

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

The 31st Legislature
Second Session

Standing Committee
on
Alberta's Economic Future

Lobbyists Act Review

Wednesday, November 4, 2026
6:15 p.m.

Transcript No. 31-2-13

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Dach, Lorne, Edmonton-McClung (NDP), Deputy Chair

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Transcript produced by *Alberta Hansard*

Standing Committee on Alberta's Economic Future

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6:15 p.m. Wednesday, November 4, 2026

[Mr. Wiebe in the chair]

The Chair: Well, good evening, everyone. I'd like to call this meeting of the Standing Committee on Alberta's Economic Future to order and welcome everyone in attendance.

My name is Ron Wiebe. I'm the MLA for Grande Prairie-Wapiti and the chair of the committee. I'd like to ask that members who are joining the committee at the table introduce themselves for the record, and we'll begin to my right.

Mr. Cyr: Scott Cyr, MLA for Bonnyville-Cold Lake-St. Paul.

Dr. Elmeligi: Apologies. Sarah Elmeligi, MLA for Banff-Kananaskis.

Member Hoyle: Yes, and MLA Rhiannon Hoyle for Edmonton-South.

Mr. Dach: Lorne Dach. Good evening. MLA for Edmonton-McClung.

Member Boparai: MLA Parmeet Singh Boparai for Calgary-Falconridge.

Mr. Roth: Good evening. Aaron Roth, committee clerk.

The Chair: We will now go to those joining us online. Please unmute your mic and turn your cameras on and introduce yourselves as I call your name.

Peter Singh.

Mr. Singh: Good evening, everyone. Peter Singh, MLA, Calgary-East.

The Chair: Thank you. For the record I will note the following substitution: Mr. Singh for Ms de Jonge.

A few housekeeping items to address before we turn to the business at hand. Please note that the microphones are operated by *Hansard* staff. Committee proceedings are live streamed and on the Internet and broadcast on Alberta Assembly TV. The audio- and videostream and the transcripts of the meeting can be accessed via the Legislative Assembly website. Those participating by videoconference are encouraged to please turn on your cameras while speaking and mute your microphone when not speaking. Members participating virtually who wish to be placed on the speakers list are asked to e-mail or message the committee clerk, and members in the room are asked to please signal the chair. Please set your cellphones and other devices to silent for the duration of the meeting.

I would like to now ask Member Bouchard to introduce himself for the record.

Mr. Bouchard: Hello, everybody. I'm Eric Bouchard, MLA for Calgary-Lougheed.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Bouchard.

We're now going to go to the approval of the agenda. Are there any changes or additions to the draft agenda? If not, would somebody like to move that the Standing Committee on Alberta's Economic Future approve the proposed agenda as distributed for its November 4, 2026, meeting? MLA Cyr. Any discussion? All in favour, please say aye. Online. Any opposed? That motion is carried.

I've just seen Member van Dijken join us at the table. Mr. van Dijken, can you introduce yourself for the record?

Mr. van Dijken: Good evening. Glenn van Dijken, MLA for Athabasca-Barrhead-Westlock.

The Chair: Thank you.

Next we have the draft minutes of our September 24, 2026, meeting. Are there any errors or omissions to note? If not, would a member like to move that the Standing Committee on Alberta's Economic Future approve the minutes as distributed of its meeting held on September 24, 2026? Member Bouchard. Any discussion? Seeing none, all in favour? Any opposed? And online? That motion is carried.

We will now go to oral presentations. Hon. members, at our September 24, 2026, meeting the committee decided to hear oral presentations as part of our review of the Lobbyists Act. Seven individuals and businesses were invited. Two, the Canadian Federation of Independent Business and the National Association of Federal Retirees, sent their regrets to the committee.

Before I go further, I would like to ask Member Stephan to introduce himself for the record.

Mr. Stephan: Thank you, Mr. Chair. MLA Jason Stephan, Red Deer-South.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Stephan. We will now go to our first presenter. Our first presenter this evening will be Mr. Josh de Groot from the lobbyist registrar. I'll invite Mr. de Groot to the table. You have 10 minutes to present. Please proceed when you are ready.

Lobbyist Registrar

Mr. de Groot: Thank you and good evening. Thank you to the chair and the committee for inviting me to make an oral presentation as part of your review of the Lobbyists Act. As mentioned, my name is Josh de Groot. I'm the Alberta lobbyist registrar as designated by the Ethics Commissioner of Alberta.

I want to start by reviewing the preamble of the act, actually, which sets out the public interests that are being addressed because my aim throughout the process is to try to make suggestions to better align the act with those purposes that are set out in the preamble.

The first matter addressed there is that lobbying is a legitimate activity, and "free and open access to government is an important matter of public interest." The Lobbyists Act recognizes that lobbying is a benefit to government, and it is in the public interest in that it provides government with a variety of perspectives on which to base its decisions.

Out of this principle comes the idea that the act should be values neutral. Rather than making a distinction between what might be called public benefit and commercial interest lobbying, the idea is that all ethical and transparent lobbying is legitimate and should be treated similarly.

The second public interest matter is that lobbying should be transparent to ensure trust in government decision-making. In layman's terms, what we're talking about here is focusing on making obsolete the saying: laws are like sausages; it's better not to see them being made. A lobbyist act should be set up so the public can see the full variety of people that are being paid to provide input on important decisions by the government so that they can have more confidence in and a better understanding of that sausage-making process. My submissions today are seeking to highlight where the act might not be living up to these two purposes.

In my oral presentation today I'm just going to focus on the 50-hour threshold issue as well as the nonprofit exemption. You'll note in my written submissions I did have other submissions, and I'm happy to answer questions about those later.

Regarding the 50-hour threshold, I've submitted that that 50-hour threshold before organization lobbyists need to register should be replaced with some form of a small organization threshold. Over the years the rationale that's been given for an hours threshold is to avoid having small organizations that only periodically lobby having to register in the act, but in reality what happens when you have a 50-hour threshold is that these organizations, no matter their size, have this hidden administrative burden of having to track their hours to see when they get to 50. It places that burden on all organizations while limiting the transparency about lobbying activities of many organizations.

To illustrate, to use the example of a large company that has direct access to decision-makers, they may be able to have a large impact on the policy-making process over a number of years without ever needing to register in the registry. Then when a member of the public goes into our online registry and looks for that company, they think one of two things: either that company is not lobbying, when in reality they are, or they might think that that company is simply avoiding the act and they're breaching the act. Again, they may be completely onside, but that's not what the perception might be. That's a large company.

On the other side you might have a small organization. They have a single issue that comes up. Say that there's a bill that's introduced that will impact their business, so they start lobbying for the first time. Right from when they start lobbying, they have to be tracking their hours to know when they cross that 50-hour threshold. That's that hidden administrative burden that isn't really in the act, but that's what they have to do to comply with the act. That tracking of the hours before they get to 50, in my submission, is almost certainly more of an administrative burden than simply completing a registration.

As an alternative to the 50-hour threshold I have suggested a small organization threshold, which is currently used in B.C. Recently they've made amendments in New Brunswick to their act, and they've removed the hours threshold. They haven't actually put in yet – it'll be by regulation – what their small organization threshold actually will be. In my submission these small organization thresholds are more clearly connected to this idea of avoiding putting the burden on small organizations, and it's easier for an organization to measure because they're counting employees rather than tracking all of the hours that they're spending lobbying.

6:25

As a small note, and I don't think it's in my written submissions, that small organization threshold in my submission should not be solely based just on the size of the organization. In B.C. what they have is that if it is a small organization but its primary purpose is to promote or oppose issues – so an advocacy-based organization, even if it's small, still needs to register in B.C., but those small businesses that once in a while do some lobbying do not need to register.

Moving on to the nonprofit exemption. That, of course, was the issue that received the most focus in written submissions that you received. The nonprofit exemption applies broadly to charities as well as think tanks, policy institutes, and other nonprofit organizations like that. As the act currently stands, the lobbying efforts of these nonprofits are not disclosed in the registry unless they voluntarily register.

Excluding certain nonprofits moves the act away from that values-neutral approach that I highlighted earlier. It means that the registry is missing valuable information about these lobbying activities. This incomplete picture can give the impression that maybe the government is only hearing from certain types of people when, in reality, they are hearing from these nonprofits regularly, and it can also promote an idea that we try to get away from in the lobbying world of good and bad lobbyists, going back to that idea of lobbying is a legitimate activity.

I do want to clarify a few points on this that are raised in the submission. First, volunteers are exempt under the act, so volunteer-run organizations would not be required to register if this was changed, and we're not suggesting that volunteers have to register. Secondly, the recommendation is not motivated here by, you know, nonprofits being, like, a problem or taking advantage of the exemption or anything like that. Of course, I think we'll all agree that the work that nonprofits and charities do in Alberta is extremely valuable to the policy-making process, so what we're trying to say is that that valuable contribution they make should be transparent in the registry. Third, Alberta's nonprofit exemption is an exception to the Canadian norm of requiring that nonprofits register lobbying activity. Most jurisdictions in Canada do not have a nonprofit exemption.

Regarding how many nonprofits would be required to register if this change was made, in my submission it would not be significant. First, as I said, volunteers are exempt from the act, so nonprofits that are completely volunteer run, which is the majority of nonprofits in Alberta, as you've seen in the submissions, would not need to register. From there, most other organizations – and again, that was in some of the submissions – that, say, have five or less employees, or if they're doing less than 50 hours, depending on what that threshold is, would not need to register. Then, of course, any organization that's not doing any lobbying activity would not need to register.

I can't say, of course, how many would need to register, but I thought of a couple of comparisons to help you out here to get an idea, comparing to businesses who do need to register. The GOA's economic dashboard recently found that there are 124,000 active businesses in Alberta, but there are only about 250 businesses registered in the lobbyist registry. That means that only about 1 in 500 businesses are registered as organization lobbyists. We don't know if it'd be the same for nonprofits, but that is a number to go with.

The other number would be a comparison to the B.C. Lobbyists Registry, which is very similar to what I'm suggesting here. They have about 750 total organizations registered, whereas in Alberta we have just under 400 organizations, so they have the small organization threshold that I've suggested, and they also have no nonprofit exemption. Then, of course, B.C. is the closest comparator we have for population. We have just under 400, they have about 750, so that gives you an idea of the different numbers there.

Thank you again for inviting me to speak to the committee. I would be happy to answer any questions you have about those submissions or anything else.

The Chair: Well, thank you, Mr. de Groot.

Are there any committee members that have any questions for Mr. de Groot? Member Elmeligi.

Dr. Elmeligi: Thank you. Thank you, Mr. de Groot, for your presentation. I have a whole bunch of questions, so, Chair, you can ask me to stop at any time and allow other members to speak. Maybe, Mr. de Groot, if you don't mind, we could have a little back and forth to explore some of this. Is that okay?

Mr. de Groot: It's fine with me if it's fine with the chair.

The Chair: I'm good with that.

Dr. Elmeligi: Okay. Perfect. Do I have to address everything through the chair like normal?

The Chair: Yes.

Dr. Elmeligi: I see Aaron is like: I was just going to say that. Through the chair to Aaron: thank you.

Okay. So through you, Mr. Chair, to Mr. de Groot. I'd first like to discuss this idea of a 50-hour threshold and a small organization threshold. Through the chair, you alluded to, like, an organization with five staff or less. Is that your recommendation, five staff or less?

Mr. de Groot: Thank you, through the chair. I don't have a number that I would suggest. The reason I said five is – and I think, actually, the wording in B.C. is fewer than six, which would be five or less, of course. So I don't have a specific recommendation. I don't think I would recommend going above 10. You're getting quite big then. But somewhere around there.

Dr. Elmeligi: My concern is that we want to try to ensure transparency in the Lobbyists Act, obviously – I think we're all here under that same objective – but also wanting to minimize any kind of reporting burden that might be placed on small organizations who just are struggling with capacity or funding already. To me, this 50-hour threshold really comes down to how you define lobbying activity or, well, the nonprofit exemption a little bit, too, but how we define lobbying activity.

Is it lobbying if I am at one of these many networking events that we have to attend all the time right now and I'm speaking with a stakeholder and they're telling me things that are their organizational objectives that I may or may not be able to help them to achieve? There's not necessarily planning that has gone into that. It's not a formal meeting. It's not a formal setting. Does it matter how large the organization is in how we've had and how we've engaged in that particular conversation?

How we define lobbying is really what influences how much effort is required to track lobbying activities. I'm just not convinced about moving to small organizations, but I'm open to hearing more about why you think that would be better.

Mr. de Groot: Okay. Yeah. Thank you for that question.

Dr. Elmeligi: Through the chair.

Mr. de Groot: Thank you. I'll answer through the chair as well.

I think what I'm trying to say is that right now, really, when you're an organization that does any amount of lobbying, regardless of your size – you know, you're a company of one person – you have to go to the act and you have to figure out what the definition of lobbying is, of course, which is a paid communication with a public office holder in an attempt to influence policy, programs, et cetera. Yeah. You really have to go and you have to dig into: "Oh, was that lobbying activity? Was this other meeting I had lobbying activity? Was this meeting on the street with my MLA lobbying activity?"

You have to figure that out, and then you have to keep tracking that to figure out when you get to the 50 hours whereas if we were to replace it with – and I'll just keep using the five-employee example. If we were to replace it with that regime, you wouldn't always – well, you wouldn't have to be tracking your lobbying activity. You would say: well, we're an organization of three people that's not mainly focused on lobbying, so we do not need to register. Then if you are an organization – if we're using five again, if you have seven employees, you would say: "We're an organization with seven, and we do do some lobbying. We don't have to track those hours. We just register."

6:35

Dr. Elmeligi: So I just . . .

The Chair: Excuse me.

Dr. Elmeligi: Sorry.

The Chair: Member Elmeligi, we'll give an opportunity for other members to ask questions, and we can come back to you.

Dr. Elmeligi: Sure.

The Chair: Member Bouchard.

Mr. Bouchard: Thank you, Mr. Chair, and thank you, Mr. de Groot. Based on the registrar's experience with the current Lobbyists Act framework are there any components that stakeholders seek clarification on, and if so, what does it suggest about how the current framework is functioning?

Mr. de Groot: Thank you for the question. I would say, actually, that the main thing stakeholders seek clarification on, and you saw it, I believe, in the submission of – I can't remember the name – the National Association of Federal Retirees, is this idea of the nonprofit exemption. It's not a complete nonprofit exemption. It's not that every nonprofit organization is exempt. We regularly are fielding questions from organizations that are nonprofits that want to know: do I qualify or do I not? Yeah. That would be the main kind of question that we get. We also get a lot of questions about what qualifies as government funding that needs to be disclosed and what doesn't.

As far as the second half of the question I'm not sure if I can say much about how that reflects on the functioning of the act.

Mr. Bouchard: Sure. Okay. Thanks.

The Chair: Member Bouchard, do you have a follow-up?

Mr. Bouchard: I'll have one more, please. Sure. Yes. Since the act was last reviewed, have there been any changes in the broader government legislation, stakeholder relations, or technology that can create additional pressures that weren't anticipated when the legislation was first reviewed and drafted?

Mr. de Groot: Thank you for that question. I think the main thing that I would point to there is that in the last couple of years we've seen the rise of AI, which can change how lobbying takes place. You know, if we're talking about the hours threshold, a letter that someone had to maybe sit down and spend a couple of hours writing before: are they able to ask an AI service to kind of write the first draft of their letter? It brings their time down. So maybe the idea of 50 hours: you can get a lot more lobbying done within that time. That would be, I think, one thing I would highlight on that ground.

Mr. Bouchard: Okay. Thanks.

The Chair: Thank you.

We will now go to Member Hoyle.

Member Hoyle: Thank you, Chair. I do have a couple of questions as well. I'm just going to start off, just for clarity based on transparency, with: is it correct that the registry can show an intention to lobby without showing what actually happened?

Mr. de Groot: Thank you. Through the chair, yes, that's correct.

Member Hoyle: Thank you.

Mr. de Groot: The way that schedules 1 and 2 of the act are set up, which is what needs to be disclosed in the registry, it's mainly focused on particulars of the lobbying activity that's intended to be done. But there's nothing that needs to be disclosed about, you know, that we had five meetings or we had zero meetings or anything like that.

Member Hoyle: Okay. So just setting up a hypothetical situation, if a company meets with the minister's office to seek a change in an investment incentive, can Albertans use today's registry to see who took the meeting, when it happened, what change the company sought? Would you support publishing those details for significant lobbying contracts with ministers, political staff, and senior officials, and if so, who should keep the record? Should the registrar be able to cross-check it against the minister's office?

Mr. de Groot: Thank you. Yes, we would support having that transparency about meetings that actually take place. I've stopped a little bit short of recommending a full communications registry like they have in B.C. or at the federal level because I do recognize that that could be more of an administrative burden on organizations. But what I would advocate for is some way for the public to know, you know, what lobbying is actually taking place, what meetings are actually taking place. It would probably – and this is what they do have in other jurisdictions – focus on senior public officials rather than any meeting with anyone within government, so more at the higher level.

Regarding the question of cross-checking if we did have that in the act, of course, there is the investigation power in the act. If there was a complaint that, you know, X organization held these meetings and they didn't disclose them in accordance with the act, we would be able to do an investigation, and in that investigation we do have the power to compel documents from individuals, from, like, government offices and that sort of thing. We would have that ability to cross-check.

I'm not sure if in Canada there's a model of cross-checking outside of an investigation process. I know there are jurisdictions in Europe where there's what they call open agendas, where ministers and others have to publish their agendas, and that would be, I guess, the way you would cross-check, but I'm not aware of that in any jurisdictions in Canada.

Member Hoyle: Thank you.

The Chair: We will now go to Member Dach for his question.

Mr. Dach: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Just to follow up a little bit, Mr. de Groot, with what you were talking about revolving around enforcement and complaints, I was wondering: with respect to compliance typically who will initiate a complaint? Or what opportunity is there to initiate a complaint from a member of the public or an interested party? What's the process once the complaint is received? What resources have you got to fulfill the process? Do you feel you have enough resources to allocate towards complaints that you do receive on an annual basis? What penalties might there be for contravention?

Mr. de Groot: Thank you. I'm just taking a note to make sure I get to all of that. Through the chair, the other hat I wear is under the Conflicts of Interest Act. I'm the general counsel there. There it's a completely complaint-based regime whereas under the Lobbyists Act it's if the lobbyist registrar has reason to believe that an investigation is necessary to ensure compliance with the act. That means that our office can initiate a complaint on our own if we see something to investigate. Then we can also receive complaints from the public.

The vast majority – yeah, I think that's fair to say – of what we do when it comes to compliance is on what would be considered quite minor. You know, an organization misses a deadline by a certain number of days or that sort of thing. The process is typically that we reach out to them. The first time they might get a warning. We have kind of a whole tool kit of enforcement we can do. We can do informal up to referring to the RCMP for offences. In that case, it's really reaching out to them. If there have been a few times they've been late, we can go to an administrative penalty. Administrative penalties can be up to a $25,000 fine. In reality most of the fines that we give out are in the $1,000 or less range, and that's typically for missing deadlines.

The process when a member of the public complains to us is, of course, that we evaluate to see if we feel it meets that reason to believe that an investigation is necessary standard. Then we can go into a full investigation where we can, like I said, compel documents. We'll interview witnesses and that sort of process that you would do in any administrative investigation. Then we write a report that would go and be filed with the Speaker. That could also result in a penalty, and like I said, it could also result in a referral to the RCMP if we believe there are offences that have been committed under the act.

I believe the last part of the question I did not answer is about resources. I am, of course, the lobbyist registrar and general counsel. On the conflicts of interest side I often am helping with the investigations, and I would do the same thing on the lobbyist registrar side. We do have some resources to retain outside counsel, but they're limited, the resources that we do have. In my time we have not had any large investigations on the lobbyist side that have required us to expend a lot of resources, but it would be limited if there was a large investigation.

6:45

Mr. Dach: Thank you.

The Chair: Mr. Dach, did you have a supplemental?

Mr. Dach: No.

The Chair: Okay.

Any members on the government side wishing to weigh in?

We will now go to Member Hoyle.

Member Hoyle: Yeah. Just a follow-up to that answer that you just gave on resources. I'm curious, then. How many files in the last five years ran out of time before your office could act? And if we were to change when the clock starts and what staff and audit tools or records would need to detect unregistered lobbying in the first place, like, what would that . . .

Mr. de Groot: Thank you. In my time – I've been in the role for four and a half years – I don't believe there have been any matters where the clock has run out. We have a two-year limitation. I would have to review, but I can't think of, off the top of my head, any where the clock has run out before we, you know, become aware of an issue. Like I said, most of what we're dealing with is late registrations or incomplete registrations or something like that, where we become aware of it immediately, essentially, because they come forward or they register.

I apologize, through the chair. I don't remember the second half of the question. Or did I answer it?

Member Hoyle: Yeah. All it was was that if we were to change that, when that starts, you know, what staff audit tools or records would you need to detect unregistered lobbying in the first place?

Mr. de Groot: Yeah. So just to answer that quickly, I think we actually have fairly good tools. Obviously, if we had more staff, there might be more ability to go out and look into things, but right now I think we generally have the tools that we feel that we need to detect these things.

Member Hoyle: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you.

We'll now go to Member Elmeligi.

Dr. Elmeligi: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Going back to this 50-hour threshold versus small-business threshold, I'm going to build a little hypothetical situation here. Many politicians, when they retire from politics, go into the private sector, and some of them are working for small organizations, or maybe they're doing consulting work or contract work on the side. They might not be working for larger organizations, but they have direct connections to other politicians because this is where we work, and it's easy to imagine them or maybe their partners or husbands or family members lobbying but not working for a large organization. How are those sorts of individual lobbyists captured if we move to a small organization threshold instead of an hour threshold?

Mr. de Groot: Thank you for that. Actually, one thing I should have made clear from the beginning is that under the act – because there are consultant lobbyists, and then there are organization lobbyists. Those individuals that are doing contract work would typically fall under that consultant lobbyist rubric, which is if you have an undertaking to lobby on behalf of a third party. So even if they are a one-person shop, if they are undertaking to lobby on behalf of a third party – so they're a one-person consultant shop, but they're doing it on behalf of another company – right now there's no threshold for that. Once you undertake to lobby in that context, you must register.

It's the small organization with their own employees, so if there was, you know, an organization with one or two employees and one of them was someone who had direct access to government decision-makers, under what I'm suggesting here, there may be a situation where if they're not an organization that's focused on advocacy, they may not have to register. But that would be the company itself. As soon as you're talking about someone lobbying on behalf of a third party, that needs to be registered today, under our current regime.

The Chair: Did you have another question?

Dr. Elmeligi: Yes, please, Mr. Chair. I think part of the challenge with the Lobbyists Act is that you can't know what you don't know – right? – and there are always going to be people who are less honest and who want to try to get around the work of registering as lobbyists, so I think it's really challenging for this committee. It challenges us to think about the people who might be trying to take advantage of the system and not reporting their lobbying activities. That's why I'm trying to ask these hypothetical questions, because not all people are trustworthy, sadly.

Moving to the nonprofit exemption idea. You know, I worked in the nonprofit sector before becoming an MLA, and we were already beholden by the CRA for a percentage of our work that could be classified as lobbying. So, to me, requiring nonprofits to register feels redundant because their lobbying activities are already part of charitable status from the CRA. Can you please explain how that's not redundant?

Mr. de Groot: Thank you. The idea behind the lobbyist registry is to be a one-stop shop, essentially, for seeing where lobbying activities are happening in Alberta or with the Alberta government and its agencies. While there may be a filing with CRA that someone could find, they would have to know that, "Oh, businesses are registered in the lobbyist registry. I can look there, but nonprofits or, like, a charity, for example, are exempt, so I'm not going to look in the Alberta one. I'm going to look at the CRA filing." Whereas what I'm advocating for is to have kind of a one-stop shop where people can see that this is where all the lobbying activity happens. There will be – you know, I've done those CRA filings myself for a charity that I work with, and I can see that there would be things that are in the CRA filing that also are in the lobbyist registry, but it brings that one-stop shop aspect to it.

Of course, if it is the same information, they'll have it on hand. Granted, it is another step they have to take, but they have it on hand and they can enter it in our registry as well.

The Chair: Any questions from any other members? Member Elmeligi, you have one more?

Dr. Elmeligi: Just one more. I just feel that asking nonprofits to engage in additional work, especially if that work is redundant, is not effective. Nonprofits are typically working to the max – you know – with very little capacity. I want to say that, but I also want to circle back to what my colleague was talking about in terms of outcomes.

The registry is about providing transparency to Albertans. One of the things that came up in some of the submissions was around: people need to know what happened at these meetings, what was discussed, and what the outcomes were. That is actually a critical component of this, and if that's not in the registry right now, then the registry isn't a one-stop shop for information. Does the legislation need to change to support that kind of transparency in what the outcomes of the lobbying activities are?

Mr. de Groot: Yes. Yes, I would agree that it does. Thank you.

Dr. Elmeligi: Perfect. I'm writing that down. "Yes." I even put an exclamation mark there.

Thank you.

The Chair: Okay.

Excuse me. Member Cyr, do you have a question?

Mr. Cyr: "Yes" doesn't quite answer that question. Can you be more specific?

Mr. de Groot: Yes, I can. In my submission, which I wish I could find right now – there it is – I tried to touch on this in on page 3 and going on to page 4. We're talking about providing more specific information about lobbying activity that takes place in addition to providing general information about the subject of lobbying. Again, I stopped short of recommending a full communications registry, but that's how this issue has been dealt with in other jurisdictions in Canada. They have a monthly meeting or communications registry where lobbyists have to register the meetings that they have had with senior government officials, and then that gives that transparency not just about the subject of what they would like to lobby about, but it gives more transparency about the lobbying that actually is taking place.

6:55

Mr. Cyr: Thank you for that clarification.

Mr. de Groot: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. de Groot, for your presentation, and thank you, members, for your questions.

We will now go to the next presenter. Our next presentation this evening is from the Alberta Chambers of Commerce. I'll invite Ms Dana Severson and Ms Shauna Feth to the table. You have 10 minutes to present. Please proceed when you're ready.

Alberta Chambers of Commerce

Ms Feth: All right. Thank you, Mr. Chair and the committee members. I'm Shauna Feth. I'm president and CEO of the Alberta Chambers of Commerce, and with me is Dana Severson, our manager of advocacy and research. We represent 106 community chambers of commerce that are across the province of Alberta with over 2,200 member businesses. We have incorporated feedback from our local chambers as part of our presentation. We really support transparency, and we're asking for four practical changes that recognize how chambers develop policy and the resources available to do that work.

The first issue is the boundary between developing a position and preparing to lobby. Today's preparation for communicating with public office holders counts towards a 50-hour annual threshold alongside the communication itself. Relevant paid time is combined across the organization. Consider a business that tells its chamber a provincial licensing rule is delaying hiring. The chamber needs to check whether other employers face the same problem. We need to review the rule and consider whether better information would resolve it. The border policy committee may then consider a recommendation before approaching an MLA or a minister.

At ACC Alberta Perspectives helps us test concerns across communities. We design research, invite participation, analyze responses, and publish findings. That evidence serves businesses and informs our advocacy. We may not know what change to recommend until that research is completed. So the difficulty is assessing which parts of that work prepare a lobbying communication. A part-time employee must make that judgment while managing other chamber duties. A larger organization must assess relevant work across several people and projects. That takes time and capacity even before a chamber knows whether it needs to register. We asked the committee to exclude ordinary internal research, member consultation, and policy development from the threshold calculation with a clear boundary for work specifically preparing a lobbying communication. Guidance should cover each research stage, including the reporting and public sharing. Clearer rules would let chambers establish the evidence before deciding what to do and how to approach government.

The second issue is the absence of a simplified registration route for chambers and comparable member organizations. The act already separates organizational lobbyists from consultant lobbyists. Chambers use the general organizational framework, so we're asking for a simpler registration and return within that framework designed for qualifying nonprofit membership organizations.

Our grassroots model starts with direction from local businesses. ACC does not decide what the network's priority should be. Local chambers identify issues in their communities, test them with members, and bring those proposed policies forward so that chambers can debate and adopt them. ACC's role is simply to amplify those priorities at the provincial level. Local chambers also remain free to advocate provincially in their own right, including directly to their MLAs and ministers. They do not need to channel that advocacy through ACC. This combination of local direction and independent advocacy is important – critically important – to how our network operates. A small chamber needs something one employee can administer. A larger chamber, or ACC, for example, needs to manage several advocacy subjects across almost all ministries.

Chambers are a unique model from other business advocacy organizations. The registration process should recognize this combination of local direction, collective policy development, and independent advocacy. Comparable organizations with those characteristics should also qualify. We ask for a simplified organizational return built around a standing profile, broad advocacy subjects, and clear responsibilities for accuracy. Eligibility should reflect member governance, collective advocacy, and policy positions with clear nonprofit and nonpartisan criteria.

The third issue is duplication between information chambers already publish and information required for registration. ACC publishes a searchable policy collection and a downloadable policy book. The policies identify an issue, explain the background, and set out recommendations. Our Alberta Perspectives research platform reports are public as well.

Public submissions and correspondence can provide further detail about the changes we seek. That transparency reflects how our positions are developed. Local concerns can be tested through member consultation and are debated by chambers before becoming an adopted ACC policy position. The resulting recommendation is available for anybody to examine. Today those public documents do not replace any registration obligations. A chamber still needs to maintain its registry information. We accept that responsibility but see an opportunity to use the public material more efficiently.

For a small chamber describing an adopted position, again, takes staff time that could support their members. When several chambers and ACC advance the same policy, each needs to meet its own obligations and keep its own registration accurate. The same underlying recommendation may be explained in several places. We ask the committee to allow chambers to link or refer directly to publicly available policies and submissions where those documents provide the required advocacy information. The return should identify the relevant ministry and policy reference without requiring the recommendations or supporting explanations to be restated. For a local chamber and ACC advancing the same adopted policy, the public could consult that policy directly, and when our advocacy changes, we would update the reference and provide information that is not already available in that linked document.

The fourth issue is that routine filing dates do not align with our annual policy and governance cycle and every return requires separate certification by the CEO. Today's organization returns follow a six-month cycle with changes to information reported within 30 days. Staff can prepare a return, but the CEO as ACC's designate filer must certify it. ACC's own schedule illustrates the duplication. Our semiannual returns are due October 8 and April 8. Then, following our AGM at the end of May, where we provide new policy recommendations and they are adopted and also where our board members change, we file again to update all of that information. This means we complete the April return shortly before our AGM, and then our AGM itself brings another round of updates. For a small chamber just consider these steps and how they compete with all of the other things they're doing like events, member services, and administration.

Larger chambers' and ACC's coordination of information across staff also is a consideration. The requiring of CEO certification adds

another step even when staff have prepared and checked the return thoroughly, so we ask the committee to allow annual confirmation aligned with an organization's governance cycle alongside timely material updates. For ACC filing annually after the May AGM would bring the routine return to a point post-AGM and can provide those updates together. The existing 30-day change-reporting rule provides a starting point for keeping the record current during the year.

7:05

We also ask that the CEO be able to formally delegate authority to a designated staff to complete, certify, and submit returns on their behalf. The delegation would be recorded with the CEO and organization remaining accountable for accuracy. Staff managing the information could then complete the filing without requiring the CEO to certify each return separately.

Together these changes would reduce repeated work and approval steps while retaining current disclosure levels. A simplified return would carry forward standing details and identify changes. Advocacy for a chamber's own grants or financial benefits would remain subject to all applicable requirements. Practical guidance would support these improvements, including examples for volunteers, online activity, consultations, and shared advocacy.

Our four requests are: clearer treatment of the internal policy work, a simplified registration route, recognition of existing public disclosures, and annual confirmation with timely updates. Delegated certification would help make that simpler process work in practice. We would welcome the opportunity to work with the registrar and the government on these details.

Thank you, Mr. Chair. I would be happy to take any questions.

The Chair: Thank you. Thank you, Ms Feth and Ms Severson.

Are there any questions from committee members for this presentation? Mr. Bouchard.

Mr. Bouchard: Sure. Thank you, Mr. Chair. Thank you for the presentation. When a membership-based organization makes a policy recommendation, can you walk the committee through the internal research and policy recommendation process that recommendation 4 would like to exclude?

Ms Feth: Yes. Within our internal policy process the way it works is that all of our policy that ACC advocates on behalf of everything that we would meet with ministers or elected officials on is all really determined at the grassroots level, so a lot of that work is being done by the smaller chambers across the province. The background work, all of the research, and the understanding of the priority, the issue that they're trying to alleviate by creating the policy: all of that is done at that local level. Then during our AGM, as I said in May, those policies are then debated by all of the chambers across the province and are either approved or declined. If they're approved, then they become officially adopted by the ACC as our provincial policy priorities. At that point is when ACC really steps in to do the advocacy work. We then take over that policy book, and we are the ones that then set up the meetings with ministers, making sure that we're advocating those priorities to all of the elected officials.

Now, I did make the distinction and I want to be really clear, too, that that doesn't preclude the local chambers from also doing that work. We don't take it over and we're the only ones that are working on that file; very often the local chambers will also still be advocating on behalf of that, so there's a tiered approach to how we manage that.

Mr. Bouchard: Okay. Thank you.

The Chair: Mr. Bouchard, did you have a follow-up?

Mr. Bouchard: Yeah. Through the chair, I guess: do you have an approximate amount of time that these activities take you?

Ms Feth: Through the chair, again, every single one is different, quite honestly. It depends on the policy; it depends on, you know, how much research we need to do. As I suggested, we do have our own advanced data research platform that we use. Sometimes it could take a lot longer on one policy if we don't actually have clear data that can support it. That research piece is very different from policy to policy in terms of how much time it takes. In some cases we could research it by throwing it in AI and have it flip back at us in five minutes. In other situations we just don't have the data, so in those cases we actually have to take that step to compile that data and ask those questions of our business members to find out what is really going on.

Mr. Bouchard: Great. Thanks.

The Chair: Thank you.

We will now go to Member Hoyle for a couple of questions.

Member Hoyle: Thank you. Through the chair, I've got a question. If a local chamber, you know, might ask government to fix a grant program because dozens of its members are running into the same problem and that same chamber might also help one member ask for an exemption for the program rules, would you report those two activities differently, and what should the public be able to see in each case, then?

Ms Feth: We would report them differently. I think, you know, we're not talking about reducing transparency by any means. Like, we have full disclosure. All we're really looking at is just trying to reduce the burden on smaller chambers and on chambers in general. You know, we've already heard from one member about how nonprofits are so strapped, so we're just trying to create a system where – we don't want to be treated very differently; we just want to make sure that it aligns a little bit more in terms of how our governance cycles work and to alleviate some of the reporting and the complexities around that 50-hour threshold rule. Does that answer your question? And my apologies; I should have said: through the chair.

Member Hoyle: It does.

The Chair: Member Hoyle, did you have another one?

Member Hoyle: I do have one more, yes. This is just, you know, thinking about what should trigger an update between annual filings, and you've proposed an annual confirmation with updates when something material changes. If the chamber takes up a new issue mid-year, let's say, such as asking government to change who qualifies for an investment incentive, should that new request be disclosed at the time, and what would you define as a material change?

Ms Feth: You know, material changes would fall under how the act is written now. Like, a change in board of directors would be one huge material change that we would need to report right away. In terms of the request that we made around being able to just use public-facing documentation and being able to make sure that that's part of the reporting process instead of having to list every single one of those policies, being able to use that. But, you know, if we had to materially change something in that policy book, to your point, between the time that we would have approved the policy at

our next AGM, that would be something else that would trigger that type of an event.

Member Hoyle: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you.
We will now go to Member Stephan.

Mr. Stephan: Thank you, Chair, and thank you for coming on behalf of the chambers. I was a director on our local Red Deer chamber and appreciate the work you do. I have to say that I'm a little bit educated from going through this. I understand why we have the 50-hour requirement, because generally you're not meeting with MLAs for 50 hours. I don't think pretty much anyone other than our spouses, hopefully, is able to meet with us more than 50 hours, but it would be strange for an organization to meet 50 hours with an MLA. So I understand the preparation part of things. It is interesting that it's an annual kind of aggregation. It's not on a project-by-project basis. Someone like, you know, the chamber: you'd blast through that pretty quickly, I would expect.

It is interesting as well. I was kind of looking at the exemptions, and you're a nonprofit organization, but it's kind of interesting because the Lobbyists Act says in 3(1)(i) that if you are

> directors, officers or employees of a [nonprofit] organization . . . not constituted to serve management, union or professional interests nor having a majority of members that are profit-seeking enterprises . . .

Well, most of your members are profit-seeking enterprises, so that nice little exemption probably doesn't kind of carve you out.

Ms Feth: It doesn't.

Mr. Stephan: Like, I kind of think of your advocacy on a more general application basis, and I appreciate the member's question there about, you know, kind of distinguishing between general application advocacy and maybe for specific members. So there seems to be public interest or general application advocacy, which I don't really think of as lobbying. That seems to be different than lobbying for private interest, which kind of benefits a specific organization, whether they're a large nonprofit or even a for-profit, but there's not a private interest pertaining to an organization but more of a general advocacy. So would you see the general advocacy, like reducing corporate income taxes or the small-business rate, which probably your members would like, many of them would like that – that, I assume, would be caught under lobbying although it's kind of a general application thing. Is that how the law is currently being applied, that if you were advocating for a reduction in corporate tax rates or a reduction in payroll taxes to kind of help support employers in hiring more people, that would be considered lobbying, wouldn't it, under our current act?

7:15

Ms Feth: That's the way we apply it, absolutely.

Mr. Stephan: Yeah. And it seems to be kind of caught. It's kind of odd.

Ms Feth: Well, on one hand, I mean, it's understandable. The whole purpose of a chamber of commerce is to advocate on behalf of business in the province of Alberta, which by definition better be profitable. You know, we're hoping that they're profitable. So it's kind of that catch-22. To your point that we don't – a lot of the policies or the priorities that we would advocate on behalf of would actually have application to the general public in terms of good, but because of the organization that we are and how our membership is constructed, then we do fall into those reporting pieces.

Mr. Stephan: Yeah. But you're not a consultant lobbyist.

Ms Feth: No.

Mr. Stephan: I don't think your chamber fees amount to a – they're not that high.

Ms Feth: It'd be awesome if they were, but no. They're not.

Mr. Stephan: I appreciate you drawing this issue to our attention, and I think there's some opportunity there. So thanks.

Ms Feth: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Member Stephan.
We will now go to Member Elmeligi.

Dr. Elmeligi: Thank you, Mr. Chair. My question is very quick actually. There are a few submissions that talked about the CEO being able to delegate somebody else because maybe they're on holidays or sick or whatever. Like, there are lots of reasons why having one person as the sole authority to sign off is problematic. I'm just wondering. From your perspective, if we were to create something where the CEO could designate alternates, would that be individuals, like named individuals in the registry, or named positions and then whoever is in that position automatically becomes the delegate?

Ms Feth: Thank you, Member, through the chair. In our example we would be looking at, for instance, whoever is managing our advocacy and reporting the research, the data, who's filling out that form for us as a chamber organization. It would be, you know, the individual that's actually doing all of the research, that is compiling all of the information and would actually be able to really quickly answer those questions versus the CEO who potentially is reviewing and signing off but hasn't spent the 20 hours or however much time – I could ask Dana how much time – it takes to fill out that report.

I think it could go either way. I mean, I think as long as it's transparent and it's done in an official way and that it's approved as part of the process and we're following whatever guidelines or rules are put forward around that type of a delegation, then we would be in compliance, and I think that would, again, independently save some time in this entire process.

Dr. Elmeligi: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you. Did you have a follow-up, Member Elmeligi?

Dr. Elmeligi: No, actually. My other questions have been asked already.

The Chair: Okay.
Member Hoyle.

Member Hoyle: Thank you, through the chair. This is just pertaining to your request for clearer rules and a simplified registration process that I have here in my notes. Would you be able to give us an example of a local chamber that was unsure whether they needed to register and what caused that uncertainty? Would a plain-language guide from the registrar have resolved it, or are you saying completely that the act itself really needs to change in terms of that process?

Ms Feth: I think clear guidelines, for sure. I'm sorry, Member; through the chair. My apologies.

Clear guidelines are always welcome, and we wouldn't want to create a huge make-work project, but just the transparency to the level that they can be really readily understandable by our volunteer chambers. The composition of chambers in the province is that we literally have 50 chambers that don't actually have a paid staffperson, so for them to be able to translate and understand at what threshold they have to start reporting, what it actually means, what activities that covers, everything that I suggested in our submission. Larger chambers, you know, although we have that issue of cross-reporting across different staff members, don't have the same challenges in terms of really understanding the impacts and understanding where and how they should be registering to be lobbyists.

So I think both. Again, not to make a lot of work but just so that whoever that board chair is, that volunteer board chair can pull out a document and it says, "Okay; if you're doing this, this, and this, then you need to register," and just make it that simple. Not just for chambers; for nonprofits in general. I think that would go a long way to making nonprofits – I wouldn't say more compliant because I don't understand what the environment is like for other nonprofits. What I would say is that it would go a long way to make sure that – everybody has good intentions, especially in the nonprofit world. But you don't know what you don't know, and then when you can't understand, a lot of times that's where discrepancies happen and omissions occur.

Member Hoyle: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you.

Are there any further questions for our presenters? Seeing none. Thank you for your presentation.

Ms Feth: Thank you, Chair, for having us. Thank you, all.

The Chair: All right. Our next presentation this evening will be from the Canadian Taxpayers Federation. I'll invite Mr. Scott Hennig to the table. You have 10 minutes to present. Please proceed when you're ready.

Canadian Taxpayers Federation

Mr. Hennig: Thank you, Chair. Thank you, members, for inviting us to be here today. My name is Scott Hennig. I'm the president and CEO of the Canadian Taxpayers Federation. To just quickly let you know who we are, because it will inform some of the comments we'll make tonight, we are a nonprofit advocacy organization dedicated to lower taxes, less government waste, and more government accountability, founded in 1990. We have more than 30,000 Canadians donate to us every single year. We don't take a dollar from government. We don't take money from unions. We don't take money from political parties, politicians, or from any foreign sources. We're funded by ordinary Canadians who give us a few dollars at a time, and we answer to them.

We come to this review as an organization that believes in transparency but also knows what it's like to speak up and get noticed for it. On principle, a lobbyist registry has a purpose. That purpose is to show Albertans who is being paid to influence their politicians and what those paid influencers are asking for. When a company hires someone to land a contract or to change a rule so that money flows to that company, taxpayers deserve to see it. We support that. We always have supported that.

But transparency aimed at paid self-interest is a different thing from a registry that catalogs ordinary citizens who tell their elected representatives what they think. One shines a light on money and power. One shines a light on the voter. The first protects democracy. The second one chills it. If you keep that line clear, I would say that most of the hard questions of this review will help answer themselves, but I do have two recommendations I would like to talk about.

The first one is to keep the nonprofit exemption. A member earlier actually quoted the same quote I was going to use. It says that the officers and staff of a nonprofit aren't caught by the act so long as the group isn't set up to serve management, union, or professional interests and isn't mostly made up of profit-seeking businesses. Your registrar drew that line for you on June 29. He came to this committee and said that a charity like the Heart and Stroke Foundation falls inside that exemption; an industry association that represents profit-making companies does not, and they have to register. I think that's the right place to draw that line. It separates groups that are pushing for a cause from groups that are pushing for their members' bottom line.

You've heard the same from others who have reached out to this committee. I've read some of the submissions: the YMCA, the Alberta Municipalities, even from a volunteer who said that she sits on several nonprofit boards and just simply wants to be heard. These are the people that this exemption protects. None of them are trying to pad their own bottom line, and all of them ask you to leave the nonprofit exemption alone.

Secondly, I would ask that you keep a meaningful threshold in place. Today a group's in-house staff only register once their combined lobbying efforts passes 50 hours in a year. That threshold is what keeps many small industry groups out. These are people who may talk to their MLA a couple of times a year, and they're not being asked right now to be part of a reporting regiment built for full-time influence. There is a cost to this. If getting rid of this threshold were to happen, there is a cost. Alberta's carrying some serious debt. Every new reporting rule means more staff, more forms, more enforcement, both on the government side but also on the groups that are caught by it. Lowering the threshold doesn't raise a dollar or save a dollar; it grows paperwork and red tape. For a province trying to get their spending under control, that's the wrong direction.

7:25

I've heard that the threshold is hard to enforce and that you should lower it or scrap it. I would say that your registrar was honest that it's hard to measure, and I can appreciate that. Difficulty is a reason to enforce it well; it's not a reason to drag hundreds of more Albertans into this net. If you narrow these exemptions around nonprofits and the number of hours, here's who you're going to catch. You're going to catch community groups and charities and volunteer boards, people who show up to the Legislature because they care about something, not because they're trying to get a government contract. If you make them register their officers, log their hours, and file paperwork the same as the paid corporate lobbyist, that won't give Albertans more transparency. In fact, it'll probably give them less. It will bury the signal that we're actually trying to find, the real commercial lobbying, under a mountain of other filings from nonprofit organizations. And it quietly tells ordinary people that speaking to their own government is now a regulated activity. Most of them will just stay at home.

If you'll indulge me, I'll tell you a quick story of how this actually comes to be. Years ago I was in Ottawa. I was at a conference, and in the evening I ended up at a bar, as you do at these conferences, a table full of people, some who I knew, some who I didn't know. One turned out to be a staffer for a federal cabinet minister. First thing he did was ask me if I was a registered lobbyist. I said no. I told him what I did, and he relaxed. His minister's office had a flat rule: no meetings with lobbyists. Full stop. A few minutes later a

registered lobbyist walked into the bar, came over to say hi to some of the people that they knew at the table. The staffer bolted, like stood up, literally ran for the door, and left me with the bill. That's not why I was confused or upset.

Dr. Elmeligi: But also.

Mr. Hennig: But also.

Here's why he ran. If that lobbyist so much as mentioned a file that his department was handling, that lobbyist could log it, could bill their client for it, and register it with the lobbyist registry, and the staffer would have broken the rule. He would have broken his minister's rule that there are no lobbyists allowed for the meeting, so he ran for the door. That's what overregulation can produce, not more transparency but a government employee sprinting away from the possibility of a conversation.

Every rule you add has consequences. They're not always the ones that you intend. A minister hearing out an expert, even one with something to gain, is often how politicians find out what's actually happening on the ground. And worse, depending on how you write the rules, you could be pushing groups with no personal gain whatsoever away from having conversations with politicians. Will the Kananaskis clean air society spend the time to get registered, file all their paperwork so they can have a once- or twice-a-year meeting with their MLA about local air quality? Maybe. Maybe not. And we don't want to discourage that.

Now, I would say one caution. I think the submissions that you've received make the point better than I have or better than I can. The great majority of the nonprofit organizations that submitted to this committee asked you to keep the nonprofit exemption and leave the act largely alone. This isn't unusual or untested. It's been reviewed. This act's been reviewed three times: 2011, 2017, 2022. This is the fourth time. The handful of submissions that did urge you to expand the act, to cut the threshold, to log every meeting, to scrap the exemption: they're taking a different tack, and one is coming from the office that would run that expanded regime. Where that office asked you to tighten the rules on contingency fees, gifts to officeholders: completely agree. Those target paid lobbying, and they're very much worth strengthening.

But if we think about what a lower threshold and a new meeting-by-meeting registry would actually require by the registrar, it would mean more filings to review, more compliance to monitor, which means a bigger office, more staff, bigger budget, more people to run it. Now, I'm not going to pretend that that's some sort of scandal. That is very normal. Everyone in this business wants a bigger shop. I want a bigger shop. I want more staff. I want a bigger budget. That is normal for everyone who works in this type of work. But companies that come before you lobbying this: that's often their whole point. It's more revenue for them, and there's nothing wrong with that. It's human. It applies just the same to the office that is asking you to grow this registry. There's nothing wrong with asking your barber if you need a haircut, but you've got to keep in mind that you know the answer you're probably going to get. Where any proposal to expand this registry lands in front of you, it's fair to ask: what real problem does it solve for taxpayers? If the honest answer is that it mostly solves a problem for the regulator, that's your answer.

I would just want to speak on one last point, and then I will stop for questions. This one is on the type of expansion that I want to single out because it crosses a line that others don't. It's to treat citizen advocacy as lobbying or build a registry that records the individual people who contact their elected officials. The Supreme Court has called the connection between free expression and the political process the linchpin of the Charter's free expression guarantee. When a person picks up the phone and tells their MLA what they believe, it isn't a transaction to be logged or publicized. It's the thing that democracy was built on.

The risk is concrete because this registry is open for anyone to search, and we already publish the lobbyist filings. We publish the names of submissions on submissions like mine, like you're getting here today. If we start to pull ordinary citizens into the system and you've put political views on a searchable list with their names attached, people can lose jobs because of their politics. People get targeted over their politics. A system built to expose paid influence should never become a tool that exposes a voter for holding an opinion and sharing it with the people that represent them.

In closing, here's the line I ask you to hold. Find the paid actor seeking a private benefit and shine a light on them. Protect the citizens exercising a democratic right and leave them alone. The act as written today already knows the difference between those two people. My ask is simple. Keep it that way.

Thank you for having me, and I'm happy to take your questions.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Hennig, for your presentation.

Are there any questions from the committee members for the presenter?

Mr. Cyr: Well, that was a very thorough presentation that you gave. It actually answered both questions that I had for you. I can tell that you've put a lot of thought into this. Have you presented before other provinces on this matter?

Mr. Hennig: No, and I didn't want to present here either. I'm the CEO. I don't normally go and make presentations to committee. In fact, I'm glad I don't have to sign off on anything for a lobbyist registry. A CEO should delegate as much as they possibly can, and I would like to have done that in this case, but our Alberta director was unavailable, and I also find this one kind of interesting, so I guess I invoked my CEO privileges to come in and present on it.

No, I don't think we have presented, and I wouldn't have known about it if you wouldn't have sent us a request in the summer asking for input. I'm glad you did because we do occasionally come across the lobbyist registries, and this is where I always find it interesting because there are different rules in every province. We've at times gone and asked: "Well, we don't reach the 50 hours. We don't reach your threshold. What should we do?" One hundred per cent of the time we get told: you should probably register just out of an abundance of caution. I think that is the answer you would likely get whenever you ask a question about this stuff, and I think the guidelines should be clear about that stuff, how and when you need to register, because out of an abundance of caution everyone will have to register.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Cyr, did you have a follow-up?

Mr. Cyr: Have you found other provinces to be more challenging than Alberta and how so?

Mr. Hennig: Well, I would say that particularly the changes the federal government has made, the B.C. government made: we're still reviewing some of them, but it has the potential to, I think, fall into some of these pitfalls that I've suggested could happen if we change the act here in Alberta.

The Chair: Member Stephan.

Mr. Stephan: Yeah. Thanks for your presentation. My understanding is that the Canadian Taxpayers Federation would probably

seek to be excluded from our Lobbyists Act on the basis that it is a nonprofit organization and it's not constituted to serve management, union, or professional interests or have a majority of members that are profit-seeking enterprises or representatives of profit-seeking enterprises. That would be my understanding. Would that be correct?

Mr. Hennig: That would be correct. Us and many other organizations, yes.

Mr. Stephan: Yeah. Yeah. I know your membership is not – unlike the chamber, where you pay a fee as a, you know, profit-seeking business to become a member of the chamber, your membership is not like that. People can donate, but they're not members by making a donation.

Mr. Hennig: That's correct.

Mr. Stephan: Okay.

In terms of your membership, though, I kind of want to – like, I know your membership is actually fairly narrow. I just kind of looked at your bylaws because I wanted to understand how that works. Just hypothetically, if a majority of your members were representatives of profit-seeking enterprises, so let's say they were directors of their own private businesses – let's just take that hypothetical – do you think that the nature of the advocacy in any event that the Canadian Taxpayers Federation constitutes lobbying anyhow?

7:35

Mr. Hennig: Well, I guess if you change the definition of lobbying, maybe. What I would suggest is that I think when people think of lobbyists, they're thinking about not groups that are putting up billboards and writing op-eds in newspapers. They're thinking about the, you know, backrooms. They're thinking about individual meetings. They're thinking about things that are not public and in front of everyone.

I would suggest that under what I would define as lobbying, no, I'm not a lobbyist. I don't go and do individual meetings. I've never met with anyone in this room. No offence; I'm sure you're all lovely. I'm sure it'd be nice to meet with you, but we don't do that. That's not the work that we do. We don't do behind the scenes. I also don't sell access. None of our donors have ever come to me and said: I'd love you to get me a meeting with the minister. It's not what we do. I think that by what most people would define lobbying as, we don't do lobbying.

We do advocacy, and I think there's a big difference between those two things. One is in the public, and one is for the public interest. You can disagree with what we're calling for, but when, at the end of the day, we push for the government to follow through on a gas tax cut, which maybe we did here recently – we did push for that – it wasn't just my supporters or my donors that got the gas tax cut. Until I can convince someone to do no taxes for guys named Scott maybe, that would be the first time. It would be the only way that we would get a private benefit.

Mr. Stephan: Can I just clarify? I appreciate that. The fact that you are considered a nonprofit organization: but for that, you would actually be considered a lobbyist notwithstanding that the nature of what you're doing is advocacy, not necessarily lobbying under our act as current wording. Is that your understanding?

Mr. Hennig: If we also met the threshold as well. I would say that it depends on how that's defined. If the definitions change on this, then – like, our general counsel actively follows what's changing from province to province so that we make sure we're in compliance, but . . .

Mr. Stephan: Yeah. You probably spend more than 50 hours as an organization doing preparation.

Mr. Hennig: Preparation for public advocacy campaigns for sure but not for what I would call lobbying, going into meetings, no. We wouldn't.

Mr. Stephan: Yeah. Okay. Thanks.

The Chair: Thank you, Member Stephan.

We will now go to Member Hoyle.

Member Hoyle: Thank you, through the chair. Yeah. Just for clarity I've got a couple of questions here. I just want to be crystal clear on this. I do agree with you that Albertans should be able to call their MLAs and talk to them without having their names put on a registry, but if a company's government relations team meets with a minister's office to ask for a multimillion-dollar subsidy, should taxpayers be able to see who made the request and what they asked for even if the company is below the 50-hour threshold?

Mr. Hennig: That's a good question. I think the goal of your question is absolutely correct. We should be able to figure out: who are the paid actors trying to get a private gain? They're trying to get a contract, trying to get a rule changed to their private gain. The mechanism of how that comes together is – I wouldn't say I'm agnostic on it, but I do think that there are probably better people than me to ask about the exact mechanism of how you do that. You know, provided that we are also just being aware of – like, there's a balance between ensuring that we're getting to the heart of the question that you're asking, which I agree with, and ensuring that we're not creating rules that catch everyone else. I think that's the fine balance that this committee will have a tough job to figure out.

Member Hoyle: Okay. Thank you for that.

I do have one more question, please.

The Chair: Go ahead, Member.

Member Hoyle: Yeah. This relates to the cost to taxpayers that you mentioned earlier. You've raised the cost of expanding reporting – right? – that issue there. What evidence should this committee ask for to weigh the cost of a targeted disclosure, a disclosure rule against the public value of seeing who sought a major contract or a subsidy before the decision was made?

Mr. Hennig: This is a great question. I think that whatever changes are being proposed, going through each one and determining, "Is this going to help me get to that answer, or is this going to increase the amount of other groups that we're not necessarily trying to capture, or is that going to accidentally capture them or maybe intentionally capture them?" is the real question. I think that it's – we support transparency. We support the lobbyist registry. We would support changes that would ensure that what you're asking for would get captured. We wouldn't support something that would end up capturing a bunch of other public advocacy that is being added in. I think that some of these ones may have the intent of what you're trying to get at but might have the result of the latter so might end up catching the people that we're not necessarily trying to capture.

Member Hoyle: Thank you for that.

Thank you, Chair.

The Chair: Thank you.

Are there any further questions for Mr. Hennig?

Seeing none, thank you for your presentation.

Mr. Hennig: Thank you.

Dr. Elmeligi: Thanks for coming even though you didn't want to.

Mr. Hennig: I enjoyed it.

The Chair: Thank you.

We will now go to our next presentation this evening from the Public Affairs Association of Canada. I'll invite Mr. Graham Sucha up and Mr. Imran – can you please introduce yourself? I'm sorry.

Mr. Mohiuddin: Imran Mohiuddin, Public Affairs Association of Canada.

The Chair: Thank you.

You'll have 10 minutes for your presentation. Please proceed.

Public Affairs Association of Canada

Mr. Sucha: Thank you, Mr. Chair. It is very hard to go after something so lively. My name is Graham Sucha. I'm the past president of PAAC Alberta. We're the Alberta chapter for the national organization. Thank you for the opportunity of providing a perspective on the review of the Lobbyists Act. Our chapter brings together public affairs professionals whose members represent organizations across the public, private, and not-for-profit sector. We also work with lobbying regulators through educational workshops to help practitioners understand their legal and ethical obligations. Our central message is that the act does not require significant amendments at this time. In our members' view the existing framework provides appropriate levels of transparency. We support oversight that maximizes transparency and compliance while keeping practical and financial burdens proportionate.

Our submission offers five recommendations to maintain the balance and make targeted improvements. First, maintain the existing exemptions for certain not-for-profit representatives and for municipal governments and their staff when acting in their official capacities. I recognize there's a theme to that that I've heard throughout this whole meeting here as well. The not-for-profit recommendation is not a blanket exemption for every not-for-profit organization. Our submission refers to qualifying organizations that are not contributed to serve management, unions, or professional interests and do not have majority profit-seeking businesses as memberships. Our rationales proportionately preserve the exemptions, help direct provincial compliance resources effectively while avoiding burdensome red tape for not-for-profits and municipalities. We ask the committee to consider those practical implications alongside the transparency objectives of the act.

Our second recommendation comes out in light of some news out of Calgary at the time of writing the submission. It is that municipalities should retain flexibility to decide whether lobbyist registries are appropriate for their community and if so how they should work. Our preference approach is not to extend the provincial act to municipalities. Local governments have different circumstances, concerns, and decision-making processes. A single provincial approach may not adequately reflect those differences. We therefore favour locally designed systems where municipalities voluntarily choose to establish them. If the committee instead concludes that municipal registries should operate under the provincial act, our submission proposes a limited pilot in Calgary and/or Edmonton. That would allow practitioners and registrars and administrators to test the approach and identify potential changes in the Municipal Government Act.

Third, learn from the concerns emerging through the federal Lobbying Act review described in our submission. The previous presenter also alluded to that as well. Our members identified four connected risks: ambiguous disclosure language, disproportionate reporting obligations, barriers to participation, and excessive reliance on evolving interpretations rather than clear legislation. Monthly communication reports is one example raised in our federal submission. Our concern is that additional administrative work may not deliver transparency benefits. The consequences can be partially significant for smaller and not-for-profit organizations. Added obligations may discourage engagement with government, make voluntary board recruitment more difficult, and reduce the diversity of voices contributed to public policy. Guidance from regulators remains valuable, but our position is that clear statutory requirements should provide the foundation of predictable, consistent compliance.

7:45

Our fourth recommendation is to amend the designated filer system to allow greater local accountability, and again, members such as the chamber alluded to this as well. As our submission explains, a senior officer may be responsible for registrations while remaining removed from the lobbying activities in a particular province. For organizations operating across jurisdictions, collecting and checking information can become onerous and create risks of unintended noncompliance. We propose that individual consultant lobbyists be accountable to the registrar for their own activities. Alternatively, national organizations should have the flexibility to designate local senior officers as the designated filer for their Alberta registrations. The objective is not to reduce accountability. It is to place responsibility closer to people who understand the work, making reporting more practical and reducing the likelihood of errors.

Finally – this is a recommendation that we make in light of just when the review commenced and recognizing that you are under the obligations of tight legislative timelines – if the review leads to significant proposed amendments, we do ask for additional consultation. Our submission notes that the request for information commenced over the summer period and during the Calgary Stampede activities, which may have limited some practitioners' abilities to fully contribute, especially if it's a smaller organization. Further engagement would help the committee assess the practical and financial effects of proposed changes and whether they advance the act's objectives. Alternatively, if that could not commence, we'd recommend that the minister proceed with that in that absence.

In closing, our position is straightforward: preserve the existing framework where it works, maintain appropriate exemptions, respect municipal choice, learn from the federal concerns, and improve accountability through targeted designated filer reforms. Significant changes should follow meaningful consultation.

With that, I thank you for your consideration.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Sucha, for your presentation.

I've noticed that we have a new member at our table. Ms de Jonge, would you mind introducing yourself.

Ms de Jonge: With pleasure. Good evening, everyone. Chantelle de Jonge, MLA for Chestermere-Strathmore.

The Chair: Okay. We will now go to questions from our committee. Are there any questions from our committee members?

Mr. van Dijken: Thank you for coming this evening, and thank you for the work that you do to help develop public affairs professionals. Important work. I do note, and you've stated it, that your submission positions that Alberta's current framework has struck an effective balance between transparency and regulatory burden. From your organization's perspective, what aspects of the current system are working well, and do you see any areas that the committee should keep in mind moving forward?

Mr. Sucha: From my perspective, I think the not-for-profit exemptions are quite meaningful. A lot of the conversation that's existed throughout here talks about the tight pressures that a lot of not-for-profits are put under. They can vary in different scopes, and we think that the current act is pretty good about defining, if there is a for-profit nature, them still having to be registered under the Lobbyists Act. I would probably say that under the current framework that works pretty well. We feel that there is adequate public accountability. We can still be held accountable if we're a for-profit lobbyist. However, we do want to be cautious to not try to fix a problem that we don't necessarily deem exists at this time.

The Chair: Mr. van Dijken, do you have a follow-up?

Mr. van Dijken: Yeah. Just one supplemental with regard to nonprofit organizations. From your perspective, if that exemption was removed, what impact would that possibly have on the nonprofit organizations?

Mr. Mohiuddin: Yeah. I could take that. The committee has heard from a lot of organizations that could talk very kind of authoritatively on behalf of that sector. Among our membership we also have a lot of public affairs professionals in that field. The feedback we've heard is that removing that exemption would actually create a fairly big burden without kind of also safeguarding transparency. I think the original intent of the act or certainly an appropriate interpretation of it is that where Albertans want to know about lobbying activities is going to be kind of when the entity has a set of interests that may not necessarily align with the public good. The act originally made that distinction. I think each subsequent review since then has kept it. I think the feedback from our membership is that those exemptions are very good and they should stay.

Mr. van Dijken: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you.
Are there any other questions? Member Hoyle.

Member Hoyle: Thank you. Through the chair, just thinking, if the registrar has proposed bringing in-house lobbying for major government contracts under the act – right? – if two companies go outside of the formal bidding process to influence the same contract award and one sends an employee while the other one hires a consultant, what public interest is served by treating these contracts differently? Would your association support the same disclosure rule for both?

Mr. Sucha: In avoidance of speaking too prematurely in relation to this without further consultation, I would say that ultimately an approach such as that should generally be done in a uniform fashion. With that being said, you do need to be cognizant in relation to the broader engagements for bidding processes to be aware that sometimes too much transparency in relation to broader costs can impact potential outcomes as well.

Member Hoyle: Okay.

The Chair: Member Hoyle, do you have a follow-up?

Member Hoyle: I do have one more. Sure. You've proposed giving Alberta-based staff more responsibility for filing because a national executive may be far removed from the lobbying that happens here, so if a significant contract is left out of a filing, who should be accountable for correcting it, and how would your proposal make it easier for the registrar to verify that the record is complete?

Mr. Sucha: From my perspective, if I'm understanding the question correctly, Mr. Chair, ultimately we're looking for the front-line lobbyists, the ones who are engaging governments directly and leading most of the projects to be the ones who are the registered filers. Ideally, we wanted there to be a bit more sort of transparency and accountability as it pertains to that. Often these individuals will be filling out the work for the senior leadership anyways, so it allows for a bit more direct contact as it pertains to follow-ups and clear directions as to what level of government engagement was occurring.

The Chair: Thank you.
Are there any further questions? Member van Dijken.

Mr. van Dijken: Just one question, kind of as a follow-up with Member Hoyle's question. Do you have any recommendations that would help increase public confidence in the transparency without creating unnecessary burden to organizations?

Mr. Mohiuddin: Yeah. I think our position is that the act already does a very good job of that.

Mr. Sucha: Often sometimes with an engagement you can hear people make recommendations: we want more transparency. They may not necessarily know that it's already there. You know, as lobbyists we could even do a better job communicating: hey, there are ways for you to refer back to the registry and check this information for yourselves. There could be even opportunities for us to have broader communications with the public about the available resources for them to check this information as well.

The Chair: Do you have a follow-up, Mr. van Dijken?

Mr. van Dijken: Just more comment than question. I do note that – you mentioned it in your opening comments – with regard to if there are any significant changes, it's in your submission that additional consultation may be necessary just based off the timelines of when submissions were received. We do take note of that and thank you for that.

Mr. Sucha: Through you, Mr. Chair, we do appreciate that. The main concern, especially if there are changes to the not-for-profit thresholds and exemptions, is that organizations might be caught off guard as well, and while we can do a lot of work to communicate to them, there may be some smaller organizations that might fall through the cracks as well.

The Chair: Thank you.
Member Elmeligi.

7:55

Dr. Elmeligi: Yeah. Just, through you, Mr. Chair, following in the same line of questioning on the reporting, I've been thinking a lot about outcomes, and we talked about it with the lobbyist registrar at the very beginning of the night. How do we make sure that when there are meetings with cabinet ministers or MLAs where a particular company – I'm thinking specifically, like, for-profit

companies and corporations are typically advocating for something where they financially benefit from that something. That development, let's say, may or may not happen. If it does happen and they lobbied for it over a period of years, I think the public has a right to know and understand that that development is a result of paid lobbying efforts. Nonprofits may also be discussing with the minister opposition to said development, for example, and I think it's important for people to know where the decisions are made.

So if I'm thinking through the lobbyist registry, it is a little difficult to put that outcome reporting on the proponent because the meeting could have happened, you know, six months ago. But where does the onus sit, then, to report that outcome, and how can we ensure transparency in the outcomes of lobbying, not just the fact that meetings took place?

Mr. Sucha: From my perspective and kind of digging into your question a little bit more here, I think it can depend on some of the circumstances because if we're talking about a tendering process, there are different sort of frameworks in place of how that might go forward. But, again, too, if I hear your question correctly, through the chair, you're talking about sort of the lead-up towards those conversations that might have been occurring.

Dr. Elmeligi: Well, and the outcomes that they achieved. Like, I'm really focused on the outcomes because conversations are just conversations. If they don't lead to anything, I mean, people should know, but if a particular thing is approved or carries forward because of lobbying activities, that's why this whole thing exists – right? – so that Albertans or the public are aware of any backroom deals or backroom conversations that are happening. This whole act is meant to bring those to the light. If those conversations are happening and they don't result in an outcome, people should still know that they happened, but it seems less impactful. It is very different than if there was an outcome that favoured a particular company over, you know, a nonprofit advocating for the opposite of that thing.

Mr. Sucha: That's a very fair note from the hon. member, Mr. Chair, and that might even open up a broader conversation of "How frequently do things get published?" or "How frequently do you report?" if I'm hearing you correctly there as well.

Mr. Mohiuddin: Yeah. I think what you're speaking – sorry; through the chair. What's being proposed is – my understanding is that that's not currently in the purview of the act. That would be potentially, like, a more substantial structural legislative change. Our recommendation there would be consultation to get there. But as far as I know, the act as it currently is: transparency is kind of the main goal in and of itself. There's an element of the act that kind of entrusts people that if they have this information that these meetings are happening between these individuals, they can make informed determinations from there. But above and beyond that, I think, it's a more structural change.

Dr. Elmeligi: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you.

Our next question comes from Member Dach.

Mr. Dach: Thank you very much, Chair. Mr. Sucha, I just noticed in doing a bit of research in your organization that you have an upcoming national convention on November 9 and 10, and I was wondering: on your agenda, what might be the most consuming issue that you'll be considering during your upcoming convention?

Mr. Sucha: There was something on the news yesterday, but within the convention, obviously, intergovernmental affairs and relations is coming up, and speaking in relation to the impacts of the trade wars in the United States is a big topic, and we're engaging heavily with them there. I anticipate, too, that there are going to be quite a bit of conversations surrounding the proposed revisions to the federal act and just some of the sort of overarching concerns that come from that and some of the reforms there as well.

Mr. Dach: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Dach.

Are there any further questions?

If not, thank you for your presentation.

We will now go to our final presentation this evening, and it's from the Edmonton Chamber of Voluntary Organizations. I'll invite Ms Gemma Dunn to the table. You have 10 minutes to present. Please proceed when you're ready.

Edmonton Chamber of Voluntary Organizations

Ms Dunn: Thank you, Mr. Chair and members of the committee, for the opportunity to speak today. As said, my name is Gemma Dunn. I'm the executive director of ECVO, the Edmonton Chamber of Voluntary Organizations, and we work to strengthen the nonprofit and charitable sector and support organizations serving communities across Alberta. We have over 350 member organizations currently.

Our recommendation is straightforward, and it's been spoken about by many of the speakers here today: maintain the current nonprofit exemption under Alberta's Lobbyists Act. We're in favour of transparency and accountability in government decision-making. We also believe regulation should respond to a demonstrated problem and be proportionate to the risk it addresses. Our written submission explains why we believe the existing exemption achieves that balance. Today I want to focus on what changing it could mean in practice both for public benefit nonprofit organizations and the government officials who rely on their knowledge. We have identified three clear areas for consideration.

The first is that the current exemption is targeted. It's not a blanket exemption for every organization that happens to be incorporated as a nonprofit organization. As our submission sets out, it excludes organizations established to serve management, union, or professional interests and nonprofit associations whose membership is primarily made up of profit-seeking enterprises or their representatives. That distinction matters. Nonprofit incorporation alone does not place an organization outside of the act. The existing approach recognizes the public benefit of community organizations engaging with government. A nonprofit may bring forward evidence about barriers to services, identify a gap in a provincial program, or recommend a change that would improve outcomes for the people it serves. Those conversations can influence government decisions. They can also help government make better decisions.

We are not suggesting that public benefit organizations have no interests of their own. They may advocate for funding or changes to the programs they deliver. Government should examine those requests carefully and hold organizations accountable to public funds, but that does not by itself establish that the current exemption creates a transparency gap requiring broader registration. ECVO is not aware of evidence that the exemption is being misused or has created a material gap in transparency. We encourage the committee to make that evidence central to its assessment of any proposed change.

The second concern is the practical cost of new requirements and the scale of the red tape they could create. As our written submission highlights, Alberta's nonprofit sector includes approximately 26,000 organizations, and about 58 per cent are entirely volunteer run, and another 21 per cent have fewer than five employees. These figures matter because they show both the size of the sector and its limited administrative capacity. Many organizations do not have a government relations department, in-house legal counsel, or a dedicated compliance position. Administrative workforce are the same people responsible for its programs, staffing, fundraising, and relationships with community. Across a sector of this size, even a modest new requirement could have a substantial collective cost.

That does not mean that every nonprofit would need to register, but removing or narrowing the exemption could require many organizations to spend time determining whether the new rules apply to them. This government has made a commitment to reducing red tape across all ministries. Removing the current exception would add red tape. This would look like time spent interpreting requirements, seeking advice, establishing tracking processes alongside work for government to explain and administer the rules. Those costs should be justified by a clearly identified problem and a demonstrated public benefit.

For many organizations the burden would begin before any registration or reporting would begin. They would need to understand whether the rules applied to them, which activities counted, what records to keep, who was responsible when a report was required. They would need to revisit those questions as their activities changed and as staff or volunteer leadership turned over. An important point to consider is that this effect is cumulative.

A new reporting requirement may appear manageable when considered alone. Organizations are experiencing it alongside other requirements they must meet. Many organizations are reporting doing more with less and experiencing many pressures by underfunding of administration. In our engagement with membership to develop our submission, over 80 per cent of organizations reported that inclusion in the act would create either a moderate or significant burden.

8:05

Consider a community organization preparing to discuss a service gap with a provincial official. Its staff should arrive with clear evidence about the issue, the people affected, and possible solutions. All of this takes time. If the exemption changes, they may find that they first need to seek advice about whether this discussion triggers registration or reporting obligations. This captures the practical concerns organizations will find themselves facing. Even where an interaction ultimately falls outside of a reporting requirement, understanding and documenting that conclusion can take time.

Government would also need to provide guidance, answer questions, and administer any expanded registration and compliance requirements. We're not putting a dollar figure on those costs. We are asking the committee to establish what additional public value would justify them.

Lastly, we must consider whose knowledge reaches government. The risk extends beyond the time spent counting hours and completing paperwork. It includes conversations that may never happen. Nonprofit boards are responsible for safeguarding public trust, managing organizational risk. When they are uncertain about a rule, some may choose to limit engagement rather than risk getting it wrong. This is what we mean by an advocacy chill. It's a risk that uncertainty will discourage organizations from bringing forward concerns or participating in policy discussions. The result could be a narrower range of community perspectives informing public decisions.

This matters because organizations closest to an emerging issue are not always organizations with administrative capacity. They may be the first to notice that people are falling through a service gap, that a program's eligibility rules are creating an unexpected barrier, or that a policy is working differently in practice than intended. Those observations help officials understand how decisions affect Albertans.

They can also bring forward concerns that are difficult to see in aggregate data. From ECVO's perspective as a capacity-building organization, supporting nonprofits includes helping them participate effectively in the decisions that shape their work. We want organizations to be able to share evidence, offer practical solutions, and raise concerns constructively. A change that discourages that participation would carry a public cost that cannot be measured by simply counting registrations.

Maintaining the exemption does not mean setting accountability aside. As our submission notes, it does not displace financial accountability requirements tied to public funding, nor does it shield industry or professional associations that fall outside of the exemption. We recognize that funding accountability and lobbying transparency serve different purposes. Our point is that each new requirement should have a clear purpose and a demonstrated benefit. Changing the exemption would therefore require a clear answer to several questions. What specific problem has been identified? How would the proposed change resolve it? What would it cost to administer? How would it affect participation by organizations with limited resources?

We would want to also urge caution about placing the current exemption with new eligibility tests or thresholds. A rule intended to benefit smaller organizations can still require every organization to work out which side of the line it falls on, and changing circumstances may require that assessment to be repeated. If the committee identifies evidence of a specific problem, that evidence should guide a focused response. In the absence of such evidence ECVO does not see a public policy rationale for imposing a broader requirement on public benefit organizations. Government benefits when community organizations can contribute their knowledge directly and confidently. Preserving that access should be part of the committee's assessment of the act's effectiveness.

I will close by returning to our recommendation. ECVO asked the committee to recommend maintaining the current nonprofit exemption under Alberta's Lobbyists Act. The exemption already draws a distinction between public benefit organizations and the commercial and professional interests excluded from it. We have not seen evidence that it would justify changing that approach. Removing or narrowing could add administrative work for organizations and government whilst making some voices less likely to be heard. The question is what a change would achieve for Albertans and whether it would benefit from the costs. On the evidence available to us maintaining the exemption preserves a targeted approach to transparency and supports the flow of community knowledge into public decision-making.

Thank you, and I welcome your questions.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms Dunn, for your presentation.

I now want to give the committee members the opportunity to ask questions of our presenter. Are there any questions? Mr. Stephan.

Mr. Stephan: Thank you. Thank you for your presentation. As I understand it, the advocacy is to preserve the nonprofit exemption and trying to see if there are any gaps in respect of that, and you're not aware of any.

Ms Dunn: Absolutely.

Mr. Stephan: That's fair.

Just one thought that came to my mind as I was kind of listening to your presentation: do you think there would be an issue if a minister had a spouse who was a director or senior officer of a nonprofit organization that was lobbying for money or a grant? Do you think that that would be something that should be disclosed? That's the only exception I could kind of think of. I think you're right. It's a pretty narrow class. I'm trying to think if it's an absolute cover, having a nonprofit exemption, which I think 99 per cent of the time it probably is. Just curious.

Ms Dunn: Yeah. Through the chair, I would say that there are multiple accountability mechanisms inside of a nonprofit organization, especially if they're a charity as well. Then you've got CRA rules that you have to report on your T3010 around lobbying activity. I mean, that could happen. But you would hope that the board of the organization would be very clear and they would have policies that direct clear authority around who gets to do lobbying.

For example, in my organization only the executive director is authorized by the board to go out and speak to government officials around activities for ECVO. I think that what we would look for is organizations to have stringent policies around who gets to make decisions and what those decisions look like, and I think that there has to be accountability on the government side around, "How are you making decisions around what funding gets attributed to organizations?" and open and transparent processes around how funding and contracts are determined.

Like, usually there's an open and transparent process. It goes through the ministry. Administrative staff have to make – so they report it through a structure of points, and then those decisions are made. I think that there would be a huge crack in the system if a minister was able to just say, "Fund this organization" and they've been able to bypass all of the accountability mechanisms that government already has.

Mr. Stephan: Sure. Well, that's why in part we have a Lobbyists Act, to be that safeguard.

I wasn't necessarily thinking of the spouse making the direct lobbying. Do you see any conflict if the spouse of a minister or decision-maker was a director of a nonprofit organization lobbying for grants and things of that nature?

Ms Dunn: I mean, I could see that, but we do have conflict-of-interest policies that are embedded into our governance system. Organizations should have – you should be declaring conflicts of interest when the board is discussing something like a funding system like that. So if you are married to a director and it's being sort of – that funding would come through a very particular mechanism. It wouldn't be coming through a normal mechanism in terms of how contracts are usually applied to nonprofit organizations. In theory, that director should be excusing themselves from any kind of conversation about that because there's a conflict of interest there.

The Chair: Thank you.

Thank you, Member Stephan.

We will now go to Member Hoyle.

Member Hoyle: Thank you. I just wanted to give you an opportunity to give the committee an example that's really clear. You've warned that removing the nonprofit exemption could make it harder for small volunteer-led organizations to speak up. Can you give us a concrete example that you can think of of an organization that might think twice about bringing an issue to an MLA or a minister? What would government actually miss out in losing, from a front-line perspective, in good governance and decision-making for good policy?

Ms Dunn: Yeah. One organization that just springs to mind immediately is Kulan. It's a Somali organization that serves youth in the north of Edmonton. They're a very small organization, and they're doing amazing work in supporting the Somali community and integration into Alberta communities. If they had to register as lobbyists and, like, start to track their time, I know for a fact that their executive director would not be trying to meet with elected officials because they would always err on the side of caution. I think we heard that earlier in terms of being asked to register, and it's, like, err on the side of caution. I think that many nonprofit organizations would err on the side of caution, and they wouldn't be wanting to approach, so then you wouldn't get that richness of how policies or programs or particular things are starting to bubble up in communities that give MLAs and ministers really good information about what's happening on the ground.

8:15

Another example would be organizations like Bent Arrow, who give an awful lot of advice to ministers around kinship care and what that looks like and how their communities participate in that. They would have second thoughts about, like, how they would participate in that, and you would lose that richness of how families are actually experiencing policy programs. And you'd also lose that foresight in terms of being able to understand what is coming down the stream that we can't see quite yet but it's on its way towards us.

Member Hoyle: Thank you very much.

Thank you, Chair.

The Chair: Thank you, Member Hoyle.

Are there any further questions?

Seeing none, thank you, Ms Dunn, for your presentation.

Ms Dunn: Thanks very much.

The Chair: Hon. members, that concludes our presentations for this evening. I would like to thank our presenters on behalf of the committee.

Hon. members, the committee has received written submissions and oral presentations as part of our review of the Lobbyists Act. Are there any further comments, questions, or motions regarding the information gathered in this phase of the review of the Lobbyists Act? Mr. Dach.

Mr. Dach: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I'm wondering. I think it would be appropriate that someone move – and I'm prepared to do so – that the Standing Committee on Alberta's Economic Future direct the Legislative Assembly Office to prepare an issues document in support of the committee's review of the Lobbyists Act and distribute it to the committee members for their review.

Mr. Roth: Sorry. Could you restate that?

Mr. Dach: Could I repeat that?

Mr. Roth: Yeah.

Mr. Dach: Yes, I could. I move that

> the Standing Committee on Alberta's Economic Future direct the Legislative Assembly Office to prepare an issues document in

support of the committee's review of the Lobbyists Act and distribute it to committee members for their review.

I'm prepared to repeat.

Mr. Roth: Sorry. It's just a lag on the screen.

Mr. Dach: Ah.

The Chair: Mr. Dach, your motion is slightly different than the wording that we have. Would you like to amend your motion, or does this wording work for you?

Mr. Dach: Let me check. Yeah. That's satisfactory.

The Chair: Is there any discussion on this motion? Member van Dijken.

Mr. van Dijken: I don't know. The wording to me is somewhat confusing: committee of the Lobbyists Act.

Mr. Roth: I'm sorry. I think there might be a typo up there.

Mr. van Dijken: I don't know. I'm not worried about the typo, but I am worried about: like, we want to see written submissions and oral presentations of the Lobbyists Act made to the committee. You know what I mean? I'm just worried that we're putting it to . . .

Mr. Stephan: Is "of" supposed to be "on"?

The Chair: Let the table officer . . .

Mr. Roth: Sorry. It should be "in relation to its review of the Lobbyists Act."

Member Hoyle: That's right.

Mr. Roth: Sorry. Just let me make a quick correction here.

Mr. Dach: Yeah. That'll work.

Mr. Roth: Sorry. I think there was a piece that got cut out from the standard motion.

Mr. van Dijken: Okay.

The Chair: Members, will this motion work as amended?

Dr. Elmeligi: Yes.

The Chair: Are there further questions, then, or any further discussion on the motion?

Dr. Elmeligi: I guess I just have a question. Sorry. It says "through." Maybe this isn't a big deal. Maybe it's just because it's 8:30 and I'm tired, but it says issues and proposals identified "through written submissions and oral presentations," so that's assuming that we have received, either through a written submission or the presentations we had this evening, all of the information that will be included in this review. Are there other – like I said, I'm tired. Are there other sources of information that we would want considered in this issues document?

The Chair: Member Elmeligi, I will get the table officer to explain.

Dr. Elmeligi: Okay. Thank you.

Mr. Roth: Thanks, Mr. Chair. This document is – I don't know if this will directly answer your question – a standard document that's prepared sort of at the end of the information collection phase. Of course, it's up to the committee to decide if there are additional sources of information that you may want to collect. I don't know what that would be. This document would take the written submissions that the committee has received, the information received here this evening, and it would condense it, you know, so it would identify the proposals that were made. It would identify recommendations that may have come out from those presentations, so it would be in relation to the written submissions and the oral presentations. I don't know what other source you might be looking at, but it's basically to take the submissions received that the committee has asked for and put a summary of those issues and the proposals made into a document so that when the committee hits the deliberation phase, those are all in a document that is available for you to see.

Dr. Elmeligi: Yeah. I guess something that has occurred to me based on some of what we heard tonight is that there's been this continual comparison between our Lobbyists Act and the B.C. lobbyist act and the changes that they've made recently to the threshold and to the nonprofit exemption, and I would be very curious to know about, like, the challenges or successes that have happened in B.C. since they made those changes. And I'm not sure when we get to talk about that or who researches that. Do we just research that and talk about it when we get into deliberation, or where would we be able to learn more about that?

Mr. Roth: Thank you, Mr. Chair. There was a crossjurisdictional document that was prepared for the committee, so that's available. That's a separate document from what is being proposed here. I mean, if the committee were wanting to seek additional input, the committee could certainly move in that direction. You know, if you were looking to hear from somebody about that, the committee could make that decision to hear from those people in the areas that you identified. Up till now what the crossjurisdictional document has is sort of a comparison of what the legislation is and the regulation there in those jurisdictions. If the committee were looking for more, the committee can ask for more for sure, but that would be a decision for the committee to make.

Dr. Elmeligi: A separate thing. Okay. That's fine. Thank you.

The Chair: Is there any further discussion?

If not, I'll call the question. All in favour? Any opposed?

That motion is carried.

Hon. members, the next steps in our review of the Lobbyists Act will be to commence deliberations and make recommendations to be included in the committee's report to the Assembly. This will take place at an upcoming meeting.

Are there any other business discussions for today's meeting?

Seeing none, the date of the next meeting will be at the call of the chair.

I will now call for a motion to adjourn. Would a member like to move to adjourn?

Mr. van Dijken: So moved.

The Chair: Member van Dijken. All in favour? That motion is carried.

Thank you, everyone. The meeting is adjourned.

[The committee adjourned at 8:25 p.m.]

Published under the Authority of the Speaker
of the Legislative Assembly of Alberta