I wanted to thank him further for consultation, for listening to members of this House and caucus in getting to this point. The Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake-St. Paul had asked a question, and I just wanted to sort of follow up on this one as well.

8:40

I have no problem with the \$4,000 aggregate limit nor the \$12,500 that's referenced here on 41.4(1), but I do have some concerns – I think we all in this House want to ensure there's fairness and openness and transparency in our dealings and certainly in our approach to the election finances and donations disclosure act – just with respect to that. I want there to be not only the reality but the perception of transparency with our constituents, that I can talk to my constituents and explain to them. I have some concerns with that. These limits, I think, are fine. I think they operate just fine in terms of the nominations themselves, and I'm fully supportive of this amendment, but I am concerned about the perception of the possible circumventing of the other election finance rules with respect to campaigns, NCAs, and the party themselves, the \$4,000 indexed amount that is referenced there as well and how we're going to be able to move those dollars from the nomination process, which will be recorded and reported, and I think that that's good. I think that that's fair. I think that that's adequate for that.

However, when those monies move into the realm that is addressed by other clauses within this act in terms of the contributions limits, I don't want there to be any perception that there is a circumventing of that. Hence, I have some concerns about how that's going to be moved into the system, both the \$4,000 limit for individuals contributing and the \$12,500 by the candidate, that those can be moved in without them – being subject to the perception that there may be some circumventing of the limits. That's my concern with this. I fully support this amendment here, but that concern is one that I think will be raised by our constituents. I want us to be able to address that, and I think that perhaps it's something that is in the process which could be addressed by Elections Alberta. They're very good. In fact, many of their systems, I think, are top notch thanks to the oversight that is provided by this Legislature. But that is a concern for me, just in terms of perception.

I really am someone who wants to make sure that the integrity that we can project to our constituents is such that when they ask us

that question, we have a good answer and they don't perceive it as being a way to circumvent other election finances rules. To the minister. This amendment as itself I think is great – very grateful for it – but I also want to make sure that we're finding other ways to ensure that the reality, the perception, the spirit, and the letter of the law that we bring forward are something that we can stand up with to our constituents and say: "No. This is clean. This is straightforward. This is not meant to circumvent any other limits that we bring into the campaign or the party or the constituency association realm." I'd certainly like to hear more about that.

Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: I see the Minister of Justice has risen.

Mr. Madu: Thank you, Mr. Chair, and thank you to the Member for Calgary-Fish Creek for your comment and for raising the concern. I can confidently say that there is nothing in amendment A1 that would circumvent the Election Finances and Contributions Disclosure Act.

We have in the context of a nomination contest under – there are usually two elections running. One happens first. One is a nomination. At the conclusion of that nomination, there's usually a general election, and there is nothing in Bill 81 that would impact the contribution limit with respect to a candidate. The only time that there would be an impact on the expenditure of a successful candidate is when that candidate decides to say: I'm going to use part of the surplus money from my nomination to fund my general election campaign. Once that happens, you are subject to Elections Alberta disclosures, reporting, and all of those things. Nothing in Bill 81 and the amendment impacts the relationship between Elections Alberta and once you become a candidate.

Now, right before, let's suppose you are not the successful candidate. Again, as I indicated before, let's suppose you raised \$40,000. You spent \$12,500. You have that surplus left. There is nothing I have proposed in Bill 81 or in the amendment that would impact how you spend that money. There is a current section 12 that I have not touched. So even at the end of your nomination you will still be required – donations: you have to receipt them. You still have to file with Elections Alberta four months after the conclusion of the nomination. That process is still there. I haven't touched that.

The Deputy Chair: I thank the hon. minister.

Next, I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-South has risen.

Mr. Dang: Thank you, Mr. Chair. It's a pleasure to rise today and speak to government amendment A1 to Bill 81, the Election Statutes Amendment Act, 2021 (No. 2). Let me be very clear. Bill 81 continues to be, even if this amendment were to be passed, a bad piece of legislation. It continues to try and muzzle democracy. It continues to try and take away the rights of workers in the middle of a pandemic, for which we owe them so much. But I am pleased to see that the minister has perhaps listened to many things that have been raised in this place over the last several weeks of debating Bill 81.

Frankly, I'm a little bit surprised because the minister – while he was listening, many members both of his cabinet and in his caucus stood in this place and told us that we were wrong, that, no, the nomination contests were not creating unlimited donation loopholes. Now we see in the very first speech of Committee of the Whole, actually, that the very first amendment is a correction to this oversight the government made. On top of that, some of the most egregious aspects of third-party affiliation, including political activity and advertising and making statements around policy: we now see that those are also removed from this bill.

To be clear, I actually want to thank the minister for making those changes. They're good changes. They were extraordinarily bad parts of this bill. We had the opportunity to see funnelling of massive amounts of money, potentially millions of dollars, through these nomination contests, that are now going to be limited to the index, \$4,000, which is essentially, I guess, doubling the donation limit that we have today, which I don't think is necessarily the right direction in general, but certainly it's the correct direction as we move forward with this bill. Certainly, it's something that I think makes a bad bill better.

Mr. Chair, we also see here the government, after having denied day in and day out, over and over again that, no, they weren't making these substantive changes around the filing of constituency associations – now they're coming in and saying that, oh, actually they have to make a correction, that the minister has to correct this because there was an oversight. Instead of just trying to remove red tape, they had actually basically removed filings completely for constituency associations. That was one of the unfortunate oversights that we pointed out, that was, again, denied by cabinet ministers and government members. Now in the first amendment, in the first speech from the government, we see it coming forward.

Mr. Chair, to be clear, I'm very pleased that the minister has been listening to the debate in this place. I'm very pleased that the minister has been listening to the opposition and indeed also some of the independents. I believe that government backbenchers as well have been making these arguments. I'm very pleased that we've been able to make this bad bill better. I'm very pleased we've been able to – well, it appears to have put a little bit of lipstick on this pig. We haven't quite finished polishing – I won't finish that idiom – the bill. Certainly, I think this is something that I as the democracy and ethics critic can support. I think it's something that makes a situation where we're talking about a bill that was having significant attacks across our democracy, was having significant attacks across our democratic process and access to democracy, and now instead we are seeing these fairly reasonable changes.

Perhaps I would have liked to see the changes go still further, particularly in some of these donation limits, particularly in how we're dealing with third-party affiliation, but I think that overall I'm pleased to see the government responsive in this case. I look forward to seeing what other amendments may be coming forward from both government members and opposition members.

Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

I see the Minister of Justice has risen.

8:50

Mr. Madu: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Again, I'm pleased to hear from the Member for Edmonton-South that he is pleased with the amendments made in this amendment A1, but then, obviously, I have always been someone who has consistently stood before the floor of this Assembly to say that if we focus on the substance of the bills before the House, then we have a prospect of making progress.

I have always urged the members opposite to focus on the substantive provisions in bills that will be before the floor of this Assembly rather than, you know, going on bold accusations that have got nothing to do with the bill before us. So, again, this amendment is consistent with the concerns that I heard and in keeping with the commitment that we made to the people of Alberta. But I think where I disagree with the Member for Edmonton-South is in – again, hopefully, we will have an opportunity to learn from this exercise – his accusation that this muzzles, I think is the word he used, this continues to muzzle or take away the rights of workers. I recall that on the day that this bill

was tabled, the Member for Edmonton-South took to the media. He held a press conference to convince the media and Albertans that this bill will muzzle workers and take away workers' rights.

The journalists, multiples of them, consistently challenged the Member for Edmonton-South to prove that, and the Member for Edmonton-South could not. So, again, there is nothing in Bill 81 – I repeat: there is nothing in Bill 81 that would muzzle or take away the rights of workers to participate in their elections. Workers are Albertans. Workers are individual Albertans, and we want them to participate in their electoral process. We want them to be the ones to decide the outcome of their election, to determine the future direction of their province. But what I will not do or tolerate is to allow foreign money or money outside of our province to impact our elections or allow one single union to spend multimillions of dollars, as the AFL have consistently done since the NDP created that loophole.

Now, if that is what the Member for Edmonton-South is referring to, our commitment to take away potentially hundreds of millions of dollars from the AFL that were funnelled into NDP-allied candidates, if that is his concern, yes, that is exactly what this bill will do. But that has got nothing to do with individual workers of this province. To participate in their elections, individual workers of this province – our Albertans – can contribute to the Member for Edmonton-South, they can contribute to any member in this Assembly, but what we will not tolerate is to allow the AFL to funnel through the back door, that the NDP created, multimillions of dollars. We are levelling that ground, and we are putting a cap on the amount of money that folks like the AFL can spend, on the amount of money that can be donated to them, at \$30,000, in keeping with the commitment that we made to Albertans.

But, at the end of the day, it is pleasant to hear that the Member for Edmonton-South has now come to the realization, based on the media availability that he heard on the day this bill was tabled, that there was nothing in this bill that will prevent workers of our province from exercising their political right.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. minister.

Next, I see the hon. Member for Chestermere-Strathmore has risen.

Mrs. Aheer: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. I also want to start off by thanking the minister. The amount of time that you've provided to us to have these conversations and the work that's been done up until this point on this amendment: we're very grateful for those changes, so thank you so much, through the chair, to you.

I just wanted to point out, though, that something I think we need to consider is that right now, with the way that the memberships are flowing in – and, like I said, very grateful for this amendment, but in the true spirit of what I believe democracy needs to look like and in the true spirit of understanding where this is going to go, we've capped the \$4,000 or \$4,230 at where that's going to be. However, if those are allowed to be used to buy memberships – and especially, like, in my family I have myself, my husband, and my two sons, who are all capable of having those \$4,000 donations, so if we bought memberships with that, Mr. Chair, through you, that would be 1,600 memberships. It's just a factor that I think we need to consider.

I'm so grateful for the cap. I'm so grateful for the aggregate amount that you've put in there. However, without informed consent from the people to whom those memberships will be designated, we truly believe that there could be concerns as to how those memberships end up being used, especially because, you know, we're going into an election in – what is it? – 14 months, 16

months here, the next little while, but particularly if we ended up going to an electronic style of using those memberships, to make sure that we are as accountable as possible. I know how important that is to you, Minister.

I just wanted to bring that up. I'm not sure if it's something that you can answer on right now but something to please consider as we look at how it is that we are allowed to allocate that money during our nominations and how they're being used for memberships.

Thank you very much.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you.

I see the hon. Minister of Justice.

Mr. Madu: Thank you, Mr. Chair, and thank you to the Member for Chestermere-Strathmore. Thank you for your comments on amendment A1. With respect to your comments on membership, let me be clear. I think it's important for the members of this Assembly to be clear on the current state of the law, that I have not sought to change section 25 of the act. Right now you could take a look at section 25 of the act. It makes a distinction between membership purchase up to \$50. Under section 25 that is not considered to be a contribution, but if you were to buy a membership for \$55, \$50 is not considered to be a contribution right now under the EFCDA, but the \$5 is considered to be a contribution that then counts towards your contribution limit.

All that we have done in Bill 81 is to implement a request by the Chief Electoral Officer to clarify that, and you will find that on page 123 of Bill 81. That is a request by the Chief Electoral Officer. In section 25(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.

Rather than, you know, a confusion that has got to do with whether or not that is accounted for, the Chief Electoral Officer would want us to account for that money. What he wants is to make it clear that that money used in purchasing memberships would be counted as part of your contribution once it exceeds \$50. That's all the amendment with respect to membership. I hope that that is part of the concerns that the Member for Chestermere-Strathmore has got with respect to membership. I have not sought to create a new set of rules around membership.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. minister.

Are there any members looking to join on A1?

[Motion on amendment A1 carried]

The Deputy Chair: We are back on Bill 81. I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-South.

Mr. Dang: Thank you, Mr. Chair. It's a pleasure to rise on Bill 81, the Election Statutes Amendment Act, 2021 (No. 2). Let me be clear. While I am pleased at some of the changes that we have been able to make tonight, I still have significant concerns with this bill. I think that we continue to see a degradation of our democracy in this place, including that filings are now annual instead of quarterly for constituency associations. We can go extended periods of time without having the adequate reporting if there were illegal contributions or improper contributions in some way.

9:00

We continue to have so many problems around stifling of speech in this place, but in particular I think that one of the things that my colleague here from Chestermere-Strathmore was just bringing up

is the problem around memberships. I did quickly flip to the point that the minister was trying to make talking about membership fees paid by a person on behalf of another person. I know that my colleague here from Chestermere-Strathmore tabled this afternoon, I believe, a bulletin from Elections Alberta which indicated that paying for expenses to attend registered party events or on behalf of people that included things around parties such as memberships – administrative expenses would be prohibited if it was paid for by a third-party advertiser, and I think that that’s something that is interesting because it’s something we saw potentially being used in very recent AGMs, potentially the UCP AGM, where memberships and then attendance were purchased on behalf of members.

With that in mind, I do have an amendment I’d like to move. I’ll wait for the table to see it.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you.

As is the usual course, there will be copies on the tables by the entrances. You can raise your hands if you would like a copy of this amendment. This amendment will be referred to as A2.

If the hon. member could please read it into the record.

Mr. Dang: Thank you. I would move that Bill 81, the Election Statutes Amendment Act, 2021 (No. 2), be amended by striking out section 5(26) and substituting the following:

(26) Section 25 is amended by striking out “An annual membership fee paid for” and substituting “An annual membership fee paid by a person for the person’s own”.

Thank you, Mr. Chair. I’m going to just speak briefly to my arguments here. I think that, pretty clearly, when a third party incurs an expense to reimburse a person tasked with organizing or running a party’s event or a membership or anything like that, it’s likely considered, in the current Election Finances and Contributions Disclosure Act, an offence under section 41.41(1)(d), where you’re contributing to part of the administrative activity of a registered party, right?

With that in mind, I want to take out this new language the minister is trying to put in that says, basically, that it is okay. We’re introducing language that attempts to make it okay to purchase memberships on behalf of another person, and I think that’s something that is underhanded. I think it’s something that would allow us to open up purchasing things like leadership races or leadership reviews, would allow us to open up having these substantial contributions – if you’re talking about, let’s say, a \$10 membership and you have a \$4,200 donation limit right now, give or take, that means you’re buying hundreds of memberships, 423 memberships potentially, one person. We’re talking about this new loophole that the government is opening up with Bill 81 where we’re accepting that fees should be paid by a person on behalf of another person, and I don’t think that’s something we should accept. I think we should be leaving that out of the legislation.

I think that each member in a democratic party, in a party that believes in the grassroots, should be purchasing their own membership. Of course, it’s up to the party to determine what a membership should cost, but certainly they should be able to make it as accessible to their membership as possible so that the people who are actually trying to influence decisions in parties, who are actually trying to influence decisions in things like leadership reviews and leadership races, are people who are really committed and doing their work to be a member of that party.

Again, like I said, the interpretation bulletin that was released by Elections Alberta and tabled by my friend from Chestermere-Strathmore just this afternoon, I think, does clarify that when you make contributions that are for the administrative activities of registered parties – I believe that when you buy a membership in a

political party, some if not all of that money typically goes towards administrative activities. Processing the membership dues, having a membership card issued, putting out digital communications or paper communications: those are all administrative activities. Those are all things that parties have to do when they sign up new members – right? – and the fee goes toward that.

The EFCDA as written, I think, does prohibit these types of contributions by third parties on behalf of members, and I think that we should stick to that language. I think that it would help us immensely in terms of trust in our political parties and trust in things like leadership reviews that go on in political parties. Hopefully, the government members will be able to support me in this. I think it’s a good amendment, and I think it will continue to make this bad bill better.

Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

I see the Minister of Justice.

Mr. Madu: Thank you, Mr. Chair. There is no question that I would not be supporting this amendment for the simple reason that section 25 of the act speaks for itself. What we are seeking to do in the amendment in Bill 81, which is a request from the Chief Electoral Officer, is to clarify the current interpretation of section 25. I think, you know, the Member for Edmonton-South referred to bulletin 6, that Elections Alberta issued on November 19. I have had opportunity to review bulletin 6, issued by the chief of Elections Alberta on November 19. While I can’t speak for Elections Alberta, I can speak to the interpretation of section 25 as contained in this particular piece of legislation.

Let me say this. There are several lawyers in this Assembly. One of the elementary canons of interpretation is that if a law doesn’t ban something, it is not prohibited, meaning that if the drafters of a particular law, a particular provision – if the legislators’ intention was to prohibit something, they would write that in the legislation, and there is no prohibition in section 25 that prevents someone from buying a membership for a third party or someone from buying a membership for a family member. In fact, I don’t think the Chief Electoral Officer or Elections Alberta would disagree that someone buying a membership for a family member is prohibited. The EFCDA, in section 25 or anywhere else in the act, does not make a distinction between a family member and a third party that is not a family member. That distinction does not exist in the act. That is all you need to know about the intentions of those who drafted section 25.

I have not sought to amend section 25. There is nothing in Bill 81 that departs from section 25. To the contrary, what we have in Bill 81 is a request by the Chief Electoral Officer to clarify section 25 so that the confusion around section 25 will no longer be there. That is something that the drafters ought to have done when they wrote section 25. There is a clarification that is worth making. The goal is so that if you are spending more than \$50 to purchase someone else’s membership, whether a family member or someone else, that money would be captured in your global aggregate contribution limit. That is the goal, and you could take a look at all of the sections of the EFCDA that deal with contributions.

Again, lawyers in this particular room will understand that sometimes it’s what we call the combined reading of statutory provisions contained in an act. You could take a global combined reading of this act, and it will still come to the same conclusion. I don’t think that the Chief Electoral Officer would disagree with that. Nothing that bulletin 6, that Elections Alberta has put forward – should Bill 81 pass with the clarification that he sought, I am confident that that bulletin 6, that he put forward, will be taken down.

9:10

The Deputy Chair: Thank you.

I see the hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View has risen.

Ms Ganley: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. I'm pleased to rise and speak to this amendment. There's been a lot of talk about what the changes in the bill proposed by the government do and, therefore, the necessity of this amendment. I think the amendment is important because I think it's important for people to be buying their own party memberships.

I take what the minister is saying to be: you know, the law was unclear in the first place, and it's been interpreted in this way, and we're just clarifying. I mean, allowing that argument for a minute – I don't necessarily agree with it – so what? I guess that's my question: so what? I mean, if we here in this place think that people should buy their own memberships, if we here in this place, the people who write the laws, whose job it is to decide what the laws should say, feel that it is inappropriate for people to be buying memberships for each other, then that is the law that we should pass, because we are granted the power to pass that law. It is our choice. There's nothing sort of unconstitutional about passing a law that says that people ought to buy their own memberships. I think there's nothing unethical about it.

I mean, regardless of what the intent is or who said what when, I think the question before us is: do we think people should have to buy their own memberships in political parties? I think the answer is and ought to be, at least for my part and for my colleagues: yes, we think people ought to buy their own memberships.

I mean, certainly, we saw, without getting too far down into the weeds – let me put it this way. The allegation made against the current Premier in his leadership race was about e-mails going to the wrong places, about people sort of having signed up, you know, fake memberships on behalf of other people and getting the e-mails and voting a different way. That was the allegation. So it is a very odd choice ethically for this government in that situation, when an investigation is ongoing into these matters, to come before this House and render that action legal. Now, it still wouldn't render voting on behalf of someone else legal, but it would arguably facilitate it because people could sign other people up. People with enough money could sign a whole bunch of people up.

Mr. Chair, I just don't think that's how we want our parties to work. I just don't think that we want them to work by way of individuals with deep pockets being able to have that kind of sway and being able to sign people up. It doesn't necessarily say that they will have undue influence over those people and their ultimate voting, but in my opinion it has that potential. If it has that potential, then let's just not do it. I don't think there's any good reason for doing it, so if we have the potential for that sort of contributing to or allowing the potential for wrongdoing, then why would we do it? Mr. Chair, at the end of the day, I think this is a good amendment. I think that regardless of what our agreement or disagreement is on whether this is a change – and I think it is; they think it isn't – it doesn't really matter because, at the end of the day, what matters is that people should buy their own party membership, and that is why I will be supporting this amendment.

Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Mr. Madu: Mr. Chair, obviously, I have been listening to the comments made by the Member for Calgary-Mountain View, and obviously I don't agree with her submission and her comment because it is important to recognize that the NDP as a political party – even the federal members of the NDP are automatically members of the Alberta NDP. The federal members of the NDP are

automatically members of the Alberta NDP. I think it is disingenuous for the Member for Calgary-Mountain View to talk about buying memberships in a political party when in their own rules – when in their own rules – there is no accountability mechanism in the way they have structured their party memberships in compliance with section 25 of the EFCDA. There is none.

Again, I have always considered, you know, debate that is substantive, and I will pay attention to each and every one of them, and I will carefully consider and ponder upon them if they make sense, in keeping with the commitment that we made to Albertans. We will not take lessons from the NDP on membership because it doesn't matter where you're coming from; you could e-mail the NDP and you would become a member of their political party. There is no accountability whatsoever.

Again, this amendment achieves nothing from the current provision of section 25. This amendment A2 achieves nothing. When I see a substantive amendment that's worth consideration, we would. All that Bill 81 has done is implement the request of the Chief Electoral Officer with respect to how that agency has interpreted section 25. You're not avoiding the confusion that currently exists. Unless anyone can stand before the floor of this Assembly and point to a ban in the EFCDA, any amendment to that particular effect will not be accepted by me.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. minister.

I see the hon. Member for Central Peace-Notley has caught my eye.

Mr. Loewen: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. I guess I just had to join into this debate here quickly. The minister mentioned here just a few minutes ago that this bill didn't amend section 25, but obviously it does amend section 25. On page 123 it starts by renumbering it as section 25(1), and then it goes into subsection (1): "by striking out 'An annual membership fee paid for' and substituting 'An annual membership fee paid by a person for the person's own.'" Now, that does obviously change the intent of section 25. Furthermore, when you go into number (2) down below there, it adds after subsection (1):

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.

Obviously, this clearly talks about paying for membership fees, one person for another. Those are clearly changes that this bill brings forward to this act.

Now, I also want to point out something that's been brought up before. I'll bring it up again, the interim interpretation bulletin from the Chief Electoral Officer dated, I think, November 19, 2021 – obviously very recent – where it says: "An interpretation of section 25 that would enable an individual to pay for an annual membership on behalf of others would be inconsistent with section 34."

Now, section 34, of course, deals with when people are paying money to political parties on behalf of somebody else, doing indirectly what they can't do directly. Obviously, there are rules against that. There have been fines levied with that with the past leadership race, in fact, tens of thousands of dollars' worth of fines on that. I think that's pretty clear, that that's not acceptable now and never has been acceptable.

9:20

Mr. Chair, I just wanted to bring that forward and make sure that everybody in the House is aware that this bill does open up section 25 with the membership rules. It clearly talks about paying for memberships, "a person [paying] on behalf of another person."

That's a quote from the changes made to this bill. Again, we have the Chief Electoral Officer's interim interpretation dealing with annual party membership dues dated November 19. Obviously, this is something that is a concern to people. I think it's a concern to members of parties that buy their memberships in good faith and want to have influence on the direction of a party. Obviously, when this sort of thing is changed, which will allow members to buy memberships for others, I think that that's a grave concern to party members and their opportunity to influence in good faith the direction of the party.

Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

I see the Minister of Justice has risen.

Mr. Madu: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Again, I have listened to the comments and submissions made by the Member for Central Peace-Notley on Bill 81 on his interpretation of the changes made in Bill 81 to the current section 25. I can, you know, confirm that it's incorrect insofar as what he's trying to get to is whether or not someone could purchase a membership for someone else. Section 25 of the current act reads:

An annual membership fee paid for membership in a political party or in a constituency association of that party, or in both, is not a contribution for the purposes of this Act if

- (a) the fee or, when a fee is paid to the party and to a constituency association of that party, the total of those fees, does not exceed \$50 . . .

If it doesn't exceed \$50, it is not a contribution. It doesn't matter who paid for it or for whom it is paid. That is section 25(a). Unless someone can stand before the floor of this Assembly and point to the contrary interpretation, then this amendment has got no place here, and the argument made by the Member for Central Peace-Notley has no merit whatsoever.

Subsection (b) says, bearing in mind the primary provision of section 25:

- (b) the political party and constituency association each maintain a membership list indicating the amount of the fee or fees paid by each member that is allocated to the political party or constituency association, as the case may be, but if the fee or total of those fees exceeds \$50, the amount of the excess shall be considered as a contribution.

Again, in excess of \$50 it doesn't speak to paid by who for whom. Unless any member in this Assembly can point to an otherwise interpretation, then, again, this amendment has no business to be here because it was seeking to do what is irrelevant under section 25.

The amendment that we made is, yes, on page 123 of Bill 81, and I note that would clarify, once again, a request by the Chief Electoral Officer. I note that the Member for Central Peace-Notley referred to the interim bulletin notice No. 6, that I have already referred to and spoken to, and he referred to section 34 of the EFCDA. Again, section 34 deals with contribution, and the clarification sought by the Chief Electoral Officer would confirm that that excess of \$50 used to buy a membership for someone else will now become part of the person's who is paying that extra global contribution pursuant to section 34. That is the only natural and logical and legal interpretation that can come out of the combined reading of section 25 and section 34 and the amendment that we put forward. Again, unless someone in this Assembly can point to an absolute ban, this amendment has no business.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. minister.

I see the hon. Member for Central Peace-Notley has risen.

Mr. Loewen: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. Again, you know, it's interesting to listen to the minister speak. He talked a lot about (a) and (b) under section 25, but of course they're not being changed, so we were not discussing or debating what is said in (a) and (b). What we are talking about is what it says in section 25, which is renumbered as section 25(1), where there is a change in the annual membership fee paid by a person for the person's own membership, and also the addition under subsection (1), which is subsection (2), where an annual membership fee paid by a person on behalf of another person for that person's membership.

Again, Mr. Chair, we go back to this document, the interim interpretation bulletin from the Chief Electoral Officer, where it says that "an interpretation of section 25 that would enable an individual to pay for an annual membership on behalf of others would be inconsistent with section 34." Of course, section 34 is the furnishing section of the legislation, that clearly outlines that that would not be acceptable. There are laws against furnishing, which is giving money to somebody else or paying for something on somebody else's behalf that they normally couldn't do themselves because of rules.

I just want to keep the minister focused on the issue at hand, which is section 25(1), the changes that were made there. If these changes don't change anything, then I'm not sure why they're there to begin with. Obviously, they changed something, and it appears that they changed that people can be paying for memberships on others' behalf, like it says in section (2), that's being added: "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." That clearly outlines the precedent or the situation where a person could pay for another person's membership. That clearly is stated right there. Again, if this is something that doesn't do anything, then why is it there to begin with? I think, obviously, if the minister would just agree to striking out those changes altogether, then I guess we would be back to where we were before. I'll leave it at that.

Thank you very much.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you.

I see the Minister of Justice has risen.

Mr. Madu: One final point on this particular point and a comment I want to respond to, again on amendment A2 before this Assembly, that I wanted to point out. Early on, Mr. Chair, I talked about the intention of the drafters and the intention of the Legislature that passed the EFCDA. Again, you could go to the archives and read the debate that proceeded in this Assembly when those were dealt with. The drafters, in their wisdom, intended to ban something, to prohibit something, in the EFCDA, and they did so in section 35. So it is not as if their minds were not alerted to a type of contribution that they wanted to ban. They indeed averted their mind to what type of contribution needed to be banned and, in their wisdom, just prohibited certain types of contributions. If you are looking to see the type of contribution prohibited in EFCDA, that we have not touched, that has not been amended in Bill 81, take a look at section 35. The heading of section 35 is Prohibited Contributions, and it proceeded after section 34 and section 25.

9:30

The lawyers in this room will understand what I'm talking about. Again, this will be – and you can read that. The things itemized and mentioned in the circumstances referred to in section 35 are the circumstances that the drafters meant to prohibit anything that has got to do with contributions.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. minister.

I see that the hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat caught my eye.

Mr. Barnes: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I've just got a couple of things to add as to why I'm in support of this amendment and striking this portion right out of the bill that you can buy memberships for somebody else, up to 400 or so.

I'm just looking at the whole process, you know, overshadowing changing the election law, Bill 81. Of course, as the hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View mentioned earlier, the RCMP investigation into the unity vote and the leadership election from three and a half, four years ago and the talk and the investigation and the reporting that so often bubbles back to the top of the media from three and a half and four years ago. Here we are, clearly – clearly – where there's a huge disagreement, a huge disagreement as to the meaning of the clause and our interpretations, and, Mr. Chair, here we are just 18 months before the next election. If three and a half or four years after these other serious allegations Albertans still haven't received final and fair due process, what if we end up there again?

What if we end up in a situation where this is challenged in court, where there's disagreement, where because of a clear statement – as my hon. colleague from Central Peace-Notley just mentioned, on page 123, clause (26)(c), subsection (2):

An annual membership fee paid by a person on behalf of another 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.

Okay. If it's over \$50 or \$55, it's part of the contribution, but it's still legal. So what happens when there's a discrepancy? It ends up in court, and 18 months before the next election – I hate to go to motives because you only end up guessing wrong, but here we are 18 months before the next election, and, Mr. Chair, let's look at the process.

Second reading of this bill happened last week at 11 or 11:30 at night, when this place was – well, it's 11, 11:30 at night. Secondly, we know that time allocation is on the Order Paper. Are we jeopardizing the main reason we're sent here? Are we jeopardizing, Mr. Chair, Albertans' right to be fully engaged in a democracy that is more than just them going to work and paying their taxes but actually allowing the 87 of us in here to speak on their behalf?

Mr. Chair, it's clear that what's in writing is inconsistent from what I'm hearing, and for that reason I absolutely support the hon. member from I believe it was Edmonton-South in the desire to strike this clause, and I think that for the good of Alberta, for the good of democracy, we all should support that.

Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

I see that the hon. Member for Edmonton-West Henday caught my eye.

Mr. Carson: Thank you, Mr. Chair. It's an honour to rise this evening to just say that I am fully in support of the amendment put forward by the Member for Edmonton-South and have appreciated the conversation, especially through this amendment debate, from the independent members, of course, as well as my own caucus members in the opposition here.

First off, I think it's, you know, important to reflect on some comments that were made by the Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview at some point, talking about the fact that we do from time to time have people in our communities that are interested in getting

involved on a party level or a partisan level, and in some instances those people say that they don't necessarily have the money to put forward for a membership fee. In those instances we have to be clear, as far as we can, that it's, unfortunately, just one of those things where we believe you shouldn't be able to be buying those memberships for other people.

Again, in this instance, with the amendment before us, and the lack of clarity and the confusion – I mean, the minister spoke about confusion that exists. I think that it hasn't become any more clear because of the words that have been put forward by the minister, but I think that it's relatively clear from the interpretation from the Chief Electoral Officer, that we've heard spoken to at length through this conversation this evening and in previous amendments on this debate, that this continues to be a concern. I truly don't understand why the government is so unwilling to accept this amendment to ensure that membership fees are only paid for by a person that is buying the membership for themselves. It's truly fascinating to me why the government is so set on ensuring that other people can buy memberships for other people, for lack of better terms, Mr. Chair.

I can only reflect again, as the previous member who was just speaking did, on the history that we've seen from the actions of this party or the leadership of this party through the leadership election that happened under the UCP just a short few years ago. I am very concerned, not only for democracy across the province and all Albertans but for the democracy within the UCP Party. At the end of the day, we disagree on many things, maybe most things, Mr. Chair, but I think that we should be able to agree that the only person that should be buying a membership into a party is the person that wants that membership themselves.

You know, I continue to be concerned about this decision of the government to move forward with such a weird piece within this legislation. I'm hopeful that they would be willing to accept this amendment so that we can move forward, as we have been able to in other instances within the legislation. I think that we've made some decent progress on making a bad bill better this evening from amendments that this government has put forward. I think that this amendment before us is another opportunity for us to make that possible.

Now, my last point on this amendment or the conversations that we've heard this far, Mr. Chair – you know, the fact is that, again, as much as we can, we do our best to be respectful, and I think that I have good days and bad days. But the fact is that we just heard the Minister of Justice rise and say that the NDP gives memberships to people when they e-mail them. I mean, it's absolutely unbelievable, again, with the concerns that have been brought forward against the leadership of this party over the past few years, that the minister is even willing to make such allegations. I don't think that it's befitting of this House or that position, and I would appreciate if that kind of rhetoric could just end at this point.

Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: I see the hon. deputy government whip has risen.

Mr. Rutherford: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I appreciate being recognized and also for the comments from Edmonton-West Henday, I really don't care who they give an NDP membership to. That's party business. They can decide that. For the United Conservative Party, we can control our own memberships and have bylaws about what those members can do and who can buy them and for who and what privileges that allows. That's party business.

9:40

I appreciate the concern that the NDP seem to have for how the United Conservative Party runs, but that's for its members to decide

and for governance to be decided at annual general meetings under the Societies Act. There are rules for this. There are ways to govern it. There are ways to handle it. I think that needs to be, you know, recognized, frankly. I don't think this amendment is necessary at all because this is party business, and it doesn't need to be legislated.

With that, Mr. Chair, I would like to move to adjourn debate.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you.

[The voice vote indicated that the motion to adjourn debate carried]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 9:41 p.m.]

[Fifteen minutes having elapsed, the committee divided]

[Mr. Milliken in the chair]

For the motion:

Aheer	Long	Pon
Allard	Lovely	Rehn
Copping	Luan	Rowswell
Ellis	Madu	Rutherford
Glubish	McIver	Sawhney
Gotfried	Neudorf	Schweitzer
Guthrie	Nixon, Jason	Smith
Hanson	Nixon, Jeremy	Williams
Issik	Orr	Yao
LaGrange	Panda	

Against the motion:

Barnes	Deol	Goehring
Bilous	Eggen	Sabir
Carson	Ganley	Sweet
Totals:	For – 29	Against – 9

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Bill 73 Infrastructure Accountability Act

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

10:00

Ms Ganley: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. I rise to move an amendment. I will let that reach the table.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

As always is the case, there will be copies at the tables at the entrances. You can also raise your hand, and one will be delivered to you. This will be on behalf, I believe, of the Member for Edmonton-South. For your benefit and all those here, this amendment will be referred to as amendment A5.

Ms Ganley: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. I'll read the amendment. On behalf of my hon. colleague for Edmonton-South I move that Bill 73, the Infrastructure Accountability Act, be amended (a) by striking out section 4(g) and substituting the following:

(g) additional criteria as prescribed by the Lieutenant Governor in Council.

And (b) by adding immediately after section 6:

Regulations

(7) On the Responsible Minister's recommendation, the Lieutenant Governor in Council may prescribe additional criteria for the purpose of section 4(g) that the Responsible Minister must consider when evaluating a capital planning submission.

What does it do? What the amendment does is – currently the act sets out a series of criteria. In addition, the minister has the ability to prescribe criteria. This would make it the case that the Lieutenant Governor in Council – that would be cabinet – could prescribe the criteria instead. “Why is that different?” one might ask. Well, in Alberta, I was interested to discover, ministerial orders are not always required to be published and certainly not all in the same place. Depending on the ministry or the minister, the orders may all be published online. They're not necessarily required to all be published online. They're not necessarily gathered and all published in one place, so for your average member of the public, it can be a bit difficult to follow.

Orders in council, however, are required to be published. They're required to be published in a certain way, in a certain place. What that does is that it basically would sort of render public any additional criteria that were added on. That's a big deal because it isn't just the government that needs to care about what the criteria are. Lots of other people need to care about what the criteria are. For instance, there are a bunch of outside agencies. There are municipalities. Many people have an interest in what these criteria are because they'll affect projects that are critical for them. For instance, for a municipality, you know, this potentially has a huge impact on projects that have an impact on the lives of the citizens of that municipality, so they will care very deeply what these criteria are.

In addition, Mr. Chair, I think that the entire stated purpose of this bill is to make the criteria publicly available. These are the criteria that were already used by government. They were used before us. They were used while we were there. They have been used after us. You know, these are criteria that have been used to evaluate projects. Now, obviously, I quibble somewhat with certain criteria that are lacking; for instance, the consideration of the environmental impact, the consideration of energy efficiency. That sort of thing, I think, is increasingly relevant and ought to have been included.

For the purposes of this amendment, what it would do is that it would make it the case that if the government wishes to amend the criteria, at minimum the criteria have to stay public. I mean, definitely worse than not having publicly available criteria at all is to have some criteria which are public and some which are hidden. That just leaves people with this sort of, like, expectation that the rules are one way when, in fact, they may turn out to be another way. I think this is important. I think that if we're going to make these things public, we should make them all public. What it does currently is that it allows the government to say: look, we made the criteria public; here they are in these acts except for the ones that we made by ministerial order that we didn't publish anywhere and nobody knows about. Actually, then people are attempting to play by the rules of which they are unaware, and that's, I think, challenging and unfair to those individuals.

Again, this will have impacts on industry, First Nations, irrigation leagues, community leagues, municipalities – the list goes on – so I don't think that this is unreasonable. It really just adds to what the government's stated purpose is, so were they to reject it, I would be very curious about their stated purpose. If the stated purpose is transparency, then simply making it the case that additional criteria be published in a publicly available and clear manner for people to see, I mean, should be an obvious improvement. It should be something that the government is thrilled to hear about. If it truly is the case that the point is to be entirely transparent, then we have done nothing but help the government. We have done nothing but say: “Oh, yes, you have your criteria in the legislation. But look here, you can add one that doesn't get

published anywhere, so we fixed it. Now if you want to add criteria, we'll all be able to see that criteria."

I think, you know, that we've had a lot of conversation around this sort of thing in the House. The government is fond of saying that sunshine is the best disinfectant. I don't disagree, so I don't see any real reason to reject this. All it means is, again, that – I mean, the minister can still come to cabinet and suggest to his colleagues the additional criteria he wants to add. All this requires now is that his colleagues around the cabinet table agree and then that it be published. That's the only change. It still allows the same thing otherwise. I think this is well in the spirit of transparency. I think it's good public policy. Yeah. I'm hoping that the government will accept or at least consider this amendment because it's a reasonably straightforward amendment. I think it's clear what it does.

Again, it doesn't take the government's ability to prescribe additional criteria away. They're still perfectly able to prescribe additional criteria. It's just that now those additional criteria will be in an order in council instead of a ministerial order, and the order in council will be published. That way, all of the other people who rely on infrastructure projects funded by the government, who will be affected by this act and by any sort of subsequent ministerial order making additional criteria, will be aware of those criteria, and that will make it easier, more transparent, more fair.

I'm extremely hopeful that the government will consider this amendment, which I think is very good, in the spirit in which it is intended. Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

We are on amendment A5. I see the hon. Minister of Infrastructure.

Mr. Panda: Yeah. I would like to thank the member opposite for offering that amendment, but I don't see any value in accepting that amendment because we considered all of that in what we included in the bill. I would ask everyone to reject that amendment because as the needs change over a period of time, the minister should have the flexibility to respond to the changes and the needs of the day. That's why, respectfully, I can't accept that amendment, and I would like to call the question.

Thank you.

10:10

The Deputy Chair: I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-North West.

Mr. Eggen: Thanks, Mr. Chair. Yeah. I totally concur with the hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View. While I've observed some inconsistencies in Bill 73, I think that an amendment like this really makes it acceptable for us, quite frankly, as a caucus. What we are trying to do, the intention from the beginning – I know that the hon. minister has been telling us that he was looking for transparency and that he was looking for criteria that were easily accessible. For the sake of efficiency and bidding on contracts, that's what you've got to do. I mean, you want to make sure that everyone has an equal chance to see exactly what is being looked for, and if the minister is, you know, making that information available to the public, then that's going to help a lot. This amendment definitely does that. It allows for the additional criteria that the minister might consider when evaluating a submission, and I think that that's the essence of common sense and good governance as well.

I know that we have lots of building to do here in the province of Alberta, which is something to look forward to, building more sustainable infrastructure and being a leader in regard to building transport and sustainable buildings and new schools and hospitals and so forth. You know, when we do that, we're putting those buildings and the programs that are being housed by this

infrastructure sort of on a set course. It's kind of like setting the banks of a river – right? – so you want to make sure that you're doing it well and doing it correctly the first time. I think that Bill 73 could serve that purpose as long as we were following this ability to have full transparency as to what the purpose is and what the parameters are of any given project. I think that this is a laudable goal.

We know that municipal partners would benefit from this as well and industries, First Nations, everyone that needs the information to make a proper bid to build any given government project. I like that. I haven't heard that sunshine-is-the-best-disinfectant cliché for a long time, and sometimes when you don't hear these clichés for a while, they become fresh, right? I like that idea, literally the metaphor of the sunshine, of passing the minister's evaluations on capital planning submissions so that they might have a full evaluation by all members and people that are part of any given project that we're building here in the province.

I encourage everyone to vote for this amendment. It'd be fun. We see amendments being passed and considered here tonight. There's a special thing in the air tonight. I think we can do very well to continue on with our streak of passing amendments here now with Bill 73.

Thanks.

The Deputy Chair: Thanks.

We are on amendment A5. I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadows.

Mr. Deol: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I'm pleased to rise in the House to speak to amendment A5, and I'm speaking in support of this amendment. The reason why I'm saying that is that it really strengthens the spirit of this bill as this bill states that this is actually strengthening accountability in infrastructure. By seeing this, as my colleagues the Member for Calgary-Mountain View and the Member for Edmonton-North West have so effectively explained why this amendment is important to this piece of legislation – itself, looking at the government's summary documents that say clearly some of the important concerns by the major stakeholders, by municipalities and municipal leaders, the government heard and the government did acknowledge those, but they are not being addressed in this piece of legislation.

This amendment is taking that feedback that we heard and that the government admits in their summary document that they heard, that the municipal leaders should be actually heard. By passing this amendment, it adds to the provision of this act the process of decision-making and the orders that actually are published and available to the general public, where they can really, if not being part of everything, judge the decision and provide their feedback to the government decisions.

Around accountability, as it states, there are a lot of issues. This bill generally does not really address the large concerns around the government actions in the past two and a half years, where the government put the huge interest of Albertans at stake without consulting and providing transparent information to them. This bill doesn't address a lot of that stuff, and it does not guarantee that it will not happen again, but this amendment focuses on a very specific portion of the piece of the legislation that will help promote the spirit of this bill. As the government is claiming and as this bill states, it's increasing the accountability around government decision-making, so I think this amendment needs to be supported, and I would encourage my colleagues to support and vote for this amendment A5.

With that, I also conclude my remarks on this amendment. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other members? I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs.

Ms Goehring: Thank you, Mr. Chair. It's my honour to rise tonight to speak to A5 on the Infrastructure Accountability Act. I think that part of this legislation is essential to have transparency, and that's what the criteria are, so the amendment that's being proposed really gives the ability for anybody that's looking at accessing infrastructure requests a clear understanding of what the criteria are. The way it is written in this legislation, if it's under a ministerial order, we heard it explained that it isn't required to be public. Therefore, it puts so many at a disadvantage. If there is a municipality that wants to look at some infrastructure or there are community leagues or, you know, sports organizations or First Nations, anybody that really wants to have a clear understanding of what the criteria are, the way that it reads now, it's not accessible to the public.

By the Member for Edmonton-South putting forward this amendment, it's really just giving an opportunity for everybody that would be accessing the criteria a clear understanding. If it's done through orders in council, it's public, so everyone would be able to access it. It's not saying that the minister can't have some impact from time to time on the criteria. It's just simply saying that it has to go to all members of cabinet, and it has to be made public rather than just a minister in isolation making the decision in a closed room without it being open to everybody that would be expected to understand what the criteria are.

10:20

I know as the Culture critic, you know, I've talked to people all across the province about what their infrastructure asks are, and really infrastructure is impacted by everybody in this Chamber. Every member in this Chamber has an infrastructure ask for their community, and instead of guessing what the criteria are or what the minister may have done from time to time, this amendment just provides some clarity, some transparency, and, like the act itself is named, some accountability. It simply makes sense to change this section of the act to ensure that there is transparency to the public. The people who are actually asking for these infrastructure needs in their communities have a right to know what the criteria are.

I'm concerned when I hear the minister get up and say: no, it's not needed. I just question: why? Why would you not want anybody that's wanting to have an infrastructure ask to have the best information available rather than hiding what the criteria are? It should be accessible to the public, and by putting it through the orders in council, it does that. It makes it published. It makes it public. It gives all members of council an opportunity to have some insight. Decisions this big shouldn't be made in isolation. It should be an opportunity for all the different ministries to come together to talk about what their needs are.

I know that in Culture there's a really good understanding of what the needs are, whether it's something in the Red Deer sports community where they wanted to add accessible washrooms, right? The Culture minister would have an understanding about that, and if there was a criterion that the Minister of Infrastructure wanted to change, that minister could simply say: "You know what? That doesn't make sense because of A, B, and C." So it might change it or it might make it better by having all of these voices at the table to have a discussion about what the criteria are. This doesn't decrease their ability; it doesn't decrease accountability. It actually increases it, makes everybody accountable, and it makes everybody in the public aware of what's going on.

When we're talking about the Infrastructure Accountability Act, this amendment actually makes it more accountable. So to hear the

minister say no makes me question: what's happening? Why would you not want transparency? Why would you not want accountability? It's a simple change. It doesn't cost any money to make this change. It's just a way to open things up, to shine light on what's happening in the ministry, and to give more understanding to those that are applying for infrastructure asks.

When people are coming forward and they come through my office and ask, "Can you help with this grant?" we want to be able to say very clearly: "If you go to the website and you look under infrastructure, if you look at what the criteria are, it's all laid out. It should be very clear what the expectations are for you to secure this." But when decisions are made by ministerial order and in private behind closed doors, that transparency is gone.

People put tons of hours into their asks for government. They know that there are limited funds available, and they want to make sure that the time that they're spending in their organization is of benefit. To spend hours on putting forward a proposal for an infrastructure ask only to find out that there was some criteria that wasn't disclosed can be pretty frustrating for the organizations that are applying. I think that by all the members accepting this amendment A5, it just makes sense to make government more accountable, to look at what's happening when decisions are being made, when criteria are being changed.

The wording "time to time" makes it sound like it's not something that is going to happen very often, so it shouldn't be very time-consuming to have all council come together to talk about what the asks are and to just put it out to the public: "This is what's happening. This is what the criteria are, and here is what is exactly expected of you when you're putting an ask forward." In my opinion, this is an amendment that makes sense. It's an amendment that is clear, it's transparent, and it's helpful to all members in the Chamber when they're working with their organizations across the province to put forward their infrastructure asks.

With that, Mr. Chair, I would ask that all members in this Chamber support this notice of amendment A5 and vote yes. Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

We are on amendment A5. I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview has joined debate.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I appreciate the opportunity to speak to amendment A5, which I support. I support my colleague and my colleagues. There are a number of issues that we have with the bill as it currently reads. I appreciate the fact that the Minister of Infrastructure has claimed that this bill is merely a housekeeping bill and has codified what previous governments have done. Now, the claim or the insinuation that previous governments did not follow any kind of direction or prescription for how projects are vetted and approved is patently false. I can tell you, having served as a member of cabinet, that the process that our government followed in 2015 was one that previous governments followed.

I appreciate the fact that the minister is codifying what's been traditional practice for governments for many years, in fact practice which has been followed before my time, before my colleague from Edmonton-North West's time, and before the Leader of the Official Opposition, who is the longest serving member currently in the Chamber, long before her time. Anyone in this Chamber who claims that we are suddenly about to embark upon a new practice which has never been followed is incorrect. That's the politest way I'll state that fact.

We're talking about the current tabled amendment to Bill 73, the Infrastructure Accountability Act. The challenge that I have with this bill, and the reason that I'm supporting this current motion, is

the fact that government should be looking at opportunities and ways to partner with municipalities. I mean, quite frankly, Mr. Chair, if we want to get to our optimal position, if we want Alberta to compete on the global stage, we need to align not just all three orders of government; we need to align all of our economic development associations, and we need to align entities, quite frankly, like Invest Alberta.

I can tell you, Mr. Chair, where we are today: they are not all aligned. The problem with that is that we all lose. I mean, this isn't about scoring points or who's right or who's wrong. I've said to the minister, I've said to stakeholders: I support the fact that Invest Alberta was taken out of the Ministry of JEI, the former ministry of economic development and trade, and moved to a Crown corporation.

10:30

Now, it should be noted that the current government loves to rewrite history and talk about Invest Alberta as an entity they created. It's not. The entity existed under the previous ministry. However, I will give credit to this government that they moved it into a Crown corporation, a separate entity. There are significant opportunities that we have, Mr. Chair, but we need to ensure that the government is not only acting in the best interests of Albertans, that they're not just bringing in legislation but that they're bringing in policies that will ensure that there is adequate oversight in these entities.

When we look at the current bill, that's codifying a number of processes that have existed – and not just with the previous government. I mean, honestly, Mr. Chair, this is where I wish that the current government could strip away the partisan comments and recognize that this process has been followed, what's being codified in this bill, for a number of years. And it has. When I look to governments that served before my time, they followed similar guidelines that this legislation is outlining. I appreciate that the minister and this government are in fact codifying the processes that have existed. I think the fact that this bill does not introduce new funding for existing infrastructure or, more importantly – well, equally importantly – that municipalities and regions within the province are not brought in as partners is problematic.

You see, what our government, under the NDP, tried to do was ensure that there was an alignment between municipalities, regions, the private sector, and the provincial government. You know why? Because internationally investors want to know that there is an alignment, and those are the jurisdictions they want to invest in. In fact, we know for a fact that companies like Infosys, Mphasis, and other companies that are coming to Alberta are not coming here because of the corporate tax rate. In fact, none of them, including Amazon – AWS, I know for a fact because I sat down with them, did not mention the corporate tax rate. You know what they mentioned, Mr. Chair? Access to talent.

What I didn't tell them, because I want companies like AWS to invest in Alberta, is the fact that this government has gutted our postsecondary institutions to the tune of \$700 million. You know what, Mr. Chair? I worry about the day that companies like AWS look at how this UCP government treats our postsecondaries and our talent pipeline. It's ironic. This government touts the fact that they are pro pipeline, yet they are the most antitalent pipeline government in the country. We have or had one of the best postsecondary institutions in the country. One of our researchers won a Nobel prize, and this government's response is to gut the very institution because it doesn't align with other provinces.

Do we want to continue to have some of the best postsecondaries to attract talent, or do you want to be average or below average? That's what you're shooting for. Do you know why Alberta is

ranked third, now fourth, thanks to you, for artificial intelligence? [interjection] Oh. No. This relates to the bill, Mr. Chair.

The Deputy Chair: No. I'm saying: through the chair. That's what I'm saying.

Mr. Bilous: Yes, sir. Back through you, Mr. Chair.

Do you want to know why Alberta ranks fourth globally, in the world, for artificial intelligence? Because of funding that started – and I will and I'm happy to give credit to a former, former, former government. The PCs under Ed Stelmach started funding AMII, the Alberta Machine Intelligence Institute, back in about 2004, 2003. We attracted global top talent – and this should have the interest of the Minister of Jobs, Economy and Innovation – and that's how we attracted top researchers and how Alberta for decades ranked third. We're now fourth.

Investments in our postsecondaries are critical. It's the talent pipeline, Mr. Chair. That's why Infosys came here. By the way, the Infosys deal was worked on back in 2017. How do I know that? Oh. I sat down with them. Shake your head, Minister of Justice. Were you there? Were you in San Francisco with me and Calgary Economic Development? You were not.

Mr. Jason Nixon: Another junket by Bilous.

Mr. Bilous: That's laughable. The Minister of Environment and Parks just called it a junket, yet at every turn . . .

The Deputy Chair: Hon. members, I do also just want to take this opportunity to remind all members that names, proper names, of elected representatives should not be used in this House. One of the main reasons for that is because it can personalize debate, which usually tends to lead towards decreased decorum, which thereby leads to ineffective debate.

The only member with the call right now is the hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview. [interjections]

10:40

Mr. Bilous: Mr. Chair, the members of government have no worries because they are about to be a one-term government.

Now, what I can say, Mr. Chair, is that deals like Infosys took years in the making, and I appreciate that this government is so desperate for wins that they'll claim whatever they want. I encourage this government to go talk to Calgary Economic Development and ask them: when did you start meeting with these companies to attract them to Alberta? It was long before their term.

Mr. Jason Nixon: They told me they were so happy you were gone.

Mr. Bilous: Once again the heckling from the government proves that a member can say anything in this place regardless of how far from the truth it actually is.

Now, what I will say, coming back to this, is that there are a number of issues with this bill, which is why I'm supporting the current amendment that's before the House. I can tell you, Mr. Chair, the gravest concern that I have is with the future of this province in the hands of this current government, who are happy to take credit for investment decisions that happened long before they ever came to power, and that the fact is that their current decisions will have impacts that go forward for years. I know that the Minister of Jobs, Economy and Innovation understands this, that every single positive announcement that has occurred in the last three years is, first and foremost, around talent and, secondly, around quality of life, and this government has done an incredible job messing up the two of them: a \$700 million cut to our postsecondaries, the very talent pipeline. They've shrunk it. They eliminated the interactive

digital media tax credit, about which we've heard from company after company and Alberta entities saying that you've placed Alberta at a disadvantage.

This government claims that they know about industry. They're so naive or ignorant or both. Mr. Chair, what companies are looking for is a level playing field, and this government has eliminated it. It's put Alberta at a disadvantage. The problem is that these investments have happened despite the current government, not because of it. The challenge is that we'll see these impacts happen far in the future.

Mr. Chair, this comes back to the current Bill 73, the Infrastructure Accountability Act, and the current amendment, which is to make significant changes to the current bill. The fact that this government has not included municipalities or regions within the province is extremely problematic. I believe the Minister of Municipal Affairs has told me that there are 330-ish municipalities in the province. I'm seeking some kind of verbal, eye agreement.

Mr. Eggen: That's about right.

Mr. Bilous: It's somewhere around there.

Mr. Chair, what Alberta needs – and you know what? The Minister of Jobs, Economy and Innovation talks about Team Alberta all the time, and I appreciate that, in fact, we started that language back in 2015. I can tell the House that I was proud as minister of economic development and trade to lead the largest trade delegation in Alberta's history. There were over 80 Alberta companies and business associations that accompanied us to China, over 300 participants, and it was extremely successful. In my opinion, that's what governments should be doing, leading trade delegations to help Alberta businesses expand, break into new markets.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other members looking to join on A5? I see the hon. Member for Calgary-Bhullar-McCall has risen.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I rise to speak to amendment A5. This is an important amendment, and I will briefly explain what it does. But before that, I want to say that this bill essentially codifies what governments have been doing, what governments are supposed to be doing. I think the government came up with this bill so that the Minister of Infrastructure will have a piece of legislation to his name. Otherwise, I don't think this bill changes much.

[Mrs. Pitt in the chair]

As I said, we are all about increased transparency. We are all about accountability around infrastructure projects and how public money is spent on that project. When I was in my constituency for the last little while, I have been discussing different bills with different people, different stakeholders. Not one person asked me about this bill, but what they do ask about is the last budget. Even though the northeast communities were the fastest growing communities across the province, the kids in those communities have to travel to other quadrants of the city to attend school. The government did not allocate a single school, public or Catholic, for the entirety of Calgary, not just the northeast. They did not invest a single penny on new schools in Calgary, in northeast Calgary.

People are concerned about how government is spending infrastructure funds. If this bill helps people understand how funds will be spent going forward, I think, sure, that transparency is welcome. Following the introduction of this bill, we have consulted as well. We have consulted with Albertans. We have consulted with

our constituents. We have consulted with stakeholders. We also took time to read the document produced by this government through its own consultation process, the What We Heard document. I think Albertans told this government exactly what they want to see in infrastructure planning, but again the government did not listen. The government completely ignored the feedback they got from their own consultation.

10:50

Let me quote from the executive summary of that document, that clearly articulates some of the most important things this government heard and chose not to listen to. It reads in part: "The criteria used to evaluate capital projects should be . . . defined, consistent, and in alignment with regional and municipal planning." That's what Albertans told this government, that when we are planning infrastructure for this province, we need to work with other orders of government, the most important one being our municipal governments. That's in government's own document, that that's what they heard from Albertans. Albertans want consistent and well-defined criteria that are in alignment with regional and municipal planning, and I don't know why the government didn't include this important criterion in their legislation. That's something municipalities have been asking for. That's something that makes sense. If you talk with anyone in land-use planning, that's something they will support. Instead, government chose to ignore that.

Not just that; government has cut funding for municipal sustainability initiatives. Government has cut municipal funding in many other areas as well. Oftentimes it felt like government was at war with municipalities. More recently, when we met Alberta Municipalities at their convention, when we met Rural Municipalities of Alberta, I think the consistent feedback that we were hearing was that government is ignoring their feedback, that government is not listening to them. Just like this bill, where they refuse to include alignment with regional and municipal planning, where they refuse to work with municipalities.

There were a number of other issues that were raised by Alberta Municipalities and Rural Municipalities of Alberta, that government is ignoring their feedback, that government is not willing to work with them. One example was the RCMP and the government plan to replace the RCMP. The Alberta Municipalities convention and RMA convention: I went there a few times and to their socials. I had an opportunity to talk to many of them, and the feedback was consistent: government is not listening to municipalities. Not one municipality – not one municipality – was there who supported the government plan to replace the RCMP with an even more costly Alberta provincial police force. They even had buttons printed with writing on them: keep the RCMP. Then they talked about many other issues, but the consistent theme was that the government would not listen to what municipalities have to say. One big omission in this act is that government ignored municipalities, government ignored aligning infrastructure projects with regional and municipal planning.

Again, government wants to talk about transparency. Government wants to talk about well-defined criteria. The amendment that is before the House: I hope that the minister will consider this one. In section 4(g) the bill currently reads: "other criteria as determined by the Responsible Minister from time to time." On one hand the government has named this bill the Infrastructure Accountability Act, and on the other hand the government is giving the minister power to include any other criteria that the minister determines at his sole discretion from time to time.

All this amendment is doing is replacing that discretion with a more accountable provision, with a more transparent provision. What it does is that it replaces 4(g) with a provision, and I'll read that provision: "additional criteria as prescribed by the Lieutenant Governor in council." Instead of giving the minister, again, discretion, all this amendment is doing is asking the minister to publish that additional criteria, prescribe that criteria through regulations, and in section 7 provide that corresponding reg-making authority to do the same.

If this bill is truly about accountability, if this bill is truly about transparency, if this bill is truly about defining the criteria of how we spend infrastructure money, if this bill is truly about applying consistent criteria, then I think that instead of giving the responsible minister discretion, we should have power in this legislation such that the minister may prescribe additional criteria but that criteria need to be transparent, that criteria need to be enacted through regulation, and that's what this amendment does.

I hope that all members of this House will support this amendment. It makes this legislation a bit better. It makes the criteria a bit more transparent even though the government has ignored municipalities altogether in this bill. Whenever future infrastructure projects are decided, and if the minister needs to consider additional factors, those factors, that criteria, can be prescribed through regulations. This amendment provides for that, and it also provides for that reg-making authority to the cabinet.

11:00

I hope that the minister will consider this amendment, and I urge all members of this House to vote in favour of this amendment, to vote in favour of accountability and transparency in infrastructure spending.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Chair: Any other members wishing to speak to amendment A5 on Bill 73?

Seeing none, I will call the question.

[The voice vote indicated that the motion on amendment A5 lost]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 11:01 p.m.]

[One minute having elapsed, the committee divided]

[Mrs. Pitt in the chair]

For the motion:

Bilous	Eggen	Sabir
Carson	Goehring	Sweet
Deol		

Against the motion:

Aheer	LaGrange	Panda
Allard	Long	Pon
Copping	Lovely	Rehn
Ellis	Luan	Rowswell
Glubish	Madu	Sawhney
Gotfried	McIver	Schweitzer
Guthrie	Neudorf	Shandro
Hanson	Nixon, Jason	Smith
Issik	Nixon, Jeremy	Williams
Kenney	Orr	Yao

Totals: For – 7 Against – 30

[Motion on amendment A5 lost]

The Chair: We are back on Bill 73 in Committee of the Whole. Any members wishing to join the debate?

Seeing none, I will call the question.

[The remaining clauses of Bill 73 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

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

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Chair: Any opposed? Carried.

Bill 80

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

The Chair: Hon. members, we are on amendment A1. Are there any members that are wishing to join the debate on the amendment? The hon. Member for Edmonton-West Henday.

Mr. Carson: Well thank you, Madam Chair. I appreciate that. I'm happy to rise to speak to the amendment on Bill 80, the Red Tape Reduction Implementation Act, 2021 (No. 2). I've had a few opportunities to speak to this bill, speak about my major concerns. Of course, being a red tape reduction bill, as this government loves to put forward, we are seeing many different pieces of legislation being affected by this. It is what we would consider an omnibus piece of legislation. Unfortunately, again, we're seeing a pattern from this government using these so-called red tape reduction acts to hide detrimental changes to some important pieces of legislation that are going to affect the funding allocations for people who are trying to further their education, many of these people accessing different levels of support. In this case we are indeed talking about part-time and full-time learners.

While we have had some opportunities to speak to the entirety of this bill, Madam Chair, I believe that at this point we are dealing with an amendment seeking to remove the changes that are being proposed to the part-time and full-time learner funding. We've heard from this government and this minister responsible for such programs about how something new is being put in place and that we should, you know, take it at face value that these changes are going to lead to better outcomes, but unfortunately it's really hard for myself and my colleagues to take that at face value.

Like I have said so many times in this Legislature, especially with the changes that are being made specific to this issue and in terms of the regulations that still have to come forward with that but also from what we've seen of the ability of the minister to choose who is going to be receiving this funding and how much funding is going to be provided in many cases, that's extremely frustrating. On one hand, we have these supports written into legislation already. This government is proposing that we trust them when they remove these important learner benefits and believe them that it's going to be equivalent on the other end.

Unfortunately, we haven't gotten that commitment from the Advanced Education minister, who at this point has not been willing to share whether he is expecting the same amount of funding to be allocated, whether the criteria and the expectations of who's going to be able to access this funding and timelines and so forth – that continues to be a major frustration for us, especially when we look at the track record of this government, as I've stated several times on the record, Madam Chair, regarding AISH funding, regarding seniors' benefits, and the move to deindex such programs and, going further, even when we talk about the issues of affordable housing and even as far as the \$700 million that we've seen this

government cut from postsecondary institutions at the same time as raising tuition, at the same time as increasing the changes to income support. I'll leave it at that.

11:10

The fact is that these all have compounding factors, and at the end of the day it's Albertans who are going to be stuck without proper programming, without proper funding for them. It's absolutely frustrating, again, in the midst of a continued pandemic, when we should be encouraging people to further their education and to be able to access supports that are going to keep them in housing. Again and again we've raised concerns about this government's lack of action on affordable housing and, really, on shelter funding as well. Of course, even here in the city of Edmonton the UCP government waited till the very last hour to provide funding for shelters. Madam Chair, at the end of the day, we need to be focused on affordable housing and these other programs that are going to keep people in their community, living the life that they wish to lead. Unfortunately, again, so many decisions by this government are hurting those opportunities.

Again, when we look at the changes to these learner programs, we have many newcomers to Canada or the province and immigrants hoping to access these full-time and part-time learning income supports. We've already seen this UCP government cut \$83 million from employment and income support through this current budget, and I imagine some of those cuts are going to be realized through the changes to these respective acts and learner benefits. It's truly devastating to see these changes, on top of the ones that I discussed earlier, in terms of how Albertans are being taxed on these types of programs, and at the end of the year, during tax time, finding out that their funding is going to be claimed against their income, now all of a sudden they're either losing other benefits or they're being forced to pay out money without truly understanding that that might be the case.

Again, this government continues to make decisions at the last minute that are affecting Albertans. As I raised earlier, the same thing happened with benefits in terms of AISH, not only this government deindexing them but also changing the dates when those funds would be rolled out. It's extremely frustrating to see these changes being proposed, and again it's why I'm supporting the amendment that's before us.

You know, Madam Chair, I'm hopeful that we'll have more opportunity to potentially speak to this bill because I do have other concerns that have been raised regarding the health care insurance pieces. I know that this government has recently put out their Budget 2020 consultation survey online, and it's interesting to see that they actually are asking people how they would feel about potentially having health care premiums. While we see, you know, this government saying, "While these changes to the Health Care Insurance Act are included in here, it's kind of an across-the-board change that isn't going to have any effect," then, on the other hand, we have this government proposing that this might be an idea that Albertans support. Again, hopefully, I will have some more opportunities to get to that at a later date.

With all that being said, Madam Chair, again, I hope that we can find support for this amendment that's before us. I think that while there is some modernization that we're seeing within this legislation in terms of grammar and wording throughout, there are some major concerns included in this bill. The main ones, as I've stated again and again, are regarding the learner benefits.

I think that we must reflect on the situation that we find ourselves in. I think the Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview this evening, on a separate piece of legislation, laid out quite clearly the fact that we need to continue to consider our talent pipeline and the

opportunities that we have and also the consequences that we are going to have if we continue to scale back funding not only to our postsecondary institutions through direct funding but also to those same institutions by moving to cut supports like the ones that we're seeing being considered under the Income and Employment Supports Act in this legislation.

Again, Madam Chair, I would encourage all members to support the amendment that's before us. I think that it's incumbent upon us to not continue down this path of removing the supports that are in place to support Albertans and have been historically. I think that we should be building on these programs. We haven't received that commitment from this minister, that this is indeed a move to strengthen this program or to increase funding, which, at the end of the day, is going to be one of the biggest concerns for me. We haven't received that confirmation, so at this point I'm not going to be able to take the minister's word for it, that he is going to make decisions in the best interest of all Albertans when it comes to his discretion on who gets funding and when that program rolls out and how it rolls out. Those continue to be concerns that could be easily fixed if we were to support this amendment.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadows.

Mr. Deol: Thank you, Madam Chair. I'm pleased to speak to the amendment on Bill 80, Red Tape Reduction Implementation Act, 2021 (No. 2). This bill introduces a number of changes, and many of these changes in Bill 80 are simple housekeeping measures. This could have been a miscellaneous statutes amendment act. I'll just focus on one of the substantial changes that is being introduced through this legislation to the Income and Employment Supports Act, and it has also impacted the skills training bursary program. This program provides support for both training benefits and income support and benefits.

Bill 80 removes this access to this training benefit if a person is not accepted in a training program that commences before April 1 next year, 2022. This means that the government is essentially sunseting or going to close the training benefit for people who need it most.

It does this by amending sections 6, 10, and 11 of the Income and Employment Supports Act to require that for a member of a household to be eligible for income and employment support as a full- or part-time learner, they must be accepted in an approved training program that commences before April 1, 2022. Madam Chair, this means that the full-time learner stream of income support no longer exists if this bill is passed. This UCP claims that full-time learner income support is no longer needed because changes made to the Student Financial Assistance Act achieved the same goal. However, the changes made in the regulations give the minister complete power to decide who receives funding and how much funding they get.

Section 3 in the regulation states that "the Minister may provide foundational learning assistance only if money is available for ... assistance." So this substantially weaker than legislative requirement is arbitrary and states no criteria for who receives funding.

11:20

The UCP made changes to support for low-income postsecondary students earlier in the year. That changed the learner income support and the skilled investment bursary part-time students program, which helps adult learners pay for basic education, upgrading, or English as a second language, which no longer would be considered as a reportable benefit on income tax. I spoke on this, and I also referred to the comments from one of the

beneficiaries who ended up actually giving up on the program she was in after those changes were brought in in 2020 by the UCP government.

These programs have been critical support to low-income families. I have my personal experience and understand how important these programs were to those people who wanted to either learn English as a second language or pursue the next level of education or postsecondary or both. Many of those people in racial communities and ethnic communities are the people who come from other countries to make Canada their home. They face a number of barriers and challenges by, one, their education and their degrees not being recognized to the full capacity. These were the programs that helped them or gave them courage to step up to improve or update or upgrade their education in Canada, not only for the benefit of those individuals and their families but also to our province by providing the talent and the skills that our province needed to progress in many different sectors.

I have a number of friends who were able to pursue their degrees or upgrade their education because these programs were available. They could quit their full-time jobs to join postsecondary education while working in part-time jobs and not having enough income flow to support their postsecondary or education fees. By passing this legislation, it not only directly impacts those individuals losing these benefits, but the number of moves and the actions of this UCP government have already made life very hard for those individuals. They are living on the bottom lines or struggling in their life to make ends meet.

We have seen the government move on deindexing the AISH benefits regardless of public pressure and opposition calls. The government not only cut support to the seniors' program but a number of the benefits that seniors were able to access. Also, there are huge cuts to public education, cuts to postsecondaries.

I had a meeting with the francophone college, Campus Saint-Jean. I had a meeting with the principal, a long meeting, and he painfully described the impact of postsecondary education cuts to their institution and explained that the institution is forced to cut almost 44 per cent of their programs because of the approach of this government. I have seen the Advanced Education minister rising in the House and saying that they are not directly funding the college and they're not micromanaging how these institutions are spending their money, but that is a cut. You have cut nearly three-quarters of a billion dollars from their funding.

When those institutions are struggling and life is becoming harder and more expensive, now through this bill the UCP is going further to cut that very program that was so helpful for the low-income families to be able to, you know, step up and have courage to join education institutions to get to the next level of education or update their education to the level where they can serve this province and benefit from their education that they attained elsewhere, have those education degrees and experiences fully recognized while they apply for immigration to Canada, fully recognized and allotting them the scores, the numbers, they need to qualify to be able to move to Canada.

But, unfortunately, once they're here, real life is different. In real life they don't get the benefit of their full education, the degrees and the experiences they had in their countries, but they have to start their life totally from a new level. In many cases they start from zero again. The government is not able to see the benefit and the advantage and the necessity of these programs not only to provide support for those individuals but how important these programs are to achieve the talent and skills that we need in our province in order to prosper in many areas in our province.

So, with those comments, I would encourage all the members, on both sides of the House, to please support this amendment. With

that, I conclude my remarks, and I put a motion forward to adjourn the debate.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

11:30

Bill 78
Alberta Housing Amendment Act, 2021
(continued)

The Chair: Are there members wishing to join the debate? The hon. Member for Calgary-Bhullar-McCall.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Madam Chair. I rise to speak to Bill 78, an important piece of legislation, which could have been made better, could have been much better than this. I think we all agree in this House that homelessness is an issue, affordability of homes is an issue, and actually having a place to call home is about basic dignity. It's a fundamental right of every human being to have a place called home.

Government is looking for solutions, is repeating mistakes of the past that didn't help us with this issue. Einstein once said that insanity is doing the same thing over and over and expecting different results. This is exactly what this government is doing with this piece of legislation.

We do know that in our market, in our free market, there is enough capacity to produce more homes, capacity in terms of land resources, in terms of building resources, in terms of capital, access to capital, in terms of skilled trades, all those things. The market has the capacity to build more homes. The issue is that there are many Albertans who cannot afford to buy those homes. That's the issue.

What we need to decide as a province, what we need to decide as a society is: will we leave all those Albertans at the mercy of the market, or will the government step up and do something? Will the government step up to provide homes outside the market? I believe that in a fair society, I believe that in a just society it's the role of the government. It's a fundamental role of the government to make sure that every human, every Albertan, has a safe place to call home, not the mats that the government announced.

We do know that it's fairly prevalent, homelessness. It's fairly prevalent in Alberta. We have seen homelessness among youth. When we were in government, I also heard from rural communities that now they are seeing homelessness in their communities which was not there 10, 15, or 20 years ago. We have studies, we have evidence, we have literature out there that it's more prevalent in LGBTQ communities.

There is also enough academic literature that there is something called hidden homelessness as well. Some people may be staying where they are staying because they don't have anywhere else to go. In more recent numbers it's really unfortunate that working-age people from 24 to 44: that's the group who's facing the worst homelessness. That's the group who is unable to afford homes, and in order to address this issue, the government needed to talk with all these communities, government needed to engage with all these communities, and along with the provision of more homes, it was important that government also addressed the reasons that we know lead to homelessness: incarceration, unsafe housing conditions, medical issues, mental health issues, abusive relationships, job losses, changing market conditions, addictions.

What this government has done: they have made sweeping cuts to many of these areas. Their cuts and their policies will lead to more homelessness, will lead to more Albertans unable to afford homes. The solution that the government found is that they will sell the existing stock. They will privatize what the government has now, and somehow that will magically create 25,000 homes. The

minister was asked, government was asked over and over: why is there no stipulation in this legislation that the money that will be generated from selling existing stock will be reinvested into providing housing, into providing affordable housing? There's no provision to that effect. We are just asked, Albertans are just asked to trust this government.

11:40

There is no provision in this legislation for how long these assets will remain as affordable housing. When you ask the government, when you ask the minister, again the answer is: trust us. The problem with that is that this is the least trusted government across Canada. They cannot be taken at their word, and in many of the things in this legislation that's all the government is asking from Albertans, that's all the government is asking from this opposition. "Trust us; we will sell the existing stock, and that will create 25,000 homes," a number they picked from somewhere. There is no logical explanation of how selling and privatizing existing . . . [interjections]

The Chair: Hon. members. [interjections] Sorry, hon. member. There are a lot of members wishing to speak right now and only one that actually has the ability to do so on the floor. I'm having a hard time hearing them. If there are members that wish to have conversations, perhaps the lounge is the best place to do that.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Bhullar-McCall.

Mr. Sabir: Agreed, Madam Chair.

What I was saying here is that we are facing a crisis under this government's watch. Homelessness, houselessness has increased. There are a number of reasons for that. They have cut investments from programs that help to keep people housed. They have cut supports that help keep people housed; for instance, in education they have made cuts. They have made cuts to many other programs that help people maintain employment, maintain homes, and now the government is taking this crisis and making it even worse.

They have not talked to the stakeholders and groups that are facing homelessness more than others. If there was some consultation done with the LGBTQ community, the minister can get up and talk about that. Who did she talk to? Which groups had she consulted with? They are among the groups that are at more risk of being homeless. There is now rural homelessness in rural communities. If the minister has talked to anyone in rural Alberta or rural communities, they could share those consultations. The working-age Albertans between 25 and 44 . . .

The Chair: Hon. member, just a reminder that we're on amendment A1. Go ahead.

Mr. Sabir: They have not talked to that age group.

The amendment that we have brought forward will at least make this bill a bit better because all this bill does is that the minister will sell the existing housing stock, and that will create 25,000 homes. Where is the evidence? Where are the numbers? How much will you make from selling that inventory? No answer. "Just trust us." That's what the minister is saying.

Ms Pon: I did not say that.

Mr. Sabir: The money – even if you say that, nobody still trusts you, because that's not possible.

The same thing about the money that the government may make from selling the existing inventory by privatizing the existing housing stock. There is no guarantee in this piece of legislation that that will be reinvested in creating affordable housing. The only assurance again is: trust us; we will do that.

There are a number of issues with this piece of legislation, and this amendment doesn't fix everything, but it certainly will help make this bill a bit better. Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Chair: Any members wishing to speak to amendment A1 on Bill 78? I see the hon. Minister of Seniors and Housing.

Ms Pon: Well, thank you. Well, thank you, hon. members, for your concerns and the "trust me" statements. I just want to make it clear that I never said the words "trust me." Instead, we have a very detailed, comprehensive strategy plan.

An Hon. Member: Hear, hear.

Ms Pon: Thank you.

Let me just explain a little bit about the concern, and it's my pleasure to explain a little bit more in a little bit more detail. First of all, the concerns about the proceeds when we sell some of the government assets that are underused, unused, have been sitting in the province for years. We've been paying lots of operating costs, a waste of taxpayers' money. Well, the NDP didn't do much, so we did it. We sell it, we utilize all of this asset, and we reinvest the money. That's what this government does. We take care of maximum taxpayer dollars. It's not that we're just selling assets; we have a plan.

We have a one-year plan where we get a company to review all the assets. We are holding 3,000 units right now, and we will convert them, maybe sell some of the assets that are unused, and get the proceeds, reinvest the money back into affordable housing. The opposition party says: oh, well, trust me; how do I know that the money is going to be reinvested back into the affordable housing? I could mention so many times if they would pay attention.

Mr. Kenney: If they did.

Ms Pon: Well, yeah. Maybe. Trust me.

Anyway, they're posting the measurement. Many times we did talk about that, discussed it with the Treasury Board: what is the best way to utilize this money and what is the best way to invest and what is the best way to make sure these proceeds go back to affordable housing? As the minister that is my job, to look after Albertans. "Well, the best way," they said, "is to sell the proceeds. We're going to put the full fund in the system so that we will post it." Well, you can find it on the financial statements for the business plan and the budget. When we sell the proceeds, it will be listed on our financial statements. Anyways, you can find it anywhere, so I don't understand why – well, maybe they don't fully understand what the financial statement means or the budget means or the business plan means. The proceeds of selling it: it will be a listed on those documents. It's open to the public, and you can see.

How is the revenue generated, and how are we going to spend the money? We will spend the money by going back and building more affordable housing or join in a partnership, a new venture. This is what this Bill 78 is about. Bill 78 is about partnership, how to maximize taxpayer dollars, how to utilize that and to make sure that we are going to build an additional 25,000 household units . . .

Mr. McIver: Twenty-five thousand. Wow. That's 50,000 people.

Ms Pon: That's lots of people.

. . . and reduce 30 per cent of the people on the wait-list. That's what this is about. That's why this amendment is so important, because we have a long plan. We have a vision to help all these people who have been waiting for a long time.

When the NDP was the government – well, guess what, Madam Chair? Well, listen to this. Four years – four years – they invested

huge money in affordable housing, but the wait-list increased by 65 per cent in four years.

Mr. Jason Nixon: How much money?

An Hon. Member: Lots.

11:50

Ms Pon: I know. Sixty-five per cent. That's why we had to pick up the mess and clean it up. That's okay. That's what we're good at. That's what we can deliver.

Let us talk about the sales asset and that they always say, "You're privatizing" and this and that. Nothing is about privatization, Madam Chair. What this is about is a joint venture. It's a partnership never done before. It is innovative. I have lots of people that come to me: "Wow. You guys look at things differently." It is about time the government creates a different way to utilize the money and to build more housing, and this is a creative way. That's what the government has been doing.

Look at our Premier. He just made an announcement of \$7 billion in genuine investment in one week. Have they done that before? No. [interjections] Exactly. Anyways, there's a partnership, and we're going to partner with our nonprofit organizations, our corporations. In fact, I understand the concern because the bottom line is that everyone here wants to do the best thing for Albertans. This is why we work together, and this is such a great debate because this is important and acknowledges the concern about privatization partnership. We will work with that. We will also guarantee that – not guarantee, but at least utilize the money.

Mr. Bilous: You can't guarantee.

Ms Pon: We have a plan. You don't.

Mr. Bilous: And your plan stinks.

Ms Pon: Oh, sorry. You have a 12-page plan, including the picture. I forgot that.

The Chair: Hon. minister, this is a good reminder to direct your comments through the chair.

Ms Pon: I'm just excited. Sorry. I'm just excited.

When we do that – yeah. So this strategy plan: we have a very comprehensive strategy plan. Thank you to my friend the MLA for Calgary-Cross for creating a very comprehensive strategy plan to set up stronger foundations for affordable housing.

I think I answered most of the questions. We answered you that this is not privatization; it's a partnership. We're looking forward to a number of people lining up – looking forward to it – and working with us. The sales of the assets: we are going to sell the assets. All the proceeds will be returning to affordable housing and be reinvested in affordable housing. If you're not sure, you can audit all the sales for all the assets. You can find it online, so stop saying: you'll sell it to your wealthy friends. That's not very smart because you can find it online. Everything is clear. Anyways, I think I answered all the questions.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Chair: Are there any members wishing to speak to amendment A1? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview. [interjections]

Mr. Bilous: Madam Chair, it's my pleasure to speak to this, despite the fact that there's a whole bunch of heckles from the other side, uninformed heckles, quite frankly. [interjections]

The Chair: Hon. members.

Mr. Bilous: I'll keep my comments brief. Just responding to the hon. minister, where, sadly, what we get are speaking points, talking points read off a sheet as opposed to the reality of what this bill will do, which will not create new affordable housing units at all. You know what? If this government hadn't run its credibility into the ground about a year and a half ago and then continued to dig a hole like Sonic the hedgehog, maybe Albertans would actually have some faith in this government. [interjections] Apparently, the front bench is a little jovial tonight and would like me to remind them of all of their failures over the past two years.

An Hon. Member: We don't have that much time.

Mr. Bilous: You know what? To my colleague: we actually don't have enough time to recount all of the failures, including the \$1.3 billion gamble that the Premier made on a government that never came to be in the United States. Coming back . . .

The Chair: Hon. member, I hesitate to interrupt you, but we are really far off track on amendment A1, but I know you're coming around to it right now.

Mr. Bilous: I am, Madam Chair, and I appreciate that.

Quite frankly, this bill and this amendment do not accomplish what the government claims that they will accomplish. In fact, it does quite the opposite, and the opposition has pointed out time and time again how this current piece of legislation does not actually contribute new affordable housing units. In fact, it will do the opposite through a scheme that allows the privatization of existing units without an incentive to build new units while continually removing units off the market. Madam Chair, for those reasons, myself and my colleagues cannot support this bill.

With that, I'll take my seat.

The Chair: Any other members wishing to speak to amendment A1?

Seeing none, I will call the question on amendment A1 as moved by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods on behalf of the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

[Motion on amendment A1 lost]

The Chair: We're back on Bill 78 in Committee of the Whole.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning.

Ms Sweet: Well, thank you, Madam Chair. It's a honour to rise and try to get us refocused on Bill 78. I do have one comment that I would just like to make in response to the minister before I get started on the other pieces that I'm going to speak to. That is the fact that although the minister has made comments about, well, she doesn't believe that the NDP did anything and that the structure and that the way that supported housing was being delivered in the province wasn't working and that it wasn't any good and all the things; however, in saying that, I do think that it's appropriate to maybe remind the minister that not even a few weeks ago she actually was in northeast Edmonton at the Londonderry facility, where she was speaking about what a great facility it was and how well it had been established and all the different services and things that were going to be coming out of that supported housing facility, which is actually a mixed-income building which was built under the NDP.

So the minister will take credit for something that happened under the NDP and will actually celebrate it, as she did a couple of weeks ago, and what a great model it is, and then not even five

minutes ago start talking about the fact that the way that the NDP wanted to do it doesn't make any sense. I find that very interesting.

Mr. Jason Nixon: PCs put that in.

Ms Sweet: It was in my riding, Minister. I'm very aware of who built it. I broke ground on that, but thank you very much for trying to interrupt.

Now, the other piece that's concerning about how that works is that what we've seen under Bill 78 is a certain piece which is under 10(a), which gives the minister the power to set arbitrary competency requirements for housing management bodies. There's nothing within the piece of legislation that speaks to how those will be established, if there's going to be consistency between each board, and what those boards will look like. So I find that piece a little bit concerning.

Because of that, I would like to propose an amendment. I will have it brought to the table. I think it's important that we take that piece out of this piece of legislation. I'll wait, Madam Chair, till you have a copy of it.

12:00

The Chair: Hon. members, this will be known as amendment A2.

Hon. member, please proceed, noting that you're moving on behalf of another member.

Ms Sweet: Thank you, Madam Chair. I will read it into the record. I'm moving amendment A2 on behalf of the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview to move that Bill 78, Alberta Housing Amendment Act, 2021, be amended by striking out section 10(a).

Again, the biggest piece around this section is:

respecting the manner or method of appointing or electing the members of a board of a management body, including the knowledge, skills, experience, expertise and qualifications required for the members of a board of a management body.

Now, that is what the section currently reads in this piece of legislation.

The concern around that, of course, is that there's no defining mechanism to actually set clear, defining qualities when it comes to what the expectation would be around knowledge and understanding of working with the individuals that would be supported in this housing environment, the skills, the expertise, and the experience and qualifications that are required.

There's nothing to indicate that that would be consistent across all the boards that are going to be appointed by this minister and the structure that would exist because of that. So the struggle with that, of course, is that as the minister continuously speaks to this partnership with the private sector, there hasn't been any clear definition as to what kind of knowledge base and requirements will be required by this board.

Now, we all know that for affordable housing to work, all levels of government need to be moving in the same direction, and they need to be working together. We know this because we see that there are federal dollars that will be transferred to provinces to build such housing. We know that municipalities will also partner with provinces and federal counterparts to be able to create plans and to be able to build these facilities.

Now, the issue that we have here is that when you have a private partnership, who sets those priorities? How is that determined? If you know that federal dollars are going to be coming down, you need to also understand what the municipality's needs are, where they have determined the location of these buildings need to be, and of course the province needs to be part of that discussion.

Now, if you're working within a private sector and you haven't decided what the structure of the boards will be, who's working in

those partnerships? Who is deciding and who's making sure that the goals and the priorities that are being set by the municipalities are being met? Who's working in conjunction with the province and the federal government to make sure that those funds are being accessed appropriately? Does it and will it meet the funding requirements that are being set out by those different funding bodies? So there is a problem with this section.

Now, we know that historically the government hasn't been a big fan of working with municipalities and setting those priorities. We've seen it with infrastructure bills. We've seen it in consultation with the RCMP. We also know that there continues to be a conflict in relationship with the federal government, all which play a role in housing management, deciding where those priorities are and how that money will be allocated to different municipalities.

Now, of course, as we've already heard very clearly this evening, the government chooses to blame housing management bodies instead of acknowledging that, in fact, there have been significant cuts to many of the housing management companies that already exist in the province. There has been this push to move from a structure that was working. Again, Londonderry would be a prime example of a partnership of a nonprofit organization, that works well with the municipality of Edmonton, that set up a program that is going to make sense, that's going to work, and even the minister has celebrated it. Obviously, there's something that's working there, yet they're undoing all of those good things with this piece of legislation.

Now, as my hon. colleagues have already said, we know that this bill is going to do more harm and probably damage relationships with existing nonprofits that are already providing the services that make sense. In fact, I would say that it's actually going to create more red tape for many of these housing bodies when they try to look at building new infrastructure.

Now, the other comments that we've heard from the minister have been: well, you can look at the budget, you can look at what we've done during estimates, and if there have been any properties that have been sold or land that's been sold, which clearly the minister has already said is going to happen, it will be in the budget line item. The very fundamental issue with this, though, Madam Chair, is the fact that there's nothing in the legislation that actually requires that those dollars be reinvested in housing.

Again, as my hon. colleague said, it's a trust-the-government philosophy, trust that from the land that will be sold or the properties that will be sold, those monies will be reinvested because we say that they will be. The reality of it is that we can't trust the government because unless the opposition goes through every single line item, which we will do because we're very, very good at estimates . . .

Mr. Jason Nixon: When?

Ms Sweet: Well, you know what? Table a budget, and I'll be more than happy to come to estimates, Minister.

Mr. Jason Nixon: We'll table it on time.

Ms Sweet: The issue with it is . . .

The Chair: Hon. member, I hesitate to interrupt you, but if you could direct your comments through the chair, that would be super helpful.

Ms Sweet: I would be more than happy to. If the minister doesn't want to heckle me, I won't respond.

The issue here is that, again, it's one of those things where, "When we get caught, then we will respond," but the problem with

this is that it has to be a we-caught-you moment versus an investment.

I would encourage all members to really look at how this piece of legislation is written, look at how the structure of this body is going to be set up to ensure that there's accountability, and acknowledge that the way this piece of legislation is written under section 10 isn't going to actually ensure accountability and good service to the people that are going to be accessing the service.

The Chair: The hon. Minister of Seniors and Housing.

Ms Pon: Thank you, Madam Chair. Thank you to the hon. members asking all of those questions. First of all, trust has been repeated so many times during this debate period, so I just wanted to emphasize that this is a government that as of today has reached over 85 per cent of our platform commitments. That's what trust is. It's showing in evidence that we deliver, and we continue to deliver. It's not just talking, just: trust me. We are action people. We deliver, and we get things done.

Another thing that the member talked about is this amendment and said: oh, yeah, well, how are you going to choose the partners, and how are you going to allocate the funding, their budget? Good questions. I'm going to answer to you how we are going to choose that partnership.

The partnership that we are going to choose to partner with is going to be open and transparent. There is no hidden agenda, no backdoor deal. It will be open to anyone that wishes to partner with us, but they have to meet the criteria. That's no different, Madam Chair, than when you apply for a loan or when you're wanting a joint venture. You have to meet the criteria. That's no different. When you partner with the government, this government, you have to have the qualifications to be partners with us. This is how we will choose the partner. It's not like we pick and choose the people that come to us. This is not the case.

Another question is: how is the fund allocated? It depends on the project. It depends on the demographic. It depends on the needs for the different community, particularly in rural areas or smaller towns. We will pay more attention.

We talk about the housing management bodies. We want to make sure that we have a competency-based board that can help to strengthen the housing management bodies which are governing and that the right people are around the table. As a housing provider we are going to empower them to take a stronger lead on planning, building, owning, and operating affordable housing. They're going to be our partners. They are going to be our right hand to look after our affordable housing project.

12:10

It's especially important that housing management bodies consider taking over the ownership of affordable housing assets. That is a partnership. That is one of the partners we're looking for. It will also help with succession planning and position housing management bodies for increased growth and sustainability.

It is important to note that this shift will not happen right away. There is a very detailed plan, and Alberta's government will support the transitions to the new model. Of course, local needs will be taken into consideration as we will be working with the housing management bodies to assist in this process. We believe that not one size fits all. That's why we have the housing needs assessments dealing with that, working with all different municipalities to let us know. We listen. We want to hear from you. What is the best for you? How can we work together to meet the housing needs?

Madam Chair, I'll ask all the members to vote against this needless amendment. Thank you.

The Chair: Hon. members, we have 14 minutes remaining on Bill 78. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs.

Ms Goehring: Thank you, Madam Chair. It's my pleasure to rise to speak to amendment A2 for the Alberta Housing Amendment Act, 2021. I find it interesting that the minister is suggesting to vote against it and talks about her partnership and relationships with different levels of government, yet we hear loud and clear from the municipalities that there's not a good working relationship with this UCP government.

What this amendment does is that it takes away the power for the minister to set arbitrary competency requirements for housing management bodies. You know, I think she said that there is no hidden agenda and no backroom deals. Then accept this amendment that we're introducing to this piece of legislation. I think it makes sense when we're hearing from this government over and over and over that they're against unnecessary red tape, yet this bill gives the minister the ability to create it.

With that, I would suggest that all members move to support this amendment. Thank you.

The Chair: Any other members on amendment A2?

Seeing none, I will call the question.

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

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 12:13 a.m.]

[One minute having elapsed, the committee divided]

[Mrs. Pitt in the chair]

For the motion:

Bilous	Eggen	Sweet
Carson	Goehring	

Against the motion:

Aheer	LaGrange	Panda
Allard	Long	Pon
Copping	Lovely	Rehn
Ellis	Luan	Rowswell
Glubish	Madu	Sawhney
Gotfried	McIver	Schweitzer
Guthrie	Neudorf	Shandro
Hanson	Nixon, Jason	Smith
Issik	Nixon, Jeremy	Williams
Kenney	Orr	Yao

Totals:	For – 5	Against – 30
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[Motion on amendment A2 lost]

The Chair: We are back on the remaining eight and a half minutes in Committee of the Whole on Bill 78. Any members wishing to join the debate? The hon. Member for Edmonton-North West.

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Madam Chair. You know, if at first you don't succeed, try, try again. I have another amendment for Bill 78, and I'm going to use it, by golly.

The Chair: Hon. members, this will be known as amendment A3.

Hon. member, please proceed and note that you're moving it on behalf of another member.

Mr. Eggen: Well, thanks, Madam Chair, and as it's being distributed, I'll just read it as well. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview moves that Bill 78 be amended in section 11 by striking

out “proclamation” and substituting “September 1, 2023.” Basically, this is an amendment that delays proclamation of this bill until after the next provincial election, which is maybe coming sooner rather than later. I don’t know.

Basically, we have seen, with the recent municipal elections especially, how important people see addressing poverty and homelessness to be, and the UCP’s plan with Bill 78 to liquidate affordable housing I believe is not supported by Albertans. Many experts also believe that a solution to affordable housing is that we need to build more, not less, and that we need to have more public housing available to us. If the UCP really believes, you know, against all logic and reason and popular opinion, that this is still the best way to go, then probably they should hold it and run on it in the next election. That’s the general concept behind this, and quite frankly, Madam Chair, I think that’s the way it should be.

12:20

We know that there is a looming housing shortage that is already upon us in many of our cities and towns across this province, and it will only get worse without concerted action. Certainly, Bill 78, while it talks about housing, talks about it in, I believe, the wrong way, absolutely. Please, if each and every MLA can consider this change of the proclamation date – I mean, lots of legislation by this government doesn’t get proclaimed anyway, so let’s put this one on the pile. I think that that would serve Alberta’s best interests in the most general way possible.

Thank you.

The Chair: Any other members on amendment A3? The hon. Member for Chestermere-Strathmore.

Mrs. Aheer: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. I just wanted to make sure I understand the amendment. You want a delay to housing that is necessary. If we’re so honoured to be able to pass this legislation in the Legislature, you want us to delay proclaiming it, meaning that we’re stopping people from actually getting into the needed housing that we’ve been talking about for days and days.

The Chair: Hon. member, just a reminder to direct your comments through the chair.

Mrs. Aheer: Sorry, Madam Chair. Thank you so much.

Just to be clear, it seems a little counterintuitive compared to all of the work that’s been going on in here to try and get folks into housing.

I just wanted to clarify, too, that when we’re talking about housing, Madam Chair, we’re talking about some of our most vulnerable people in this province. I remember, probably in the second year that I was elected, I think it was, when we had asked the opposition to talk about – the Associate Minister of Mental Health and Addictions will remember this – the opioid crisis. We spoke about it at length, actually, asking for the government of the time to declare that crisis, not only the opioid crisis but a mental health crisis as well, over and over and over again. It was a constant discussion, and the government never did that at the time. Now, we all know, especially post-COVID, that we’re going to be going into and are seeing where these things are increasing not just because of COVID but multiple things.

It’s interesting to see this amendment come forward. The reason I’m bringing it up is because when you are looking at a crisis, my thought process and common sense would tell you that we should probably jump forward and do as much as we can in those circumstances. I am so proud of our Minister of Seniors and Housing for the work that she’s done and of the MLA for Calgary-

Cross for the incredible work that he’s done and of the background and the deep consultations that they’ve done.

I also remember, when I sat in opposition, meeting with all the housing authorities and the difficulties. One of the things that they talked about on a regular basis was the red tape, what they had to go through in order to get a person into housing. Not only was it a criteria issue, but certain housing companies had different criteria than other ones that were actually led by government intervention. It was actually a barrier in government that disallowed them to be able to either build or be creative or be thoughtful in how it was that they were going to put housing together.

I cannot support this amendment. I’m very proud of the work that the minister and the MLA have done on this and excited to see how it is that our government is going to be able to house some of the most vulnerable people in the province.

Thank you.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-West Henday.

Mr. Carson: Thank you, Madam Chair. I don’t plan on speaking too long here, but I do in fact support this amendment. You know, at the end of the day, the fact is that if we delay this, which I think is the right thing to do, or whether we don’t, I don’t see any clear path forward in what’s being proposed from the minister through this legislation. I see a path forward to selling off affordable housing stock. At this point it hasn’t been clear if people are living in those homes right now, if they’re completely empty, as the minister tells us. That’s unclear. The member that we just heard from talked about how we need to support vulnerable people but continues to work with a government that deindexed important programs like the seniors’ benefit, income support, special needs assistance for seniors, the supplementary accommodations benefit. That’s a big one. We’re talking about hundreds of dollars a month that have been taken away from Alberta families.

So, again, if we want to talk about keeping people housed in their community, I think it’s important that we reflect on the decisions that this government has made already and on the silence that we’ve heard from members, including the previous one, on these important issues. Again, I don’t think, whether we pass this and proclaim it tomorrow or three years from now, it’s actually going to address the real crisis that we have in our province.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Chair: Hon. members, according to Government Motion 110 the time allotted for debate has now expired, and the questions must now be put.

[Motion on amendment A3 lost]

[The remaining clauses of Bill 78 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

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

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Chair: Any opposed? Carried.

The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Jason Nixon: Thank you, Madam Chair. I move that we rise and report bills 73 and 78 and report progress on bills 80 and 81.

[Motion carried]

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake-St. Paul.

Mr. Hanson: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. The Committee of the Whole has had under consideration certain bills. The committee reports the following bills: Bill 73 and Bill 78. The committee reports progress on the following bills: Bill 81 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.

The Deputy Speaker: Does the Assembly concur in the report? All those in favour, please say aye.

Hon. Members: Aye.

The Deputy Speaker: Any opposed, please say no. That is carried.
The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Jason Nixon: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I rise to ask for unanimous consent to go to one-minute bells for the remainder of the evening.

[Unanimous consent granted]

Government Bills and Orders Third Reading

Bill 78 Alberta Housing Amendment Act, 2021

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Minister of Seniors and Housing to move third reading.

Ms Pon: Well, good evening, everyone. Thank you, Madam Chair. Today I'm so pleased to move third reading of Bill 78, the Alberta Housing Amendment Act, 2021.

I want to thank all colleagues here, on both sides of the Assembly, for raising such important issues, for a good debate, and for their support of this valuable legislation.

[The Speaker in the chair]

The nature of this bill, Mr. Speaker, is our commitment to provide a fair, flexible, and sustainable affordable housing system for Albertans now and in the future. I know that there is broad support for the housing transformations from housing stakeholders and from members in this Chamber, like my MLA for Calgary-Cross and the House leader and so on, from everyone here, I mean, from this side, at least.

12:30

About the recognition from the housing providers and the stakeholders from the new release. Social media: I'm reading so many of those these last few months. If I can share some quotes with you, Mr. Speaker. The quote is from the interim CEO of Cividia. "Everybody should have access to a house they need, that they can afford. We believe that the problem of housing affordability is solvable, and this strategy will help us to get to those solutions." Another important quote I would like to share with you is from the senior director of operations, urban housing, Métis Capital Housing Corporation:

Alberta's 10-year strategy to improve and enhance affordable housing is a significant step forward to address the housing crisis in Alberta. There is no affordable Indigenous housing without wraparound services, and this strategy promotes such supports. This strategy focuses on achieving sustainability and affordability by adopting innovative ideas that encourage meaningful partnerships. We look forward to working with the

ministry and supporting the most vulnerable members of our community.

As I have said before, this bill is critical to our ability to progress on the transformational measures outlined in Alberta's 10-year affordable housing strategy. We simply cannot allow an efficient system to continue falling further and further behind the needs of Albertans. Albertans deserve better, Mr. Speaker. By updating the Alberta Housing Act, we're laying the groundwork for a stronger affordable housing system that is able to meet the diverse needs of Albertans. Thank you for the opportunity to speak to Bill 78. We are on track to ensure that Albertans in need have access to safe, stable, affordable housing.

I encourage all members to support this Bill 78 amendment of the Alberta Housing Act. With that, I move to adjourn our debate.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Government Motions (continued)

Time Allocation on Bill 78

110. Mr. Jason Nixon moved:

Be it resolved that when further consideration of Bill 78, Alberta Housing Amendment Act, 2021, is resumed, not more than one hour shall be allotted to any further consideration of the bill in third reading, at which time every question necessary for the disposal of the bill at this stage shall be put forthwith.

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Jason Nixon: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to move Government Motion 110. This bill has been with the Legislature for weeks as the NDP have attempted to filibuster and block legislation meant to be able to help people seeking low-income housing. As the minister said tonight, a 65 per cent increase on the waiting list for affordable housing inside our province, about 25,000 families, I believe, looking for affordable housing as the NDP sits inside the Chamber and filibusters repeatedly, because their only concern – I've been listening to it for hours – is that this in some way would help non-unionized organizations to be able to help the government when it comes to creating housing inside the province. I have not heard a new argument from the NDP in about a week. [interjection]

I know I can hear the hon. Member for Beverly-Clareview heckling away. I'm sorry to tell you, Mr. Speaker, he hasn't had a new argument in weeks either, and it's plugging up the Legislature. [interjection] Man, he's upset we're at a time allocation motion, and he's that upset, but you can see it's because, again, it's about non-unionized; it's about the union. He's got to listen to Gil McGowan, and he's going to do what he's told, but, you know, what we've got to do inside this Chamber is make sure that we do the people's business. This many weeks and this many hours of debate on one piece of legislation is too far. It's ridiculous. They've got one hour to have a conversation about it, at which time the Legislature needs to make a decision.

The Speaker: Hon. members, are there others? The Member for Calgary-Bhullar-McCall.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to speak against this motion. It's a heavy-handed, undemocratic motion that seeks to curtail the debate on this important bill. When the Government House Leader was on this side, I think he would go on at length to speak against time allocation. But at every sitting the government resorts to and relies on these heavy-handed measures to pass pieces

of legislation that actually do nothing to solve the problems that Alberta is facing.

We have asked repeatedly of the minister how privatizing existing housing stock will create 25,000 units. Will that money go to creating new housing? Will those assets stay affordable housing forever or for any given length of time? Absolutely no answers. We've been hearing feedback from Albertans, from those who work with the homeless population about how this bill will make things worse. Privatizing existing housing stock doesn't solve anything. Now we are limited to one hour of debate on this important piece of legislation. It doesn't have to be this way. It's unfortunate, and we will certainly be opposing this motion.

[Government Motion 110 carried]

Government Bills and Orders

Third Reading

Bill 78

Alberta Housing Amendment Act, 2021

(continued)

The Speaker: Hon. members, there are 60 minutes remaining for debate. Is there anyone wishing to join in that debate? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs.

Ms Goehring: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have to say that I'm disappointed that time allocation has occurred. We've heard throughout this debate that this is a concern, and, you know, the fact that this government is just pushing it through in the middle of the night is quite concerning. I know that people are paying attention to the decisions that this government is making. When it comes to this piece of legislation, Bill 78, the Alberta Housing Amendment Act, 2021, people are expressing concerns. They are concerned when the minister stands up and acknowledges the housing crisis and acknowledges the need for affordable housing yet proposes absolutely nothing in this legislation that actually addresses that need. What it does is that it sells off affordable housing units.

There is absolutely nothing in this legislation that says that the money that is received from that sale goes back into affordable housing. There's nothing in this piece of legislation that actually says that there's some sort of requirement for this, once it's sold, to maintain its status of affordable housing. There's no time limit in there, so essentially the government can sell it, take the money, put it anywhere they want, not reinvest in affordable housing. Then the purchaser of that affordable housing can then turn around and sell it and do whatever they want with it, which is very, very concerning.

12:40

It's very frustrating to argue in this House with a government that just sticks to talking points, that says how much they're doing to support individuals in the province. They wave this piece of legislation around like it's going to have an impact, yet it does absolutely nothing to help those people that are struggling.

We know that with Alberta's housing market, people are in dire straits, Mr. Speaker. There are people that are struggling to find housing, people that are struggling to make ends meet. The pandemic has created an absolute devastation in the province, and we've watched the UCP contribute to that. The poverty that is happening right now has grown, and the UCP policies are doing nothing to address it.

I have spoken in this House about, you know, family and friends who are experiencing difficulty with finances, difficulty with finding housing, difficulty in accessing mental health and addiction

supports. Unfortunately, all this government does is that it stands up, talks about campaign promises, talks about their wonderful legislation that they're proposing, but there's nothing in this legislation that actually supports people to be housed.

I just simply don't understand. You know, people in Alberta deserve access to safe, affordable housing, period, full stop. What happens to those individuals that are in the affordable housing right now when it's sold? There's nothing in this legislation that mandates that housing stay affordable. There is nothing in this legislation that mandates what happens to the money that's received from that sale.

There is absolutely no plan as to how to address affordable housing. There's no partnership working with municipalities to meet the needs of people all across the province. This shouldn't be a partisan issue. It should be governments of all levels coming together to really address the need. People in Alberta deserve better.

Unfortunately, this government has talking points and a piece of legislation that sounds wonderful: Bill 78, Alberta Housing Amendment Act. It does nothing to make sure that this government is actually supporting affordable housing in the province.

Now to have time allocation on it in the middle of the night; it's 12:44 a.m. Once again we see this government using time allocation to quickly put through legislation that they know doesn't actually do what it's supposed to do, but they can say that it's a win. They can say that it went through third reading and it was successful: promise made, promise kept.

It's quite disappointing, and I can tell you that Albertans aren't buying it. Albertans know that this legislation does nothing. People that are struggling with housing deserve better. They deserve access to affordable, safe housing. They deserve a government that has action... [interjection] Absolutely. I'd like to give way to the member.

The Speaker: My apologies. This being the second speech, the first speech after the mover, interventions are not allowed.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs.

Ms Goehring: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I apologize.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I would like to take my seat, as I know we're on a short timeline, and let other members of the Chamber speak. Thank you.

The Speaker: Are there others? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadows has the call.

Mr. Deol: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for the opportunity to speak to Bill 78, Alberta Housing Amendment Act, 2021, once again on behalf of my constituents. I cannot stop – actually, one of the most grave of my disappointments is what the government claims under this piece of legislation and what exactly this bill does. Not only this, the number of meaningful attempts by the opposition in this House to strengthen the bill, to achieve the mandate that the minister every time claimed by rising in the House that the bill would achieve – every single effort to strengthen the mandate of this, the claim of the government on this bill, was defeated by the government members.

The problem with affordable housing has been there for decades, and the roots go back to the early '90s, with the Progressive Conservatives' huge cuts to the funding. Since then the problem has been growing. Our past government invested \$1.2 billion to address the issues of growing affordable housing problems. As the government documented, with the many times this has been echoed, the list of the applicants waiting for affordable housing – the minister has said that this mystery bill will achieve the 25,000

affordable housings in the next some years. That claim is not supported anywhere in this piece of legislation in the way it is being claimed or the government is bragging about. What this bill proposes is that the government will sell the current stock, and what the government is claiming . . . [interjection] Thank you, Member, but I'm not ready to give way, actually, at this point in time. Maybe in a bit. Let me emphasize my point, what I wanted to say. You know, we still have one out of two.

What the government is saying is not being legislated in this bill. The government, obviously, if this bill is passed, will be able to sell our current stock. The government claims that they will get that revenue from the sales and reinvest in building affordable housing, but that is not anywhere legislated in this bill that we are discussing.

The opposition proposed a number of amendments to strengthen that mandate, and the government defeated them a number of times. We cannot simply believe in government because they just say it. We have seen it. We have seen it when government changed the decisions and moved the casino funds to general revenue, and then we have seen the consequences from that. We have seen the huge cuts, about 70 per cent, to community initiative programs. We have seen the cuts to community facility enhancement programs. The cuts were not small. The cuts were, like, 60 to 70, 70 to 75 per cent to those programs. We've seen the cuts to the ARAC, Alberta's Anti-Racism Advisory Council, budget and in a number of different departments, in the ministry of multiculturalism and status of women.

12:50

The government said that by making those changes, you know, that would help government to promote those programs, but it didn't. I've seen a number of those organizations, those that relied on that funding, and they suffered, being that the funding was not available. The application was closed. The application program was shut probably within a year. I have the organizations and my constituents coming to my office, even as of yesterday, looking for the funding so that they can afford to have their facilities functioning, afford to be able to get through this pandemic, afford to be able to get those organizations going.

We have seen the outcomes of those changes that the government made, and that is exactly what this bill will do if we will just pass this bill as it is proposed. The government still says every time they get up that they will build 25,000 new affordable housings if they will move ahead with this bill because they will reinvest that revenue that comes from the sale to build new affordable housing, but this bill doesn't say exactly: this is how it will happen. This is very concerning.

The other biggest factor in this bill is that this bill improves the private partnerships. Now, the government said that, yes, if the government needs to fund the program, the government accepts responsibility as the funder of the program, but they will hand the money to private companies to build these projects. We have seen the problems with private partnerships in our province, in neighbouring provinces, in other provinces. Even the previous Progressive Conservative government in 2014 decided not to invest in P3 funding by building public projects.

This bill creates all those provisions, but they're not talking about the previous problems. They're not answering the questions around those problems. There are no oversights. What will happen if with the wrong decisions and mismanagement the public sector, instead of achieving the goals of building the affordable housing, suffers more financial losses? There's no mechanism. There's no oversight. A number of those things will even get into the regulatory process. The bill also gives the minister huge powers. The minister

could decide what is affordable housing and what is not affordable housing. This bill bypasses a lot of democratic mechanisms, processes.

It is very hard for us to support this bill as it is. That was the very reason that we were trying to propose, through our amendments – if those amendments were passed, it would still not be probably the way we envision that Albertans expect those problems would be solved to address the affordable housing crisis, but it would make this bill a bit better in the sense of what the government is already saying that this bill would do. All of those amendments got defeated because government House members and the minister did not show the courtesy of looking into what the amendments were proposing. The minister, every time he rose in the House, was saying the same thing, but it was not part of the bill. It's disappointing that I'm not seeing a very positive approach and attitude from the government members on those moves. Also, it's very disappointing that we have limited time allocation to debate this bill in the middle of the night.

At this point in time I would say that this bill cannot be supported as it is, and I will ask all the House members to please vote against this bill. If we are serious about addressing the housing crisis in our province, then we need to defeat this bill or we need to allot more time or we need to take a better approach.

By this, I conclude my remarks on this matter. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Are there others? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise and speak to this bill, which claims to do something that it does not. It claims to address the critical need and shortage of affordable housing units in this province, but sadly this bill fails to address the critical issue of the shortage of affordable housing units. The fact of the matter is that the COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated the problem of homelessness and homelessness that we see throughout the province.

Now, Mr. Speaker, I'd be remiss if I didn't acknowledge the fact that under the NDP government we allocated and spent \$1.2 billion on building new affordable housing units. The reason that that investment alone did not build the number of units that are needed to house Albertans is because for many years under the former PC government there was a failure to invest in and build an adequate number of affordable housing units. In fact, previous governments . . .

1:00

The Speaker: I hesitate to interrupt the hon. member; however, the sidebar conversations are becoming a little louder and louder. I ask that members would show some courtesy to the member that has the call, or they're welcome to head to the lounges to continue their conversations.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

So the challenge that faces the current government, that faced the previous government, is a challenge that faced a number of governments. Really, you know, the challenge with affordable housing units is a similar challenge that governments face with deferred maintenance and upkeep on infrastructure. It's an easy budget item to continue to defer, to kick down the field, to pass on to future governments.

You know, quite frankly, Mr. Speaker, the example that I've given in this place over my years here has been an example of a homeowner needing to make roofing repairs or to replace their shingles as one of those things where a household can put it off and put it off. "This year – you know what? – we can't really afford it, so we're going to defer to the next year and defer to the next year,"

and you continue to defer it until it gets to a point where your roof is leaking. Now you're causing damage to a number of things, from your structure to all of your contents and everything, and it's going to be a much costlier bill than if you had kept up with maintenance.

The same thing with cars, right? If you don't take your car to get its oil changed, if you don't take it in for maintenance year after year, you might get away with it for a few years, but it gets to a point where it becomes either irreparable or extremely expensive. For many years previous governments did not allocate adequate resources to build affordable housing units. They just continued to kick that can down the road until it got to a point where there was an extreme shortage. Even though the previous NDP government allocated \$1.2 billion to building new units, it still didn't address the shortage that existed and accumulated over the years.

We now have a bill before us, Mr. Speaker, that doesn't actually allocate any new dollars to building affordable housing units. What it does is it promises to sell off existing units to the private sector. Now, that in and of itself isn't necessarily a bad thing; however, it doesn't add new units to the pool. It doesn't address the fundamental issue that the minister and this government continue to claim. [interjection] I'm not taking interjections this evening, Member.

The challenge here is that this government continues to provide lip service to addressing an issue. Now, I will recognize the fact that the member that was looking to intervene is an advocate of affordable housing and has a record of advocating on behalf of those who are facing dire situations. I acknowledge that. My frustration is that the bill doesn't address the critical issue of a lack of affordable housing units. My frustration is that amendments were brought forward by the Official Opposition to at least – at least – ensure that dollars brought in from selling off the existing stock would go into a separate fund to build new units.

Now, quite frankly, Mr. Speaker, any rational person would agree that if you're going to sell units and claim that you're going to build new stock, the revenues from those existing units would be allocated toward building new stock. This government couldn't even bring itself to do that. The revenues and the proceeds coming from existing stock will go into general revenues. I'm sorry; I don't trust this government. In fact, the majority of Albertans don't trust this government.

Now, to be fair, if the tables were turned and the current government was the opposition and this was a bill – well, first of all, we wouldn't propose this bill. But if this element of the bill, selling existing affordable housing units, was to go into general revenues, I am certain that members of the government would be up in arms for those revenues going into general revenues. I actually know this for a fact, Mr. Speaker, because there were the rare moments where our government did propose that funds went to general revenues, and the opposition said that it should go toward the targeted, specific reason of what the government proposed. In hindsight, it should have.

Here's an example of a bill, Mr. Speaker, that falls so far short of what it claims to do. I appreciate that the minister, you know, does a phenomenal job reading her speaking points, talking about some kind of rainbows and unicorns, that there are going to be some new affordable units when there actually aren't. [interjection]. My two-year-old daughter will be thrilled that the Minister of Municipal Affairs just said that I'm made of unicorns or that I'm a unicorn, because she would appreciate that, very much so, and I think she believes that, actually.

The challenge with this, Mr. Speaker, is that if there was any budget allocated to this bill or any commitment to build affordable housing units, I honestly believe that the Official Opposition would

be able to support this bill or at least support a piece of it. But the fact of the matter is that the minister is claiming this will magically build new units or that through some kind of trickle-down step process, when certain units get sold off, then that will trigger the private sector to build other units. Yet when questioned by the Official Opposition on how long the units that are sold have to remain affordable, the answer is that there are no criteria, that there is no minimum. As the government sells its stock to the private sector, a company could within a year take those affordable housing units off the market and charge market rates. So we're not only not building new affordable units; were reducing the stock that we have. It's absurd.

1:10

No, we're not going to support this bill. It's ridiculous. And if the minister and others actually believe that this is building new units, they haven't read their own bill at all. You know, at least, if you're going to claim something, have a shred of truth in it and a shred of evidence, but the fact of the matter is that this bill does the opposite of what the government is claiming. It doesn't build new units. It actually takes units off the market. That, Mr. Speaker, is completely shameful.

You know, clearly, this government continues to make absurd claims, and what's frustrating, Mr. Speaker, is that all of us, all 87 of us, have a responsibility not only to represent the constituents who elected us here but to take care of every Albertan. What this does: this bill will put more Albertans on the street without homes. For that reason, I cannot support this bill.

The Speaker: Hon. members, are there others? Oh, man, all of the options. The hon. Member for Chestermere-Strathmore, followed by the minister should he still choose to, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-West Henday.

Mrs. Aheer: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and thank you again for the opportunity to debate this. Again, I just wanted to unpack a little bit of what was just said here. We had an amendment earlier that wanted to put off proclaiming the bill, which, in essence, stops the ability to build housing. The opposition is saying or is alluding to the fact that we will not have enough housing for the public that is needing this housing. But I find it interesting in the conversation because when we look at the strategy, the entire strategy is around multiple options in order to build housing. Again, I go back to when we were having these conversations when we were sitting in opposition, and one thing that kept coming up over and over and over again was the opportunity for the private sector and other organizations to be able to participate and build those partnerships and to be able to leverage the money of government along with the private sector in order to be able to build.

I'm thinking about my own riding in particular right now. Wheatland county has been able to facilitate the land. I think, Mr. Speaker, you would know this one, too, because it impacts, actually, all of our ridings. They've been able to purchase the land. They've been able to get private-sector investment. They've been able to bring people together. It is very much the needs of the community that are at hand. I think the assumptions that the opposition makes that somehow the folks that are involved in these decisions are terrible people that aren't going to take care of our most vulnerable... [interjection] Did you want to intervene? Go right ahead.

Mr. Jeremy Nixon: I do, and thank you for taking my intervention. I wasn't as quick as everybody else, so thank you for the opportunity. I just am so blown away by the opposition's inability

to get out of their own ideological prison on this one and think through, if this bill gets passed, the opportunity that they would have, if they end up forming government, to be able to use this bill to take underutilized assets, to be able to partner with private partnerships, with not-for-profits, with civil society to actually expand upon our ability to provide housing for vulnerable people and to be able to work with them. Like, it's just so huge. You were just mentioning a few. I can think of dozens of not-for-profit partners, private partners, and civil society partners in my constituency that are doing phenomenal work, and with just a little bit from us, a little bit – and that's what this bill allows us to do.

They won't take my intervention, so thank you for taking mine, but I'd encourage them to think about the not-for-profit and private partners, civil society partners in their constituency and think about how they could leverage this. I encourage you to continue to share. Thank you.

Mrs. Aheer: Thank you. To that point, when we talk about the multiple usages of these buildings, we're not just talking about – this is something that we've said before. When we're talking about mixed units, we're not just talking about one particular group of vulnerable people. My oldest is also autistic. So when we look at this group of vulnerable people, there are amazing opportunities for people to be housed in multi-units and also, on top of that, to be able to leverage the dollars from government in order to be able to help out these wonderful people and create communities as well, too.

I go back to, you know, what I was saying earlier about the one that's in my riding in particular. To the MLA's point, there are so many amazing opportunities to bring these organizations together. When you take the power of civil society and what they're capable of doing, and you put that together in partnership with government and the private sector, there are amazing things that can happen. That's not in any way to take away from the public organizations that are doing great work.

One of the members was mentioning, you know, fixing roofs and tiles and all that, and I totally appreciate that. One of the things I think that became really, really obvious during COVID was how many issues there were just in seniors' care in particular. I remember having discussions with the minister, tearful discussions, about what we were going to do and how to change that.

Actually, the minister came out to my riding, Mr. Speaker, and met with Wheatland county and met with the hospice association to talk about one of the new projects that they have going on, which is going to have pods of people so that if there's something – well, I mean, obviously with COVID, anything is possible – they can isolate people in it but in a community, in a cohort. And the HVAC and the way that it's going to work: they had discussed this with the minister at length, about what that HVAC system is going to look like and how it is that the private sector and the leverage of those dollars is really what's going to make that feasible.

Building it is one thing, Mr. Speaker; maintaining it is a whole, whole other thing. And to be able to allocate dollars towards that to make sure that there is a future for these buildings, for these spaces – and as many of the members have said, we're going to see an entire generation of people going into these places . . . [interjection] Go ahead.

Mr. Jeremy Nixon: You got me even more excited than I was a few moments ago.

Building them is one thing – you're absolutely right – but providing the supports in the community around the people that end up needing to utilize this housing is another thing, and the opportunity in these partnerships to work with our civil society, work with community groups to create supports and community

and everything that's needed around individuals that are vulnerable, that need these types of programs and housing, is so critical. There's huge opportunity in that as well. Again, I just push the opposition and everybody to see beyond and to see the potential in the partnerships that we can do through this bill. I thank you for your comments and encourage you to continue to talk more about how we can partner and work with civil society and not-for-profit and private partners to provide more than just housing but also community and other supports.

Thank you.

Mrs. Aheer: Well, to your point, we're talking about social housing in many of these aspects, aren't we, Mr. Speaker? That's actually something that, when I think about when we discussed this years ago, never came up, and it was a discussion that came up actually in many of the conversations that we've had over the years. I mean, my goodness, the MLA for Calgary-Fish Creek as well, too, worked heavily on seniors and the seniors' side of things. Just so much opportunity to bring folks together.

I think about, like, in my culture in particular our seniors are really our gems, they're our diamonds, and the stories and the wisdom and the ability to bring kids together with seniors and especially in rural areas – there is one that they were trying to open up in Rocky View county, actually, that was for senior farmers and especially those who had been widowed to be able to have something that was really appropriate to their lifestyle, so they're able to still visit their farms and their gardens and their horses, like, just so many thoughtful things.

But the other part, too, and a very important piece, I believe, that has come as a result of these conversations – and again I thank the minister for this – is a discussion on palliative care. Again, we had brought this up over and over again, how important that is for the person who is in that particular situation but especially for the family, Mr. Speaker, especially for people to be able to gather and be able to have those spaces to have their last moments with their loved ones.

Again, if there's ever been a time where that's become more apparent as to how important that is, it was throughout COVID. We just felt that sting of that isolation and being away from the people that we love most. I believe with all my heart that when you leverage that civil society, the public sector, the private sector, the supports, being able to have multi-use buildings, where you're bringing multiple generations together as well, too, and the opportunity to be able to leverage that.

1:20

The other thing that we don't talk about enough, too, is that it's one thing, again, to build a house – I mean, the opposition can correct me – but many of the spaces that they were building were well over the \$290,000 mark, into the \$300,000 mark, for one apartment. The money was going into these really, really expensive spaces, but they weren't actually building capacity. Then when you talk to places like some of the housing foundations and the other organizations – and we'd actually brought this to the NDP as well, too, when we were in opposition – they were able to build them for around \$180,000, if I remember correctly. It was almost half the price in order to be able to build the same level of quality and type of housing. For whatever reason, and without casting aspersions but at the same time wondering why, that level of dollars was going into something where we could build the same quality with organizations that were willing to get involved, who, again, had access to the land, had access to people and organizations that really wanted to contribute to the well-being of their communities.

I just have to state again how grateful I am to have the opportunity to be able to see these opportunities of private and public sector being able to come together, the nonprofit partnerships. Then also making sure that – there's another part of it, too, with the joint ventures, to be able to attract that nonprofit sector into it. There's a tremendous amount of opportunity to invest in this affordable housing, to have people and different sectors participate in a really meaningful way in the building of their communities, so I'm very optimistic and extremely proud to see these affordable housing units come online.

Again, I question the opposition's positions on this simply because what we're trying to do is learn from – you know, there are a lot of difficult decisions to make, but one thing that we did learn from this is that there are a lot of experts out there, Mr. Speaker, a ton of experts that really, really understand and know how the housing has to work, what that should look like. Again, just to be able to cut a lot of the red tape around the barriers to actually get into housing: we heard about that over and over and over again.

We really want to be able to appeal to partners. We really want to be able to make sure that folks can have equity stakes in projects because that makes them more accountable to the situation. [interjection] Go ahead.

Mr. Jeremy Nixon: I think what you were getting into a little bit there, too, and what I'm hoping you could expand on, is the ability to custom build to meet unique needs in unique communities, because there's such diversity in our community, so being able to work with individual not-for-profits or private-sector civil society partners that are passionate about a specific issue or meeting a specific community group and that this will allow us to be able to partner with them and allow them to fulfill their mandate, their purpose, to be able to meet the specific and unique needs within their communities. I thought you were touching on it a little bit, so hopefully you can expand a little bit more.

Mrs. Aheer: Yeah. I'll just maybe finish up, Mr. Speaker. The Dashmesh community association in northeast Calgary is actually one of those organizations that's looking at leveraging. They have land. They actually have a seniors' facility there that is not a live-in facility. Again, during COVID we learned how important that might be, and again in different cultures and especially in – I can't speak for other cultures, but in Southeast Asian culture it's an unusual situation where folks will put their loved ones into seniors' housing or into places where vulnerable folks go when they need help in these particular situations; however, that is changing. Families are changing. The needs are changing. It's very unique. Also, there's the social aspect of it.

If you ever have a chance, Mr. Speaker, to go to the Dashmesh Cultural Centre in northeast Calgary, you'll see that not only are they dealing with the gems of their society, their seniors, but they also have volunteers coming on a regular basis, and they're teaching them. They actually have a community garden there, where the seniors are able to work in the gardens and grow something that's beautiful. Then the kitchen is right in the gurdwara, and they cook, and they make all this beautiful food and have seva, where they all sit together and eat as a community. They're also looking at building a community hall or a shelter potentially for women on their property as well, too. Just so many opportunities. That's just one.

Again, I really thank the minister for this wonderful opportunity, and thank you so much for the interventions and for the conversation. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-West Henday. The hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs has ceded.

Mr. Carson: Well, thank you. As we get to the end of our time allocation here – and it seems like the government members have a lot to say, so it's unfortunate that they made the decision to time allocate at this point – you know, we heard some really nice words and stories from the last two members interjecting with each other. At the end of the day the problem is that while they have these ideas that these wraparound services are going to be provided and – you know, the previous member, again, was just saying that if we don't pass this, it's going to stop the ability to build affordable housing. I mean, the rhetoric is at a thousand here this evening, and it's so unfortunate.

At the end of the day what's going to stop the ability of this government to build affordable housing is the fact that they cut the investments allocated to that by a massive amount, from – I want to get this correct – over \$1 billion to \$238 million. We will see, as these affordable housing stocks are sold off, if that \$238 million number goes up at all, or if they're simply going to use the money from that to backfill the commitment that they already made and not make any further commitments. Just as much as we might hope to see wraparound services built at these new affordable housing projects, which aren't actually confirmed or promised through this legislation because of the complete lack of transparency from the minister proposing it, we could just as likely see that that property is bought up and high-rises are built on it, not affordable by any means. We could see, you know, commercial coffee shops.

I mean, the things that we've had to listen to through this debate from the government and the completely – it's just so hard to believe that they're trying to sell this as a win. The fact is that there's nothing in here that is going to commit to building affordable housing, nothing to ensure that targets are met or that there are even targets in place. This truly is just a fire sale of our affordable housing stock. It seems like this government wants to wipe their hands clean of having to have any accountability when we get to the estimates process. They can say: "Look, we've been clearing up all the affordable housing stock that needed modernization. You know, we sold it all. There's none left. It's not our problem anymore." I can totally see this situation arising through the estimates process. We will see how that plays out.

Again, when we think about the consequences before us for passing a bill such as the Alberta Housing Fire Sale Amendment Act, I can see many opportunities where the government looks at the existing units that are before them, very possibly with people in them already at this point, and saying: "No, we don't want to take the expense of fixing these. We're just going to consider it, you know, a saleable asset and move forward with that." We are going to see not only pieces that need to be fixed at this point and should be and repurposed – or not repurposed, excuse me, but reused for affordable housing. Again, we don't have that commitment through this legislation, but we are going to see it go even further, very likely, and see people that are living in these affordable housing units kicked out. If the government really cared about ensuring that people stay in their communities and in homes and not end up houseless, they would not have made many of the changes.

I appreciate the Member for Edmonton-Meadows, on accountability, also talking about the idea of this government making changes to casino revenue, to CFEP and CIP and all these programs that are so instrumental to keeping families in our community. This government has completely wiped out so much of those dollars. I believe, on CFEP and CIP, that it was between 50 per cent and 60 per cent. The casino revenue is going to general

revenue now. I mean, day after day we see this government making decisions to not have to have any accountability, to take money away from our communities, our community leagues, and nonprofits. Again, through Bill 78 there is no commitment that is going to ensure that these units are built by nonprofits, that they are purposed for affordable housing. None of it.

1:30

While the government continues to paint quite a rosy picture of how this is going to all play out, at this point all we have is a bill that promises to sell off government assets with no transparency, no commitment to reinvest it in affordable housing. We see a government that has scaled back a commitment of over \$1 billion down to \$238 million over three years. It's pretty clear that this government is not concerned about building affordable housing in this province. It's pretty clear that they are more concerned with selling these assets with no strings attached. It's deeply disappointing, but it's not surprising. It truly seems like a government that is so desperate to do as much as they can to appease their donors and friends because they know that they're on their way out. It's not surprising, Mr. Speaker, based on the popularity of the decisions that this government has made.

Again I would say that I do not plan to support this piece of legislation. I think that the government should drastically change course on this. I think that they need to consider the decisions again. Not to belabour this point, but the changes that they've made to deindexing the seniors' benefit, income supports, additional shelter allowance: the decisions of this government are directly affecting Albertans in my community and every community across this province. They are putting more people on the street. They are driving more people to the food bank. It's so deeply disappointing that now they have moved time allocation on such an important bill, that they're trying to say that if we were to delay this bill, they wouldn't be able to build affordable housing.

Mr. Speaker, again, the fact is that this is a government that made the decision to make massive cuts to investments in affordable housing. If they are concerned about the lack of housing being built, they need to take a look in the mirror. I truly cannot understand what has transpired this evening, the rosy fairy tales that this government has told about how this bill is going to fix all the affordable housing woes within this province. You know, they're giving themselves a pat on the back before they've even had a chance to see how this plays out.

I continue to hear members of the government heckling, but the fact is that – this will speak for itself, I guess, at the end of the day – nowhere in their platform did they say that they had a plan to sell off Alberta's affordable housing stock. I think that Albertans will be deeply concerned to see this taking place with no transparency, no accountability to ensure that it is kept as affordable housing for the Albertans who so desperately need it.

I'm so disappointed this evening or this morning, I suppose, to again see this government moving time allocation on such an important bill that Albertans deserve to have more say on, that this government, as we just listened to for the last 20 or so minutes, seemed like they had more to say on, as much as I disagreed with them. The fact is that to stop this bill right now is not to stop the ability to build affordable housing, as the last member said. If they truly want to build more affordable housing, then they need to invest more money into it at the end of the day.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I will take my seat, but I appreciate the opportunity to speak to why I will not, by any means, be supporting Bill 78. Thank you.

The Speaker: There are approximately four minutes remaining.

Mr. McIver: You go back and forth, don't you?

The Speaker: Well, there are approximately four minutes remaining.

Mr. McIver: I'll take it.

The Speaker: Pardon me?

Mr. McIver: I'll take it, sir.

The Speaker: I had mentioned earlier that the hon. minister was able. It's up to him should he choose to use the time.

Mr. McIver: We go back and forth. It's the custom.

The Speaker: I just offered you the time. Would you like to use the four minutes remaining in debate or not?

Mr. McIver: Yes, please.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs.

Mr. McIver: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate that. I think it's important that we support this bill. You know, the other side says that they're not going to support it, and they're complaining about not having enough time. They spent most of their time complaining about time allocation instead of talking about the bill. Well, what they should have done, when they had four years in government, is actually pay attention to this issue. What this minister will do, that the other side never did when they had a chance, will consider all options for building new affordable housing, including working with the private sector.

The folks on the other side are so beholden to Gil McGowan that they don't want to build homes with anybody that isn't going to have the people that are represented by Gil working there. We will actually consider that option and the private sector option, Mr. Speaker, because this isn't about Gil McGowan. This isn't about them. This isn't about us. This is about Albertans that need housing, and on this side of the House we will consider all options for building, developing homes for people that need it. We'll consider partnerships with – yes, I know it's a dirty word for the other side – private-sector companies that want to help. Oh, the horror. And, of course, we will work with municipalities.

Mr. Speaker, I know a little bit of what I'm talking about here. I spent three years as the chair of the board for the Calgary Housing Company, which is the largest landlord in Alberta. We will look for opportunities to work with municipalities and with seniors' lodges and other housing organizations. There's a great number of nonprofits, private-sector companies that really want to put the engine of private-sector development in service of Albertans that need housing.

Yes, those organizations at many times will provide and look for ways to connect people in housing to the wraparound services that they may need. Of course, these are individual people. They are individuals and families that have different needs. Some just need to get a roof over their head – for whatever reason, they don't have enough income – and other ones need to have a roof over their head and other supports. These housing companies, public and private, in Alberta are very good at connecting people that are in affordable housing with the services that they need, and our government will encourage that.

The hon. minister that brought this legislation forward has made it clear that one of the strategies is to take a bunch of housing that's in such poor repair that no one's actually living in it and take the money from the sale of that and actually employ it in housing that people can live in. The other side: they'd actually, Mr. Speaker, rather see a

building old and rotten than to have a private-sector company take the value of the asset, add more value to it, and actually have people that need a home living in it.

An Hon. Member: You've got socialism.

Mr. McIver: Socialism hasn't ever worked, unfortunately.

The Speaker: I hesitate to interrupt, but pursuant to Government Motion 110 this concludes the time allotted for third reading of Bill 78, the Alberta Housing Amendment Act, 2021, and as such I am required to put all questions to the Assembly.

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

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 1:38 a.m.]

[One minute having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

[The Speaker in the chair]

For the motion:

Aheer	LaGrange	Panda
Allard	Long	Pon

Copping	Lovely	Rehn
Ellis	Luan	Rowswell
Glubish	Madu	Sawhney
Gotfried	McIver	Schweitzer
Guthrie	Neudorf	Shandro
Hanson	Nixon, Jason	Smith
Issik	Nixon, Jeremy	Williams
Kenney	Orr	Yao

Against the motion:

Bilous	Eggen	Sabir
Carson	Goehring	Sweet
Deol		

Totals: For – 30 Against – 7

[Motion carried; Bill 78 read a third time]

The Speaker: The Government House Leader.

Mr. Jason Nixon: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I move that we adjourn the House until tomorrow at 10 o'clock a.m.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 1:43 a.m. on Tuesday]

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