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The 30th Legislature
Second Session

Alberta Hansard

Tuesday morning, December 7, 2021

Day 138

The Honourable Nathan M. Cooper, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta The 30th Legislature

Second Session

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Party standings:

United Conservative: 20

New Democrat: 24

Independent: 2

Vacant: 1

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Standing Committee on Alberta's Economic Future

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Standing Committee on Legislative Offices

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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

10 a.m.

Tuesday, December 7, 2021

[Mr. Milliken in the chair]

Prayers

The Acting Speaker: Lord, the God of righteousness and truth, grant to our Queen and her government, to Members of the Legislative Assembly, and to all in positions of responsibility the guidance of Your spirit. May they never lead the province wrongly through love of power, desire to please, or unworthy ideals but, laying aside all private interests and prejudices, keep in mind their responsibility to seek to improve the condition of all. Amen.

I see the Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Schow: Good morning, Mr. Speaker. Thanks for acknowledging me. I rise to ask for unanimous consent for one-minute bells for the entire morning sitting, including the first bell in Committee of the Whole.

[Unanimous consent granted]

Orders of the Day

Government Bills and Orders Committee of the Whole

[Mr. Milliken in the chair]

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

Bill 79 Trails Act

The Deputy Chair: Are there any comments or questions to be offered with respect to this bill? For everyone's benefit we are on amendment A2. I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. Schmidt: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I just want to rise and respond to some of the comments that the minister of the environment made with regard to . . . [A cellphone rang] It is the season of giving, and I certainly hope that whoever's cellphone went off will be generous with his or her donations to the charity of his or her choice.

I do want to respond to some of the things that the minister of the environment said in response to the amendment that I proposed. First of all, let me just express my profound disappointment that the minister of environment is clearly not interested in having a good-faith debate. That was quite clear from the comments that he made with respect to my character, the character of the Official Opposition. He certainly made a whole bunch of assertions that weren't true about the kind of people we are or our intent with respect to bringing forward these amendments.

What is most concerning is that, I think, he was too quick to write off the amendments that we're proposing. I mean, the only refutation, if you could call it that, that he provided was that this amendment that we brought forward was going to be the equivalent of Bill C-69, that if we passed this amendment, there would be no more trails constructed or operated in the province of Alberta. Unfortunately, not only is that not true, but I think he's too quick to dismiss the concerns of many Albertans who have looked at the Trails Act and said that they are concerned that there is no process for consultation, that there's no process for environmental

assessment of trails, and they're very unhappy with the process of land-use planning.

Now, going over the comments from the minister that he made in response, trying to separate out the vitriol and bombast from the actual substance of the debate was a very difficult task, but the best that I could come up with, Mr. Chair, was that the minister intends for the land-use planning process to fill the gap that's created by the passage of this Trails Act with respect to public consultation and environmental assessment when it comes to the creation and operation of trails. The people of Alberta, I think, believe strongly in the process of land-use planning. The only problem is that this government has not moved an inch on land-use planning. We know that there are only two completed land-use plans, the South Saskatchewan regional plan and the lower Athabasca regional plan. The process, if you look on the environment department's website, for the North Saskatchewan regional plan has been started, but nobody seems to know what, if any, kind of progress has been made.

The minister also referred to the creation of subregional plans through the land-use planning process. Well, as far as I know, Mr. Chair, there's only one subregional plan in place, and that's the Livingstone-Porcupine Hills subregional plan. It's been this minister's involvement with changes to that plan that has caused concern for so many people who are interested in the Trails Act, right?

We had a process in place for bringing all of the stakeholders together to come up with a sustainable way of promoting recreation on the landscape in the Livingstone-Porcupine Hills region, and the minister threw a monkey wrench into that whole process and has essentially set that process back. It certainly appears to many of the people who've been involved with that process that he intends to favour one group of recreational users over many others, and I think many of the other people who don't appear to have the favour of the minister of environment are quite upset with how that process is playing out.

It's not correct to say that land-use planning will address all of these concerns that are trying to be addressed through the amendment that I brought forward. The minister, as I said, is not making any progress on land-use plans, and the land-use plans that are in place have been stalled or set back intentionally by the actions of this minister.

I would just urge all government members today to understand that the consultation, environmental assessment requirements that are contained in this amendment are fundamental to making the Trails Act a successful piece of legislation and need to be in there because the land-use planning process is not far enough down the track to provide the protections that the people of Alberta are looking for.

With that, Mr. Chair, I will conclude my remarks and urge all members of the Assembly to listen to what the people of Alberta are saying, pass this amendment, and create a comprehensive consultation and environmental assessment process that is sorely needed in the creation and operation of trails.

Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any members wishing to join debate on A2?

[Motion on amendment A2 lost]

The Deputy Chair: We are back on the main bill, Bill 79. Are there any hon. members looking to join on Bill 79? I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar has risen.

Mr. Schmidt: Thank you, Mr. Chair. You know, it is the Christmas season. I think we have plenty of opportunities to listen to bells outside of the House. We don't need to listen to them inside the House.

I rise to propose another amendment to this piece of legislation.

10:10

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. members. There will be copies of this amendment at the tables close to the entrances. If you raise your hand, one will be delivered to you as well. For everybody's benefit this will be amendment A3. If the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar could please read it into the record and then continue with any comments should he so choose.

Mr. Schmidt: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I move that Bill 79, Trails Act, be amended in section 5 (a) in subsection (1) by striking out "Subject to the regulations, the Minister may establish" and substituting "The Minister may, in accordance with subsection (1.1) and the regulations, establish" and (b) by adding the following immediately after section (1):

(1.1) A trail management plan must set out each of the following:

- (a) in relation to each designated trail and designated trail area that is subject to the trail management plan, each of the following:
 - (i) the purpose of, and expected benefit from, the designated trail or designated trail area;
 - (ii) the cultural and historical significance of the designated trail or designated trail area;
 - (iii) the designated trail's or designated trail area's contribution to each of the following values:
 - (A) sustainable outdoor recreation;
 - (B) environmental, economic and social outcomes;
 - (C) individual well-being;
- (b) the user experience, landscape conservation and environmental protection objectives or measures that the Minister or the trail manager, as the case may be, must achieve through implementation of the trail management plan and the timeline on which the objectives or measures must be achieved;
- (c) an explanation as to how the trail management plan complies with any applicable ALSA regional plan.

Mr. Chair, this amendment is really designed to address some of the gaps that are created in section 5 of this piece of legislation with respect to trail management plans. Now, anybody can look at the piece of legislation that is before us and see that there really isn't a whole lot of information provided in the legislation about what a trail management plan is to include. That has created a lot of concern for the people that I've heard from about this legislation because they want some guardrails. They want to know exactly, well, not exactly what, but they want to have some kind of idea of what a trail management plan has to include. And I think that's only fair.

A trail management plan, if it's going to meet the purposes that the Trails Act is setting out for itself, has to balance all of these things that, if this amendment is passed, will be set out in a trail management plan. You know, we want to balance the cultural and historical significance. We want to balance sustainable outdoor recreation. We want to balance environmental, economic, and social outcomes along with individual well-being. I think this is a reasonable request and certainly one that many of the people that I've talked to have made.

You know, it's quite well established that in some parts of the province we have a density of trails that are creating problems on the landscape. Now, it's problems of overuse, problems of environmental damage, and this kind of situation cannot continue

in this fashion. It's our hope that by presenting this amendment, the creation of a trail management plan will seek to be clear about its purposes and how it meets the objectives that are trying to be balanced here.

I just want to say a quick note about one section of this amendment, and that's the cultural and historical significance of designated trail areas. One thing that's an interesting idea, that people who have written to my office about the Trails Act have suggested, is that perhaps there are some trails that are so culturally and historically significant here in Alberta that they should be set aside in legislation. They point to some of the trails in the United States. I believe one of the examples that was provided to me was the Appalachian Trail in the eastern United States, which runs more or less the length of the country along the Appalachian Mountains. That is set out, designated, in legislation because that trail has such cultural and historical significance to the people of the United States. I certainly hope that as the trails development process proceeds, we will identify similar trails here in Alberta that have such high cultural and historical importance that they are designated in legislation.

That is not the purpose, though, of this amendment. The purpose of this amendment is simply to identify the cultural and historical significance of trails through the designated trail management plans.

Mr. Chair, let me just sum up by saying that the Trails Act in its original form doesn't provide any kind of detail around what a trail management plan should include. This amendment, I think, is designed to address some of those gaps and will put some guardrails in place in the trail management plan creation process that I think will result in the Trails Act being a better piece of legislation and the trail designation and operation process being better in terms of balancing all of the various demands on the landscape that we see now.

It's my hope that all members of this Assembly see fit to adopt this amendment. Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

We are on amendment A3. Are there any members looking to join debate on amendment A3?

[Motion on amendment A3 lost]

The Deputy Chair: We are back on the main bill, Bill 79. Are there any members wishing to join debate on Bill 79? I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. Schmidt: Thank you, Mr. Chair. It's incredibly disappointing to me that the government didn't even see fit to provide a response to amendment A3. You know, I think that that highlights a significant problem that this government is facing. They continue to ignore the voices of Albertans, and it's incredibly frustrating.

The people of Alberta at least want to know what the government's position is on trail management plans, how they'll be created, what they'll contain. The government provided absolutely no information whatsoever. It boggles the mind, really, to just think that the government sees that this is all fine, that they don't owe the people of Alberta at least a response to these significant concerns that they've brought forward. I know that members here in this Chamber right now are getting letters on this very issue. We all certainly have. People have been quite vocal on some of the many gaps that this piece of legislation has created or hasn't addressed.

Anyway, we will continue on in the spirit of hope, and to that end I would like to present another amendment.

10:20

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

There will be copies of this amendment on the tables. If you would like a copy delivered to you, just put up your hand, and one will come to you. This will be amendment A4 for all those debating.

I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar. If you could please read it into the record, and then if you so choose, you can obviously have more time for remarks.

Mr. Schmidt: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I move that Bill 79, the Trails Act, be amended in section 6 by adding the following immediately after clause (3):

- (4) The trail manager must provide a report to the Minister each year that sets out each of the following:
- (a) a summary of the signs and notices posted under subsection (2), and
 - (b) an explanation as to how these signs and notices support the implementation of the applicable trail management plan.

Mr. Chair, just to provide a little bit of context on this particular amendment, one of the concerns that we heard from the people of Alberta, who are paying very close attention to the Trails Act and this debate, is that, like section 5, which just creates a trail management plan but doesn't actually set out any kind of criteria for what a trail management plan can be, section 6 is also very silent on who a trail manager is, what a trail manager has to do. It doesn't provide any indication, really, about what this person who will be designated the responsible person for a trail management plan will do.

Now, in consultation with Parliamentary Counsel we tried here as the Official Opposition to create an amendment, as best we could, that would at least provide some guardrails, fill in the gaps a little bit about what a trail manager's role will be. In consultation with Parliamentary Counsel we came up with an amendment that says that a trail manager has to provide this summary of signs and notices and explain how those signs and notices support the implementation of the applicable trail management plan.

It was Parliamentary Counsel's view that that is the only job that a trail manager has according to this legislation. Now, I suspect that that's probably not what this government had in mind when they created this position of a trail manager through this legislation. I suspect that a trail manager's role will be much more significant than just providing signs and notices under subsection (2). We really don't know what the trail manager's job is going to be because there are no details in the bill or in any of the public communications that the environment department has put out. This amendment is our best attempt at trying to define the role of a trail manager and provide some accountability to the people of Alberta for the work that a trail manager is doing.

Now, I will say that one of the concerns that we have heard from the people of Alberta with respect to this creation of a trail manager position is that there is no definition and there's been no intent signalled by the government as to who a trail manager could be. You know, the minister comes from quite a large family. Maybe he intends to appoint many of his other brothers and sisters who aren't in this House as trail managers. I don't know. That's a significant concern, Mr. Chair. People, I think, rightly expect that the trail manager role will be an important one in making sure that our trails are well constructed and well maintained and that the Trails Act is meeting the objectives that have been set out for it by the government. But there is no assurance. There is no assurance that the right people are going to be appointed to this role, and there is no accountability going to be provided as the trail managers execute this role.

You know, unfortunately, it's not within our power as the Official Opposition here to amend the bill to put any guardrails around who trail managers are going to be. One of the things that we've heard from many of the groups is that the trail manager needs to be someone who is knowledgeable about the creation and operation of trails, knowledgeable about the local area, and who has a good relationship with many of the stakeholders who are on the landscape with these trails. Certainly, it's my hope the trail managers will at least meet these criteria.

One of the other things that we've heard concerns about is that we don't know what kind of resources trail managers will be given to do this job. There is nothing in the bill that provides any kind of guaranteed revenue stream to a trail manager, nor is it the case that a trail manager will be an employee of Environment and Parks or any other department of the government. It's quite possible, according to the legislation, that a municipality or a designate of a municipality could be appointed as a trail manager, but municipalities won't be given any revenue, as far as we can tell, from the province to hire somebody to do this role. My fear is that this is another example of the government downloading costs, that should be rightly borne by the province, onto municipalities.

Certainly, we know that municipalities vary widely in terms of how well resourced they are to be able to hire a trail manager and give this person the resources that he or she needs to operate a trail management plan. But even more concerning than that, I think, Mr. Chair, is the potential for this trail manager position to be left to volunteers. And I have nothing against volunteers. I think that volunteers have contributed so much to the creation and operation of trail networks here in the province of Alberta, and I'm eager to see that good work continue.

You know, the minister continues to hurl assertions at us that we are against partnerships and that we're only looking for union jobs. Let me just, first of all, say that there is nothing wrong with a union job. In fact, a union job is an excellent way to make sure that you're paid fairly, have excellent wages and benefits and working conditions that can ensure that you meet your needs, meet your family's needs, be able to take care of your family, put a roof over their heads, food on the table, clothes on their back, and shoes on their feet. I don't know why the minister is so concerned that Albertans will have more of these kinds of jobs. Certainly, with the high unemployment rate and the rising cost of living, I would think that the minister would be working overtime to figure out how to make sure that more Albertans have these kinds of jobs that pay well, provide good benefits, and have excellent working conditions that ensure that the people who are in those jobs can come home safely at the end of every day. Anyway, that's my rant in support of unionized labour.

One of the things that volunteer groups have identified to us is that they are so strained for capacity that they're not certain they'll be able to fulfill these roles and meet the objectives that the government has set out for the Trails Act and these trail management plans. I have talked to many trails groups, contrary to the assertions of the government that we haven't. One of the things that they say is that in order for their volunteers to be successful, they need to have at least some kind of person dedicated to making sure that these trail managers and trail management plans are working suitably. Oftentimes that will require somebody to be paid, and they're not sure who is going to be able to take on this role.

10:30

One of the things that trails groups are concerned about is that their revenue has dried up. Because these trails groups operate on donations, almost entirely by donations, they don't have the revenue in place to pay a person to take on these roles. If the

government wants to appoint these trail managers, I think it makes sense, to me, to at least provide some resources to enable the proper functioning of these trails management plans.

Now, like I said, this amendment doesn't actually amend the legislation to provide those resources to trail managers, but by providing an annual report of the activity of the trail managers, the people of Alberta will at least be able to see what work they've been able to undertake and perhaps get an inkling of what additional resources they need in order to be successful at achieving their objectives. I think that that is something that is sorely lacking. You know, the accountability mechanisms for government departments achieving their objectives are lacklustre, shall we say.

My friends here in the Official Opposition and I sit on the Public Accounts Committee, and, you know, we get two hours a year to question the environment department if we get to question the environment department at all. Whether or not they appear before committee is entirely up to the government members, and apparently they are very concerned about other departments. They don't give a whole lot of importance to the environment department and making sure that it appears before Public Accounts. We have two hours to question the environment department on how well they've done in achieving their objectives. Let me tell you, Mr. Chair, that there is a lot going on in the environment department. We couldn't possibly get through all of the programs and initiatives that the environment department has undertaken in a given year and adequately examine them to make sure that the government is achieving the objectives that it set out.

I think that this is an additional mechanism that, if passed, would allow the environment department to provide additional accountability and transparency to the people of Alberta, make sure that trail managers are achieving the objectives that have been set out for them. If it shows that things are going badly, then the government can respond accordingly and provide them with additional resources, or perhaps if somebody is failing to meet the objectives, because they are not performing their duties well enough, that trail manager can be replaced with somebody else who is better suited to the role. This amendment, if adopted, would make sure that this bill creates a trails management process that is much more likely to be successful, and I think that that's really important.

I think it's also quite possible that by filing these annual reports, we could identify best practices of trail managers. You know, it's not quite clear to me or to anybody else who is reading this legislation how many trail managers we're going to need to appoint to manage our trails here in the province of Alberta, but with 13,000 kilometres of trails already existing in the province, I think that that's going to require quite a few trail managers. If the people of Alberta are able to see these annual reports, we'll be able to look at which trail managers are doing a really good job at meeting the objectives that have been set out for them and perhaps learn from those best practices and inform other trail managers of best practices as well. I think that this is part of a process of continual improvement that the government should be happy to undertake.

Let me just summarize my points as best as I can by saying that this amendment, if passed, will provide sorely needed accountability and transparency on the work that trail managers will be doing in the implementation of this piece of legislation, and it will help the government understand how the process is working and be able to respond accordingly with additional resources and plans to improve their work. It makes sense to me to pass this amendment and make sure that the Trails Act is working as best as it can on behalf of the people of Alberta.

Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

We are on amendment A4. I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-South.

Mr. Dang: Thank you, Mr. Chair. It's a pleasure to rise and speak to my colleague's amendment A4 on the Trails Act, Bill 79. Let me just begin by saying how profoundly disappointing it is that government members and the government minister cannot even find the time and effort to rise in this place and defend their own legislation or speak to amendments the opposition is proposing. This is a transparency measure that is being proposed right now. This is an accountability measure that's being proposed right now. We are trying to make this legislation better, as is our duty as the Official Opposition and as elected members in this place. Instead of even bothering to reply, the government appears to be content to vote down amendments without even speaking to their rationale.

Mr. Chair, Albertans are truly watching, right? If you just drive down any street in any area in this province, you'll see protect-our-parks signs, you'll see stop-the-coal-mining signs, and you'll see so many different signs that relate to environmental issues that this government has directly caused and is directly responsible for, that are directly responsible for how unpopular this government is as well. Instead of even bothering to stand in this place and defend their legislation and talk about the rationale on amendments we are trying to propose, the government instead sits behind their laptops, sits behind their phones, and does nothing.

Mr. Chair, that is, I think, perhaps a profoundly adequate metaphor for how this government has decided to govern. They've decided to ignore Albertans, just as they're ignoring this House. They've decided to ignore the people who sent them here. Instead of actually doing their jobs and debating legislation, instead of actually doing their jobs and listening to Albertans, they've decided to run away and hide. I think it's profoundly disappointing.

I think it's obvious that they're not taking this seriously, that the government is not taking this amendment seriously, not taking this bill seriously. They're not taking this job seriously. I think that's obvious to Albertans as well. I think that as we move forward with this legislation, we're going to see the same pattern of behaviour, where the government decides not to engage and not to work on the actual issues that we're being sent here to do work on. I think that's, frankly, something that would be profoundly seen as laziness by some constituents. If they see their members are not speaking to . . .

Mr. Hunter: Point of order.

The Deputy Chair: A point of order has been noted. I see the hon. Member for Taber-Warner.

Point of Order Language Creating Disorder

Mr. Hunter: Standing Order 23(h), (i), and (j). Mr. Chair, the hon. Member for Edmonton-South has said that we are being lazy, that we are running and hiding. If that does not cause some disorder in the House, I'm not sure what will. The hon. member was very quick many times in the past to be able to jump up and to call out members of the government side of the House for stating things that he was not happy about. I would ask him to be able to get back to the amendment, which is on the table, and to talk about that rather than encouraging us to be upset about the things that he's saying.

The Deputy Chair: I see the hon. member.

10:40

Mr. Dang: Thank you, Mr. Chair. This is obviously a matter of debate. I'm referring to what Albertans may perceive, how we're

debating this amendment to be. It's certainly something that I think is relevant to debate on this matter. It's a bill that has profound impacts across this entire province, and it's a bill that we have seen has a high level of interest for Albertans. I'm simply referring to what I think Albertans might see as they watch us today, whether they're watching Assembly Online or on their televisions at home. Certainly, I've been trying to make the point that this is important legislation. In that context, I think we should continue with debate on that.

The Deputy Chair: Okay. I see the Member for Red Deer-South with something, I'm assuming, new to add.

Mr. Stephan: Yes, Mr. Chair, it is. We're occupying our seats. I don't see how we could be running and hiding. This is obviously a false statement.

The Deputy Chair: Okay. I am prepared to rule on this one. I will state that this, by my estimation, doesn't meet the level of a point of order. I think that the language, though perhaps disagreeable to some members of the House, hasn't raised itself to a point where it was absolutely creating disorder.

What I would, though, say is that we are on amendment A4, and I would ask that the hon. member, after having had the opportunity to, I think, say what he wanted to say – I think that it's an opportunity now for us to get back to amendment A4 specifically.

Please.

Debate Continued

Mr. Dang: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Certainly, like I was saying, amendment A4 is simply about accountability, right? It's simply about having a report that a trail manager would provide to the minister and, hopefully, would be published for Albertans to view.

In a similar way, I think Albertans are interested in seeing what their government is doing, right? They're interested in seeing what trail managers are doing. Albertans are interested in seeing what their government is doing. Albertans are interested in seeing why their government is choosing not to reply to these amendments and is choosing not to reply and deal with the contents of this bill. Frankly, Albertans are watching, and they're disappointed. Albertans are here, and they're listening. Again, this is an issue that matters to many people. This is an issue that – you drive around the province, and you can see those signs on lawns all over constituencies in Alberta.

With that, Mr. Chair, I strongly recommend, perhaps for the government's interest, that they put somebody up to speak against this if they're going to be voting against it. Otherwise, I hope that all members would support this as remaining silent, I think, would mean that you have nothing to oppose.

Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other members looking to join on A4?

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

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 10:43 a.m.]

[One minute having elapsed, the committee divided]

[Mr. Milliken in the chair]

For the motion:

Dang	Pancholi	Schmidt
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Irwin Nielsen	Renaud	Sigurdson, L.
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Against the motion:

Aheer	Long	Singh
Amery	Nally	Smith
Fir	Neudorf	Stephan
Frey	Nicolaides	Toews
Getson	Nixon, Jason	Toor
Guthrie	Pon	Turton
Horner	Rosin	van Dijken
Hunter	Rutherford	Walker
Issik	Schow	Wilson
Jones	Schulz	Yaseen

Totals:	For – 7	Against – 30
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[Motion on amendment A4 lost]

The Deputy Chair: We are back on the main bill, Bill 79. Are there any members wishing to speak? I believe I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. Schmidt: Thank you, Mr. Chair. It is incredibly concerning to me, as I'm sure it is to the people of Alberta, that at least half of cabinet can show up to defeat the amendment that I just brought forward . . .

The Deputy Chair: Hon. member, I just want you to apologize for mentioning whether or not members are . . .

Mr. Schmidt: They just voted. It's a standing vote, Mr. Chair. We all heard their names being called.

The Deputy Chair: In the future, I would just say, please refrain from doing things indirectly that you can't do directly.

If the hon. member could please continue.

Mr. Schmidt: Well, Mr. Chair, as anybody who will go through the transcript will see, half of cabinet just voted to defeat an amendment, yet none of them had the decency to even respond to the amendment. That is quite clear from the transcript.

More importantly, Mr. Chair, we saw more members of the government caucus engage in points of order than engage in debate. This is not a one-off. You know, we see that the members are quick to take offence at any perceived slight, and they take dives all the time. The Italian soccer team . . .

Mr. Rutherford: Point of order.

The Deputy Chair: A point of order has been called. I see the hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont.

Point of Order Relevance

Mr. Rutherford: Mr. Chair, thank you. Standing Order 23(b)(i), "speaks to matters other than the question under discussion." I'm not sure what the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar is referring to. Are we on the main bill? Are we on an amendment? He's just a stream of consciousness because he has nothing to say to the bill.

The Deputy Chair: Okay. I will listen to the opposition with regard to a response should there be one.

I do not find that this is a point of order. Historically people do get a wide berth with regard to what they discuss in Committee of the Whole. I would also just ask that the hon. member with the call

refer or focus perhaps back on Bill 79, the Trails Act, and I would not want to be here reflecting on a previous vote of this Assembly.

If the hon. member could please continue.

Debate Continued

Mr. Schmidt: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I think it's well within my right to make comments on how this debate has proceeded to this point in my comments regarding the bill and the amendments that I'm going to bring forward.

10:50

It is incredibly concerning to me, as well as it is to the people of Alberta, that we've now had three members of the UCP caucus stand up and raise points of order for perceived slights yet have offered nothing of substance with regard to the amendments that we've brought forward.

Mr. Getson: Because the amendments have nothing of substance.

Mr. Schmidt: If the Member for Lac Ste. Anne-Parkland believes that there is nothing of substance here, then I invite him to tell us why he thinks there is nothing of substance. You know, I understand that the Member for Lac Ste. Anne-Parkland has troubles distinguishing fish from ducks, but I fully expect him to be able to represent the views of his constituents . . .

Chair's Ruling Decorum

The Deputy Chair: I hesitate to interrupt. However, I'm going to ask one more time to please – I think what is happening here, and I see what's happening here, is that the decorum is slowly but surely beginning to deteriorate, I think, in no small part due to both sides of this House and some of the comments that were made. I would just ask that all members consider the language that they use carefully in order to ensure that it doesn't add to potentially creating disorder within the House. As we all know, when there is disorder in the House, then there isn't effective debate, and we are all here to have effective debates. At this time the effective debate that we are having will be on Bill 79, Trails Act.

I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. Schmidt: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Let me just express my view for the record that it is not both sides who are engaging in lowering the decorum. It is clearly one side that is engaged in trying to derail a good-faith debate.

The Deputy Chair: Hon. member, I just want to be clear here. I know you're putting something on the record. Are you challenging my ruling? I ruled that it was seen as debate from both sides and comments from both sides, and you stood up and said: no, that's not true. Is that what you're doing?

Mr. Schmidt: No. Absolutely not, Mr. Chair.

The Deputy Chair: All right. Perfect. Just wanted to clear that up. If the hon. member would please continue.

Debate Continued

Mr. Schmidt: Thank you. Perhaps we will see a change of heart and a change of attitude from the members of the United Conservative caucus with respect to the final amendment that I will be bringing forward presently.

The Deputy Chair: This will be referred to as amendment A5 for all those listening. Of course, there will be copies on the tables by the entrances. If you would like a copy of this amendment A5, please raise your hand. One will be delivered.

If the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar could please read it into the record for the benefit of everyone. Then, of course, please, the option is there to continue with further comments.

Mr. Schmidt: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I move that Bill 79, Trails Act, be amended by adding the following immediately after section 7:

Annual report on trail management plans

7.1 The Minister must, within 30 days of the last day of each fiscal year

(a) complete a report that sets out the total amount of public monies that the Government spent on the implementation of trail management plans during that fiscal year, and

(b) make the report publicly available.

Mr. Chair, one thing that has been incredibly concerning to me and to many Albertans who have watched what this government has done with respect to the management of our parks and our public lands has been with respect to transparency around how public money is spent. Now, we all know that the government has imposed a number of new user fees on people who are recreating on public land and in parks. We had, at the beginning of the year, the implementation of a random camping fee. Then in the middle of the year we had the implementation of the Kananaskis conservation pass. We don't know how many additional fees the government may choose to impose in the future because, of course, the government made some amendments to the Public Lands Act that will allow it to create and increase existing fees as it sees fit.

Now, one of the promises that the government made when it chose to implement these fees is that we will see a whole host of improvements in the management of our parks and our public lands. They promised to use the money that is collected from the random camping fee as well as the Kananaskis conservation pass to hire additional conservation officers, invest in the infrastructure improvements. A whole host of things were promised by this government when they implemented the fees.

Ms Rosin: And delivered.

Mr. Schmidt: I hear the Member for Banff-Kananaskis say that they've delivered on those promises. Well, that's news to the constituents of Banff-Kananaskis, because they haven't seen the benefits. They haven't seen where that money has been spent. They certainly don't see the benefit of it. I've heard from many people who have spent the \$90 on their Kananaskis conservation pass. All they see are overrun parking lots, overflowing garbage bins, outhouses that aren't being cleaned, trails that aren't being maintained to their expectations, and if they see additional people working as enforcement officers, their only job seems to be to collect the fee that the government has imposed.

Now, Mr. Chair, if the government has actually created some kind of benefit that the people of Alberta can see through the creation of these fees and the spending that they've allegedly engaged in in these infrastructure improvements and management improvements, then they should absolutely be able to provide an annual report every year outlining in detail where that money has gone. In fact, when the Public Lands Act was brought forward in the spring of this year, we brought forward a similar amendment to try to create that kind of transparency and accountability. The government simply refused. Their response, essentially, was that we should just take their word for it: "That money is being spent on

the things that we say they're being spent on. Please ask us no further questions. Move along."

Well, Mr. Chair, the people of Alberta have lost trust and faith in this government. They've already seen that the money collected from the random camping fee and the money collected from the Kananaskis conservation pass is not necessarily going to the things that were promised to the people of Alberta when those fees were implemented. This amendment is designed to address this lack of trust.

Now, the government has promised, again, that everybody involved with the creation and management of trails will have all of the resources that they need to make sure that this is successful. Prove it. Adopt this amendment. Require annual reports from the environment department every year outlining how much money has been spent on trails creation and management, where it has gone, what kind of infrastructure improvements or staff hires have been made to make sure that this Trails Act has been successful. Without these annual reports, Mr. Chair, there will be no other way for the people of Alberta to see clearly how public money has been spent.

I mean, I know that not too many Albertans give their rapt attention to the Environment and Parks department's annual report, but there is not enough detail in the annual report that will provide people with the assurances that they need that the money that they're already paying for the Kananaskis conservation pass, the random camping pass, any support for the Trails Act is going to where it was intended to go. By passing this amendment, I think that we are just simply holding the government to its word, to show us its work and make sure that the people of Alberta can clearly understand where the money is going.

11:00

Now, Mr. Chair, I think this is also sorely needed because one of the things that I've heard from many trails groups, particularly in the Kananaskis area, is that the creation of the Kananaskis conservation pass has actually caused donations to their organizations to dry up. I think people rightly assume, because the government has told them, that the \$90 a year that they pay to visit Kananaskis is going to be spent on trail improvements, but none of that money seems to be making it to the trails management groups.

Ms Rosin: Five hundred thousand dollars.

Mr. Schmidt: I hear the Member for Banff-Kananaskis taking issue with what I'm saying. Here's the problem. Here's the problem, Mr. Chair. If the Member for Banff-Kananaskis knows how much money is going, we shouldn't have to take her word for it. She's not a member of Executive Council. She's not privy to all of the information that the government has at its fingertips. Only the members of Executive Council have that information, and they should publish it so that everybody has a right to see it. If the Member for Banff-Kananaskis has special knowledge about how the government is spending its money on trails management, Kananaskis infrastructure improvements, and those sorts of things, that's not fair. We should all have access to that information. There should be no question about how much the department is spending and where it's being spent. We shouldn't have to rely on individual MLAs' words for it, that the government is spending certain amounts of money on certain groups.

The point that I was trying to make, Mr. Chair, is that the Kananaskis conservation pass has actually hit a number of trail groups hard financially. Their donations have dried up, and the grants that the Member for Banff-Kananaskis says are going to these groups are not filling the gap. These trail groups are being starved for resources, which is not the intent of the government. The

government has publicly stated that they want these trail management groups to be successful. Well, they need money to be able to do their work. If it's not coming from donations, it has to come from somewhere, so at least provide the people of Alberta with an annual report.

Now, one of the requests that many of the trail management groups had was that a certain portion of government revenue be earmarked for their operations, and I think that that is an interesting idea. However, I just want to make sure that everybody understands that here in the Official Opposition we don't have the ability to alter a bill so that it earmarks funding. That would change the nature of this bill to a money bill. We don't have the ability as the Official Opposition to make those changes. That's one of the reasons that we aren't moving forward with something that would actually guarantee a steady stream of revenue to trails groups to make sure that they're successful in achieving the objectives that the government has set out for them. But I think that this is the best that we can do as the Official Opposition in making sure that there is public money going to their operations and that the people of Alberta can see where it's well spent.

I encourage all members of the government as well as my friends in the Official Opposition to actually show that they're doing what they say they would do and pass this amendment and provide the people of Alberta with the information that is currently sorely lacking.

Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you.

Next I see the hon. Member for Taber-Warner.

Mr. Hunter: Mr. Chair, I would like to just speak to this really quickly and state that the member knows full well, as he was part of Executive Council in the last iteration of their government, that when bills are passed through legislation, there are also other parts to it, which are regulations and policies and forms. The member knows full well that all the amendments that he has brought forward could be done very easily within regulations and policies. This strategy that he is employing now, Mr. Chair and to the members in the Chamber: you need to realize that this is a stall tactic. This is exactly what he is doing.

This is a very good bill. I believe that all members need to see this as prescriptive versus working towards making this a better bill, and I would ask all members to vote it down.

The Deputy Chair: Next I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore.

Mr. Nielsen: Well, thank you, Mr. Chair. I'll be very, very brief. Obviously, I rise in support of the amendment. I actually expect some – there are a few – members of the UCP should be voting in support of this amendment. Just yesterday afternoon we spoke about a private member's bill that talks exactly about doing this, about being transparent, about teaching Albertans where their money is being spent, and several members got up and almost sung the praises of the Member for Red Deer-South for bringing his bill forward. If that is indeed the case, if that is actually what you believe, then you would support this amendment because that is the exact same principle. We're going to find out whether that's indeed a fact. I thought I'd better point that out to some of those members, that if they do vote against this, I'm expecting them to vote against the private member's bill because that does the exact same thing.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

We are on amendment A5. I see the hon. Member for Chestermere-Strathmore.

Mrs. Aheer: I'm just going to take 10 seconds. Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. I just wanted to respond a little bit to what the member has said. They voted against that motion yesterday by the Member for Red Deer-South. I find it interesting that that should be brought up considering that it's exactly what we think, that he would have mentioned how important that was, but he actually voted against the bill.

Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: All right. Any other members on amendment A5?

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

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 11:08 a.m.]

[One minute having elapsed, the committee divided]

[Mr. Milliken in the chair]

For the motion:

Dang	Pancholi	Schmidt
Irwin	Renaud	Sigurdson, L.
Nielsen		

11:10

Against the motion:

Aheer	Nally	Singh
Amery	Neudorf	Smith
Fir	Nicolaides	Stephan
Frey	Nixon, Jason	Toews
Getson	Panda	Toor
Guthrie	Pon	Turton
Horner	Rosin	van Dijken
Hunter	Rutherford	Walker
Issik	Schow	Wilson
Jones	Schulz	Yaseen
Long		

Totals:	For – 7	Against – 31
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[Motion on amendment A5 lost]

The Deputy Chair: We are back on the main bill, Bill 79. Are there any members looking to join debate?

[The remaining clauses of Bill 79 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

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

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Deputy Chair: Any opposed? Carried.

I'll allow people just some time. We'll have Bill 80 in 30 seconds or less.

Bill 80

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

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. members. Are there any comments or questions to be offered with respect to this bill? We are on amendment A1. I see the hon. Member for St. Albert.

Ms Renaud: Thank you, Mr. Chair. It's my pleasure to rise and speak to amendment A1 to Bill 80, Red Tape Reduction Implementation Act, 2021 (No. 2). Basically, what this amendment

looks to do or tries to do is to remove section 10 in the bill, that pertains to income support. You know, I've spoken to this bill a couple of times already. I think that every time that I've talked about this, I focused on this particular piece because I think it is one of the most problematic pieces in this piece of legislation. I would hope that all members, regardless of which side of the House you currently sit on, would listen to the concerns and understand that voting for this piece of legislation has the potential to negatively impact thousands of Albertans' lives, and I'd like to explain how it does that.

For those of you that don't know, income support is very much like assured income. Assured income is a form of income support, but the eligibility criteria is very specific around severity and permanence of disability. Income support is a little bit different, and the amounts that people get on income support are less than half of what people receive on AISH.

People on income support: there are two categories. There is expected to work, and there is barriers for employment. People that are on barriers to employment income support typically have chronic health conditions, mental health issues. Often they have disabilities. They're either in the process of applying for AISH, they've been turned down, or they're appealing. There are really significant barriers to their employment, and that's been demonstrated usually over a period of many years.

The expected-to-work category is quite different. This is a group of Albertans that has a lot of challenges in terms of finding and maintaining competitive employment for whatever reason. They are very low income. These are people with very few assets. In fact, I think the eligibility to qualify for expected to work income support is that the maximum assets you could have are about \$5,000 in RSPs and the total value of a vehicle can't exceed about \$10,000. The amount that you earn or have earned cannot exceed the core benefits of income support. Now, what you need to know is that income support for an expected-to-work person who's eligible is \$745, and that's for a single person. It's a little bit more if you have children. But can you imagine trying to navigate life on \$745 a month? It's impossible, Mr. Chair. I would challenge any member of this House to find someone who could tell you that living on income support is manageable and comfortable, because it most definitely is not.

Before this was proposed, income support benefits were legislated, so basically if you met the criteria for income support in terms of your eligibility – you're over 18 years old, a resident of Alberta, all of these things – if your income and your financial assets met the threshold for eligibility, you were eligible for income support. That's it. You were eligible. This was a legislated benefit. What this legislation does or proposes to do is to remove that and to put it into, first of all, Advanced Education but into regulation. It no longer is: "You must receive these benefits," or "You will receive these benefits if you are eligible." It's: "You may receive these benefits if there are funds available to you." In particular, for this piece of legislation, those are federal benefits, so of course none of us can guarantee that those benefits will be available to people.

The really sad thing about this, Mr. Chair, is the short-sightedness. We've come to know that this government, if they are anything at all, is short-sighted. They cannot see that even if it's only a few thousand Albertans that are impacted by this change, by removing the support for people, they're introducing more long-term problems, long-term poverty, long-term unemployment not just for the person who is impacted by the change but their families, the people that they are supporting. It is really just a ridiculous change, in my opinion. I think, once again, this is evidence of the short-sightedness of this government, simply trying to cut costs to

make their deficit look better in any given fiscal year without thinking: what is the long-term impact on Albertans?

I don't believe this is a government that looks at and measures the benefit to Albertans when they make these decisions. They crow about it a lot, Mr. Chair. They talk about: "We're going to do it for Albertans. We're listening to Albertans. We're here for them." But then what they say and what they do don't match. If they did match, I have no doubt that this government would not be voting for this piece of legislation.

I also want to put on the record a second time that I am stunned at the cowardice, the true cowardice, of this government, for them to make huge changes to income support benefits like assured income for the severely handicapped, like income support for expected to work. They make these really big changes via a piece of legislation that they call red tape reduction, which is really just an omnibus bill. They claim: "Oh, no. We're just cleaning things up. We're making it better. You know, it's going to be easier for people." But that is just patently false. The cowardice of this government, making these really deep changes to income support benefits in a bill like this, is just awful. It's just awful. It's a symbol of how little care and concern this government has demonstrated from day one for people who are disabled, for people who are low income. It's truly sad.

11:20

You know, I look back at the, I guess, almost two and a half years under this government, and they have chipped away at benefits like this for people that, first of all, rarely have a voice in this place, that do not have a lot of power, that do not have a lot of influence. They don't have lobbyists working for them; that is for sure. This government has chipped away at programs and supports for people who are vulnerable, and this is just one more example of that.

I wanted to talk about section 10. This amendment looks to eliminate section 10 of Bill 80. The Income and Employment Supports Act was amended in this legislation by phasing out part-time and full-time learners on income support as of April 1, 2022. Now, the UCP claims that this will be replaced under regulation in Advanced Education, and in fact a couple of weeks ago we heard the Minister of Advanced Education say this very thing.

A number of my colleagues stood up that day and then subsequent days that we were debating this legislation and asked very pointed questions. If that is the case, if it's simply a transfer because this government sees fit to move this adult learner program to Advanced Education, then tell us: what is the rationale? Who asked for it? Were there bureaucrats that suggested to this government that this would make things more seamless, easier, cost savings? Did low-income Albertans talk to this government and say: hey, why don't you move this to Advanced Education because it'll make our lives easier? I don't think so.

This is a government that has time and again failed – failed – to consult with Albertans on changes that actually impact their lives. We see it time and again. Whether it's around housing, whether it's around income supports for disabled Albertans, whether it's around coal mining, whatever it is, this government fails to consult. But the reality is that these small changes – you know, the government members opposite seem thoroughly bored with my comments – that are made in Bill 80 have the ability to really negatively impact individual families, and they may be your constituents, yet there seems to be no thought whatsoever by this government, by the members opposite to think: well, maybe we got it wrong.

Or at the very least ask your own minister: if it's just a simple transaction, moving this pot of money from Community and Social Services to Advanced Education and, really, it's not going to impact anything at all, then how much money? What are we talking about?

What is the budget? What is the advantage of doing that? How does it make life better for anybody? This government has failed to answer any of these questions, so of course, Mr. Chair, we're left wondering: why on earth are you doing this? Then I default to my reason, that this government seems to prove over and over again is their reason: it's just to make the bottom line look a little different. That's all.

You know, a perfect example was that over a year ago, with almost no notice whatsoever, none, this government changed payment dates for approximately 130,000 Albertans. Now, these are people who live, most of them, in poverty. They earn less than any kind of poverty line you want to establish. Those are people on AISH, people on income support. This government chose to change the payment date not to make life better, like they said, which was not true. We had to go to the Auditor General to prove that, but it was not true. They did it to make their bottom line temporarily look better by changing a payment date. We know this. This is fact. This is proven by the Auditor General. This was just to make the bottom line look better, and there was no consultation with actual human beings, Albertans who would be impacted by this, who incurred NSF charges, who were faced with eviction, who couldn't pay their bills, who had to stretch very meagre funds just a few more days. One more example of this government making life just a little bit harder for Albertans.

Going back to this amendment, you know, I would hope – I've said this again and again. No government – no government – ever gets it a hundred per cent right. I think we could probably all agree on that. Nobody is perfect. Everybody makes mistakes. I would suggest that this government really rethink this and at least think about this amendment. If you're so dead set about passing this piece of legislation, that's fine. You have the numbers right now to do that. That is fine. But I implore you to think about the decision that you're making for the small segment of people in Alberta that rely on this support. They rely on income support, and they rely on the training amount to change their lives. They rely on it. The way that it is right now is not perfect, but the system, the way that it is right now, ensures that anybody who is eligible gets it.

The changes that this government is proposing alter that. It puts in some criteria that the federal dollars be available and who knows what else, because we don't know. We have not seen the regulations. For the least trusted government in this country to say, "Well, trust us; we'll just work it out in regulations, no problem" – you know what? There is not a lot of faith. Albertans don't trust this government. I certainly don't.

One of the other things. You know, we've seen time and time again that this government is just unwilling to make changes in the sunlight, to debate the real issues or to answer difficult questions where we all can see, understand, and then fact-check. Instead, they make sweeping changes and then push them aside and make the details – and the devil is in the details. Then they make these changes through regulation, and then there's nothing we can do about that once that's done.

Mr. Chair, you know, it is incredibly disappointing that at this late hour here we are talking about yet another change that will harm people. I just want to remind the members in this place: you may not care, but Albertans certainly care, and Albertans that are struggling – and there are a lot of them – have felt the impact of really bad decisions made by this government. I'm talking about really, really vulnerable people. People who are on income support, I can pretty much guarantee you, do not want to be on income support. They are very likely at probably the worst time in their lives – for whatever reason, things have happened and things are not going well – where they are forced to go on income support. They don't have any choice.

Now, there is this program that allows them to make use of a learner program to possibly change their skills, learn new skills, enhance some skills so that they can be ready for employment and change their lives going forward. The way that the legislation is now, it guarantees that if they are eligible, they will get that help. The change that this government is proposing takes that away. Are you all okay with that? Are you okay with that? Knowing what this legislation does, are you comfortable with that? What may change your bottom line right now – I suspect that is why this is happening. What may change the bottom line right now has the ability – let's put it in dollars and cents – to cost a whole lot more in the future. If we don't invest in people today, it will cost us far more in the future.

You know, I can recall, Mr. Chair, the first budget I saw this government table. I was horrified at the cuts to income support. I was horrified. There were tens of millions of dollars cut. Of course, in the budget they're projecting the next few years, what the budget will look like, and we saw very clearly what the intent was of this government. Over the next few years there were massive, massive cuts to income support. Actually, Budget 2021's were \$83 million alone. Right in 2019 we saw what the goal was of this government, and that was to cut, deep, deep cuts to income support.

Now, don't forget that these are really vulnerable people. Actually, it's about 45,000 now during COVID. These are tens of thousands of Albertans that are quite vulnerable. They're vulnerable financially and otherwise. This is a government that has had a plan all along to cut income supports, and we've seen more and more evidence of that. This is just the latest. We saw payment date changes. We saw the index change, the deindexation. Now, I always find it almost insulting, actually, to Albertans. I'm used to it, but I think Albertans find it insulting when we say, you know, "You cut income support benefits; you cut AISH benefits" and, I guess, the government brain trust came up with the spin, "We didn't cut." Well, you deindexed. Two years later it's a massive cut.

11:30

What they did in 2019 – and let's be clear. A lot of members sitting in here right now, this morning, voted in support of indexing these benefits and said again and again and again in local papers to their constituents: "Oh, no, no. We support this. Trust us. We would never do anything to harm the now Premier." I mean, at the time he was all over the media accusing the NDP of fearmongering, fear and smear, because we were saying that we anticipated this would be one of the things that this government would do, and sure enough, Mr. Chair, that was one of the first things they did, via omnibus bill. Why? I would say cowardice.

This is a government – I mean, it's beyond disappointing at this point – that has continued to make life incredibly difficult by cutting income support. We saw right off the bat what the plan was, and we've seen it happen ever since. Ever since. We've seen deindexation. And, by the way, two years after you deindexed and cut AISH and income support benefits, people on AISH and income support earn approximately \$1,300 less per year now than they would have had you just left things alone.

Now, what's really funny to me is that people will crow – well, your federal counterpart is making this their new poster, I guess – about inflation and try to blame whoever. But, talking about inflation, we know that inflation is real. We see it. I mean, you can't ignore how much it costs when you buy your groceries. We know this is a fact. Inflation is real, and this government has taken away any capacity for Albertans who are incredibly vulnerable, whether it's financially vulnerable or vulnerable via disability, any ability that they had or have to manage inflation, to even try to keep their head above water. Yet this government will claim making life better for Albertans. Well, I would suggest that their plan is to make life

better for some Albertans – only some – because it seems like only some are worth this government's support. It is certainly not vulnerable Albertans.

Mr. Chair, I would really encourage – I mean, I'm always hopeful that things can change. I am hopeful that there are some government members that realize that the people that tell them what to do or tell them the way things are aren't always right. They don't always have all the answers. They certainly don't have a crystal ball to the future. They're just not always right. It is my sincere hope that there are some government members that are actually paying attention, have a little bit of humility, and maybe think: "Well, you know what? Maybe we got this little piece wrong."

The Deputy Chair: Thank you.

I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore on amendment A1.

Mr. Nielsen: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Happy to rise just to add some very brief comments here on amendment A1 and the reason why I feel we need to pull this section out of the bill. I want to thank my friend from St. Albert for very clearly explaining the impacts this is going to have on the very real people that the government purports to represent. You know, it almost seems a little bit like: why are we putting this section in a red tape bill, to begin with, with the implications of it? It really seems a little bit like it's this attitude of penny-wise but pound-foolish. Here you are asking some of the most vulnerable Albertans, like my friend from St. Albert has said, yet we seem to have had money to give a \$4.7 billion corporate handout. We seem to have had a whole bunch of money – millions, tens of millions of dollars – to go and chase Bigfoot and not even design a logo properly. You know, we spent millions of dollars on a report to find out that there was nothing going on, yet we're asking these individuals to take the hit for that.

I know the argument that I've heard, that this is going to be covered off in another area, you know, titled the foundational assistance learning program. In section 3 the minister only needs to fund the program if it has money. So as long as we continue to make decisions like – oh, I don't know – betting \$1.3 billion on an election, well, we're not going to have any money. If we're going to continue to make decisions like \$4.7 billion corporate handouts, we're not going to have any money. That is the problem here.

One of the other concerns that I have that I really want to emphasize to MLAs that they pay attention to here: section 6 outlines that the minister gets a lot of discretion on what type of funding is approved and who it applies to. You know, I remember the former minister for red tape reduction, when he served very well in the Official Opposition in the 29th Legislature, was ridiculously opposed to giving a minister that type of leeway, so it should be no surprise that I have that kind of problem. Then the other problem I have, of course, is that in section 8 it says that the minister determines the amount each student can receive. That really leaves it up to just a willy-nilly decision on things.

I am sure that members of the government caucus who served in the 29th Legislature would not have let that go quietly, yet now that the roles are reversed, are you prepared to let it go quietly? It's kind of seeming like that. I might be surprised. I never presuppose the decision of the House. But, again, it's funny how it always comes down to what has been said before and what's being said now. The two are always butting heads persistently and consistently, so I am really urging that members of this House support this amendment to pull this out. We need to just put the brakes on this and not leave it on the backs of the people that can least afford it. Trust me; the Walton family can afford something a little bit more.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any members wishing to join on amendment A1?

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

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 11:38 a.m.]

[One minute having elapsed, the committee divided]

[Mr. Milliken in the chair]

For the motion:

Dang	Pancholi	Schmidt
Irwin	Renaud	Sigurdson, L.
Nielsen		

11:40

Against the motion:

Aheer	Long	Singh
Amery	Neudorf	Smith
Fir	Nicolaides	Stephan
Frey	Nixon, Jason	Toor
Getson	Panda	Turton
Guthrie	Pon	van Dijken
Horner	Rosin	Walker
Hunter	Rutherford	Wilson
Issik	Schow	Yaseen
Jones	Schulz	

Totals: For – 7 Against – 29

[Motion on amendment A1 lost]

The Deputy Chair: We are back on the main bill, Bill 80. I see the hon. Associate Minister of Red Tape Reduction has risen.

Ms Fir: Thank you, Mr. Chair. At this time I wish to move an amendment.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. minister.

There will be copies of this amendment at the tables by the entrances. You can also raise your hand, and one will be delivered to you. For the benefit of all, this will be amendment A2.

If the hon. minister could continue.

Ms Fir: Thank you, Mr. Chair. The amendment is required simply due to a numbering error in section 5. These amendments make no changes to the content of Bill 80 and are simply a renumbering exercise to ensure that there is not any duplicative numbering in the Ensuring Fiscal Sustainability Act, which then subsequently amends the Alberta Health Care Insurance Act.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. minister.

We are on A2. I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore.

Mr. Nielsen: Well, thank you, Mr. Chair, and I will actually thank the associate minister for red tape for sharing this a little bit earlier so we were able to take a little bit of a peek at it. While I don't necessarily have any problems with the amendment, I would be remiss in my job if I didn't point out that we, quite honestly, shouldn't even be here to begin with.

One of the things that the Official Opposition tried to very clearly point out: that the proposed legislation around essentially telling doctors where they're going to work in the province of Alberta was going to go over like a lead balloon. We've seen how that type of legislation clearly failed in I believe it was Nova Scotia, where they brought that in. They're in the process, if they have not already completed the process, of getting rid of that directive telling their doctors where they're going to work. At the end of the day, they're

kind of like small-business owners. Can you imagine if small-business owners were told, "Well, no; you're going to set up your shop down the block here in this one location that's maybe not quite as desirable as the one that you are currently looking at"? I mean, those business owners would be absolutely furious. Doctors are kind of the same way. So you might have an individual that grew up in rural Alberta and wants to practise medicine, and then they come back to their hometown to do that practice, but you're all of a sudden going to tell them: no, I'm sorry; I realize you live up north here somewhere, but you're going to be practising down in Calgary. That's just going to spectacularly fail. We shouldn't have even been here to begin with, Mr. Chair, and we tried to warn the government that that type of change was going to be not in their best favour.

But I am, of course, pleased that at least the government realized, based on the language that we saw here in Bill 80, to maybe push pause and consult a little bit further. My guess is that likely, because I've certainly heard from doctors, they probably got an earful on it. So, you know, I think the last thing they need is yet another bad-news story, so at least they're working on trying to maybe fix that. I would suggest that you probably just repeal it.

As I said, we've already seen one example where it spectacularly failed. They're in the process of repealing if not have repealed it, so just learn from that example, just abandon that. While I still have significant concerns currently with Bill 80 and some of the content, especially since we just voted down an amendment to get rid of a very problematic section of the bill, I'm happy to support the current amendment. You know, will that change my entire outlook of Bill 80? Likely not because, again, we're putting together legislation that has things that we're trying to call red tape which is really just housekeeping and could have been taken care of through a statutes amendment act.

Actually, now that I think of it, we haven't actually heard an answer yet from any of the ministers, especially the Health minister, on whether the cut-and-paste job of the health care premiums into the health care act is not a precursor to bringing in health care premiums. No one has actually stood in this House and said: no, that's not the case. Hopefully, we've still got some time left here in Committee of the Whole such that we could get somebody to jump up and put Albertans' minds at ease, because I'm getting those questions still: are there health care premiums?

You know, I would almost say that if that was indeed the case, as long as the money is actually going to go into health care, maybe Albertans will agree. I don't know. But if it's just going to go into general revenue to be then funnelled into organizations that, as I'd mentioned earlier this morning, chase Bigfoot or, you know, are going after environmentalists for doing what they're allowed to legally do and things like that, then I think Albertans are going to have a problem with that. But that's probably a discussion for another time.

I will urge all members to support the current amendment. You know, overall, would I be supporting the bill? Likely not because I have some very significant problems with one section of the bill that clearly puts the most vulnerable Albertans in an even worse place, and they can't afford that right now.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

We are on A2. Any members wishing to join? Seeing none.

[Motion on amendment A2 carried]

The Deputy Chair: We are back on the main bill, Bill 80, red tape reduction. Are there any members wishing to join debate on Bill 80?

Seeing none, are you ready for the question on Bill 80, Red Tape Reduction Implementation Act, 2021 (No. 2)?

[The voice vote indicated that the remaining clauses of Bill 80 were agreed to]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 11:49 a.m.]

[One minute having elapsed, the committee divided]

[Mr. Milliken in the chair]

For:

Aheer	Long	Schulz
Amery	Nally	Singh
Fir	Neudorf	Smith
Frey	Nicolaides	Stephan
Getson	Nixon, Jason	Toews
Guthrie	Panda	Toor
Horner	Pon	Turton
Hunter	Rosin	van Dijken
Issik	Rutherford	Walker
Jones	Schow	Yaseen

Against:

Dang	Pancholi	Schmidt
Irwin	Renaud	Sigurdson, L.
Nielsen		

Totals: For – 30 Against – 7

[The remaining clauses of Bill 80 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

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

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Deputy Chair: Any opposed? Carried.

[The voice vote indicated that the request to report Bill 80 carried]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 11:55 a.m.]

[One minute having elapsed, the committee divided]

[Mr. Milliken in the chair]

For:

Aheer	Long	Schulz
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Amery	Nally	Singh
Fir	Neudorf	Smith
Frey	Nicolaides	Stephan
Getson	Nixon, Jason	Toews
Guthrie	Panda	Toor
Horner	Pon	Turton
Hunter	Rosin	van Dijken
Issik	Rutherford	Walker
Jones	Schow	Yaseen

Against:

Dang	Pancholi	Schmidt
Irwin	Renaud	Sigurdson, L.
Nielsen		

Totals: For – 30 Against – 7

[Request to report Bill 80 carried]

The Deputy Chair: Seeing the time and under Standing Order 4(3), the committee will now rise and report bills 79 and 80 with amendments.

[Mr. Milliken in the chair]

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

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

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

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

Hon. Members: Aye.

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

Noting the time, it is noon. Under Standing Order 4(2.1) the Assembly stands adjourned until 1:30 p.m. today.

[The Assembly adjourned at 12 p.m.]

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