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The 29th Legislature
Fourth Session

Alberta Hansard

Wednesday morning, November 21, 2018

Day 51

The Honourable Robert E. Wanner, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta
The 29th Legislature

Fourth Session

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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

9 a.m.

Wednesday, November 21, 2018

[Ms Sweet in the chair]

Prayers

The Acting Speaker: Good morning.

Let us reflect or pray each in our own way. Today marks the 86th anniversary of the creation of Alberta's first provincial parks, which have preserved some of the natural beauty of Alberta for us and our children and will continue to do so for future generations of Albertans. During our deliberations today let us keep in mind that the work that we do today should be forward looking. We should strive to make the lives of Albertans better and easier and to preserve this province for generations to come.

Orders of the Day

Government Bills and Orders

Second Reading

Bill 25

Canyon Creek Hydro Development Act

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for West Yellowhead.

Mr. Rosendahl: Well, thank you, Madam Speaker. It's always a pleasure to rise in the House. I rise today on behalf of the Minister of Energy to move second reading of Bill 25, the Canyon Creek Hydro Development Act.

On August 2, 2018, the Alberta Utilities Commission approved Turning Point Generation's Canyon Creek application, and that application is for a 75-megawatt, closed-loop, pumped hydro energy storage project. The AUC determined that the project is in the public interest and should proceed. This triggers a legislative requirement on our part under the Hydro and Electric Energy Act. Once a report like this one from the AUC is submitted to the Lieutenant Governor in Council, section 9 of the act requires that Executive Council direct a bill to be prepared. This allows the AUC to authorize construction of this project. Section 10 requires an order in council to authorize operation of the hydro project.

In its review and approval the AUC considered both the construction and operation of the project. This enables the passage of this bill to authorize the AUC to make an order for both the construction and operation of the Canyon Creek project. This bill is one step in the project approval process. The company has expressed strong interest in advancing this project but can only do so after receiving authority to proceed from the Alberta Utilities Commission. The AUC can only approve construction and subsequent operations of the project upon royal assent of the bill. With this bill, if passed, the Canyon Creek project still will be subject to further approvals from the Alberta Utilities Commission and Alberta Environment and Parks.

Madam Speaker, I'd like to share a few details about the proposed Canyon Creek project. The proposed Canyon Creek project is located about 13 kilometres northeast of Hinton. It is not a large-scale hydroelectric dam. Rather, it's a small, 75-megawatt, closed-loop, pumped hydro energy storage project. A closed-loop project like this one isn't connected to naturally flowing sources of water. The location is easily accessible to existing infrastructure while isolated enough on Crown land for minimal disruption to neighbouring communities and landowners.

The project has received letters of support from local communities and officials and will bring long-term economic benefits. As the project is adjacent to a previously disturbed area, the old Obed coal mine, and is not connected to existing natural water bodies, we expect environmental impacts to be reduced. That said, the company will be required to adhere to and meet all of the province's strong environmental standards. The company has consulted with stakeholders to discuss any concerns.

At this point I think it's important to note that the bill would not remove any of the regulatory authority of the Alberta Utilities Commission or Alberta Environment and Parks. Through this proposed legislation we would be granting the Alberta Utilities Commission the authority to approve the construction and operation of the Canyon Creek project, and Alberta Environment and Parks would still be required to issue the approvals.

It's also important to note that this bill would only apply to this one project. A similar bill, the Dunvegan Hydro Development Act, was passed in 2009 under the same process. Any future hydroelectric project would require a separate bill and go through the same approval process.

Madam Speaker, this is a good-news story for Alberta, showing that companies are confident to invest in our province. Projects like this show a long-term vision and demonstrate a long-term commitment to investment in Alberta. Alberta has always been a leader in oil and gas, and increasing the production of greener electricity will further enhance our leadership position as a responsible energy producer.

I hope that all members support me in moving forward with Bill 25. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other members wishing to speak? The hon. Member for Calgary-Foothills.

Mr. Panda: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Good morning. I rise to speak to Bill 25, the Canyon Creek Hydro Development Act. Normally when a project requires the approval of cabinet to proceed, it simply receives it. In this case, however, the law is different, as I understand. The Alberta Utilities Commission approved Turning Point Generation's Canyon Creek pumped hydroelectricity storage project on a portion of the site of the former Obed coal mine near Hinton. The Hydro and Electric Energy Act is written in such a way that hydro projects have to be brought before the Legislative Assembly to receive approval.

Now, I'm sure there is an explanation for this requirement to bring hydro projects to the Legislature for approval. But in this case the requirement to bring this project to the Legislative Assembly looks a lot like a piece of red tape for project approval. The UCP is committed to eliminating red tape. Madam Speaker, my colleague from Cardston-Taber-Warner is assigned by our caucus to consult multiple stakeholders on how we reduce red tape and speed track projects like this.

The Canyon Creek project is designed by incorporating two small off-stream water reservoirs. One is up the hill by the Obed mine, and the other one is at the bottom, not far from the Athabasca River. These two man-made lakes will be connected by the pipeline with pumps, turbines, and generating equipment near the bottom reservoir and powerhouse. The design utilizes a closed-loop system, the first of its kind in Alberta, and it will use the same water repeatedly for pumping and generating. There are other companies interested in similar projects, Madam Speaker, and since there are going to be more renewable energy projects in the province, we're going to need more projects like the Canyon Creek hydro development to act as storage for electricity.

This project acts like a battery or a green peaker plant. When electricity prices are high, the water falls from a high pond over the generators to a low pond, producing 75 megawatts over 37 hours. When electricity prices are low, the water is pumped up the hill for storage. Now, for the physics people out there, I know there is a concern about the energy equation around the conservation of energy with this project. But, as you know, Madam Speaker, one theory in physics is that energy cannot be created or destroyed, only changed in form. I'm assured this project is more about conserving low-price electricity for use at high prices with 80 per cent efficiency.

9:10

We need new generating plants to replace the coal-fired plants that are retiring, are forced by the NDP government just to meet their ideological policy goals. They have accelerated the phase-out of coal mines more than the prescribed federal requirement. With that, you know, Madam Speaker, Alberta taxpayers are on the hook to compensate generating companies and the coal mines. That's a different story for a different day. But we need new generating plants to replace those coal-fired plants, and this project is a good opportunity to create that required generation. We also need the generating peaker plants to backstop wind and solar projects.

The Canyon Creek hydro development is estimated at \$200 million in private investment and 300 construction jobs near Hinton. Once the Legislature approves this project, that is not the end of the approvals, Madam Speaker. Alberta Environment and Parks is going to need to issue some permits. One of those permits will be a Water Act permit to withdraw water from the Athabasca one time to fill the ponds, and water will also be needed every so often to compensate for evaporation. So although they are going to recycle the same water, they have to top up to compensate their operation.

But it is those water permits that are of greatest concern. This project was approved by the AUC on August 2, 2018. It took 14 weeks to get the bill before the Legislature. That is three months, one-quarter of a year. Bill 25 will likely have Legislature approval this week. Then the Lieutenant Governor has to give royal assent. But it is the licences from Alberta Environment and Parks that will be the holdup.

We know from experience, talking to municipalities at the Rural Municipalities of Alberta this week, that people are waiting years for permits out of Alberta Environment and Parks. Simple things like gravel extraction are tied up, and construction projects for public projects like roads, including provincial highways, are stopping because of Alberta Environment and Parks. They need to look for critters in the ditches or travelling through the culvert that is about to be replaced. These studies can only be done between the months of May and October because – well, who wants to be out in the snow and cold, Madam Speaker? – the studies apparently need to see free-flowing water.

Alberta Environment and Parks is known to have held up permits for changing the fuel used by the cement plants in the order of two to three years. On a simple fuel change, Madam Speaker. Yesterday I was talking to the Cement Association, and that's what they told me. It took two to three years to get a yes or no to stop burning coal and switch to garbage instead. Two years. They're trying to replace coal because they burn coal to create heat in their clinker and cement plant. They're trying to be innovative. They want to use commercial and industrial garbage instead to generate that heat, but Alberta Environment and Parks took two to three years to give those simple permits.

Meanwhile the same cement producers in, of all places, British Columbia get those permits in 21 days. If anyone on the other side,

on the government benches, can take note of this and can do something about this, that would be great. Madam Speaker, it's unacceptable. If other provinces are taking 21 days and we are taking two to three years, we are sending the wrong message to investors. It doesn't take two to three years to check the science and to do a risk assessment. Use some common sense and take a customer service approach to government before issuing permits.

With that, Madam Speaker, I believe this is a good project for the Hinton area and for Alberta, and I believe enough time has been wasted on the approval process and debate and that we should get on with this pump hydro project. This is a green project that is needed with the level of renewables being introduced to the Alberta electricity market.

I urge all my colleagues on both sides of the aisle to support this bill. Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other members wishing to speak to Bill 25?

Seeing none, the hon. Member for West Yellowhead to close debate.

Mr. Rosendahl: Madam Speaker, yes, I close debate on this. Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

[Motion carried; Bill 25 read a second time]

Bill 23

An Act to Renew Local Democracy in Alberta

Mrs. Pitt moved that the motion for second reading of Bill 23, An Act to Renew Local Democracy in Alberta, be amended by deleting all the words after "that" and substituting the following:

Bill 23, An Act to Renew Local Democracy in Alberta, be not now read a second time but that the subject matter of the bill be referred to the Standing Committee on Resource Stewardship in accordance with Standing Order 74.2.

[Debate adjourned on the amendment November 20: Mr. Cooper speaking]

The Acting Speaker: Are there any members wishing to speak to Bill 23? The hon. Member for Little Bow.

Mr. Schneider: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It's always a pleasure to rise in this room to speak to legislation that affects all Albertans. Today we speak to Bill 23, An Act to Renew Local Democracy in Alberta. Now, this bill proposes a variety of amendments and changes to the Local Authorities Election Act. As many others have mentioned . . .

The Acting Speaker: Hon. member, sorry to interrupt. My mistake. We're still on the referral, so I just wanted to clarify for the House that we're speaking to the amendment still.

Mr. Schneider: I'm speaking to the referral, Madam Speaker. Thank you.

As many others have mentioned in this room, this is a complex piece of legislation that needs time to be gone through with a fine-tooth comb, so to speak. It is a bill that, quite frankly, needs to have some consultation done, I believe. You know, we on this side certainly need to have enough time to consult with the towns in rural Alberta, the villages, rural municipalities, Métis settlements, and any other entity that this piece of legislation proposes to affect. I guess I should continue: I think it also talks about school boards and irrigation districts.

After giving the document a read through, the only conclusion I can come to, given the short time we have, is that legislation such as this requires a little more time than the government has allocated. Now, that's fine. Time is the currency of the Legislature; that's understood. But something this encompassing, something that affects people right down to the neighbourhoods, hamlets, and settlements that they live in, needs more than cursory attention to detail, Madam Speaker. We need to do our due diligence. That's why my colleagues and I are so insistent that this bill be referred to the proper legislative committee. As my colleague from Livingstone-Macleod mentioned, I too have some questions that need to be answered. Now, whether we get the answers is entirely a horse of a different colour.

Madam Speaker, I'm a pretty big fan of movie westerns. If you were to take a walk through my office here at the Federal Building, it would take you several minutes to take in the western memorabilia that I've brought to Edmonton in order to have a place that I feel comfortable in when I write speeches like this one. Now, if this bill were a western, it might be characterized as *The Good, the Bad and the Ugly* because, in my opinion, there are elements of each here.

Let's start with the bad. I feel like a glass-half-empty kind of guy today. That being said, some of the bad includes, for starters, in my opinion, the fact that this legislation appears to me likely to increase third-party advertisers, or political action committees. Third-party advertisers' presence in municipal elections is likely to increase. Now, this has been a huge bone of contention with the government as far as provincial politics are concerned. I certainly have no problem with the fact that big money was taken out of provincial elections. Let's be clear here. This side of the House certainly supported that change right out of the gate, and we're proud to do so.

9:20

Now, the political action committees have primarily been seen in the provincial realm in Alberta politics due to changes made by this government's reform to election laws, but it has not dissuaded the government from attempting it here for other realms, I guess I would say. The new proposed rules appear to favour political action committees over candidates, especially outside of the election period. Political action committees appear to be able to spend with limited impunity possibly directed at a specific candidate or incumbent. I mean, I don't know how else you could read the intent here. PACs certainly need to disclose any contributions they receive, but they need to disclose those contributions that will be used to promote or oppose a candidate.

Madam Speaker, what is being suggested here is that we bring provincial partisan politics and the ways of provincial partisan politics into the realm of municipalities and Métis settlements and school boards and irrigation districts, where, in my experience, this kind of politics has not been seen. Based on that statement alone, I believe that the amendment that has been put forward here from my good friend and colleague from Airdrie to refer this bill to committee is absolutely the right thing to do.

I have served as a councillor in a municipality, a small municipality, not a city by any means. The geographic area of that municipality is 2,150 square miles, so it covered a big area. I think it would comfortably fit the city of Calgary, the area that that city sits on, six times within that municipality. Of course, there's a slight discrepancy with population. I think our municipality was populated with 6,800 people. The municipality that I was part of the council for actually only had 3,800. One town and five villages made up the rest of that population.

In my tenure I certainly was never aware of any councillor that took a contribution in order to get themselves re-elected. Actually, I never heard of a councillor taking a donation to his campaign in rural municipal politics, period. It doesn't mean it didn't happen, but in my experience I certainly never saw it. But, like I said, I was a councillor in a small municipality, where everyone knows who the councillors are, and it really would be somewhat rare for a contentious election at all. Door-knocking in rural Alberta is usually still the preferred way to remind ratepayers that there's an election coming up and that you may be running in it.

But I understand that this isn't necessarily the case when it comes to municipal politics in cities, certainly the big cities. I understand that councillors can and do raise money for their potential re-election bid at any time throughout the year. I kind of get the reason for this proposed piece of legislation when it comes to city elections, elections where councillors represent areas of the city or wards where big money may indeed be spent in one of those wards. For example, perhaps a developer whose project is coming before council the following week could offer a donation to a councillor of a ward where that may be happening in order to try and sway things more in his favour, and no one would ever know.

Back to what we were speaking about here a moment ago, political action committees and councillors and what the difference is when it comes to raising money for a campaign, again, I believe that this would be more likely in a big city, in my opinion, than in the vast majority of municipalities across this province.

While the individual is limited to only \$2,000 to spend over the first three years following an election, which is supposed to be countering a potential political action committee's narrative, guess what? The PAC appears to be able to spend unlimited amounts of money attacking various opponents or supporting various opponents. It just seems somewhat unfair to me, Madam Speaker, especially as I have always tended to side with the underdog in situations like that, for the most part.

Speaking of the little guy, why are we limiting the amount that an individual can actually campaign? After all, municipal elections are nonpartisan, and often the candidate's name recognition is key to their success. That certainly enhances concerns that these changes will further solidify the chances incumbents will have to retain their position. After all, local politics is often where people first get involved because of the nonpartisan nature. I can't be the only one that has deep concerns that these changes are kind of burdensome and may cause potential candidates to feel somewhat of a sense of intimidation.

In this day and age where groups across the political spectrum are trying to attract more people to get involved – as I think we all know in this room, all levels of politics seem to have the same problem – I'm not sure how any of these changes would give newcomers the kind of incentive required to get involved. Why are we throwing up additional barriers, Madam Speaker?

Has the government done any outreach on this subject? That would be a question I would have. If they have, we certainly haven't had it shared on this side of the House. This is, I think, a solid argument for sending this bill to committee. Why not hear from representative groups of all sorts to see what they have to say? I mean, what could be the harm? Why are we making things more onerous?

Speaking of which, I'll segue right here into another onerous little tidbit. Why is it that in provincial politics the threshold for donation disclosure is set at \$250, but the legislation that we're talking about today wants to make the threshold \$50? I just wonder: why not \$250, which would mimic the provincial rates? It's just another question. I would certainly like to hear the reason for that number.

Speaking of cents, a little tongue-in-cheek, of course, wordplay, we do have a dollars-and-cents issue, and that is that there seem to be significant changes to the campaign limits. It seems that if you're a candidate running for re-election or simply a candidate who's looking to get a head start on campaigning early, you won't be totally prohibited, but there are certain restrictions. During the first three years the proposed rules would allow you to spend up to \$2,000 on things like door-knocking and literature promoting you as the candidate. If you're a self-funded candidate, however, your eligible contribution has been lowered from \$10,000 to \$4,000, matching the new donation limits. Now, I'm not sure of the rationale here, to be honest. I mean, if you're self-funded, it's your money. Another reason to toss this to committee to find out if this is something that potentially is a huge problem here in municipal campaigns. In my experience I certainly haven't heard of this being an issue, certainly from the small municipality side of Alberta politics. Of course, big-city and small-town politics certainly have different situations. I'd like some clarification on that for sure.

Going back to local politics, these new campaign financing rules, in my opinion, this certainly seems to me that it makes raising money for a local campaign much more difficult when you're raising it \$50 at a time. Unfortunately, the main complaint we've heard from stakeholders and constituents in the little amount of time we've had to speak with them regarding municipal elections appears to have been totally missed. None of the proposed amendments in Bill 23 allow for a municipal candidate to issue tax receipts for municipal donations. It seems the legislation fails on this one point. Potentially there's a very good reason for it; I just haven't heard it. I would love to hear what the minister would have to say about that.

To recap, this legislation makes it harder to raise money for local nonpartisan campaigns, it lowers the disclosure limit to \$50, it throws up hurdles that could limit people from jumping into or participating in local politics, it enacts legislation that may give rise to even more political action committees and in local politics no less, and it doesn't allow municipal campaigns to issue tax receipts. So, Madam Speaker, this seems to counter what I think the government is trying to accomplish here. Maybe I'm being a little too harsh or a little too negative. Maybe these fears are unfounded. Maybe that could easily be solved by consulting in an open forum in front of an all-party committee.

Now all that said, that's not to say that there aren't positives in Bill 23. To continue with the good, the bad, and the ugly, there is some good in there. There are elements that increase local autonomy. It puts elections back in the hands of local government by leaving the administration of elections with the local municipality. Elements of this legislation go to improving transparency and accountability of municipal elections, and I think everyone in the room and every municipality would agree that this is a good thing, Madam Speaker.

9:30

The thing that I feel is a vast improvement in the local election scene is that it goes a long way to extending the prohibition on campaigning, extending it to include the voting station property, and that includes the parking lot. I think that includes hallways, et cetera, no longer walking through an election-filled obstacle course. That, I think, once again, is more likely in a city, but I think that would be a pleasant change that a lot of people would agree with.

Another important aspect I find myself liking is the accessibility aspect. For instance, any municipality with over 5,000 people will now be required to have at least one advance poll ahead of the regular voting day. While several of us have some concerns about the cost being borne locally, ultimately this is about improving

turnout and making voting more accessible to people. Additionally, any legislation to increase locations for voting for people who can't get to traditional voting places is a big win in my books, Madam Speaker.

Now, I have decidedly mixed feelings about a couple of additional aspects of the legislation, notably the amendment that eliminates the need for a voter to have resided in Alberta . . .

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any members wishing to speak under 29(2)(a)? The hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake.

Mr. Cyr: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I really appreciate this opportunity to speak to you on this wonderful Wednesday morning. You know, I was so enthralled with my colleague's speech. I was hoping to hear a little bit more, so if he wouldn't mind continuing, I'd appreciate that.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Little Bow.

Mr. Schneider: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I really didn't know I had an enthralling effect on those in the House today, but I'd be glad to continue.

As I said, I have decidedly mixed feelings about a couple of additional aspects of the legislation, notably the amendment that eliminates the need for a voter to have resided in Alberta for six months prior to being eligible to vote in an election, leaving only one requirement, the only requirement being that they're 18 years old and a Canadian citizen. Also, the part about expanding vouching provisions, which was explained to me earlier this week in the government's tech briefing. Staff verbally informed opposition parties that the rule was that one elector can vouch for one other elector. However, I can't see anything in Bill 23, in the proposed legislation, that appears to limit the number of times someone can vouch for an elector. Perhaps, if the government sees fit to grant our motion this morning, we can find ways to address this concern, bring more clarity, bring transparency, which is what the government is trying to do with this whole piece of legislation.

Now, the ugly part of this whole movie scenario can be subjective. To my way of thinking the ugly has to be the transitional aspect of this legislation. Despite not being passed, the bill is retroactive to introduction at first reading; in other words, November 5, 2018. What that means to me is that any councillor who has already started collecting contributions with the desire to participate in our democratic process, in our democratic system, if said candidate has already accepted contributions with the thought of running in a 2021 municipal election, they will be prohibited. They simply won't be able to accept any more contributions from now until January 1, 2021, upon passage of this piece of legislation. With all the limits this legislation has already heaped upon an individual who just wants to make a difference in some small way, a contribution to help make their community a better place – that's where a lot of great politicians get their start. To further restrict their ability to challenge the status quo, well, quite simply, I would call that another ugly addition to politics, Madam Speaker.

That's another compelling reason that I believe everyone should get behind this motion. Let's fix this legislation and make the political process a better one, better than the way we found it when we got here. Because unlike the time-honoured western movie that I have alluded to throughout this speech, this bill is anything but a classic in its current form. It should be sent back to the editing room or, in this case, a suitable legislative committee.

That being said, thank you very much, Madam Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other members wishing to speak under 29(2)(a)? Bonnyville-Cold Lake.

Mr. Cyr: Thank you very much. I have to say that the Member for Little Bow has done a wonderful job explaining to this House exactly what it is that we need to do. We need to refer this to committee. He's made some pretty compelling arguments. The fact is that whenever you've got government moving something this fast through the House, we need to maybe rein back and say: let's use some caution. I can tell you that when it comes to consulting with municipalities on this issue, I think that we all can agree that our elected leaders in rural Alberta and even urban Alberta all share a common voice that we need to get this right the first time.

Now, I really do think that the Member for Little Bow hit this concern right on the head when it comes to the name of one of his favourite westerns, *The Good, the Bad and the Ugly*. Now I understand that this government really is trying to do good, but will there be bad coming out of this, and will it get ugly for the government? That is the real question here.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other members wishing to speak to the referral? The hon. Member for Highwood.

Mr. W. Anderson: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It's indeed a pleasure this morning to rise in the House to speak on the referral amendment for Bill 23, An Act to Renew Local Democracy in Alberta. The main purpose of this bill is to better align local elections, including municipalities, school boards, Métis settlements, and irrigation districts, to provincial election laws, some of which have already been changed in this bill. This Bill 23 will amend the Local Authorities Election Act to reflect the changes that are being proposed. This would better align local elections with provincial elections regarding the rules around fundraising, donations, and political action committees.

Now, let's first look at the mechanics of this bill, starting with campaign contributions. First off, Bill 23 will seek to ban corporate, union, and employer organizations from donating to candidates in municipal elections. I believe this is a change that I can support. Members of this Assembly previously passed legislation that would institute these changes at the provincial level. It makes good sense to synchronize legislation between provincial elections and local elections. Furthermore, it's important to keep special interests at bay when influencing local campaigning.

The reality is that an individual cannot compete with a large union or corporation when they want the candidate's ear. Under this legislation local election candidates will only be able to accept donations from individuals, thus giving individual citizens more of a level playing field. However, corporations, unions, and employer organizations can donate to third-party advertisers, often known as political action committees, or PACs. These PACs have no limit on the amount of money they can collect from unions, corporations, and employer organizations. This means that these groups will have the ability to participate in local elections through third parties. Now, it's important to note that groups that are not unions or employer organizations cannot donate money to PACs or pay for advertising unless it was collected from its members expressly for that purpose.

Madam Speaker, another change that Bill 23 will make is a reduction in the campaign period to one year. Currently the campaign period is four years, from January 1 of the year following the election to December 31 in the year of that election. This change

may have some adversarial consequences, which is why I believe we need to refer this bill to committee. What is the impact of this on both current and prospective candidates? Has the government given proper consultation?

9:40

With a change like this, I think it's important that we hear directly from the stakeholders in a public forum because a question we can ask is: why are we limiting the amount of time that a candidate can campaign? Especially with the nonpartisan nature of local elections, incumbents will have a clear advantage in most circumstances. For a nonincumbent to be able to have a fighting chance at beating an incumbent, they often have to start campaigning more than a year in advance, and if they are unable to raise or spend money, how much of an effort can they really conduct? The reality is that these changes can further entrench incumbents and make it even more difficult to beat them in a local election.

The next legislative change that we can look at is the reduction of an individual's donation limit. Now, currently the limit is \$5,000 per candidate. With the changes that are being proposed, this limit will now be \$4,000 in total for all municipal candidates and \$4,000 for all school board candidates. This, of course, is bringing the donation limits more in line with provincial legislation, a common theme in Bill 23. However, an issue we can bring up with this is: what if a person wants to support more than one candidate? Many municipalities have large districts where voters can choose multiple candidates. What if they would like to financially support more than one candidate? I don't think this bill addresses that. That's another reason why we should send it back to committee. This could be very much a shortcoming of this legislation, in my opinion.

There's also no longer an exception for candidates who are self-funding their campaigns. Under the current rules candidates can spend up to \$10,000 of their own money on a campaign. This exception will be removed completely if Bill 23 passes. I think that individuals who want to individually donate to their own campaign should have the opportunity to do so.

Now, Madam Speaker, much like the provincial legislation, there are no limits on contributions for political action committees. I believe this may be a cause for concern. I don't know if we're getting this right or not, and I don't know the full implication of this change. I'd like to consult with some people to get some answers. Given the tight timeline we're in during this spring session – spring session? This is a fall session. Who wrote this speech? MLAs don't have much time to consult with local stakeholders; however, that is why we have committees. [interjections] I'm still thinking of my Arizona trip coming up this fall, I guess.

Committees are able to take the time to study legislation and give all factors due consideration. That is why we need to support the referral amendment and allow for this legislation to get the proper study it really needs.

Bill 23 will also seek to change the amount of money candidates can spend precampaign. Under the current rules the campaign period more or less lasts the entire time the candidate was or is in office, so there would be no need to have any rules around precampaign expenses. However, since this government decided to limit the campaign period so significantly, they had to create rules about how money is spent outside the campaign period. Bill 23 caps both the amount a candidate can spend and raise at \$2,000.

Now, we can ask the question about what impact that will have on municipal and school board politics. What if a candidate is being targeted by a third-party group? Can the candidate significantly defend themselves? Is a \$2,000 cap enough? I don't think so. These are all questions I have, and I don't know that I can say that I have the answers to them. I'm hoping that if this gets back to committee,

we can ask those questions of those people who are going to be impacted by it. Once again, that is why we refer bills to committee, to get these questions answered by experts, giving us legislators a better understanding of how to both vote on and improve legislation because that's really what our job is.

Another point of this I can bring up: does one-size-fits-all really work for noncampaign spending limits? Why does a municipality like Edmonton or Calgary have the same spending limit and fundraising limit as small towns, small towns where my hon. friends and I grew up in and live in? Two thousand dollars doesn't go very far in a big city. As such, I believe that this could be a shortcoming in this legislation and another reason to refer this bill to committee.

Madam Speaker, let's look at campaign period spending. Bill 23 will leave this up to regulations with caps likely to be based on the size of the municipality and school board. We, of course, won't be able to see the regulations until the bill is passed, so Albertans are going to have to trust the minister and the government to get the regulations right the first time. Of course, as the opposition we want to hold the government to account to ensure that these regulations are proper. However, this government has given us very little reason to trust them, so it is important not to leave too much up to the discretion of the minister. Too much power in the hands of the minister might not be a good thing.

Let's look at the enforcement of these new rules. Bill 23 will grant additional power to the Election Commissioner to investigate, prosecute, and enforce rules related to campaign finance and third-party advertising of municipal and local school board elections. Is this the proper way that local election violations should be investigated? It might be, but we would be able to have more of a complete picture if we referred this bill back to committee.

Madam Speaker, Bill 23 will also change some of the rules around third-party advertising and political action committees. This legislation will require PACs to disclose contributions they will receive to promote or to oppose a candidate. PACs will also have to register with the local jurisdictions and indicate whether they are for or against a specific candidate or a particular issue, special-interest groups. I believe that some of these steps are favourable. It is very important that additional transparency is legislated around PACs. Now, Albertans deserve to know what money is being influenced and where in local elections. Furthermore, registering with the local jurisdiction will give them some accountability and will assure residents that the rules are being properly followed.

However, I would encourage all members of this Assembly to vote in favour of this referral amendment because even if aspects of the bill before us appear to be positive – the good, the bad – we should still take the time to publicly consult with stakeholders and give proper consideration to this bill. Now, while some of these changes around increased transparency appear to be good, there are other problems – oh, the bad – that can emerge from this increased scrutiny.

Madam Speaker, most municipal candidates are campaigning on their own without large campaign teams behind them. Candidates may have difficulty following the new, stricter rules around campaign spending and reporting. Could this discourage potential candidates from running for office? Of course, it could if they feel that they lack the experience to fulfill the requirement of this legislation. That is not what we should be doing with this legislation, and I have concerns that Bill 23 could have the potential to do so.

Bill 23 will also require candidates to disclose donations over \$50. Fifty bucks. Why did the government come up with that number, and why is it lower than the \$250 disclosure limit for PACs? Why the discrepancy? It doesn't make sense to hold

candidates to a stricter standard so that it may appear that the new rules in Bill 23 favour PACs and third-party spenders as opposed to individual candidates.

Madam Speaker, as I've outlined, Bill 23 has too many questions and concerns for me to support at this point. That is why I'm supporting my colleague's referral amendment to have this bill studied at committee in depth. I think this government has failed to listen to Albertans over the past three and a half years in their legislative agenda. It's remarkable how many of these missteps could have been avoided if they had actually listened to Albertans and consulted with those who would have been most greatly affected by this legislation. Governments need to listen to Albertans. I think that if more legislation actually went to committee, they'd be more confident and comfortable with some of the legislation that has recently been passed in the last year. Look at Bill 6. Maybe they could have saved their public embarrassment if they would have consulted with more constituents. Furthermore, what if the government had listened to Albertans when they introduced their carbon tax? I may add that it was never campaigned on, and Albertans wish they would have actually listened to them.

So far on Bill 23 I've outlined my many concerns with this legislation, so let's put it in front of committee, bring in stakeholders, have in-depth knowledge and discussion on this topic, and debate the bill in a public forum, where Albertans can see how we're listening to them. So few pieces of legislation that this government has introduced have actually gone before committees. Maybe if they would have accepted our referral amendments more often, they would be in a more favourable position. Yet here we are, and I hope this government will listen to us at this time.

Madam Speaker, in closing, let's listen to Albertans and receive the feedback from stakeholders that will help us address our concerns with Bill 23. I encourage all members of this Assembly to vote for the referral amendment.

Thank you.

9:50

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any members wishing to speak under 29(2)(a)? The hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake.

Mr. Cyr: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Again I welcome this opportunity to speak in the House regarding Bill 23. I have to say that my colleague has really done a good job summing up exactly all the concerns or a lot of the concerns that he's hearing from his constituents. He's mentioned some important facts. This government has in fact failed when it comes to consultation, when it comes to many of their pieces of legislation. Now, when we're dealing with democracy and how it is implemented across Alberta, this is something that we just need to make sure we get right the first time. I always have concern when we rush through a piece of legislation and there could be or most likely are unintended results.

If you look at this bill, it's double-sided pages, almost 90 pages. This is quite a bill to get through. The opposition usually gets this for a couple weeks, and then we've already gone through the bill and really haven't had the time to be able to get out to our constituents to see if there are concerns. A lot of times I think that politicians across Alberta forget that there is something called dome disease. It might be something that we're here engaging in with each other, very much trying to work out some of the problems with this bill. As opposition it is our job to help strengthen the bill, and in some cases some people say that we're only critical, but I would argue that if we're doing our jobs, we're out there putting amendments forward like the referral that you see before you. The referral is important. It is telling all Albertans that they are

important when it comes to consulting, making sure we get this right.

I would question how many Albertans actually know right now how much consultation or whether this bill is even going through. A lot of them haven't had a chance to be able to actually get through this document. Look at it. It's – what? – I would say, three-quarters of an inch thick. We're looking at a lot of information here. If we look at what happened when it comes to this current government, they had moved a lot of the same legislation when it came to provincial elections, and we've seen repeatedly where they've actually had to go back and correct the stuff that they've already done because there was lack of consultation.

Now, I was on the Select Special Ethics and Accountability Committee, and I took a lot of pride in debating a lot of this, the direction we were going. It's unfortunate to see that it appears the government more or less disregarded everything that that committee had done, in the end – and I don't have the quote from the House leader – more or less said that it was a waste of time. I take issue with that because I, like those members of that committee, gave up a lot of my summer to dedicate my time to make sure we got it right, and that was for the provincial side.

When it comes to consultation, when it comes to the fact that this government shows and has a track record of a lack of it, the fact is that we're running through this too fast. We need to move this to a committee. We need to make sure that we bring forward our stakeholders like Edmonton and Calgary. Even the city of Cold Lake, for instance, might have some thoughts on how to improve this, yet we haven't given them that opportunity. What we've done is put this piece of legislation on the table, more or less put a press release out saying that it's good for all of Alberta, and then hope that this turns out well for them. Well, we're not going to know until the next municipal election if there are flaws in this, and then we're going to be scrambling to correct these gaps that could have been fixed.

Madam Speaker, consultation is the key. We need to move forward with this referral, and I thank my colleague for his wise words.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other members wishing to speak to the referral?
The hon. Member for Calgary-Klein.

Mr. Coolahan: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Just briefly on the referral. I thank the Member for Airdrie for bringing it forward, but it's not the time to do this now. We need to move forward with this piece of legislation. As I said when speaking to this bill, during the municipal election in 2017, the last municipal election in Calgary, I heard from so many people: why aren't you doing for the cities and municipalities what you did for the province? It was a big deal. As I said, I went through all of the campaign records, financial records for those running in Calgary, and every single person who made the most money, spent the most money was victorious except the run for mayor. I noticed that one of the candidates actually spent nearly \$350,000. That's substantial. I'm very surprised by the Member for Calgary-Elbow actually supporting this piece of legislation, because that is 10 times the amount the Alberta Party actually raised last quarter. I mean, it's almost embarrassing, right?

Anyhow, in terms of consultation, Madam Speaker, this goes back to 2016, when we started to look at this. Really, we wanted to implement it before the last election, but there wasn't enough time to do the consultation that needed to be done. So here we are, we're trying to get it in place before the next election, and I think the consultation was robust: AUMA, RMA, city of Calgary, city of

Edmonton, Rural Municipal Administrators Association. The list goes on and on, and they received over 1,500 responses from a survey that was put out by the ministry. I think the consultation was robust.

With the regulations, we can make changes. If the opposition has amendments that they would like to bring forward, then I think they should do that. I don't think we need to stall this at this point. This is too important. These levels of government are so close to our everyday lives, and they need to be conducted fairly. I think it's pretty well known that conservative think tanks in this province have propped up local governments for many years. I think we need to put an end to that, and we will do that with the financing, levelling the playing field on the finances.

With that said, I didn't want to say too much, Madam Speaker, but I just wanted to say that I won't be supporting this amendment. I don't think we should be supporting this amendment. Let's just move forward. Let's get it through second reading and bring your amendments forward in committee.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

On 29(2)(a)? The hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake.

Mr. Cyr: Thank you again for giving me the opportunity. I do recognize that every time we bring a referral about some important pieces of legislation, the government gets up and says that they've done the appropriate consultation, and then they get up again and they say that really it's not needed. But I will tell you that the last piece of legislation that had been put through here for the provincial elections has been repeatedly corrected by this government.

Again, a lot of the stuff that we're correcting the opposition actually brought up as potential concerns. The PACs, for instance, the super PACs: we were very clear that if the government didn't deal with super PACs during that initial piece of legislation, this would grow out of control. Then suddenly what happens is that super PACs grow out of control, and the government is shocked, and then they're saying that there's shadow money and all these other things coming forward.

I can tell you that it's distressing to see that this government continues to drop the ball when it comes to consultation. To hear that the reasoning that we shouldn't consult is because some members in past municipal elections spent \$50,000 seems to be very strange reasoning to be saying that the government shouldn't do its due diligence when it comes to this.

10:00

And to hear that the government had started this process in 2016 but didn't have it ready for the 2017 election – my question is that right now it appears that what we're trying to do, then, is be prepared for the 2021 election. I don't think that's unreasonable to say that we would want to have this in place. So why is it that we're not moving this to a committee? We have the time. Let's do this right. Yet the government is saying: well, we couldn't get it right just before the last election, so we're going to rush through it after the 2017 election. There's time available. Why not involve the municipalities? Why not involve Albertans in the consultation process? Why not make sure that we iron out these flaws that the government may have in this legislation?

But because we're moving through this so quickly and because this government seems so focused on moving through with legislation that I would argue we all want to see happen – I do believe that we all want to see in this House. I can't speak for all parties, but I can speak for the Official Opposition. The Official Opposition and the government stand on the same side about

banning corporate and union donations to elections. I think that if we can come out with this as one of the main goals, then that's great.

But I will tell you that what I don't hear from these guys is: let's make sure that we reach out and do some actual consultation. God forbid somebody else comes up with a good idea and they actually have to change the direction they're going in. That seems to be the hardest part for this government and one of the lessons that it continues to learn, unfortunately, the fact that our government right now seems to care more about its ideology instead of putting Albertans first.

Now, I again, when it comes to this, say that there may have been a good amount of support when it comes to saying that maybe we do need to limit contributions. But why \$4,000? Where did that number come from? Is that something that we all need to be wary of, that they're just pulling numbers out of a hat as a number that fits just because it's the provincial one? I understand that this government really hasn't got any real justification when it comes to this magic \$4,000 number. Some of the other numbers as well: where did they come from? Did they actually reach out to anybody? I will tell you that this government has failed in consultation. So will the government explain where the \$4,000 comes from?

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other members wishing to speak to the referral? The hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake.

Mr. Cyr: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I appreciate the opportunity to speak before this House. I know that my colleague from Little Bow and other colleagues across the aisle have spoken on this, and they are saying that a referral motion or amendment is not what Albertans or they are looking to move towards.

Now, if we truly look at the past, let's look at Bill 6. I actually am quoted in a debate during Bill 6 as saying that the name of that bill should have been the no-consultation bill because the government failed terribly when it came to consultation on Bill 6. We had farmers on the steps peacefully, I might add, demonstrating against the moves that this government was making. They had not been adequately consulted with, and in the end the government had to backtrack and restart the whole process of consultation. Now what has happened is that we're seeing that there's some confusion on exactly what the consultation after Bill 6 is actually leading to.

Now, I do believe that the government wanted with that legislation to ensure that farm workers were safe, and that's admirable. I want farm workers to be safe. I know that my colleagues want farm workers to be safe. We also want to make sure that there are protections in place for those workers. But when it comes to government using ideology to make decisions, there's no balance, and that is where this government has been lacking. It has been lacking in the fact that there is no balance to the decisions that they're making.

This is why referring this stuff to committee, ensuring that we actually get industry involvement in this process – now, in this case, this bill, this referral, we're looking for involvement from our municipalities, we're looking for involvement from our municipal leaders, and we're looking for involvement from our constituents. I can tell you that when it comes to involvement from all groups of Albertans, all levels of government, we win. We win when we have the strongest piece of legislation moving forward.

In one of my comments earlier – I had the fortune to sit on the Special Ethics and Accountability Committee. I would say that we agreed on a lot of things, but we may have disagreed on some. That actually is healthy. If we all agree on the same thing, what happens is that we usually get something called groupthink. That means that we're moving in the direction that we want to end up in. Sometimes

we need that devil's advocate there to say: "Is this the appropriate thing? Are we moving in the right direction?" Yet what we don't see here is any voice when it comes to ensuring that municipal leaders have been heard across this province.

Now, what I will say is that this is a rather thick bill. When we're looking at this bill, we're looking at, again, almost 90 pages. There is a lot of stuff in this bill. A lot of times a misplaced comma can be reinterpreted in the exact opposite way of what you intended. We've seen this in court cases. The fact is that when we've given everybody the appropriate amount of time, especially when it comes to stuff that's affecting them, we will find and we will iron out these concerns. But when we have this bill in our Legislature probably for a two- or three-week period, we are not giving the appropriate amount of scrutiny we need, especially when it comes to something as important as elections. We need to make sure that we get this right.

When it comes to the government, what they have done is that they're saying: we've done all the consultation more or less, and we think this is ready. Now, my question, though, is: why is it that we're rushing this? Why can't we involve everybody in the process through a committee? I can tell you that when it comes to the fact that the government wants to pass legislation, that's fine. That's the government's prerogative. You know what? It is important that the government does move forward with policy. But I will tell you that what I don't see is a government that is actually going out and making sure that they get the consultation part right.

I am concerned that when it comes to something this important, if we get this wrong, these problems aren't going to be today, these problems aren't going to be tomorrow, but these problems are going to be in 2021 when we have our municipal elections. We're going to be reeling with some of the problems that have been created, that we won't know until it's too late. I guess what we'll end up seeing is that this stuff will be probably – if I had to hazard a guess, we're going to find problems with this over the next two or three years, and then we're going to be putting forward bills to correct this, that could have been caught in the committee process.

10:10

Now, one of the things that was brought forward is that the more restrictions we put on people, we're more likely to see fewer people going out and putting their name forward. I am concerned that what happens here is that by levelling the field, we're actually excluding people, and that we need to make sure that we're levelling the playing field and not excluding people. That, I think, is our goal here. I am hopefully saying that what we're looking to do is that we're making sure that we have a fair voice from all groups, sexes, demographics in Alberta to ensure that we get the best municipal governments across this wonderful province. If in the end we end up excluding somebody because it is too onerous to get in here because of the fact that we've made it too hard, that isn't good as well. While we may be doing something that we are hoping is with the best intentions, in the end what we're looking at doing is making sure that everybody has access to this.

Now, I hear the concern. We end up seeing a councillor putting a million dollars into a campaign. Nobody else can compete with that. Is that fair? I would argue no. I argue that in the end what we need to make sure is that there is the ability for people to be able to compete and be able to get their name and their voices through, and that what doesn't happen is the fact that when we have such a lopsided amount of money, we don't actually see that.

That's where my concern here is, that now by limiting this, are we allowing super PACs, these societies or foundations or nonprofits – I'm not sure how they're structured – to dominate municipal elections? Now, super PACs need lawyers, they need

accountants, they would need support staff, all these wonderful things. I can tell you that the average Albertan does not have the ability to compete with that, so we're actually making it harder for those that are playing by the rules. This was identified during the Special Ethics and Accountability Committee multiple times, that if there are groups out there that have more power or more influence than the actual candidates themselves, that's problematic.

I have to say that when it comes to the government, I do believe that they are trying to actually help people with this bill. I am concerned, though, that they're not going about it in the right way, and the fact that they're unwilling to test this bill with the public says a lot. A committee will test how strong a bill is based on the feedback and the stakeholders you get in there. So by bringing it to a committee, by referring this to a committee, and actually having a committee doing their job, we are all the winners. If it doesn't stand up in committee, then the committee can recommend to not move forward with this bill, but if the committee finds that the bill is fine or, God forbid, the committee actually fixes the problems within the bill, that is the best way to make sure we get this right.

What we're not seeing is a government that is willing to put this to the test. Why are you scared to put this bill to the test? I can tell you that in the end a lot of the concerns that I have got are: where did some of the numbers come from that you've picked up? Where did these thresholds come from? You know what? The fact is that it looks like you're just pulling stuff out of the dark.

Now, in my constituency of Bonnyville-Cold Lake there is a completely different campaign run between an urban municipal candidate versus a rural municipal candidate. When it comes to putting up lawn signs in, let's say, Bonnyville, it's a lot smaller. So what we're trying to do is that you're going to need fewer lawn signs, you're going to need less literature, but there's a larger compact population.

When it comes to rural Alberta, though, you need a lot more signs, and through my last election I can tell you that these signs are not cheap. They are very costly. It is important for people to know that there's a municipal election happening. It is important for people to know who is running. It is important for people to be able to hear what your platform is as a municipal leader. If we restrict this too much, are we preventing people finding out what these potential elected officials are trying to do for their communities? It could be that the person with the most literature is the one that wins this. Because we've added the super PAC component to this, that means that people with money are going to potentially have an advantage. I will argue that the whole point of putting this bill forward is to prevent money from being the absolute reason why people get elected.

Why won't this government, why won't you move this to committee? Why won't you test your legislation against the public? I can tell you that right now it appears to me, anyway, that you're scared to. You're not willing to put this to the test because you know that there are potential problems with this legislation, and you're scared that it'll come out in the committee process. You're scared that in the end we will have Albertans upset with you for putting forward this and not actually correcting the problems with this. I will tell you that when it comes to this, there is no rush to get this done by the end of 2018 because we have at least, well, another two years before the next municipal election.

Let's make sure we get it right because if we don't get it right, then we're going to find out that we could end up with a municipal election that really ends up as an unfortunate incident when it comes to the fact that we're not able to ensure that it was a fair process. I really feel that this government needs to consider a referral. This is one of the most important ones. It did create the Ethics and Accountability Committee before, even though it disregarded our

recommendations during the committee. A committee would work. I truly believe that we're all on one page. We want to make sure that we get this right.

I truly believe that if we work together, we can strengthen this legislation to do something that works for everybody in this House. That is true government, a process that is working together, strengthening legislation. Whether you are government or opposition, we all just want to see the best legislation passed through this House. What we don't want is flawed legislation, and this legislation could potentially have some significant effects when it comes to 2021. My concern is that while this might be a bill that the government is putting forward and has full confidence in, without the committee process we're not going to see the government's ability to be able to project to Albertans as a whole that this is a perfect piece of legislation, and I think that we all can learn from that.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other members wishing to speak under 29(2)(a)?
The hon. Member for Calgary-Klein.

Mr. Coolahan: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Yeah, under 29(2)(a). I am confused about the concern of the member around consultation. I wanted to ask him what he thinks his leader meant when he said that should, God forbid, he win the election, he would hire people to draft orders in council for cabinet to adopt the week it's sworn in. He said: one of the key elements of structural reform is to move quickly; speed creates its own momentum; it makes it harder for the opponents of reform to obstruct it. He said that he doesn't want to get bogged down with public consultation, so his party is doing as much as it can now on the big issues. What did he mean by that? I'm just wondering if he has any comments on that.

Thank you.

10:20

The Acting Speaker: Are there any other members wishing to speak under 29(2)(a)? [interjections] Hon. members.

The hon. Member for Sherwood Park.

Ms McKittrick: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I'm really fascinated by the discussion of the Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake because he seems to be waxing eloquent about the role of democracy and the importance of consultation. I'm always very intrigued about it because sometimes I feel that he might think that bills and changes to important acts just come out of thin air. It's kind of like we get together – you know, I always felt as an MLA that I relied on the public service, that had for years and years worked on issues of appropriate bills and were trained, professional civil servants, and that a lot of what a government does comes from the experience of professional public servants and lawyers and others who, in this case, have done the work of ensuring that Alberta keeps all elections democratic, transparent and allows the engagement of as many people, Albertans, as possible in the democratic process.

I would like to ask the Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake, two places that I find are fantastic – and I'm sure that those people there would want to make sure that as they vote for municipal councillors and school trustees, the process is fair and transparent and they actually have access to it. I'm really wondering: what is the member's view of the impact on the formation of bills of professional civil servants, and why does he think that the bill has not been carefully thought through before it's even been brought to the House?

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other members wishing to speak under 29(2)(a)?
The hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake.

Mr. Cyr: Thank you. You know, the member across the aisle – and I welcome her to my constituency every time she comes up. Actually, all members, please come up to Bonnyville-Cold Lake. Wonderful people up in my constituency. I will say that the member – and I don't have the Blues in front of me – says that we don't pull these bills out of thin air. Well, I can tell you that the veterinarians, when they were viciously attacked by this government – viciously attacked by this government – were sat down with the bill in front of them and told: this is our consultation. I will tell you that when it comes to contract negotiations, there are others that are just as fed up with this government. I also will say that farmers across this province also saw the lack of respect by this government, and our pharmacists also are seeing a lack of respect.

You know, when it comes to this government saying that they've consulted, consultation doesn't mean putting a bill on the table and saying: "You can read it for the next half hour. By the way, we're tabling it, and this is what we're debating, and you've got three weeks to more or less accept what we've put forward." That is what we're seeing right now.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other members wishing to speak to the referral?
The hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat.

Mr. Barnes: Thank you, Madam Speaker, and thanks to my colleagues for the opportunity to rise and speak to the referral. I want to start, though, with the name of the bill, Bill 23, An Act to Renew Local Democracy in Alberta. Renew democracy. You know, if there's anything that we're challenged with, if there's anything that is our stewardship, our legal obligation, our personal obligation, our complete obligation to our constituents, it's to enhance democracy, to get democracy right. When you think of world history and how far we've come, where we get to disagree and argue with words instead of swords or bullets or whatever, it's because of democracy. It's because of thousands and thousands of people, hundreds and hundreds of risks they've taken over the years to give everyone an opportunity to have their voice heard.

Madam Speaker, that's why I so support this amendment, the amendment to send the bill to committee, the amendment to take a sober, longer, complete second look, the opportunity to bring in all Albertans who have insight, who have ideas, who have knowledge, who have experience, just the time for government members, whether they're cabinet members or otherwise, the time for us here in the opposition to talk a little bit more to our constituents, to talk a little bit more to the elected officials, to hear what the insight they have is. My goodness, how important is it?

I believe that in Medicine Hat, in the municipal election which was just about a year ago, which is why there is time to get this right, our turnout was 34 per cent. Madam Speaker, we had a 34 per cent turnout; 66 per cent of eligible Medicine Hatters didn't go to the polls. Maybe that's where we need to start with An Act to Renew Local Democracy in Alberta. Maybe we need to have some committee time that looks at why so many Albertans feel that their vote or their voice doesn't matter, doesn't count, isn't important, because my six and a half years of politics have taught me how important it is. I can't count the number of good ideas that I've heard in six and a half years that Albertans have shared. Advocacy groups that routinely come here and express their ideas and concerns: it's amazing how often they get listened to. My goodness, being MLAs, one of the joys but one of the curses at the same time

is that daily log of e-mails we get. There's so much good information that gets forwarded to us.

Madam Speaker, 34 per cent last election: why would we not do anything – why would we not do anything – to try to enhance that? What was the turnout in the last provincial election? I think it was somewhere around 55 per cent, wasn't it? Federally maybe it gets up to 75 per cent. You know, to me, that's one of my questions right there: why do people – when the vote is the closest, when the vote makes the most difference, why is the turnout the lowest?

Mrs. Pitt: Fifty-eight per cent.

Mr. Barnes: Fifty-eight per cent in the last provincial election. Thank you.

Potentially, Madam Speaker, these are questions that I believe this bill has completely missed. I've been sitting listening to my colleagues on both sides of the House, and I haven't heard anyone mention this, so perhaps this is something that the government missed in their haste to get this, or with adequate due diligence it was missed. Maybe that's the real good we can do with this referral amendment for Bill 23, An Act to Renew Local Democracy in Alberta. Just to summarize, democracy is the essence of why we're here, it's what built Alberta, it's what built Canada, it's what built so much opportunity for all of us. Let's do what we can to get it right. I think that in this case it's especially important.

10:30

Our hard-working staff, who when we're in session, my goodness, work night and day and do a great job, have provided this summary. The Local Authorities Election Act provides a framework for local authority elections, including municipalities, school boards, Métis settlements, and irrigation districts. The proposed amendments in Bill 23 would better align municipal election rules with recent changes made to provincial election rules. Well, my goodness, look at how diverse and how many people it encompasses, how many people with different vested interests, different needs, different good ideas, different ways to make things better, from municipalities to school boards. Look at the varying sizes of municipalities, the varying risks and opportunities they have: Métis settlements and irrigation districts. The irrigation district in Cypress-Medicine Hat: my goodness, excellent, excellent stewards of the land, always balancing that great opportunity to feed the world, that great opportunity to innovate and do things better but sharing and balancing the use of water. At this point does Bill 23 adequately take into account all the changes and unintended consequences that could happen there?

Métis settlements: my goodness, we have a great heritage of Métis people in Cypress-Medicine Hat. They have been there for hundreds and hundreds of years. I absolutely believe that when they've reached out to me and helped me learn and understand, helped me understand their good ideas and what's important to them, in a heartbeat they would come to committee and would make sure that this government got it right. If there were any improvements, if there were any ideas, they would make sure that they were presented. Again, in Committee of the Whole in this House, yeah, we get to walk around, we get to be a little bit more informal, but it's just us. It's not access for 4.1 million Albertans that could absolutely make this better.

Again, it's a bill to renew democracy, but we're going to minimize democracy while we renew it. We're just going to do it our way. We're looking at four broad groups who are crucially important to Alberta's future for culture, for collaboration, for the education of our kids, for the enhancement and protection of cultures, and for economics. My goodness, we all know how

Alberta's economics are under threat right now with our differential price, with our layers of burden of taxation and rules and regulation. My goodness, let's not take the unintended-consequence chance. Let's not take the risk of getting it wrong for people that are already challenged to provide jobs, to pay taxes, to build wealth.

I want to talk about unintended consequences. Every single law, every single bill, probably everything we do in life always has unintended consequences. You can think things through, you can plan, but until your law becomes a reality, one doesn't really know what's going to happen, what the unintended consequences are, like a carbon tax. When municipalities, Métis settlements, school boards, and even irrigation districts touch almost every single Albertan, why would we dare take the chance of having unintended consequences? Why would we dare take the chance of not hearing from them?

Of course, back to the good summary, the good hard work that our staff provides: to align municipal election rules with recent changes made to provincial election rules. Of course, we've all spoken time and time again in favour of taking union and corporation money out of politics, making it so that everyday, hard-working Albertans and everyday, hard-working Alberta families have the loudest voice, as it should be. But we've seen how big money has drifted into PACs. We've seen how unions and other groups that have an interest in Albertans have also taken bigger positions, different positions, attracting money, spending money, having political influence. Madam Speaker, as we know, that bill is fairly new. That bill has considerable potential problems, considerable unintended consequences, so before we even analyze that bill, we're just going to do it again. What's that saying in life? If somebody fools you the first time . . .

Mr. Hunter: Fool me once, shame on you.

Mr. Barnes: Thank you. Fool me once, shame on you; fool me twice, shame on me. Thank you, my hon. colleague from Cardston-Taber-Warner, who knows those things.

Here we are. We're not even sure how it's working, but we're going to double down. We're going to try it again. From what I can see when I read this, it does not address or improve the transparency and accountability of third-party advertisers and their corporate or union supporters. And what is the worst kind of unintended consequence? When you get exactly the opposite of the result you intended. Probably all 87 of us have stood up here and said: "Yeah, yeah, this is great. Take corporate and union money out of politics. Put Alberta families and Albertans in charge." And the number one unintended consequence is that we've got the opposite happening.

Madam Speaker, if this is allowed to go to committee, potentially we can summon some of these union and PAC people. Potentially we can hear where we're at. Potentially the 87 of us can have a look at what is actually happening, and we can determine if the government has completely failed in their effort to renew local democracy in Alberta, or we can look and see what's working. Again, when An Act to Renew Local Democracy in Alberta minimizes debate, minimizes Albertans' ideas, minimizes discussions, I really wonder: why? I really wonder what the rush is. Of course, an election is coming up, March 1 to May 31. Potentially it's that. You know, when democracy and caring for Albertans is our number one obligation, our number one priority, why would we allow this government to have free rein on potentially getting it wrong?

Madam Speaker, I've always been a big fan of what I hear in Ottawa and how they have permanent standing committees instead of Committee of the Whole in here. My goodness, we know how the government of Alberta can make a law in just 48 hours, with a

one-day break on either side of Committee of the Whole. That may be necessary the odd time, but to renew local democracy in Alberta, where people are voting now in the mid-30s and that's not even being addressed? If we had a chance, if we had an understanding from Alberta voters, all Albertans, even those that aren't old enough to vote, so that they know they can come and have their voice heard, if they know that almost every time this Legislature did something, they would have an opportunity to analyze it, to make it better – you know, I can't think of . . .

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any members wishing to speak under 29(2)(a)? The hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner.

Mr. Hunter: Thank you, Madam Speaker. You know, I was very interested to hear my colleague speak quite well about the need to be able to bring this bill to committee. What's interesting is that there has been a model where we've seen this concept work, and the model was presented when Bill 201 came forward from our hon. colleague from Highwood. There was a good intention with the bill, and then there was a realization that more needed to be done. It was brought before a committee, the Resource Stewardship Committee, and Resource Stewardship was able to debate it and figure out the end result, where that bill should go.

10:40

At that point it was able to come back in here, and we've seen how even the member who brought this private member's bill forward is recognizing: "You know what? The best intentions of this bill were to help volunteer firefighters so that they don't lose their jobs, but in the end the unintended consequences outweighed those positives to the bill." So what happened was that, you know, it's still being debated, but it shows a good model, Madam Speaker. It shows the model that sober second thought is always valuable to the process here.

In the Westminster parliamentary system we have, we've seen a few things happen. We've seen a member from the opposite side leave that caucus because she established: the party whip was saying how we should vote on certain things. This is maybe one of the negative parts to the Westminster parliamentary system, but the positive part to the Westminster parliamentary system, Madam Speaker, is that we have the ability to have that sober second thought, the ability to have a debate, a robust debate where we can say: "What are the pros and what are the cons to this bill? How is it going to be beneficial to Albertans as a whole?" Then, at the end of the day, we have the ability to hopefully come up with legislation that will be of benefit not just to the current generation but to generations to come.

This is the value of our Westminster parliamentary system, but when we shortchange it, Madam Speaker, when we take away the rights as legislators to be able to have that robust discussion and robust debate, then we do not only ourselves a disservice, but we do a disservice to Albertans and to future generations. I have said this before in this House, but I'll say it again. I believe that the characterization of many people I've talked to, who say that the way they describe this government is as the government of unintended consequences, is not far off the truth, and the reason why is because they continue to ram through this legislation in order to be able to get things done that they believe are the right things for Albertans.

I actually like the federal system a lot better, Madam Speaker, because at least there they have committees that really do go deep into the legislation. They cannot ram it through quickly. It has to go to these committees. It has to be able to be vetted properly. I think that that's actually a system that works better because it is the

vetting process that helps us to figure out all those little nuances to bills and to legislation that could be problematic. Not that I'm saying that the NDP are looking to hurt Albertans, but I'm saying that there could be unintended consequences, and those unintended consequences, whether they have the best interests of Albertans in mind or not, would come out in that vetting process, during the committee process.

I think that we've seen a good model. They were willing to do that with a private member's bill. Why aren't they willing to do that with this type of a bill?

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Any other members wishing to speak under 29(2)(a)? The hon. Member for Calgary-Klein . . . [The time limit for questions and comments expired]

We are now back on the referral. Are there any other members wishing to speak?

Seeing none, I will call the question.

[The voice vote indicated that the motion on amendment REF1 lost]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 10:45 a.m.]

[Fifteen minutes having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

[Ms Sweet in the chair]

For the motion:

Anderson, W.	Fraser	Schneider
Barnes	Hunter	van Dijken
Cyr	Pitt	Yao
Ellis		

Against the motion:

Bilous	Hinkley	Payne
Carlier	Hoffman	Phillips
Carson	Horne	Piquette
Connolly	Jansen	Renaud
Coolahan	Kazim	Rosendahl
Cortes-Vargas	Larivee	Sabir
Dach	Littlewood	Schmidt
Dang	Loyola	Schreiner
Drever	Malkinson	Shepherd
Feehan	McCuaig-Boyd	Sucha
Fitzpatrick	McKittrick	Westhead
Ganley	Miller	Woollard
Gray	Nielsen	

Totals: For – 10 Against – 38

[Motion on amendment REF1 lost]

The Acting Speaker: We are now back on the original bill. Are there any members wishing to speak?

Mr. Feehan: Madam Speaker, I'd just ask for leave to have unanimous consent to move to one-minute bells.

[Unanimous consent granted]

The Acting Speaker: Are there any other members wishing to speak to the bill?

Seeing none, I will put the question.

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

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 11:02 a.m.]

[One minute having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

[Ms Sweet in the chair]

For the motion:

Bilous	Hinkley	Payne
Carlier	Hoffman	Phillips
Carson	Horne	Piquette
Connolly	Jansen	Renaud
Coolahan	Kazim	Rosendahl
Cortes-Vargas	Larivee	Sabir
Dach	Littlewood	Schmidt
Dang	Loyola	Schreiner
Drever	Malkinson	Shepherd
Feehan	McCuaig-Boyd	Sucha
Fitzpatrick	McKittrick	Westhead
Ganley	Miller	Woollard
Gray	Nielsen	

Against the motion:

Anderson, W.	Fraser	Schneider
Barnes	Hunter	van Dijken
Cyr	Pitt	Yao
Ellis		

Totals: For – 38 Against – 10

[Motion carried; Bill 23 read a second time]

Bill 24

An Act to Recognize AMA Representation Rights

[Adjourned debate November 20: Mr. Dreeshen]

The Acting Speaker: Are there any members wishing to speak to the bill? The hon. Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo.

Mr. Yao: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. It is an honour to rise in the House today to speak to Bill 24, An Act to Recognize AMA Representation Rights. This bill, while being only four pages, has a lot we need to address.

The Acting Speaker: Hon. member, just for clarity, have you not already spoken to second reading of this bill? I believe you have.

Is there anybody else that would like to speak to second reading? The hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat.

Mr. Barnes: Thank you, Madam Speaker. We look alike.

Mr. Yao: Sure.

Mr. Barnes: Thank you, Madam Speaker and colleagues for the opportunity to rise and talk about Bill 24, An Act to Recognize AMA Representation Rights. It's an honour to rise today to talk about this act. This bill, as previously mentioned, while only being four pages, has a lot we need to address. At first glance this bill seemed relatively harmless and well intended. However, after reaching out to numerous physicians across Alberta, we have learned that there are many issues with this piece of legislation that need to be addressed.

Madam Speaker, of course, to address things properly, we need more time. We need more time to reach out to all affected stakeholders to make sure that this bill is actually in the best interests of all Albertans and especially the best interests of Alberta patients. The bottom line is that we need to study this bill more

going forward. We need some time to make amendments, to talk about it because, once again, as we just talked about with Bill 23, this government has not only forgotten to consult with all relevant stakeholders but is blocking Albertans' democratic right to come in and discuss how to make this better.

11:10

I'm very proud of our UCP team, MLAs and members and staff, and I'm very pleased to say that they've been actively reaching out to physicians over the last few weeks, and we've received some great feedback. First of all, do you know what we're hearing from physicians in regard to this bill? Most of them had absolutely no idea that this was even coming forward. Most of them had absolutely no idea that this bill was being presented and was going to become the law of Alberta and become the rules and regulations that govern their livelihoods, their careers, their futures. Madam Speaker, I ask: does that seem like good consultation to you?

Madam Speaker, we've seen it consistently, continually. This government always shows that they'll push through their agenda regardless of the consequences, regardless of advice from deputy ministers and bureaucracy, regardless of 2,000 people on the steps out front. This government has an agenda, and unfortunately too much of our economy, too many Alberta families and communities are paying the price for that agenda. As important as health care is, let's make sure that doctors and patients and families don't pay that price.

You know, Madam Speaker, what I was referring to with the 2,000 people on the steps here was, of course, Bill 6, with 1,500 people down in Cypress-Medicine Hat, hundreds of people everywhere. As a matter of fact, I was just in Mossleigh, Alberta, last week. There had to be 50 people talking about how the government rammed that down their throats, talking about ideas to go forward.

It also recently happened on Bill 21. When opposition parties brought forward excellent amendments, the government didn't listen. They shot them down. They know best, better than Albertans.

Now, I'm not saying that this bill will have widespread consequences, Madam Speaker, but what I am saying is that we do not know enough about the bill to support it. Again, some consultations will be necessary, especially when it's our belief that a very, very small percentage of physicians knew about it, were consulted about it. Of course, they're very, very important to Alberta families.

We do not know about the possible implications of this bill or even how the majority of physicians feel about it. But we've seen this time and time again. The government refuses to do adequate consultations, and then they ask us: trust us; trust us. Again, we saw what happened with so many of the other bills. Potentially the unemployment figures in Alberta show what happens when that trust is misplaced.

Government has given us, of course, no reason to trust them. They've had to backtrack on numerous bills because of public outcry. You know, in the opposition we try hard to read the bills, to discuss them, to reach out and consult with Albertans. Madam Speaker, we intend to continue to give Albertans our very best. That starts with listening and goes, second, to working collaboratively, with the goal to make the legislation as good as possible so all Albertans can achieve the opportunity and the outcome that they are looking for.

Of course, with physicians I feel it is very, very important that they have the right to share their recommendations and concerns with government, and we aim to do that. Ten thousand – 10,000 – physicians in Alberta and growing numbers of nurse practitioners,

physician assistants, many other allied health professionals have a vested interest in this, Madam Speaker. So many of these good people want to give Albertans and Alberta families the best quality of care and service they can. Let's make sure that when we're talking legislation and rules and regulations, they have the opportunity to do that.

I wonder why so many members of the AMA did not have a chance to vote on this, why a backroom, backdoor deal between the AMA and the government maybe seems to be happening. You know, it never hurts – it never hurts – to shed sunlight and transparency on anything, and when we desire to have all Albertans engage in our future, in the political process, why would we do anything that would slow that down? Again, Madam Speaker, it's simple. We just need more opportunity to do our due diligence, to talk to some physicians to ensure that it's something that they actually want.

I'm so impressed. You know, I was at a Diwali celebration Saturday night in Medicine Hat. There were 300, 350 people there and several physicians. I was so impressed with how they came up to me and told me how the number of people in their clinics with broken bones from slips and falls had dramatically increased, and they asked me to spread the word to be cautious, especially to older, potentially more vulnerable Albertans. I asked a few of them if they knew about this, and I was met with a blank stare. Madam Speaker, that just so easily proves my point of how our physicians, our health professionals absolutely want to do their best. To ensure that people can do their best, they need to be involved, and they need to have a say. They proved that. They proved that at the social setting when we were all there with our spouses and our families and they took the time to express that.

Some of these physicians, others that we've reached out to, are actually a little bit upset because they're believing that it wasn't put out to them. If we don't take some time to debate this and potentially look at it and make amendments – and I hope the government will listen to amendments – then their opinions don't matter. Can you imagine being tasked with the life, the care, and the future health of Alberta children and families and not being allowed to have your input?

Madam Speaker, thank you very, very much for this chance to discuss this bill. I hope my colleagues in the government across the floor will endeavour to listen to what our good health professionals feel is in Alberta's best interests.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any members wishing to speak under 29(2)(a)?

Seeing none, any other members wishing to speak? The hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner.

Mr. Hunter: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It's a pleasure to be able to rise and speak to Bill 24, An Act to Recognize AMA Representation Rights. When the bill was first introduced, I thought: well, this is going to be easy; it's a small bill, six pages, and we can take a look at it and be able to figure out fairly quickly if it is something that's good for Albertans or not good for Albertans. Unfortunately, it did take us a little while because we had to go back to our physicians and start talking to the physicians and ask them what their opinion was. So we were able to do quite a bit of that consultation in this last week. When I say quite a bit of that consultation, it was by no measure something that I would say is fulsome and robust enough to be able to in good conscience say that this is a good or a bad bill, but what we did hear from Alberta's physicians, the ones that we talked to, is that they had no idea about this bill.

So with that, Madam Speaker, it is my pleasure to be able to introduce an amendment.

11:20

The Acting Speaker: Hon. member, can you just wait till you've tabled a copy and the original, please?

Mr. Hunter: Can I keep it?

The Acting Speaker: No. The original goes to the table, please.

Hon. member, your amendment will be referred to as HA1. Please go ahead.

Mr. Hunter: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I move that the motion for second reading of Bill 24, An Act to Recognize AMA Representation Rights, be amended by deleting all of the words after "that" and substituting the following: "Bill 24, An Act to Recognize AMA Representation Rights, be not now read a second time but that it be read a second time this day three months hence."

Now the reasoning for this, Madam Speaker. It was evident that when my colleague a little over a week and a half ago stood in this House and read a letter from a very successful, well-credentialed physician in Alberta, it was an indictment on the argument that this government has made numerous times that the consultation was fulsome and robust and was enough. Once again, prior to my introducing this amendment, I referenced that we thought that after a six-page bill came before us, it was going to be quick and we would be able to figure this out. But once we started to make calls to a few of the physicians that we had talked to, we recognized that something was amiss. I'd like to give in evidence to the members of this Chamber the reason why we believe a hoist amendment is the proper approach for this bill.

We've had an opportunity to speak this morning on a few other bills, talking about the necessity of consultation, talking about how important it is to not just our generation but future generations as well, Madam Speaker, that we allow them the courtesy to be able to have a fulsome debate about this legislation so that we make sure that we mitigate the unintended consequences that could cause problems not just for our generation but for generations to come. This is the problem that we've seen with this bill. Because of the track record of this government, the track record in that they say that they've done a fulsome consultation and they tell us, "Scouts honour, that's the truth," and then we find out afterwards that in reality that has not happened, so many of the people who should know, actually, don't know about a bill that is going to have a material effect on their livelihood and on their ability to provide for their families.

Madam Speaker, when we heard that this doctor from Calgary had no idea about this bill, we started to dig a little deeper, and here are some of the things we found. We found that when the doctors voted – when we got the government brief on this bill, they had said that 89 per cent of physicians were in favour of this. We thought: well, that seems to be a fairly fulsome debate and fulsome endorsement by the physicians of Alberta. But when we dug down deeper into, I guess, the spin that the government put on this, what we found out was that only 30 per cent of physicians actually took part in this negotiation. This idea that 89 per cent is sufficient, we've already seen cracks in it.

Then we took a look at what they were actually voting on, and what we found out is that the members of the AMA were not presented with the contents of the bill; they were presented with no fee increases. The 89 per cent yes vote was not a vote on this bill, which is what was actually presented by the government as what they were voting for, but in reality it was a vote for no fee increases.

Once again we see this government trying to pull the wool over Albertans' eyes.

It gets discouraging, Madam Speaker, when we are in this House to take a look at the pros and cons of bills to be able to figure out whether or not these things are going to be good for the members of the AMA, good for physicians, and good for the people of Alberta, and then we find out that, in reality, the numbers that have been presented to us are not even correct. This is why I think, just for that reason alone, that it's a prudent approach to take this to committee and actually get a fulsome discussion by our physicians, our health care professionals and ask them what the pros and cons to this are, get them in front of a committee to help us figure out whether or not this thing is actually what they want and then whether or not Albertans want it.

In a committee we'd have the opportunity to be able to say: okay; if physicians have this and they get this and they want this, what do Albertans want? There are two parts to this situation. There is the physicians' responsibility and rights, and there's also Albertans' responsibilities and rights. Being able to get direction from both of those parties would be important. Now, if the government had actually done their job and actually got even just good information from a large set of physicians, then maybe they'd have an argument that we should be able to move forward here. We're talking about 30 per cent that voted, but they voted on fees. They didn't even vote for the content of this bill.

I've sent this bill now to four or five of the doctors that I know in my riding, and not one of them had heard about it. Not one. In coming days I will be presenting more evidence to talk about how they're concerned about the fact that there's a bill that's going to have a material effect upon their livelihood and upon their profession that they know nothing about. That is an indictment on this government. This is something that this government needs to take seriously and recognize. How can they in good conscience create a bill and not ask physicians, whom it's going to affect, what they think about it? It just doesn't make sense.

When you go into this bill, it starts talking about what the bill does. One of the things that the government has touted is their ability to negotiate no fee increases for two years and that that was ratified by AMA members. That had 89 per cent ratification by AMA members. That is a true statement. That is a true statement, that 89 per cent of AMA members that voted – they forgot to finish the sentence – voted in favour of no fee increases. What did they give up? What was the concession that they gave up for that? The concession was that they were going to create program stability.

11:30

This is in an article, Alberta Doctors Agree to Fee Freezes in Two-year Deal with Province, by Keith Gerein in the *Edmonton Journal*, May 30, 2018. In this he says that the AMA, as they were doing the negotiations with the government, recognized that because of the environment in Alberta – you know, we were in a recession, we were in real struggles here, and lots of people were losing their jobs – a no-fee increase was the right thing to do. But the concession that the government made in there was that they were going to create this program stability. Now, a good question to ask would be: what is the program stability? Like, what does that actually mean? Program stability: what's the definition of that?

You know, they were touting the ability to get that two-year no increase in fees. They did that with the United Nurses of Alberta and the Health Sciences Association of Alberta as well, a two-year freeze on pay. However, dentists and pharmacists: in this article it says that they actually took a decrease. We'd actually love to be able to get the pharmacists and dentists in front of a committee as well to find out what they thought about this. They have seen zero

increases in a few of the unions that we've seen in negotiations. However, the pharmacists and the dentists didn't see that, the no increase. They saw a decrease in their fees. It would be interesting to have them in front of a committee to be able to figure out: well, what happened? What happened in the negotiations? What did the government do?

Now, we do know that with the pharmacists, they didn't give them consultation. They told them: "This is exactly what you're going to get. Take it or leave it." They didn't give them, really, time. No negotiations at all. We heard about this in the last little while, in the last session, again another indictment on this government. If they're supposedly for Albertans, I guess it means that they're actually for only certain Albertans. Why didn't they give the pharmacists and dentists no fee increases? Why did they decrease it? Again, that information would all come out in committee if we hoisted this bill and gave it the proper due diligence and the vetting process that these bills deserve.

One of the other problems that I see with this bill and why I think it would be good to have this is to get RPAP in front of the committee, because according to this bill the retention benefit program is going to end. In rural Alberta, where I'm from, it is tough to be able to get doctors to come there. We had a couple of doctors from South Africa, and they came into Milk River. One stayed, and one hasn't stayed. They do have struggles with that. The consequences or the struggles in having rural Alberta retain those doctors is going to be a big problem.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any members wishing to speak under 29(2)(a)? The hon. Member for Calgary-South East.

Mr. Fraser: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I just wanted to ask the member: in your dealings with the physicians that you've been speaking with, did you encounter that perhaps – when you talk about a backroom deal, we want to be careful in this House; I don't want to accuse anybody of anything. But to come up with the agreement that the physicians did come up with and based on the small numbers of physicians that were actually consulted, based on your comments, have you heard that there has been perhaps the idea that physicians want more control over our health care system and less collaborative practice in exchange for taking that freeze?

The Acting Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Hunter: Thank you, Madam Speaker, and I'd like to thank the hon. member for the good question. Now, here's what's interesting.

That question could come up in committee, and then we would be able to get the doctors and, actually, then a third party, like myself, interpreting what the doctors are saying. This is the classic value of being able to bring this to a committee, so that we could have those kinds of deep-thinking questions asked.

Now, I'm not about to say that there was any collusion, that there was any arm-twisting that happened. What I'm hearing from doctors, hon. member, is that they just don't know about the bill. There's not even an answer to "what is happening in the negotiations?" because they just don't know about it. They knew about the freeze. There were 30 per cent that took part in that vote. But the real problem is that they just don't know, so that's a concern.

I want to get back to the point that I was making earlier about the rural physicians – and I'll just end with that, Madam Speaker – and that is that it's really tough to be able to find physicians that are willing to stay in rural Alberta. This bill actually gets rid of that retention benefit program. Depending upon the years of service, they're paid anywhere between \$5,000 and \$12,000 each year as an incentive to stay in the province and in that area. This is something that I think is going to make it very difficult for us in rural Alberta to be able to retain good doctors, good family physicians, general practitioners. So this is a big concern. Again, if we brought this to committee, I think we'd be in a good situation, where we could at least figure out whether or not there are some unintended consequences for our rural physicians.

With that, Madam Speaker, I appreciate being able to present today, and I hope all of the people will vote for this.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other members wishing to speak under 29(2)(a)?

Seeing none, are there any other members wishing to speak to the amendment?

Seeing none, I will call the question.

[Motion on amendment HA1 lost]

[Motion carried; Bill 24 read a second time]

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Feehan: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Just noticing the time and the great progress we made this morning, I suggest that we call it noon and reconvene at 1:30 this afternoon.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 11:38 a.m.]

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