



Province of Alberta

The 30th Legislature
Second Session

Alberta Hansard

Tuesday evening, July 7, 2020

Day 40

The Honourable Nathan M. Cooper, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

The 30th Legislature

Second Session

Cooper, Hon. Nathan M., Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills (UCP), Speaker
Pitt, Angela D., Airdrie-East (UCP), Deputy Speaker and Chair of Committees
Milliken, Nicholas, Calgary-Currie (UCP), Deputy Chair of Committees

Aheer, Hon. Leela Sharon, Chestermere-Strathmore (UCP)
Allard, Tracy L., Grande Prairie (UCP)
Amery, Mickey K., Calgary-Cross (UCP)
Armstrong-Homeniuk, Jackie,
Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville (UCP)
Barnes, Drew, Cypress-Medicine Hat (UCP)
Bilous, Deron, Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview (NDP),
Official Opposition Deputy House Leader
Carson, Jonathon, Edmonton-West Henday (NDP)
Ceci, Joe, Calgary-Buffalo (NDP)
Copping, Hon. Jason C., Calgary-Varsity (UCP)
Dach, Lorne, Edmonton-McClung (NDP)
Dang, Thomas, Edmonton-South (NDP)
Deol, Jasvir, Edmonton-Meadows (NDP)
Dreeshen, Hon. Devin, Innisfail-Sylvan Lake (UCP)
Eggen, David, Edmonton-North West (NDP),
Official Opposition Whip
Ellis, Mike, Calgary-West (UCP),
Government Whip
Feehan, Richard, Edmonton-Rutherford (NDP)
Fir, Hon. Tanya, Calgary-Peigan (UCP)
Ganley, Kathleen T., Calgary-Mountain View (NDP)
Official Opposition Deputy House Leader
Getson, Shane C., Lac Ste. Anne-Parkland (UCP)
Glasgo, Michaela L., Brooks-Medicine Hat (UCP)
Glubish, Hon. Nate, Strathcona-Sherwood Park (UCP)
Goehring, Nicole, Edmonton-Castle Downs (NDP)
Goodridge, Laila, Fort McMurray-Lac La Biche (UCP)
Gotfried, Richard, Calgary-Fish Creek (UCP)
Gray, Christina, Edmonton-Mill Woods (NDP)
Official Opposition Deputy House Leader
Guthrie, Peter F., Airdrie-Cochrane (UCP)
Hanson, David B., Bonnyville-Cold Lake-St. Paul (UCP)
Hoffman, Sarah, Edmonton-Glenora (NDP)
Horner, Nate S., Drumheller-Stettler (UCP)
Hunter, Hon. Grant R., Taber-Warner (UCP)
Irwin, Janis, Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood (NDP),
Official Opposition Deputy Whip
Issik, Whitney, Calgary-Glenmore (UCP)
Jones, Matt, Calgary-South East (UCP)
Kenney, Hon. Jason, PC, Calgary-Lougheed (UCP),
Premier
LaGrange, Hon. Adriana, Red Deer-North (UCP)
Loewen, Todd, Central Peace-Notley (UCP)
Long, Martin M., West Yellowhead (UCP)
Lovely, Jacqueline, Camrose (UCP)
Loyola, Rod, Edmonton-Ellerslie (NDP)
Luan, Hon. Jason, Calgary-Foothills (UCP)
Madu, Hon. Kaycee, QC, Edmonton-South West (UCP)
McIver, Hon. Ric, Calgary-Hays (UCP),
Deputy Government House Leader

Nally, Hon. Dale, Morinville-St. Albert (UCP)
Deputy Government House Leader
Neudorf, Nathan T., Lethbridge-East (UCP)
Nicolaidis, Hon. Demetrios, Calgary-Bow (UCP)
Nielsen, Christian E., Edmonton-Decore (NDP)
Nixon, Hon. Jason, Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre
(UCP), Government House Leader
Nixon, Jeremy P., Calgary-Klein (UCP)
Notley, Rachel, Edmonton-Strathcona (NDP),
Leader of the Official Opposition
Orr, Ronald, Lacombe-Ponoka (UCP)
Pancholi, Rakhi, Edmonton-Whitemud (NDP)
Panda, Hon. Prasad, Calgary-Edgemont (UCP)
Phillips, Shannon, Lethbridge-West (NDP)
Pon, Hon. Josephine, Calgary-Beddington (UCP)
Rehn, Pat, Lesser Slave Lake (UCP)
Reid, Roger W., Livingstone-Macleod (UCP)
Renaud, Marie F., St. Albert (NDP)
Rosin, Miranda D., Banff-Kananaskis (UCP)
Rowswell, Garth, Vermilion-Lloydminster-Wainwright (UCP)
Rutherford, Brad, Leduc-Beaumont (UCP)
Sabir, Irfan, Calgary-McCall (NDP)
Savage, Hon. Sonya, Calgary-North West (UCP),
Deputy Government House Leader
Sawhney, Hon. Rajan, Calgary-North East (UCP)
Schmidt, Marlin, Edmonton-Gold Bar (NDP)
Schow, Joseph R., Cardston-Siksika (UCP),
Deputy Government Whip
Schulz, Hon. Rebecca, Calgary-Shaw (UCP)
Schweitzer, Hon. Doug, QC, Calgary-Elbow (UCP),
Deputy Government House Leader
Shandro, Hon. Tyler, QC, Calgary-Acadia (UCP)
Shepherd, David, Edmonton-City Centre (NDP)
Sigurdson, Lori, Edmonton-Riverview (NDP)
Sigurdson, R.J., Highwood (UCP)
Singh, Peter, Calgary-East (UCP)
Smith, Mark W., Drayton Valley-Devon (UCP)
Stephan, Jason, Red Deer-South (UCP)
Sweet, Heather, Edmonton-Manning (NDP),
Official Opposition House Leader
Toews, Hon. Travis, Grande Prairie-Wapiti (UCP)
Toor, Devinder, Calgary-Falconridge (UCP)
Turton, Searle, Spruce Grove-Stony Plain (UCP)
van Dijken, Glenn, Athabasca-Barrhead-Westlock (UCP)
Walker, Jordan, Sherwood Park (UCP)
Williams, Dan D.A., Peace River (UCP)
Wilson, Hon. Rick D., Maskwacis-Wetaskiwin (UCP)
Yao, Tany, Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo (UCP)
Yaseen, Muhammad, Calgary-North (UCP)

Party standings:

United Conservative: 63

New Democrat: 24

Officers and Officials of the Legislative Assembly

Shannon Dean, QC, Clerk	Philip Massolin, Clerk of Committees and Research Services	Amanda LeBlanc, Deputy Editor of <i>Alberta Hansard</i>
Teri Cherkewich, Law Clerk	Nancy Robert, Research Officer	Chris Caughell, Sergeant-at-Arms
Stephanie LeBlanc, Clerk Assistant and Senior Parliamentary Counsel	Janet Schwegel, Director of Parliamentary Programs	Tom Bell, Assistant Sergeant-at-Arms
Trafton Koenig, Parliamentary Counsel		Paul Link, Assistant Sergeant-at-Arms

Executive Council

Jason Kenney	Premier, President of Executive Council, Minister of Intergovernmental Relations
Leela Aheer	Minister of Culture, Multiculturalism and Status of Women
Jason Copping	Minister of Labour and Immigration
Devin Dreesen	Minister of Agriculture and Forestry
Tanya Fir	Minister of Economic Development, Trade and Tourism
Nate Glubish	Minister of Service Alberta
Grant Hunter	Associate Minister of Red Tape Reduction
Adriana LaGrange	Minister of Education
Jason Luan	Associate Minister of Mental Health and Addictions
Kaycee Madu	Minister of Municipal Affairs
Ric McIver	Minister of Transportation
Dale Nally	Associate Minister of Natural Gas and Electricity
Demetrios Nicolaides	Minister of Advanced Education
Jason Nixon	Minister of Environment and Parks
Prasad Panda	Minister of Infrastructure
Josephine Pon	Minister of Seniors and Housing
Sonya Savage	Minister of Energy
Rajan Sawhney	Minister of Community and Social Services
Rebecca Schulz	Minister of Children's Services
Doug Schweitzer	Minister of Justice and Solicitor General
Tyler Shandro	Minister of Health
Travis Toews	President of Treasury Board and Minister of Finance
Rick Wilson	Minister of Indigenous Relations

Parliamentary Secretaries

Laila Goodridge	Parliamentary Secretary Responsible for Alberta's Francophonie
Jeremy Nixon	Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Community and Social Services
Muhammad Yaseen	Parliamentary Secretary of Immigration

STANDING AND SPECIAL COMMITTEES OF THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ALBERTA

Standing Committee on the Alberta Heritage Savings Trust Fund

Chair: Mr. Orr
Deputy Chair: Mr. Getson

Allard
Eggen
Glasgo
Jones
Loyola
Nielsen
Singh

Standing Committee on Alberta's Economic Future

Chair: Mr. Neudorf
Deputy Chair: Ms Goehring

Allard
Armstrong-Homeniuk
Barnes
Bilous
Dang
Horner
Irwin
Reid
Stephan
Toor

Select Special Democratic Accountability Committee

Chair: Mr. Schow
Deputy Chair: Mr. Horner

Allard
Ceci
Dang
Goodridge
Nixon, Jeremy
Pancholi
Rutherford
Sigurdson, R.J.
Smith
Sweet

Standing Committee on Families and Communities

Chair: Ms Goodridge
Deputy Chair: Ms Sigurdson

Amery
Carson
Ganley
Glasgo
Guthrie
Neudorf
Nixon, Jeremy
Pancholi
Rutherford
Yao

Standing Committee on Legislative Offices

Chair: Mr. Schow
Deputy Chair: Mr. Sigurdson

Gray
Lovely
Nixon, Jeremy
Rutherford
Schmidt
Shepherd
Sweet
van Dijken
Walker

Special Standing Committee on Members' Services

Chair: Mr. Cooper
Deputy Chair: Mr. Ellis

Dang
Deol
Ganley
Goehring
Goodridge
Long
Neudorf
Walker
Williams

Standing Committee on Private Bills and Private Members' Public Bills

Chair: Mr. Ellis
Deputy Chair: Mr. Schow

Glasgo
Horner
Irwin
Neudorf
Nielsen
Nixon, Jeremy
Pancholi
Sigurdson, L.
Sigurdson, R.J.

Standing Committee on Privileges and Elections, Standing Orders and Printing

Chair: Mr. Smith
Deputy Chair: Mr. Schow

Armstrong-Homeniuk
Carson
Deol
Ganley
Issik
Jones
Lovely
Loyola
Rehn
Reid
Renaud
Turton
Yao

Standing Committee on Public Accounts

Chair: Ms Phillips
Deputy Chair: Mr. Gotfried

Barnes
Dach
Guthrie
Hoffman
Reid
Renaud
Rosin
Rowswell
Stephan
Toor

Select Special Public Health Act Review Committee

Chair: Mr. Milliken
Deputy Chair: Ms Rosin

Ganley
Gray
Hoffman
Long
Lovely
Neudorf
Reid
Rowswell
Shepherd
Turton

Standing Committee on Resource Stewardship

Chair: Mr. Hanson
Deputy Chair: Member Ceci

Dach
Feehan
Getson
Loewen
Rehn
Rosin
Sabir
Singh
Smith
Yaseen

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

7:30 p.m.

Tuesday, July 7, 2020

[Mr. Milliken in the chair]

The Acting Speaker: Please be seated.

Government Bills and Orders Second Reading

Bill 30 Health Statutes Amendment Act, 2020

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health.

Mr. Shandro: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise and move second reading of Bill 30, Health Statutes Amendment Act, 2020.

Bill 30 makes essential amendments to health legislation to improve our public health care system. These proposed changes support three main objectives: first, strengthening the role of Albertans in our health system; second, meeting our commitment to reducing surgical wait times; and third, modernizing the health system here in Alberta so that it's more effective. These changes are long overdue. The previous government never made these types of changes a priority during their four years in government.

Mr. Speaker, our government is committed to building a more responsive health system which puts patients and their families at the centre of everything that we do, engaging Albertans to ensure that our health system meets their needs, reducing surgical wait times, and increasing access to physicians and other health professionals. Now, Bill 30 supports our efforts in ensuring that Albertans have access to safe, high-quality health services in a more sustainable and efficient manner.

Mr. Speaker, let me go through the highlights of the act. First, the proposed amendments will better support and strengthen the work of the Health Quality Council of Alberta. The proposed amendments would expand the council's mandate to include patient-centred care. Care happens, of course, not just in hospitals or physicians' offices but also in the community at places such as pharmacies, mental health and addiction clinics, doctors' offices, and in continuing care centres. We're providing the HQCA an additional \$1 million this year on top of their annual budget to support this new focus and to envision new, broader, bolder engagement strategies with patients, their families, and all Albertans to find system gaps and promote a better health care system.

Now, the Health Quality Council of Alberta will remain a vital, arm's-length organization and will conduct independent public inquiries when they're called to do so. By clarifying that the council reports to and shares their work with the Minister of Health, as do their counterparts in other provinces, we can better co-ordinate all the work happening in the province to promote patient safety, strength and service quality, and listen to the health needs of Albertans.

Next, the amendments to the Health Professions Act would increase the number of public members appointed to regulatory college councils as well as their complaint review committees and their hearing tribunals. This means that the number of public members will increase to 50 per cent, up from 25 per cent, at the College and Association of Registered Nurses of Alberta, as one example, or the College of Physicians & Surgeons of Alberta. Now, we want to ensure that the public's and patients' needs are heard and reflected in all aspects of governance, complaint reviews, and

discipline hearings. Regulatory colleges will maintain their self-governance role and will continue to elect and appoint members of their professions to these committees, but the proposed changes will make sure that the voices of Albertans complement the voices of the experts during major college decisions.

Next, amendments are needed to the Health Care Protection Act to reflect our modern health system under one consolidated health authority, Alberta Health Services. Many Albertans need faster and better access to surgeries, for example, to replace their knees, their hips, and with cataracts, among other surgeries. Surgical wait times are far too long and have been made even longer as we made space early in the pandemic to treat patients with COVID-19. The good news is that pandemic cases are stable in Alberta, and AHS has begun, as far back as May 4, rescheduling and performing scheduled surgeries again in this province. I think we are now at 70 per cent of our pre-COVID capacity. We hope by September to be at 100 per cent of our pre-COVID capacity, getting by January to 125 per cent of our pre-COVID capacity, and eventually in 2021 getting to 150 per cent of our pre-COVID capacity and remaining there until the end of this term of this Legislature.

Amendments to the Health Care Protection Act will make it easier for chartered surgical facilities to work with us and AHS to provide publicly funded surgeries to people who need them. Currently we have in this province 43 of these chartered surgical facilities that work under contract with AHS to provide surgeries to Albertans outside our hospitals at no expense to patients. Let me repeat that for the members opposite. The surgeries in these facilities are paid for publicly, at no expense to patients. The proposed amendments here in Bill 30 would reduce barriers and administrative burdens so that new chartered surgical facilities can more easily open, reducing surgical wait times for cataracts among other surgeries. Now, of course, strong oversight of these facilities would be maintained, and the College of Physicians and Surgeons of Alberta would continue to accredit these facilities to ensure that they provide safe, quality procedures.

The current process for chartered surgical facilities to open and contract with AHS can take as much as two years. We can't afford to wait any longer to reduce our wait times and provide tens of thousands more surgeries to waiting Albertans. Wait times increased every year under the previous government, and they did, unfortunately, nothing about it. Now they're claiming that the changes create American-style health care, and that's pure hypocrisy of the NDP. Nothing about these changes are American style. They are, pure and simple, Albertan style.

The fact is that under the NDP the independent providers throughout our province delivered publicly funded surgery, lab tests, continuing care, home care, housekeeping, laundry, and other services throughout this province, just like they do now and just like other provinces under governments of all parties. The NDP funded the same clinics here to do the same surgeries for four years. The difference between the NDP and our government is that we're committed to working with all of our partners to make the system better for our patients, first and foremost, by reducing wait times. We remain committed to providing every Albertan his or her surgery within clinically appropriate wait times by 2023; that is, Mr. Speaker, 78 per cent of our surgeries within four months, the remainder within 26 weeks. This is an ambitious goal. No other jurisdiction in Canada can meet this goal so far, especially with steps taken to ensure that Alberta's health system could sustain this pandemic response while also responding to our emergencies. Now, Bill 30 will help us meet our wait time goals by increasing access to publicly funded surgeries in Alberta.

We're also proposing amendments to the Alberta Health Care Insurance Act to give physicians more options on how they're

compensated. Right now only 13 per cent of our physicians in Alberta choose alternative ways of being paid such as through annualized salary-like payment models, for example, rather than fees for services. This is far lower than the 29 per cent of physicians across Canada who are paid through alternate compensation arrangements. Alberta physicians and the Alberta Medical Association have told government that one reason for these low participation rates here in Alberta is because current alternative programming is only available through a very cumbersome ministerial order process.

Physicians and the AMA have been clear for years that service contracts would be preferred, so we're proposing amendments to facilitate contractual payment options that will support innovation and delivery of care. Alternative compensation options allow physicians to spend more time with their patients, especially patients with complex needs, without having to worry about service volumes. We're committed to creating compensation options that help us attract and retain talented physicians to provide high-quality care throughout Alberta, including in our rural and remote communities.

Further proposed amendments to the Health Care Insurance Act would allow us not only to compensate physicians as the current act prescribes but also to contract directly with a range of organizations to deliver medical services and run local medical clinics; for example, indigenous communities and municipalities. This opens up a number of possibilities for the provision of health care that puts patients and Albertans at the centre of the system.

We're also strengthening accountability so that Albertans have access to an integrated health system with effective planning, co-ordination, and delivery of services. Modernizing the Regional Health Authorities Act will clarify that Alberta Health Services is the single health authority here in Alberta. Through our proposed amendments we are clarifying their accountability for providing top-quality services to Albertans across the province.

7:40

The amendments also clearly recognize the vital and unique role that Covenant plays alongside AHS as a strategic partner and as the largest provider of faith-based health care services here in Alberta. Covenant Health's leadership in the delivery of compassionate, quality health care in the province is unparalleled and extends back more than 150 years. Covenant Health is, in fact, older than our province, Mr. Speaker. I want to be clear that the proposed amendments will not result in changes to Covenant Health as an organization or to their service delivery. Covenant Health will continue to control its own operations.

The proposed amendments to the Regional Health Authorities Act will not affect the day-to-day operations of Covenant Health or Alberta Health Services, but these amendments will clarify their roles and the role of the ministry as recommended in the AHS review. This will strengthen accountability and co-ordination and help the government guide the system as a whole to meet strategic goals and ensure accountability for the public dollars that are invested in health care here in Alberta.

Next, the proposed changes to the Alberta Hospitals Act will ease the requirements of membership for the Hospital Privileges Appeal Board so that more people are eligible for appointment. Previously only members of very specific health care boards were eligible for appointment to the board, which reviews grievances brought forward by medical staff against hospital boards. We're proposing to expand appointment options, to change quorum requirements, and to ease the scheduling of meetings and reduce review delays.

We're also introducing amendments to clarify COVID-19 quarantine requirements for international travellers coming to Alberta. Right now the act requires people returning to Alberta from international destinations to quarantine for 14 days. The amendments will clarify that anyone entering Alberta after having travelled internationally must adhere to the 14-day quarantine requirement to align with the orders of the chief medical officer of health.

Lastly, Bill 30, if passed, will repeal the Provincial Health Authorities of Alberta Act, which is no longer necessary since Alberta only has one rather than multiple health authorities, which were disbanded in 2009. It will also repeal the Health Governance Transition Act as this is also a piece of vestigial legislation, which is no longer required here in Alberta. It served its purpose to help AHS take over the responsibilities for cancer treatment and mental health and addictions services when the Alberta Mental Health Board and the Alberta Cancer Board as well as AADAC, the Alberta Alcohol and Drug Abuse Commission, were dissolved and amalgamated and merged to create AHS in 2009.

We're also proposing amendments to other legislation to ensure that the Alberta Cancer Foundation continues its important role as a fundraiser for cancer care prevention and research across this province.

In closing, Mr. Speaker, all together, our proposed amendments will modernize health legislation and set us on a strong path to making our public health system more accessible, more sustainable with patients, their families, communities, and caregivers at the centre of all of our work.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I move second reading of Bill 30, the Health Statutes Amendment Act, 2020. Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

Are there any hon. members in the House who would like to join debate in second reading? I'm looking, but I'm not quite sure I recognize who the hon. member is. I believe it's the Minister of Transportation.

Mr. McIver: At this point, Mr. Speaker, I move to adjourn debate on Bill 30.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Bill 29

Local Authorities Election Amendment Act, 2020

The Acting Speaker: I see the hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs has risen.

Mr. Madu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise and move second reading of Bill 29, the Local Authorities Election Amendment Act, 2020.

In order to promote healthy and democratic local elections, we are proposing changes to the current act that will increase the fairness and accessibility of local elections, clarify the roles of advertisers, cut unnecessary red tape, and make it easier for new candidates to run meaningful campaigns.

The changes include expanding the ability of donors to support candidates across the province by allowing them to donate up to \$5,000 per candidate; increasing the amount that candidates can spend outside of the campaign period to \$5,000 and up to \$10,000 a year for self-funded candidates; updating advertising rules to enable third parties to participate in our democratic discourse; cutting red tape by requiring surplus funds over \$1,000 to be donated to charity and not held in trust accounts by municipalities to be carried over to the next election cycle; making sure that

candidates can focus their efforts on running meaningful campaigns by moving the disclosure due dates to after elections are over, in line with other jurisdictions in Canada; and keeping the option open for recall legislation to be developed in the future, as many Albertans have indicated they would like to see.

Mr. Speaker, it has become clear just how great the incumbent advantage is in our local elections. In the past three Edmonton municipal elections, going back 10 years, there has only been one newcomer that has been successful against an incumbent. For the past three Calgary municipal elections the number is only slightly better, with just three candidates running successful campaigns against incumbents.

Another barrier, Mr. Speaker, to entry that has yet to be addressed is gender. Out of the four successful candidates just mentioned, none were female. In fact, only two of Alberta's 19 major cities have female mayors. Both of these women were elected after the previous mayors retired, meaning there was no incumbent.

This bill promotes equality in local elections by adding systemic support for new candidates. By donating excess funds to charity, each candidate will begin collecting donations at the same starting line. By adding more flexibility to donation regulations, candidates without name recognition will still have a number of opportunities to make their voices heard.

If passed, Mr. Speaker, this bill will ensure a level playing field between new and experienced candidates, clarify the involvement of third parties in local elections, and cut red tape to make local elections more streamlined for candidates, voters, school boards, municipal governments, and indeed all Albertans.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I move second reading of Bill 29.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

Are there any hon. members looking to join debate? I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung has risen.

Mr. Dach: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Good evening, all members. I just heard, along with the members of the House, the minister reflect upon what he thought were the goals of the legislation that he's just moved second reading of, the Local Authorities Election Amendment Act, 2020. He mentioned in his speech that some of the goals that he thought he would be achieving with this legislation would be more democratic local elections, greater fairness in the election process, clarifying the rules of the election process, decreasing red tape, making it easier for new candidates to run, and levelling the playing field in local elections.

Well, these would be laudable goals, and this legislation might be worthy of the name had any of these goals actually been achieved within the legislation, for, in fact, what this legislation does, like much of the legislation that the UCP has proposed in this 30th Legislature, is the opposite of what they suggest it might do. In fact, I'll argue that it does make democratic elections less democratic. It makes them less fair. It muddies the rules, increases red tape, makes it more difficult for new candidates to enter the field, and tilts the playing field against individuals who are less able to afford the high cost of these new UCP local election rules.

7:50

Mr. Speaker, we all know that right now outside it's raining again in the Edmonton area, and it's pretty wet. We've significantly been impacted by rain and wetness, whether it's been here in Edmonton, whether it's been up in Fort McMurray recently. Not long ago in Calgary there's been flooding. I recently spent, on Friday afternoon, time in Thorhild county, where I witnessed the inundated fields and flooded fields of our farmers in that county, which has now been declared an agricultural disaster area.

What this piece of legislation reminds me of is that flood. Now, it's not a flood of water that we're seeing; it's the flood of cash. I'm thinking right now of one of the earlier game shows that used to be on television, that most prairie viewers will remember. I think the Premier is of a certain age where he would remember it as well. It was *Royalite Windfall*. It was a game show where contestants who had been given little pull cards from the gas station when they bought gasoline would send them in to a draw. The draw would be a great big global sphere, which was a see-through plastic globe. The wind would flurry up all the different contestants' entry forms, and then they would reach in during the televised – it was a televised thing, and the moderator would pull out a winner, and live on television the winner of the *Royalite Windfall* would be announced. It was a big thing. People watched it with bated breath.

But, tell you what, that's the image I get when I think about this piece of legislation, Mr. Speaker, that of a windfall. The windfall of cash is going to those individuals who are the beneficiaries of the very many channels of cash that this legislation opens up to candidates who are privy to the inner workings of money movement in the electoral process in Alberta.

Now, we had hoped to have gotten rid of much of this type of political activity, where we see money freely flowing and dictating who may actually win, from a nomination campaign all the way up to a leadership campaign to a general election. When we were in government, of course, we did our very best to abate this flow of cash so that it was a level playing field. We took big money out of politics. But what we are seeing with this legislation, Mr. Speaker, is a blatant reversal of that whole attitude. We're seeing the floodgates open up in many different ways so that cash can freely flow, and those individuals who are the beneficiaries of it will be the ones who are more likely to be elected.

Now, I'll state clearly, Mr. Speaker, that the vast majority of Albertans cannot afford to donate \$5,000 to any single candidate. Right now only the wealthiest people can donate \$5,000 per person to as many candidates as they want. That's one of the things that this piece of legislation allows. It allows an individual to donate \$5,000 per person to as many candidates as they would like. It brings in gobs and gobs and gobs of cash to the electoral process in Alberta in our municipal elections. It really is a method that this government is using to influence who actually gets elected in this province by tilting the playing field in favour of those that – the people with money in this province, who can afford to donate \$5,000 a person to as many people on the slate of candidates that they may choose to select, would be the beneficiary of it. It makes sure that the wealthy friends of the UCP can finance as many campaigns as they want.

It's really reprehensible, Mr. Speaker, and it's the height of hypocrisy for the member who is the Minister of Municipal Affairs to stand on this legislation and suggest that this flood of cash, this *Royalite Windfall*, this winning ticket will produce democratic local elections, will increase fairness in our election process. Will it clarify the rules? Will it reduce red tape or make it easier for newcomers to run? It totally tilts the playing field in favour of those with the biggest and deepest pockets. It's the height of hypocrisy, and it's the worst of what we used to see in Alberta politics happening all over again. I don't think that anybody watching tonight would see anything more clearly than that. There's no facade. There's no screen over the theatre. There's no curtain rising that will attempt to blow a smokescreen. The UCP are unashamedly, unabashedly opening the wells for cash to spring forward to support candidates that would benefit from those Albertans who can afford to play.

Now, these municipal elections are basically, Mr. Speaker, being put up for sale by the Premier and his caucus. I'm sure he's confident that his wealthy friends will be there willing to buy those elections, and I'm surely sure that we're going to see American-style PACs in our local campaigns. That's exactly what this legislation is aimed to do.

I mean, it's shameful and unbelievable that the minister would get up and claim that it's going to have the opposite effect when he knows full well that the whole design of this plan is to tilt this playing field in favour of the supporters of the individuals who will want a certain slate of candidates supported by wealthy individuals elected in municipal elections. By doing so, Mr. Speaker, there's a level of control in the municipalities that the government currently doesn't have right now, short of, of course, emasculating the powers of the municipalities, which is something they're also working on, the level of control by way of tilting the playing field to ensure that their slate of candidates gets elected there, that would be more inclined to support the policies that the provincial government would like to see, be a little less opposed, perhaps, to some of the ways that the current government is operating.

I know that the relationship currently between the two largest municipalities and our Alberta government is more than somewhat strained, and I think this legislation reflects that this government would like to see that change not by collaborating, Mr. Speaker, or engaging with the rightfully elected municipal administrations in Edmonton and Calgary but by replacing them with people that, say, have a more favourable bent. That's the type of legislation we've come to see as the norm in this 30th Legislature with the UCP at the helm.

I'm not surprised. I'm certainly disappointed, and I think that Albertans who are watching this will be wondering how in the world we are stepping back in time once again on this plate, on municipal elections, because it seems to be, in every subject matter, every field that we touch, whether it's municipal elections, whether it's financing of provincial elections, whether it's nomination meetings, whether it's leadership campaigns, whether it's any part of the electoral process where there are donations that can be made, that this government is intent on reversing the progress that was made towards levelling the playing field that we incorporated into our legislation and going back to the good old days when you could open up your wallet and let the cash flow and give money to others and let them donate. The rules were pretty fast and loose, Mr. Speaker, and I don't think that Albertans expected, in one fell swoop, to see in the first term of a UCP government that this would be something that they would entertain.

As far as a first term goes, I think that Albertans who I talk to are very much inclined to do their very level best to make sure that it's the last term that this government serves as a government in this province. This government knows, indeed, that they are in a bit of trouble, to say the least, in many quarters of this province politically because of some of their policies that run against the grain of the wishes of Albertans when it comes to public service and investment in public service. One of the ways that the current government hopes to gain favour with the electorate is to tilt the balance, to try, in municipal elections, to install individuals who would be spouting more of their dogma at a municipal level than currently we find the case.

8:00

I know that when we were in government, one of the things that we did on purpose – I think it was welcomed by municipalities – was to involve, as the former minister of economic development and trade indicated today in our Public Accounts Committee meeting, the concept of collaboration at every step of the way with

our municipal partners when we looked at implementing services and spending tax dollars that could be more effectively spent on a reasonable basis. That's the type of collaboration, that's the type of direction that our government took and the approach that municipalities truly respected.

We're seeing the opposite thing happening, Mr. Speaker, with this government in terms of its relationship with municipalities. The disdain with which it holds current administrations is striking. I really don't understand why this government fails to see how a positive partnership with municipalities is something that should be properly negotiated and reached in respectful discussions rather than something that is force-fed. But that's exactly what we're seeing with this legislation. This legislation, this bill, will flood municipal and school board campaigns with dark money, following the two other bills introduced this week that will allow pretty much unlimited fundraising for provincial referendum campaigns on topics to be decided by the Premier.

The bill, as I alluded to, is clear evidence that this government is going to attack the rules that tried to keep big money out of politics because they're clearly incapable of following them. They had to fire the guy that was investigating them, and the next step is to change the law, Mr. Speaker. They can't function without having friends and insiders hand them big wads of cash: a true *Royalite Windfall*. At least now the corporate giveaways seem to make a little bit of sense, making sure shareholders have more money to donate and more places to put that money to secure power for the current government.

Now, the government undertook a survey when it announced it would be analyzing the Local Authorities Election Act. It invited Albertans to participate and express their views on a range of topics that the bill now changes. However, the results of the survey were never released. Why has the government not made the survey results public? Albertans are wondering, Mr. Speaker. For something as important as changes to local elections, local democracy, we really need to know what the public had said. Did the government consult with local municipalities? Were they asked if indeed they wanted big money once again to influence local elections? Were they asked if indeed they wanted to see local elections directed by a few with deep pockets and an intent to influence the democratic process?

Did the government consult with civil society groups that encourage Albertans from underrepresented or marginalized groups to run for public office? Not likely. Did they say that the changes put forward in this bill would help Albertans from underrepresented groups run for office? Why then? When? When did they learn? What were the consultations? We haven't seen or heard the results. Nothing has been released. Is that consultation, if there was adequate consultation, reflected in the bill? How does it increase the cap for newcomers, in fact, if that is a goal of the Municipal Affairs minister? Is it your experience that first-time candidates have access to more or less funds?

I know that there are a lot of questions that Albertans have on their minds about this piece of legislation, and they have a lot of concerns about where it's going as far as influencing our elections. We'd like to think that in this province, in this country, we live in a free and open democracy that allows people to express themselves and run for office if they like and to pick the best candidate if they are electors, to freely be able to decide after a full hearing of the various candidates for election, yet what we're seeing with this legislation, Mr. Speaker, is a process which will deny that free and open hearing, a process that will stop the newcomers from being able to enter because of the barrier of large cash unless, perhaps, they're the favoured son or daughter of those with the big large sums of cash to donate.

I'm not very hopeful, Mr. Speaker, that we'll see any improvement in democracy. In fact, I think it's going to do the opposite if this legislation passes. The attempt to bring big money into local elections is staggering with this piece of legislation. It removes the \$4,000 limit on annual contributions to local campaigns that we had introduced and increases it to \$10,000 per candidate before and after polling day. It allows individuals to donate up to \$5,000 each to an unlimited number of municipal and school board candidates before polling day. Albertans watching at home or reading the legislation can add, and they know how quickly those \$5,000 donations will add up. Believe me, they know who in this province has got that kind of money, and for the most part it's not them. It's people who have deep pockets, who wish to influence legislation in a certain way, who will be able to come up with that kind of cash to donate to multiple candidates and be subsidized for it with tax receipts as well.

Maybe that's something that should be added to this legislation. Maybe we should see an amendment so that the individuals who make over a certain amount of donations should not have any tax benefit. That would be a question to ask: if those individuals would be as willing to donate if there was no tax benefit. Maybe they would be. Let's not give the UCP any ideas. They just might be willing to jump on that one.

But, Mr. Speaker, to be honest about it, there's a very small percentage of Albertans who could even fathom coming up with \$5,000 for one candidate, never mind multiple candidates, and it's a small percentage who will have that economic power that will translate into political power given the passage of this legislation. It's the type of thing that we see south of the border, where you'll find that individuals with huge bank accounts will finance hundreds of thousands, millions of dollars.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any members looking to join debate? I see the hon. member for . . .

Member Ceci: Under 29(2)(a)?

The Acting Speaker: There's no 29(2)(a) on this. There will be 29(2)(a) on further debaters. Are you still looking?

Member Ceci: Yes.

The Acting Speaker: Okay. The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

Member Ceci: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Like my friend from Edmonton-McClung and his eloquence in talking about how utterly disappointed he is in this bill, the local authorities amendment act, I share those feelings because I think it fails on many levels and misses the opportunity to actually make something meaningful happen in this province for local elections.

I want to start by just talking about some of the reactions that people have had since, I believe, the June 25 introduction of this bill in this House. The reactions that are reported in the media, Mr. Speaker, are not good, to say the least. For instance, one person has commented. He's an expert on municipal elections, on local elections. This is the title of the media report: *Alberta Local Elections Bill Gets Mixed Reaction from Experts, Former Candidates*. One expert is quoted as saying: this is the first example I've come across of a government basically weakening provisions rather than strengthening them. That's Bill 29 in a nutshell, but, as my friend for Edmonton-McClung has said, that's this government's work in the 30th Legislature in a nutshell as well.

8:10

To recap, this expert says: this is the first example I've come across of a government basically weakening provisions rather than strengthening them. What were some of those strengthened provisions that have been weakened, Mr. Speaker? Well, one of them is, as my friend for Edmonton-McClung has used, the analogy or the example of flooding. A really big one is the flood of money that will come into local elections. You know, you may say that I'm thinking the worst, that I'm going to an extreme that will never happen in this province. But if you read the legislation – we've all read the Bill 29 legislation, the amendment act to the Local Authorities Election Act – it is, frankly, disturbing to see the kind of time and attention that has been put to third-party advertisers and the amount of cash that they can bring into elections, not only in one jurisdiction. Once they get to 10 jurisdictions, they can be then provincially regulated. Already there has been some thought that there will be third-party advertisers who will enlist or register across this province in numerous jurisdictions, and that, frankly, is disturbing.

The other reactions from in the media: I'll just read a few of them. *Past and Present Leaders Blast Proposed Local Election Finance Changes: that's in the St. Albert Today*. They blast them for good reason.

Another one is: *Municipal Election Funding Legislation Contains 'One Enormous Mistake,' Nenshi Says*. That was CBC Calgary. I think if I recall back, when I heard that report on the radio, it said that the fact that people donating funds to a candidate don't have to be disclosed by that candidate until after the election – and the minister has said that will make it easier for people to focus on knocking on doors, getting their brochures together, going to forums. Of course, he's suggesting that providing documentation of who is giving you donations before the election is too onerous for candidates, and they would be spending too much of their time away from the campaign trail, away from addressing local issues. They would be spending too much time that the Minister of Municipal Affairs has put in this amendment that donors don't have to be disclosed until after the election. That is the one enormous mistake that Mayor Nenshi says this bill undertakes.

It's not here, but I'll give one sliver of positive kudos to the minister and that is that candidates can't hold more than a thousand dollars, and if they're elected they must donate the surplus to a charity. I think that's a great idea. In fact, I know that many candidates did that in the last election.

Another bit of criticism – not a bit, a lot of criticism – to this bill is from Ask Her YYC. That's a group committed to try and get parity on councils throughout the province, all sorts of councils, whether it be school boards or local councils. And ParityYEG want changes to Bill 29. They believe that the kinds of things that are in this bill will make it harder for women to get elected across this province.

Another criticism is from *Everything Grande Prairie!*: Grande Prairie Mayor Unhappy with Proposed Changes to Local Elections Introduced in Bill 29. That is pretty evident when you read the full accounting of that report.

The last one. Again, I mentioned it off the top. *Alberta Local Elections Bill Gets Mixed Reaction from Experts, Former Candidates*. That was CBC Edmonton. Rather than strengthening bills, this bill, this government is basically weakening provisions. That's the experts' account of all of that.

I took the opportunity to look up RMA's views on this Bill 29, and they go at it a little bit differently in terms of what they would like to see in the bill. They talk about principles, principles 1 through 4, that they want to see addressed. I can tell you that on at

least two of these, I see significant failure in this bill to address these principles. I'll start with the fourth one. It talks about "nonpartisan and municipally-focused." That's what the principle is, "nonpartisan and municipally-focused." This is what they say with regard to that. "The campaigning and election process should be designed in such a way as to ensure that candidates are focused on and accountable to the interests of their municipality as opposed to a political party or broader ideology."

The reason I think that this bill fails terribly with regard to that principle is one of the things that my colleague from Edmonton-McClung says. Donors now are not capped in terms of how much money they want to – how many candidates they want to give up to \$5,000 to. They can give money to one candidate in all of the municipalities and school board elections in the province.

We know that bills 26 and 27, with regard to referenda and senatorial elections, will certainly not meet this test for principle 4. That's with regard to being municipally focused. They would like to see nonpartisan and municipally focused elections, so a focus on the municipality's issues, not on senatorial elections or on referenda the province, the government, believes are important.

Certainly, they would argue that the amount of money that third-party advertisers are likely going to be bringing into municipal elections, probably in the major cities across this province, the seven big ones and probably many more, will take the focus away from the municipal elections and be on province-wide issues.

The first principle is "inclusive and accessible." It talks about, "all those meeting eligibility requirements should have reasonable means to participate as candidates [in and] vote in an election." I don't see where this bill helps any of that in terms of inclusivity and accessibility.

"Fair and equitable. All candidates should have comparable opportunities to participate." Just on that point the minister talked about, you know, that one of the reasons is the incumbent advantage and talked about Edmonton and Calgary. The local people in those wards voted for candidates in their ward, and for some reason the minister seems to believe that the local folks don't know what's in their best interests, don't know who they want to represent them. If one newcomer has come in 10 years and three in Calgary, I think he said, in 10 years, who's to say that those newcomers weren't better than the incumbent? They were because they won at that point, but who's to say that the incumbents who won in all the other cases weren't better than the newcomers? I think the minister is saying that he thinks he knows better than the electors in those ridings and those wards.

The amount of money is just staggering that potentially could come into elections. I think it's a problem for \$5,000 donations to hit the accounts of candidates before the election and possibly after the election if there's a deficit from that same donor. Then when you multiply that across this province, it starts to get a little staggering in terms of where local finances for elections are going.

8:20

I'll certainly be able to get more into this bill with other stakeholders. That's my interest, to bring forward at the Committee of the Whole amendments that will make this bill better and, as the person who's an expert says, you know, to put more strength back into this bill.

We had a bill before, with the Local Authorities Election Act, that capped the amount of donations at \$4,000 per individual, and that, I think, was really what broadening democracy is all about. The money comes and gets reported before the election from all sorts of people. In many cases they're not staggering amounts of money – they're \$100 here, \$200 there, \$50 there – and previously the person who showed they got the broadest appeal usually was

the person who won. They got a lot of small donations. They worked hard to talk about the local issues in their community. They worked hard to make sure that they were representative of the people they wanted to beat sitting around a council table for. That's how elections were won under the previous rules, and under these new changes, the amendments that are here, it is kind of shocking to think what our future councils might look like.

The third principle – I didn't talk about it – was from RMA, and how they've gone about reviewing this bill is to talk about whether it meets the principles. The third one is transparent and accountable: "All candidates should be required to disclose contributions received to ensure adherence to applicable campaign finance requirements." Now, it doesn't say "before the election," but it doesn't take a genius to see that transparent and accountable is what they're looking for, and Bill 29 is not transparent. It's transparent after the fact, so how does that help a person understand who they're getting money from before the election occurs? It doesn't. It weakens that provision.

You know, I think what smart candidates will do is that they'll start declaring who they're getting funds from from day one of the campaign trail, and they'll say: I'm getting funds from X, Y, and Z. They'll total them up, and they'll have an advantage over a person who says: look, the bill says that we don't have to disclose until after the election. Well, I'm not going to vote for that person. That person has got something, probably, to hide. The most transparent candidates . . .

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available, and I believe that the Minister of Transportation has risen on that.

Mr. McIver: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm happy to rise on 29(2)(a). I listened with great entertainment to the speech we just heard. Lots of stuff to work with there, so I'll try to pick out some of my favourites. I particularly liked the references to third-party advertising. There was never ever nearly as much activity on third-party advertising as there was in the last provincial election, and – wait for it – under whose legislation? Whose legislation? I think it was the NDP's legislation. Yeah. Yet they're the ones that created the biggest opportunity for third-party advertising in the history of Alberta . . .

An Hon. Member: Five million dollars from unions.

Mr. McIver: . . . including \$5 million from unions. And now they have the actual – I'm trying to think of a polite word. Courage. Let's say "courage." That's a nice word. "Chutzpah": that's a nice Jewish, good word for courage – courage to stand up and complain about it after they created what they just stood up for 15 minutes and complained about. This is just unbelievable.

I will give the hon. member that just spoke credit for one thing. Now municipal councillors can't do what I did and what that hon. member did when we were in the city council together. You actually had the ability to keep money between elections just stored up for the next election, giving the incumbents a big advantage. I give the hon. member credit for pointing out that that's a good piece of the legislation. I thank him for that, but in fairness we didn't hear that when I was on city council, didn't hear that when the hon. member was on city council. I would say that that's probably a good thing. It might even have something to do with the fact that so few incumbents are defeated in elections. Heck, you give somebody a \$40,000 head start or an \$80,000 head start, it would beat me now. It's like a foot race with 100 metres. I stand at the 90 and you stand at the zero, and let's see who gets to the 100 first. I'm guessing the person who starts at the 90 would get to the 100 first most of the

time. That's kind of how the deck has been able to be stacked in the past.

I would dare say that the weakening provisions – everybody is entitled to their opinion. Even the hon. member said that there was mixed reactions, so he obviously focused on the people that didn't like what's in there. But I would say that one of the main provisions, one of the main head starts that you can get in politics is a financial head start. The other one is just plain old hard work, knocking on doors, doing all that kind of stuff. So I'm not sure. I think I would say that the arguments that we heard are pretty weak.

I would also say that talking about taking big money out – I mean, the NDP's number was \$4,000. The number in this legislation is \$5,000. Somehow, Mr. Speaker, the number \$4,000 is magically good, unbelievably great, yet \$5,000, according to the last speaker, is evil. How do you get from magically good to evil from \$4,000 to \$5,000? The previous speaker kind of made that leap, how the previous government's number was so fantastic and this really not that much changed number is somehow just beyond the pale.

Mr. Kenney: The super rich only can afford it.

Mr. McIver: Only the super rich. Everybody has \$4,000, but only the super rich have \$5,000. Now, I'm not sure how many people at home actually believe that, Mr. Speaker.

I will tell you that when the previous government put the \$4,000 number in, it was after a report came out from the previous election numbers. The sweet spot for the NDP donors was \$4,000. So magically, at least where – above that they didn't get a lot, but they did \$4,000 and below. Obviously, the goal of the previous government's legislation was to cut off support for other people but not for themselves.

Mr. Kenney: Because they're caviar socialists.

Mr. McIver: Caviar socialists. Yes. That's one way to put it.

Mr. Speaker, I'm highly entertained by that. I'm particularly amused by the fact that the previous speaker didn't mention the fact that they left one big loophole where unions who actually are part of the NDP board could go and put money into an election, and this legislation doesn't allow that anymore. But the hon. member kind of missed that little detail. Might be because it's in the NDP's best interest. Maybe; maybe not. But he conveniently didn't bring that up.

Mr. Speaker, they talked about fair and equitable. I'll tell you what. What's fair and equitable is that the rules apply to everybody, and they can go out and do the work. This legislation applies for that. I would say to the hon. member that he might want to reconsider some of the words he said just now because they don't really stand up to scrutiny.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other hon. members looking to join debate? I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore has risen.

Mr. Nielsen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the opportunity tonight to rise to speak to Bill 29, the Local Authorities Election Amendment Act, 2020. I almost wonder if I should be calling it the Local Authorities Pay-to-Play Amendment Act. Speaking of entertaining, I will admit the previous speaker was most entertaining, especially with some of his points of view, but, like he said, he is allowed to have those, so I won't take those away from him.

We've had a suite here of legislation tabled around elections. I must say that I remember back to the 29th Legislature. We had the opportunity to create a Select Special Ethics and Accountability

Committee, and one of the tasks of that committee was to look at elections financing.

8:30

Again, I know that the Member for Calgary-Hays finds it very, very entertaining around that number that was chosen. I specifically remember the members that were sitting in opposition at that time coming up with every single excuse to try to keep more money in elections. It got to such a point – and it's funny because, you know, I can recall throughout even this Legislature a couple of times having the Member for Calgary-Hays finger wagging here over at us about how, well, we don't ever seem to want to show up to work. I remember those opposition members walking out, so kind of rich when you start finger wagging with that kind of history.

My colleague from Calgary-Buffero talked about how, you know, we're being accused of thinking in the extreme. Well, I think the reason why is: look back in history, Mr. Speaker. Alberta once held the prestigious title when it came to election financing of the Wild West of elections, and that certainly was not a title of endearment; I can tell you that. That's because election finances were out of control in this province, absolutely out of control. So we tried, through the committee, to do some work around that, assuming members wouldn't walk out, and tried to bring some of these numbers in check.

Comparing what we're seeing here in this, you know, to the \$4,000 cap, that's \$4,000 that one individual can spend in a year. Period. You can spread that out in as many directions as you would like, but once you hit \$4,000, that's it. But here, when I look at this, \$5,000 to any single candidate, to as many candidates as you choose anywhere in the province: that doesn't sound like \$4,000 to me. I could take my \$4,000 right now and spread it over 20 candidates, but that's all I can do. Five thousand dollars over 20 candidates: I know that I've been accused of math is hard, but even I figured this one out. This is about paying to play. I believe I've even seen this in a news report: we're bringing back the Wild West of elections.

Then you start to couple that with all the other things in Bill 26 and Bill 27. You know, the member mentioned how we created so much chaos around third-party advertisers, the worst chaos ever, yet you're upping the ante. We said: this is how much you can spend; you can spend it how you want. All you had to do was disclose where the money was coming from. That's it. Period. No big deal. The reason we did that was because we didn't want to get any court challenges like we saw in other jurisdictions. And to the best of my knowledge, we haven't seen any here around that because we were careful enough to make sure that that wouldn't happen. But now here we are. We're seeing up to \$350,000 before you even have to really start disclosing anything.

One thing I wouldn't mind touching on here because I've heard this a few times: we start to hear all kinds of interesting comments around the unions and what they're donating. I remember in the 2019 election, Mr. Speaker, a big, bright, flashing billboard in Decore that ran for quite some time. I can tell you that it certainly wasn't promoting me, anything but. I'm willing to bet that that big, flashy billboard going on 24 hours a day was not cheap, so somebody was financing that. I know for a fact somebody was; otherwise, it probably wouldn't be up there.

One thing I would like to quickly touch on here is around keeping track of donors. This is about allowing a candidate, in this proposed legislation, to focus on the election. Now, I am just going to simply assume that a newcomer coming in doesn't have any campaign team whatsoever, and they have to keep track of the donations. Well, if they're not going to have to worry about it till after the election, are they going to be able to keep track of their donors over the course of that election period? I remember my first time

running. Man, once I got into the heat of things, I was lucky if I could remember what I had for breakfast that morning. So maybe a little bit of an incentive to at least get one other person on your team to maybe write down quickly who's giving you money.

You know, I've had the opportunity to help an individual become a city councillor, and he was the newcomer. I'll tell you right now that I had to work my tail off because there was another one that was coming up hard. And then – surprise, surprise – in the last election in my area the newcomer comes in, and he won from the incumbent.

Winning my election, Mr. Speaker, just like you did in this past one – you probably had to work your tail off as well. Absolutely. In 2015 I was lucky enough, worked hard enough, I built a team around me that worked hard enough, and I was fortunate enough to unseat a two-term incumbent. I didn't need any advantage, didn't need any special financing rules. As a matter of fact, I was playing back with the rules when it was the Wild West but managed to get it done. I was fortunate enough, you know. We spent I believe it was \$15,000 on that campaign, so you can't tell me it can't be done. This is about paying to play and influencing the outcomes of how they're going to turn out by donating incredible amounts of money.

You know, to the other point, no, I don't have any donors that can just drop \$4,000. They throw me a hundred bucks here, \$200 there. I've had a few of a whole \$500. Woo-hoo; I'm rocking now. But \$5,000?

All I see here, Mr. Speaker, in Bill 29 is yet another attempt to keep more money in elections. When you combine it with all the other suite, with the referendums and the Senate stuff, all I'm seeing is taking these elections, and I think we're going to potentially turn them into a bit of a gong show. Let the local elections do what they do. The system wasn't broken.

8:40

As I was saying, \$5,000 to any single candidate to multiple candidates anywhere, paying to play: it starts to beg some questions – and I know that my friend from Edmonton-McClung had mentioned some of these things – around the consultations. I, too, want to know: what were those results? Why don't you just put them out there? Let everybody see it. Oh, wait. We like to hide those kinds of things, as we just saw in the private members' committee.

My friend from Calgary-Buffalo, who happens to serve as the Municipal Affairs critic, has been reaching out to local municipalities. I've seen on social media from different local representatives that some of them aren't liking some of the parts that they're seeing to this. So if supposedly you consulted – or was it that you just consulted with certain individuals? – maybe release some of that information. Then we'll know.

When we're talking about connecting with people from underrepresented groups, again, what did you find out? What did you hear? Is it reflected in this bill? I don't know. I can't tell. You haven't released any information around that. In a way, Mr. Speaker, I would almost challenge the government to shut me up. Say: "Here. Here's the information. See? It's actually in the legislation." But based on the track record, I'm not going to hold out any hope for that kind of a thing.

I guess I could say that, you know, any campaign surpluses getting donated to charity: that could potentially be a good thing. Let's hope that somebody doesn't disagree with somebody's choice of a charity. We've now seen some legislation where they're telling unions: oh, well, you have to disclose how much you're going to be putting towards political activism. But then here we are going to a charity. It's possible somebody just might not like that charity that that candidate donates any surplus to. It's possible. Constantly I'm seeing conflicting language and information around these things.

It's very, very difficult, Mr. Speaker, to try to support legislation when we have experts saying that this takes us backwards. This is not a good place that we're going to. The hope is that maybe as we move this towards Committee of the Whole, we'll get a chance to bring some amendments forward. What was the favourite line I used to hear when I sat on the other side? Maybe making a . . .

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available for brief comments or questions.

Member Ceci: I know my colleague was just in the midst of talking about how amendments brought forward can perhaps improve this bad bill. I wonder if he'd like to finish his thoughts.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore.

Mr. Nielsen: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate my colleague from Calgary-Buffalo allowing me an opportunity. Yeah, hopefully, you know, we can potentially make a piece of, quite frankly several pieces of, bad legislation less bad. We used to always hear that. "Oh, we're just here to help. We're trying to make bad legislation less bad." It's not just us saying it. That's the thing. This is not the world according to me. Others are saying this. And, no, they're not affiliated with the NDP, so you can park that one.

At the end of the day, Mr. Speaker, elections are supposed to be about big ideas, not big pocketbooks, and Bill 29 is going to be about big pocketbooks and coming into elections and paying to play. At the end of the day I think the ones that are really going to really end up paying are the electors themselves because they're not going to be able to see themselves reflected in the candidates that get put into positions simply because they had really big donors.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

With about three minutes left on 29(2)(a) I see the hon. Premier has risen.

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, I thank the member opposite for his remarks, but I must confess to being somewhat mystified by his assertion that radical reforms to democratize Alberta constitutes I think he said a gong show or an attack on democracy, as characterized by the NDP, in which he enumerated referendums and Senate elections.

We saw the bizarre spectacle in this place recently of his leader attacking as, quote, undemocratic and antidemocratic the bill which would expand the ambit of government-initiated referendums from those limited constitutional amendments to matters of broader public interest of a nonconstitutional nature. I think most Albertans find it peculiar, Mr. Speaker, that a party with the word "democratic" in its title would be so viscerally opposed to the most democratic forms of decision-making.

Let's break this down. They are opposed to the government referring matters of broad public interest to the people for direct votes through referenda. They are opposed to allowing Albertans to select their nominees for the Senate of Canada. Apparently, they prefer that the Prime Minister, by fiat, should be able to determine who represents Albertans in the upper Chamber of our Parliament. I assume they oppose – right now we can hear their opposition to this bill, apparently, opposition to reforms that limit the extraordinary advantage that municipal incumbents have in elections. They'd prefer legislation that protects incumbents and disadvantages outsiders and challengers.

Theirs is a party, Mr. Speaker, that wrote election laws that allowed their allied union affiliates to spend millions of dollars through political action committees. [interjections] They laugh. The

Alberta Federation of Labour, which is legally a constituent affiliate of the NDP, through a loophole in their legislation was able to spend millions of dollars on behalf of the NDP, a total violation of any sense of equity in Alberta election law.

They apparently oppose, Mr. Speaker, I gather, the right of citizens to recall members of the Legislature if they fail to be accountable to their constituents, a right that this government fully intends to legislate this year. Apparently, they oppose as being antidemocratic the right of citizens to initiate referenda on important matters of public interest, legislation that will be introduced by this government further to recommendations from a Legislature panel.

Mr. Speaker, I'm proud of this government's action to provide real democratic reforms and appalled by the NDP's opposition to it.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. Premier.

I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-Whitemud has risen for debate on Bill 29.

Ms Pancholi: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise today in second reading of Bill 29, the Local Authorities Election Amendment Act, 2020. In fact, I actually would like to thank the hon. Premier for his comments just before I started to speak because it actually clarifies for me exactly again what this government's primary focus is on, which is distraction – which is distraction – because they actually can't deliver on what they promised in their campaign, which is jobs, economy, pipelines. We've seen a catastrophic loss of jobs in this province before the pandemic hit, before the epic drop in oil prices, 50,000 jobs lost under this Premier's first year as a result of his \$4.7 billion corporate handout.

8:50

Of course, I can appreciate that the Premier doesn't want Albertans talking about that. I think he's doing his very best, actually, Mr. Speaker, to distract Albertans from that. His record thus far, considering that his plan going forward is to just do more of the same, to double down on corporate handouts, which haven't produced any jobs – actually, it's just giving away Albertans' dollars that were going to fund their public services. So, of course, distract from that by introducing a slew of bills that are really just throwing a bone to the base of the government's party, the UCP.

I know he's got a very anxious group of supporters who are eager to talk about separatism, eager to talk about Wexit, and he's got to give them some things to preoccupy themselves with right now, Mr. Speaker. I think it's pretty clear that when we're looking at Bill 29, the Local Authorities Election Amendment Act, 2020, this is just more of that. It's more distractions, throwing some things to his base. He knows that bringing back big money into municipal politics, into referendums, Senate elections is all about throwing a bone to his base.

Of course – you know what? – honestly, I don't blame the Premier because he doesn't have much else to talk about that's good news for Albertans. In fact, everything he's talked about since he's come into power has really been bad news for Albertans. It's been increases in taxes, increases in fees. It's been cuts to their public services. It's been one bad announcement after another under this Premier's watch, so of course he's going to distract.

So I'm not surprised that here we are, at a critical point in economic recovery in our province, focusing, under the Premier's watch, on things that are not going to make any difference or are only going to make life harder for Albertans. He's going to distract by bringing through a bunch of legislation to bring back big money into politics. I think it was actually quite apt that just before I got to

speak, I got to hear the Premier once again try to distract and rile up his members and his caucus and his base by talking about the things that he can actually deliver on, which is more division, more big money in politics. What he can't deliver on is what he campaigned on, which is jobs, the economy, and pipelines. Fine.

You know, we're not part of the government; we're opposition. The government gets to decide what bills are introduced. I'm not surprised at bringing in four bills to distract Albertans, so I will debate the bill that's before us today. It wouldn't be my top choice, Mr. Speaker, to talk about bringing big money back into local politics. It would be my choice to talk about the ways to actually get Albertans back to work by investing in Albertans, who are the economy. They're not something separate. It's about investing in workers and in families and in parents. But this Premier wants us to talk instead about big money in local politics, so let's do that.

I'll walk through it. It's actually been quite astounding to hear even the Minister of Transportation stand and speak about this bill when he doesn't seem to understand his own bill or his cabinet's own bill. You know, he talked about how it's only a \$1,000 increase in donation allowances that are allowed under this, going from \$4,000 to \$5,000. But, of course, if the Minister of Transportation took the time to read the bill – and I'm assuming he has; he's been a member of cabinet for, well, not that long, but he is a member of cabinet right now; I'm sure he's taken a look at that bill – he'd know that the change that was made is not that individuals can only now donate \$5,000 versus \$4,000. The previous cap was a total donation cap on an individual in an entire election, so one individual could donate \$4,000 total in a municipal election, spread across as many candidates as they want or maybe all into one candidate. That was their choice, but it was a \$4,000 hard cap.

Now, of course, under the amendments brought forward today in Bill 29, an individual can donate to one candidate up to \$10,000, because it's \$5,000 before election day and \$5,000 afterwards, and can also donate to as many candidates as they'd like, and therein lies the big difference, Mr. Speaker, which I'm certain the Minister of Transportation is aware of – and if he isn't, well, he is now – the difference between a \$4,000 hard cap and \$10,000 per candidate, an unlimited number of candidates. That's actually a huge difference.

Actually, the number of individuals who can afford spending, really, an unlimited amount of money in a municipal election: those are the very wealthiest. Some people, of course, would struggle to pay \$4,000 or to donate \$4,000, and probably most people wouldn't hit that cap in an election. Certainly, far, far fewer Albertans could afford to spend \$10,000 on an unlimited number of candidates, but that's certainly what the amendments under Bill 29 allow. So I think we need to be clear about what we're talking about here.

I do give credit to the Minister of Transportation. He got a good guffaw out of his colleagues on that one. Unfortunately, it's not accurate, just like most of what the members opposite say is not accurate. [interjections]

So let's continue on with what's actually in this bill, which is that, as well – one of the things, actually, I will give credit for, and I think my colleague, the Member for Calgary-*Buffalo* . . .

The Acting Speaker: Hon. member, I hesitate to interrupt you. I just do want to remind members of the House that you can't do indirectly what you cannot do directly, and I think we got very close to language that would cause disorder on that, so I just wanted to take the opportunity to remind all members to ensure that they do not walk so close to the line with regard to language that can cause disorder.

If the hon. member could please continue.

Ms Pancholi: Thank you for the reminder, Mr. Speaker. I do like to watch those lines.

I would like to actually commend one of the amendments that's been put forward in Bill 29, which I believe my colleague the Member for Calgary-Buffalo also commented on. I do actually think it's a good thing that individuals who run have to actually donate what's left over from their campaign afterwards. I think that's actually a very good change, and I think universally we've heard from a lot of individuals who have said, "Yeah; that is actually a good thing," because it does prevent candidates from hoarding, basically, the money from their election and carrying that forward, which does actually provide a significant advantage to incumbents. So I think I want to commend. I think that's probably a good change to make.

But I do also really want to comment on, well, what we know about how changes to election disclosures or election contributions really affect who can run for office. I think that's a really important part because as a new Member of the Legislative Assembly who was elected last year, I know that when I was first thinking about running in a seat where there was no incumbent in the seat – the incumbent chose not to run again – certainly one of the very first questions I had as a new candidate, as a woman, as a woman of colour, a woman of colour with young kids, is that I thought about: I don't know how raise money; I haven't done this before, and it's quite intimidating, and I don't know how I could possibly raise the amount of money necessary to compete in a provincial election. I was concerned about that. It's actually, I think, one of the number one concerns that a lot of candidates, new candidates, particularly women, have, which is about fundraising and how to go about doing that.

In fact, Mr. Speaker, prior to running for office, I was involved in organizations that tried to promote and encourage women to run for office. When I'm asked to, I'm involved in those events and serve as a mentor, and one of the most common questions I get asked by women who are looking or considering to run for office, particularly most recently in the municipal elections – I've spoken to a number of women across Edmonton and, actually, in Calgary who are considering running for office – is that they're concerned about raising money because a lot of them are not in a position to themselves contribute a lot of money. Often if they're running for office, they're considering going down to part-time work. Some of them are already working part-time because they have children at home, or they're thinking about having to take a leave from their job in order to run for office. One of the biggest concerns that they have is: how do I run for office, how do I raise enough money, and how can I do that, but how can I compete with somebody who can raise a lot more money?

I actually think that, for myself, I took great comfort when I was running for office to know that there was an even playing field, to know that every single person that I was running against had the same limits in terms of what they could spend on an election, which I know we don't have currently in municipal elections and would be a little bit more challenging in a municipal context because of the variety of different municipalities. But I know I took comfort from those caps. I took comfort from the fact that I knew that whoever I was running against or even myself could not be unnecessarily disadvantaged by the fact that there might be some donors who have much deeper pockets than others. Everybody, no matter who was going to donate, had a cap of \$4,000 that they could donate in any election, and I thought that at least levelled the playing field, and it gave me greater confidence to be able to run.

I'm not the only one who thinks that, Mr. Speaker. I know the Member for Calgary-Buffalo raised this, but I'd like to bring forward a joint statement that was made by two organizations that

focus specifically on getting more women to run in municipal politics, and that is Ask Her YYC, which is in Calgary, and ParityYEG, which is an organization here in Edmonton. These two organizations came together and issued a joint statement on June 29, 2020. In there they highlight what should be basic information. I think this should not be surprising information for any of the members of this House, and if it is, I'm a little disappointed, but I will say that they brought forward pretty standard information about the greater barriers that women face in terms of running for political office.

9:00

There are a number of reasons for that that have existed for a long time, likely mostly because women tend to make less money than their partners. We still know that there is a huge gap in wages between men and women in this province. They are less likely to be participating already in the workforce, so they feel like they are less able to make the financial leap to run for office. We know that women predominantly take on the lion's share of caregiving, caring for children. That is, of course, unpaid labour.

There are also additional barriers, of course, that women face when they're thinking about running for office. A lot of that has to do with the often toxic nature of social media and politics. I have to say that I used to counsel women who were thinking about running for office before I ran and said: oh, I think that's all manageable. But I have to say that that is a very significant barrier. After being in office now for over a year, I can attest to the fact that that is a very discouraging factor for women to run for politics, the toxicity of social media.

[The Speaker in the chair]

I do want to highlight that in this joint statement by Ask Her YYC and ParityYEG these two organizations lay out that there are these significant economic obstacles for women candidates that have actually been exacerbated, of course, by COVID-19. As all the members on this side of the House know – we've been talking about it repeatedly, and in fact we're only echoing what we're hearing from economists and Stats Canada, which is that women have been hit hardest by the pandemic in terms of job losses, reduction in hours of work, and increase in terms of unpaid caregiving.

In this statement these two organizations highlight – this is a quote, Mr. Speaker, and I'll be happy to table this at a later date.

Before COVID-19, unemployment rates were only marginally higher for women. Since the pandemic began, 14% of men who lost their jobs have regained their employment compared to only 5.4% of women in similar situations. This compounds the existing socioeconomic disadvantages women are already facing.

The statement goes on to say – actually, this statement was issued in response to Bill 29.

Research shows that most campaign finance regulations have not engaged in gender-based analysis and fail to notice impacts that disadvantage women's participation and primarily benefit men as incumbents . . .

We know that women are more likely to succeed when elections include limits on campaign expenditures and donations, higher transparency requirements, and limitations on third party advertising, and as such, strongly believe . . .

their recommendations to amend Bill 29 should be taken under consideration.

Now, honestly, Mr. Speaker, you know, this statement by ParityYEG and Ask Her YYC, as somebody who has been immersed in trying to encourage more women to run for office – this is actually common knowledge. By now all members of this Assembly should be aware of the barriers that women face to running for office. The Premier himself stood up in the campaign

and claimed that he really wanted to work on promoting women to run for office, so we acknowledge – we should all acknowledge on both sides of the House – that there is a barrier to women participating in politics, and we have an obligation to try to encourage greater diversity and gender parity in politics.

Yet I have to say that I was extremely disheartened right now when the Minister of Transportation was speaking in response to comments from the Member for Calgary-Buffalo, who asked that question about that the changes that are in Bill 29 make it so that those with the deepest pockets and those who are wealthiest, which disadvantages female candidates – this raises an issue of fairness and equitability. It actually moves us backwards in terms of promoting women and other individuals from disadvantaged backgrounds to participate in the political sphere. The response of the Minister of Transportation was that it's fair and equitable because "the rules apply to everybody."

That answers my question right there, Mr. Speaker. It answers the questions of ParityYEG and Ask Her YYC as to whether or not this government has done a gender-based analysis. Something that, by the way, was standard practice when the NDP was in power was to look at policy and legislation that were brought forward to see whether or not an analysis has been done to see whether or not the impacts, unintended or intended, have an impact disproportionately on women. It's very clear from the response from the Minister of Transportation. I hope that when the minister responsible for the status of women can stand up, she can talk about the gender-based analysis that was done with respect to Bill 29 because I think that right now we can say with a fair degree of certainty that no gender-based analysis was done on this because if it was, we certainly wouldn't have statements like we just heard from the Minister of Transportation.

The Speaker: Hon. members, Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available. I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

Member Irwin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I just had to jump in here, you know, not only because the Member for Edmonton-Whitemud is so passionate and so knowledgeable, but also this is an issue that's quite close to my heart. Like the Member for Edmonton-Whitemud I too have taken it to be a pretty important responsibility to encourage women and gender-diverse folks to get involved in politics and was involved with some of the organizations that are pushing that mission as well.

I must also state that I'm concerned about the issues raised by Ask Her YYC and by ParityYEG, who've both pointed out in their joint statement that Bill 29, as written, really will add additional barriers for women and for underrepresented groups in politics. So this is an opportunity for this government to maybe reflect upon what's in that bill as it is laid out in front of us. I'm hoping that, as the Member for Calgary-Buffalo spoke about, we all have an opportunity to introduce some amendments that I really hope this government considers.

I would say, echoing the comments from the Member for Edmonton-Whitemud, that we've got a minister right now for the status of women who has claimed to be an advocate for encouraging more women and gender-diverse folks in politics, yet was she at the cabinet table advocating for those very same folks when Bill 29 was presented? I'm not sure. I'm hoping she'll get on the record and she'll speak to that.

I also want to echo the comments around gender-based analysis. I've asked this government – I've asked both that minister and the Premier and the Finance minister – about how women's voices, women's needs are being centred in this economic recovery. To date that question has been ignored; the question has been mocked.

We've asked about minimum wage workers. We've asked about low-wage workers, which are disproportionately women. Again, we haven't got an answer. Bill 29 seems to be continuing with that trend.

I want to throw it back to the Member for Edmonton-Whitemud, though. I'd like her to just finish her thought. She was just talking about gender-based analysis and talking about the need for this government to take this seriously, so I'll throw it over to her.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Whitemud.

Ms Pancholi: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood. I'm glad she reminded me, actually, of what I was speaking about when I stopped speaking because actually I was mesmerized by what you were saying. So thank you for that, Member.

Yes. I wanted to say that I too have significant concerns about whether or not gender-based analysis was done on this bill. I think the answer is: at least not while the Minister of Transportation was sitting around the table. But I am hoping that at least we'll hear perhaps from the Minister of Municipal Affairs, either during second reading or during Committee of the Whole, should this pass second reading, to talk about the consideration he gave to how the changes that are proposed in Bill 29 affect women and affect people from disadvantaged backgrounds, socioeconomic backgrounds, and how increasing the amount of donations that can be made by any individual to candidates as well as increasing the amount of third-party donations will actually impact the ability of women and those from socioeconomic backgrounds, disadvantaged backgrounds to actually run for office. I would love to know the detailed analysis, who was consulted with and who that was discussed with, because we have here some credible organizations who are raising significant concerns, and I don't see and I don't feel any confidence right now that this government has taken that into consideration.

As we continue to shut women out of the economy and its recovery, I hope we're not also going to be shutting them out even further from the political process and from engagement because I can tell you right now that if there's ever been a better example of why we need gender-based analysis, it is the current government because they seem to continue to take actions which demonstrate that they are ignoring the disproportionate impacts and the disadvantaged nature of the impacts of the work that they're doing on women. They can continue to say that when they work on one sector of the economy which is an important sector of the economy, that will somehow trickle down to women, that there will be ancillary jobs, that somehow mothers and parents will figure out how to go back to work when they don't have child care or schools are not reopened. They're continuing to say that they are not listening to the voices of women, and now more than ever we need more women in politics who are actually raising those issues.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

9:10

The Speaker: Hon. members, we are on second reading of Bill 29, the Local Authorities Election Amendment Act, 2020. Is there anyone else wishing to join in the debate? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise this evening and speak to Bill 29. You know, at the onset I do just want to give a shout-out to my colleague the previous speaker as well as to all of my colleagues this evening for each bringing a different focal lens to this bill and to provide their perspective. Again, we know as legislators in this Chamber that all

87 of us are constantly engaging with Albertans at every turn, so when we do rise to speak, we often try to include those perspectives and comments. I think it's really important, the focus of my colleague from Edmonton-Whitemud, talking about the impact of this bill especially on women and women trying to enter into local politics and the challenges that they face above and beyond, quite frankly, what the majority of men face in running for local office and all of the different facets that are involved when a person puts their name forward. So I want to commend my colleague for her very articulate, passionate speech raising her concerns.

I will note, Mr. Speaker, obviously, that I'm not about to break custom and talk about members that are absent or present, but I do appreciate that the Minister of Municipal Affairs has been attentively listening to comments from the opposition. That is greatly appreciated. I attempted to do the same when I was a minister. I think it's important to have a good, healthy discussion about the legislation in order to try to identify how it can be improved. I mean, that's really why we have this Chamber. I mean, it's part of our democratic process, but it's also equally important that we strive to improve it. I hope that the minister will entertain amendments that the opposition puts forward. I can commit to him that we will endeavour to get those amendments to him as early as possible, recognizing that a minister needs time to go through them, but hopefully that's in the realm of possibilities.

You know, I'll say at the onset, Mr. Speaker, that amendments and changes to the Local Authorities Election Act are something that I think a lot of different governments have wrestled with. I know that before we formed government, the PCs, leading up to 2015, looked at changes to this legislation. I know we looked at changes to this legislation in consultation with municipalities, recognizing that the timing is absolutely critical. You can't wait too soon before a municipal election to bring in changes because of course that has a significant impact on all of the folks who run there. This is something that I did look at when I held the office of Municipal Affairs as well.

You know, I'm happy to start off, Mr. Speaker, just mentioning some of the elements in this bill that I agree with. My colleague the Member for Calgary-Mountain View had said, and I've always said this – I know the Minister of Transportation will know because we've been in this place together for many years. I'm happy to give credit where credit is due. I'm happy to critique where I feel that things could be improved. In this bill the fact that we're ensuring that campaign surpluses are donated to charity, I think, is significant. This is a reset of the clock for candidates that are choosing to run. I know from talking especially with incumbents from the larger cities that have war chests of – some are actually over \$100,000 – a significant amount of money that that puts them on unequal footing from a new candidate.

Again, I think, you know, this Chamber is a great example of the number of men and women who decided to run in the last election. We had a significant turnover, and I think that to an extent that's healthy for democracy, Mr. Speaker, that we get some new blood in this place, new ideas. That's not to say that people should be knocking off the Minister of Infrastructure or Transportation and myself and others, but it is good. We want to encourage more Albertans and more people to run for office. I think that's how we ensure that we get the best ideas in this place.

You know, I'm glad that I mentioned that I'm happy about that change, and I support that a hundred per cent, that the surpluses are also donated to charity. Sorry. I meant to mention that. I think that's fantastic. But I do have some concerns with this legislation, and I will provide some comments from some of the mayors that I've been in contact with from around the province, some of the concerns they have. Again, I hope that the minister is continuing to

reach out to mayors and councillors across the province to hear their thoughts on these changes that are quite significant, Mr. Speaker.

You know, the removal of the \$4,000 limit on annual contributions to local campaigns and the increase to \$10,000 per candidate – that's before and after polling day – is a significant jump, more than doubling that allotment or that allowance of room. So the other question I have – and I was speaking with another hon. member about this – is the move from \$4,000 to \$10,000. Was that also for corporations or third parties, or is that only for individuals? I haven't pulled that answer out of the bill yet, so I'm hoping in Committee of the Whole that the minister can speak about that. Are we talking only about personal contribution limits that have changed, or does that also impact either corporations or third parties and what they can donate directly? I'm not talking about PACs.

I think what's interesting and that I would love to hear the background on, Mr. Speaker, is that allowing individuals up to \$5,000 – again, that's up from \$4,000; I appreciate that – to an unlimited number of municipal and school board candidates before polling day. I'm curious if that was actually in the previous legislation or if that is something new.

Now, for me the really big flag that I believe that Albertans will also want to know is the fact that there is a removal of the ability for local authorities to pass a bylaw on disclosure of where these funds are coming from. It's one thing to say: okay; we're going to increase the amounts that people can donate. You know, we may disagree with that, but fair enough. Where it becomes suspicious and where flags go up, Mr. Speaker, is when you suddenly remove even the ability of municipalities to say: "No. You know what? We want our candidates to be beholden to the citizens of our community, not to random anonymous donors." The problem with this is that it could be a group of, for example, wealthy individuals that decide that they want to influence the elections in a number of different ridings and jurisdictions across the province.

Now, let's not mince words on the fact that money and campaign contributions and war chests influence significantly the outcome of an election. Anybody that tries to stand up and say, "Money is irrelevant in elections; it doesn't matter how much you spend": you've obviously never run or, you know, you must be Pinocchio because dollars do influence the outcome of elections. I think that citizens, voters have the right to know where those dollars are coming from.

I think, you know, when we go outside of Calgary and Edmonton – I appreciate, again, that in the two cities many candidates will spend upwards of \$80,000 to \$100,000 on their campaigns, a significant amount of money. In your other municipalities and jurisdictions they are spending a tiny fraction of that. They are not coming near that amount of money. But, Mr. Speaker, if you have a group of well-off individuals throughout the province nowhere near maybe a rural remote community in Alberta and they decide that they want their person to be elected, they can get together and throw \$5,000, \$10,000 into a kitty, and suddenly that candidate that ran in the last election against competitors that all spent about \$1,000 now has a \$50,000 war chest and has significant influence over the outcome of that election.

9:20

The issue that I have, Mr. Speaker, is that, one, it is not accountable. It is not transparent. It flies in the face of our fundamental rights and freedoms that we celebrate in our democratic system. It's money that's untraceable, and we have no idea where that came from. It also disempowers the very voters that these individuals are running to represent. You're now allowing people in other parts of the province to have a significant influence over the outcome of a local election, and that I have an issue with.

Again, money is extremely powerful in elections. You know, I can't support that. More so, I would love for the minister or members of the government to disclose or share with this House and with Albertans: where is this idea coming from?

You're not only saying that you don't have to disclose; you're removing the ability of a local municipality. You're disempowering them. You're not just playing Big Brother. I mean, you're saying to municipalities that even if you wanted to try to pass a bylaw that would force donations to be disclosed and where they came from – you're taking that away from them. What are you hiding? The only way that you would possibly bring this into a bill is if you wanted to intentionally hide where money is coming from, and that, Mr. Speaker, I have a real issue with. That flies in the face of democracy.

As far as, Mr. Speaker, allowing candidates to self-finance up to \$10,000, that's a large amount of money. That's a significant amount of money. The fact is that now we are providing an advantage to those who have deeper pockets over those that don't. Again, I'm sorry; there isn't an argument to be made that this helps create a level playing field. No, it doesn't. Ten thousand dollars per candidate is a significant amount of money. The last time I checked, we want to encourage everyone, no matter the colour of your skin, who you worship, your faith, your gender, your identity. We want every person to have an equal opportunity to run for office. This is what I tell grade 6 students when I go and talk to them, that anyone can run for office. This is one of the pillars of our democracy. I'm telling you that when you have an allotment or an increase or an ability for candidates with money to self-finance up to \$10,000, the playing field is no longer level. You have now tipped the scales in favour of those with deeper pockets.

I can tell you, Mr. Speaker, that when I taught at Inner City High School – I taught at that school between 2006 and 2012, before I first got elected – I had students that were incredibly intelligent and articulate, but the system chewed them up and spat them out. They struggled with barriers that the majority of Alberta students will never have to deal with and tragedy that they'll never have to deal with. I remember talking to one of my social studies classes. I taught high school English and social studies and physics. I had a student that was passionate about wanting to make a difference and said: "You know what? I think I'm going to run one day for city council." I said: "You know what? Good for you." It was a young man that had struggled with addiction. He struggled with a number of different challenges but one of the smartest people that I had ever met, incredibly intelligent and passionate and a good person.

I still hope that one day he will run. But I can tell you, Mr. Speaker, that because of his challenges with housing, with struggling to keep a job, this will be a barrier for him to run and will be an advantage to his opponents who have the dollars to be able to self-finance up to \$10,000. Now, I recognize that there are, I'm sure, members that will say: well, he could fund raise. Yes, he can, but the \$10,000 is a significant amount, especially for individuals who aren't in the big cities.

The Speaker: Hon. members, Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available if anyone has a brief question or comment. I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung has one.

Mr. Dach: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Under 29(2)(a) I would like to invite the member to continue comments, but I wanted him to perhaps expand in a couple of different areas. I know that we are in the middle of a global pandemic, and this morning's newspaper headlines in the *Edmonton Journal* were about the Misericordia, an acute care hospital in my constituency, which is now not accepting

new patients except for emergencies and women giving birth because of an outbreak of COVID-19 at that hospital. Of course, that shows how fragile our hospital situations are and how fragile our health care system can be because of this pandemic.

We're in this global pandemic coupled with an economic downturn, yet this government seems to be intent on bringing legislation that will be more of a smokescreen than anything else at this time because they really don't want to turn their attention to the economic solutions that aren't working in their government policy packages. They seem to think that if we shovel enough tax dollars to profitable corporations, \$4.7 billion here, \$7.5 billion to a pipeline that's going nowhere there, that jobs will miraculously appear just as though spring happens every year. Well, indeed, that doesn't seem to be the case.

I'd like the member to see if he can expand on that a little bit and also talk about smaller communities, Mr. Speaker, about how this affects electoral process in smaller communities, when you get 5,000 bucks in a village as small as maybe Thorhild, where I spent some time on Thursday, and the type of influence that it can wield in those small communities throughout rural Alberta.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'll thank the member for his question. I must say that at the onset I was a little confused about where he was going with that, but I appreciate the fact that what he's doing is painting a picture of the current state of the economy and the impact it's having on so many Albertans. With this sudden significant increase to how campaigns can be funded municipally, this is a concern. I'm going to run out of time, and when we get into committee, there are a number of other comments I want to make. To the Member for Edmonton-McClung's point, I encourage all members in this Chamber, especially rural MLAs, to go out and talk to your local city, municipality, your MDs, your counties. Talk to your elected officials, and ask them how much they spent in the last municipal election.

From the comments I'm hearing from mayors, they're often self-funded, or they raise a few hundred dollars, maybe a couple thousand; that is it. What this bill is allowing is for individuals who don't live anywhere near those communities to significantly influence the outcome of those campaigns. That is not creating a level playing field. That's not enhancing democracy; that's doing the opposite. That's putting power in the hands of those who can afford to make significant contributions all over the province to communities that they don't live in.

You know, I would love to hear from the Premier. Let's hear your secret plan to take over the municipal councils all over the province. What this bill does is it takes the ability and the democracy out of the hands of local people. I would love to hear from MLAs. Our team will be reaching out to municipal councillors all over the province to find out: how much did you spend last election, and how will this bill help you in the next election? I'm going to venture a guess that the majority outside of Edmonton and Calgary and some of the larger cities will tell you that the elections are not influenced by outside campaign contributors and are very small budgets. So I can't accept the argument that this bill strengthens democracy. In fact, Mr. Speaker, it does quite the opposite, and I hope that the minister will entertain some of the amendments that the Official Opposition will be bringing forward on this.

9:30

I will talk when we get into Committee of the Whole because I fear my time is almost up, but I want to talk about a number of other

issues with this bill, along with Bill 26, and what they do when they are taken together.

The Speaker: Hon. members, Bill 29 at second reading is available for debate if anyone would like to provide additional questions or comments. The hon. Member for Calgary-McCall, then.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to speak to Bill 29, Local Authorities Election Amendment Act, 2020. We have seen three pieces of legislation, bills 26, 27, and 29. The government messaging on all three pieces is kind of the same, that they are strengthening democracy. But the way we see it, the way the bills read, I think these bills are not strengthening democracy in any way, shape, or manner. Rather, they are corrupting democracy with big money, with dark money, and that bill is exactly doing the same.

These are, this is an important piece of legislation. It has implications for our local elections. It has implications on how things are managed in our local municipalities, in our neighbourhoods. It affects everyone in each of our ridings. On a matter of such important public policy government has not done any consultations that we know of. If there are any consultations, I think we would love to hear what those consultations were, who was consulted, what they said. Instead, what we have seen is that government did conduct a survey about this legislation. Government invited Albertans to participate in that survey and express their views with respect to this local authorities act, with respect to elections in our local municipalities, but those results were never released, so it makes us wonder what the government is actually hiding. Were these changes not supported by the feedback they got from the people? That's the only reason I can think of that they chose not to share or release the results of those surveys. On something of such importance, that deals with our local democracy, that deals with our basic democracy, I think we all need to know what the public said.

When we talk to our constituents in our local communities, I think we didn't hear that the government engaged with any of them. Like, I represent a riding which has a number of organizations – community-based organizations, ethnic organizations, religious and faith-based organizations – and I didn't hear from any one of them that the government reached out to them to consult on this important matter, which will affect their communities. For the most part it will affect adversely their communities because the changes that government is undertaking with this piece of legislation are not strengthening the democracy. They're not to encourage participation. They're not to level the playing field. These changes are tilting the balance in favour of those with big, deep pockets.

For instance, there was a limit, a \$4,000 annual contribution to local campaigns. I think most Albertans will not be able to contribute that \$4,000, let alone \$4,000 to every candidate running in the municipality. They're now changing that limit to \$10,000 before and after the polling date, so that's effectively \$20,000. When you organize an election under such laws, the election is not about ideas; it's about big money and who has more money.

It doesn't encourage participation. It doesn't even encourage candidates to go to their constituents and ask for their support. When you go out in your communities, when you ask everyday families for support, they will ask you: "What's your platform?" What do you think about the issues that matter to them? If they agree with you, they will give you money. They will support you. But in this case I think they're just enabling big money to hijack the democratic process with their big, dark money.

As the mayor of Calgary, Mayor Nenshi, identified, these changes, where an individual will be allowed to donate up to \$5,000 to as many candidates as they want, I think will again help

Conservatives who previously have tried to take over city council, to take over elections of school boards. It was in the last school board election that there was a slate of candidates; out of seven there were four candidates who were backed by Conservatives. Before you could only give \$4,000. Now if there is such a slate, you can give each candidate \$5,000. So this law, this change, is actually designed to further that agenda that they tried in the last election.

How does it level the playing field when one individual in Calgary can donate \$70,000 in 14 wards? Again, that law will facilitate if some group of rich people wants to influence the Calgary city election. They can choose eight wards and give \$5,000 to each and essentially influence the outcome of local democracy. It's not in any way, shape, or manner strengthening democracy. It's eroding democracy. It's getting money back into the process that we took out.

9:40

The second thing. I think it's doing exactly the same thing with school board elections, where in a previous school trustee election Conservatives openly backed a slate of candidates that were Conservative. Now with this election, with this change in these election laws they will be better positioned to support that slate of candidates with \$5,000 each. Again, this change is designed to influence the outcome of local elections, not strengthen local democracy. Also, they're removing a local authority's ability to pass any safeguards, put any safeguards there to require campaigns to disclose their financial donations pre-election. I think Albertans have every right to know how these election campaigns are run, who is behind these slates of candidates, who is supporting whom. Democracy is nothing without transparency. Here, again, the government is making a deliberate effort to hide that big money while they influence these local campaigns, school board campaigns, municipal campaigns.

They're also allowing candidates to self-finance up to \$10,000, and they can also self-finance after the campaign for another \$10,000. That's a huge sum of money. How is this change in any way, shape, or manner levelling the playing field?

For instance, I came to Canada 15, 16 years ago, and the riding I represent is predominantly those who are newcomers, who are starting a new life. I think I would be interested in knowing from the minister how changing these contribution limits helps newcomers participate in elections. If elections were about ideas – I'm sure that many people out there may be new to this country, but they come with a lot of experience. They come with a lot of background and knowledge, but if money will be a precondition to participate in democracy, I don't think many of them will ever even think about participating in democracy. If we are talking about strengthening democracy, strengthening participation, then we should be talking about newcomers and those individuals and groups who were marginalized for the longest time and how we can facilitate their participation in democracy.

This piece of legislation doesn't deal with that at all. It's disappointing to see this at a time when the world around us is trying to recognize the struggle of marginalized communities.

The Speaker: Hon. members, Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available if anyone would like to provide a brief question or comment for the hon. Member for Calgary-McCall.

Seeing none, is there anyone else wishing to join in the debate this evening? It appears that the hon. member for Calgary-Gold Bar is rising to speak to the bill. Is that correct?

Mr. Schmidt: No, Mr. Speaker. It's the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

The Speaker: Wildly, wildly inappropriate of me. My deepest and most sincere apology to you, sir. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. Schmidt: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Now, I have to say that I love all of Alberta's people equally, but my constituents might be upset that you're confusing them for citizens of Calgary. I will go and apologize to them on your behalf if you would like that.

It's a pleasure for me to rise and offer a few brief comments on Bill 29. I have a couple of comments that I would like to make on this bill if I could. First of all, I want to comment on what this bill says about the priorities of this government, and secondly I want to address the issue of trust and, specifically, trust in this government to safeguard elections and the democratic process.

Now, on the issue of priorities I think all of us who've been here in this Legislature have come to realize that no government has the time or the resources to deal with all of the issues that it could possibly address. I know the government was elected on an incredibly ambitious agenda. We were reminded time and again of the hundreds and hundreds of pages of promises in their platform that they have to get through. We all recognize that any piece of legislation represents time taken away from other pieces of legislation and policy initiatives, that the government can't do. It's interesting to me that at a time when Alberta is in the middle of the worst economic depression since the 1930s, in the middle of a global pandemic that has killed hundreds of Albertans and made thousands more sick, we are spending our time here in the Legislature talking about local election financing. It's certainly not what my constituents have at the top of their mind when they are looking to the Legislature to help them in their moment of need.

Certainly, the things that I'm hearing from my constituents about the things that they're requesting the Legislature deal with urgently have nothing to do with local authority elections financing. They're very concerned about the quality of their health care, whether or not they can receive the medical care they need at the time they need it. They're concerned about the quality of their children's education. They're asking themselves what school is going to look like come September when it's time to resume classes, if they'll be able to go back, what kind of resources will be available to them, and if they go back to school, what kind of resources will be available to them if home-schooling continues, mobile learning. They're concerned about making rent at the end of the month, being able to pay their utility bills. They're concerned about finding a job, being able to put food on the table for their families.

9:50

I have to say that if I had to ask my constituents what their top 100 priorities are for this Legislature at this time, priority 101 would be local authorities election financing. There are many much more urgent issues that this Legislature should be dealing with, and I think that many of my constituents are wondering why it is that the government is concerning itself, taking its time dealing with local elections financing and not dealing with these urgent matters.

The only thing that I can tell my constituents when they ask me why the government is spending its time dealing with local authorities elections financing is that this government is more concerned about making sure that its friends are looked after than they are concerned about whether or not everyday Albertans are looked after. That's why I think we're seeing these changes to the local authorities elections financing. It's so that members opposite can allow the big money to flow into the campaigns for their friends and donors who are going to be seeking seats on city, town,

municipal councils, school boards all across the province in the next series of local elections.

My constituents are incredibly frustrated with the lack of concern for everyday Albertans that this government has shown to them in their time of most urgent need. I have to say that if we had the opportunity to be setting the legislative agenda instead of responding to it, we'd be dealing with things a lot more differently. We dealt with the issue of local elections authority financing. There isn't really a problem there. I don't know why we need to be spending time that should be spent on these much more urgent priorities that I've earlier outlined, dealing with fixing a problem that doesn't exist.

I've heard the members opposite talk about our concerns for democracy. They're projecting a lack of concern for democracy onto us. I have to say that those arguments ring a little bit hollow, Mr. Speaker, because we know that the stated issue, the stated reason that this government has brought forward this legislation is to give nonincumbents a level playing field when it comes to municipal elections. They're essentially reverting to the financial campaign rules that were in place before we were elected in 2015. Well, a very cursory review of the results of municipal elections prior to 2015 would indicate that incumbents had a major advantage in every municipal election prior to our making changes to the local authorities elections financing. So their stated goal of levelling the playing field is an argument that I don't buy because making the changes that they're proposing in this legislation will not result in any more incumbents losing their seats in municipal elections, and they won't achieve this stated goal.

Mr. Speaker, as I've said, while I do think that elections financing is an important topic of debate, this is probably not the right time for this Legislature to be dealing with it. It's certainly frustrating for me to go back to the constituents of Edmonton-Gold Bar to tell them that the government is really doing nothing to make sure that they have a job or that they can make the rent, have a roof over their head, make sure that their kids' schools are functioning well, or that they'll have the health care they need if or when they get sick with COVID or any other kind of disease. It's frustrating, but certainly the citizens of Edmonton-Gold Bar didn't have very high expectations for this government when they were elected in 2019, and they are very used to being disappointed by the members opposite. So while it is hard for me to go back to the constituents and continue to tell them that this government is not doing the things they need to do to make their lives better, it's definitely getting to be a habit, and I think that the citizens of Edmonton-Gold Bar are keen to break that habit when they get the next chance to have their voices heard in a provincial election.

It's certainly not true, in my view, that the stated intent of this legislation will be met by the pieces of law that are represented in it. This will do nothing to make it easier for nonincumbents to win elections because we're essentially reverting to the financing rules that were in place before we took office in 2015, and everybody knows that those incumbents had a very easy time of winning the election.

Mr. Speaker, for those two reasons I will not be supporting this piece of legislation, and I urge the government to stop worrying about their friends in the political sphere and start putting their minds to helping everyday Albertans in their time of need and bring forward some meaningful legislation that will accomplish that objective.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I would move that we adjourn debate on Bill 29.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Government Bills and Orders Committee of the Whole

[Mr. Milliken in the chair]

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

Bill 22 Red Tape Reduction Implementation Act, 2020

The Deputy Chair: Are there any comments, questions, or amendments to be offered at this time? I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore has risen.

Mr. Nielsen: Well, thank you, Mr. Chair. I appreciate the opportunity this evening to rise and add some comments around Bill 22, a very large piece of legislation here. As a matter of fact, when I first picked it up, I almost threw out my back; it was so big. This is kind of funny because Bill 22 is an omnibus piece of legislation brought forward by the Associate Minister of Red Tape Reduction, making changes across six ministries and 15, 16 different pieces of legislation. Some of those pieces of legislation are rather large. We have seen this government bring forward several – I’ve actually lost count now of how many pieces of omnibus legislation have been brought forward.

10:00

You know, Mr. Chair, I can’t help but think back to May 30 in 2017, when I heard that “this government is being disingenuous by lumping together changes to both the Labour Relations Code and the Employment Standards Code into one big omnibus bill.” Of course, that happened to have been the Associate Minister of Red Tape Reduction. You know, there were many other members at that time that rose to speak against the government of the day bringing forth omnibus legislation. Of course, the one that I just mentioned was all within one ministry alone. Granted, there were some changes, but it was only one ministry, not multiple ministries that we’re seeing today here with Bill 22. That one was only 124 pages.

So I guess I can’t help, Mr. Chair, but wonder. When you hear comments like that and then we see legislation like this here in Bill 22, was the Associate Minister of Red Tape Reduction not really on board with all his comments around omnibus legislation? Were the members that also criticized that omnibus piece of legislation not really on board with their comments back then? That’s the only thing I can think of because I’ve seen multiple pieces of omnibus legislation like Bill 22 come before us in this Legislature that members were clearly opposed to. Of course, those were the members of the government benches and of the government caucus that served in the 29th Legislature; nonetheless we are here today with another piece of omnibus legislation brought forward here by the UCP government, 175 pages.

I have to say, Mr. Chair, watching the initial announcement of this legislation was entertaining. I’m trying to be nice here. It seemed when journalists wanted to ask questions about this legislation, all we kept seeing was the Associate Minister of Red Tape Reduction saying: “Well, you’ll have to check with the relevant minister. Oh, you’ll have to check with the relevant minister. You’d better go ask the relevant minister.” I don’t know why the relevant ministers maybe weren’t present at that time to help him out, because, you know, right in the title, Red Tape Reduction Implementation Act, 2020, this is his bill, and he couldn’t speak to it virtually at all, except for a few talking points about, “We’re reducing red tape by one-third,” you know, “getting out of the way” and all this great stuff, but he couldn’t answer anything else about it. As a matter of fact, I even stood up in

question period to ask some very technical questions, even referring to the sections and pages, and I got the same tired talking points at that time.

Now, I will give credit where credit is due. He offered to meet with me at any time. His door was open. So I took him up on the offer, and I actually did finally get answers to those, but it would have been nice to maybe get those answers right off the hop, Mr. Chair, because, you know, when I initially started looking at Bill 22 and I’m seeing things like removal of language around insider trading, I mean, quick look, that just sends off some amazing alarm bells. Yet a situation like that develops, and then the government wonders why we start to get worried about what they’re bringing forth to Albertans in other pieces of legislation. I guess perhaps, maybe, a technical briefing would have helped at the time, especially given the size and complexities of this bill, just in the corporations act alone.

That being said, the bill, of course, provides more ministerial powers. Members who served in the 29th Legislature who are part of the government bench right now, part of the government caucus, were very upset whenever they felt that was being done with the previous government. So was it really a case, then, that they weren’t really onboard with what they were saying? It’s a recurring theme that keeps coming up with regard to that.

Some of the changes in here, again, I think probably could have been addressed through a statutes amendment act, so I can’t help but wonder, you know: are we bringing forward these changes through Bill 22, a red tape reduction bill, to justify to Albertans why we need to spend \$13 million of taxpayers’ money on this ministry, especially at a time when people are seeing things like their insurance rates go up? They’re seeing their utility rates go up. They’re being bogged down in more debt because of decisions made by the government on how best to handle the pandemic that we went through and are still currently going through, because we said: oh, we’ll let you defer your utility rates and pay interest on top of that. You know, I have people that are asking me: well, why are they spending \$13 million on this ministry when I have to go through that? I don’t have an answer for them, Mr. Chair. I say: well, you know, I guess if you’re trying to justify spending those kinds of dollars, you’ve got to throw in anything you can to try to make it work.

Again, it’s not something that we haven’t seen before with red tape reduction legislation, simple things that probably could have been done, probably even through just the ministries themselves. You know, why do we need an actual stand-alone ministry? I’ve clearly seen ministers on the front bench making moves towards reducing red tape, or at least what they feel is red tape, at times, and I think they’re doing it all by themselves, so maybe we could have redirected that \$13 million.

Some of these changes are housekeeping items, but, again, could we maybe have just simply done that through a statutes amendment act? You know, looking through the first part around the corporations act, I mean, there was some language there dating back I believe it was even as much as 40 years, so fair enough. Is it really red tape reduction, though, or is it just what it says it is, housekeeping? But, again, if you have to justify \$13 million to Albertans, you’ve got to show them something, so let’s show them some housekeeping items, maybe, that are contained in Bill 22.

As I said, there are some changes within the corporations act. It was helpful to at least finally get a bit of a briefing around that from the associate minister’s staff.

There are, of course, some things that maybe, I guess, require a little bit more attention around no more cabinet approvals for mining or mineral recovery. That’s a little bit concerning. I’m sure my colleague from Edmonton-Gold Bar, who is the critic for

Environment and Parks, will probably have a lot more details to share in those areas. To simply, I guess, bulldoze ahead, you know, with our heads down might not necessarily be the best course of action.

10:10

We're seeing changes around the approval of oil sands projects. That's very concerning around some of those potential timelines because we could, in our effort to try to say that we have the quickest approvals anywhere on Planet Earth, fail in our duty to consult with indigenous peoples in a meaningful way, in a fulsome way. We've seen many projects that have been delayed because of, quite frankly, careless, careless mistakes like no proper consultation.

We're seeing land leases being amended, not necessarily a bad thing. Energy efficiency is repealed. You know, we've seen Alberta take a hit on the world stage because we just don't seem to have a credible plan with regard to action on climate change. We've seen downgrades on Alberta's credit rating under this UCP government on that exact issue, so here we are now starting to eliminate things that we could be doing to try to improve that.

Now, we start to get into some other things that start to worry me. Any time I start seeing amendments to the Safety Codes Act, the hair on the back of my neck starts to stand up. You know, I'm seeing legislation around supposedly balancing things around labour laws and whatnot. We all know that when the Associate Minister of Red Tape Reduction was established, I clearly made it – and was even told by the Associate Minister of Red Tape Reduction that we would not remove protections for Albertans, protections for our environment, all under the guise of red tape reduction.

I think when we have a piece of legislation of this size, the government can't seem to get around to at least providing a quick technical briefing for a piece of omnibus legislation that at one time they were not in favour of but now seem to be wholeheartedly in favour of based on the number of pieces that we've seen come by. If we want to provide that security, that acceptance from Albertans, then I think to come across in an honest and open way will achieve results a lot faster. We won't be getting tags hung around our necks as the most secretive government in Canada. We have to do better. It's not going to allow for investment to come in with these kinds of situations.

It's all fine and dandy to sit here and say: well, look how much red tape we've reduced. It doesn't amount to anything. Again, I mean, here we are with another piece of red tape legislation, you know, and I think about the small brewers here in Alberta who could be doing a lot more business across Canada, but there's all kinds of red tape preventing them from accessing those markets. Funny enough, all of them have access to Alberta. Instead of maybe reducing red tape for everybody else's business owners, how about we start working to reduce some red tape to help our business owners here in the province expand their businesses?

It's just like when we were looking at that legislation around being able to drink in parks. That's great. It doesn't help that we're selling the parks. It kind of reduces the number of places to go and partake.

I bet you that there would be more business in the rest of Canada if we had access to it, which would create more jobs here in Alberta for Albertans. That's what this government promised, that we're going to reduce red tape so that business owners can create jobs. Hopefully, we'll start to see that happen.

We're already down 50,000 jobs prepandemic. The big corporate tax break was supposed to create jobs. It didn't. We've doubled down now. I certainly hope that doesn't mean that we're going to lose another 50,000 jobs on top of that or more because we keep

seeing pieces of legislation that are eroding workers' rights. It's going to put them at a disadvantage, and they won't have the money to spend in their economies. You know, that is supposed to be improving Albertans' lives. I don't see how.

Plenty of people are saying: "You know, red tape reduction is taking away my holiday pay. Why is red tape reduction taking away my overtime pay? Why is red tape reduction going to prevent my union from effectively advocating on my behalf?" They're mandated to do that. Unions can get in a lot of trouble when they don't work for their members. Those are the types of red tape reductions that are not helping Albertans, especially through this pandemic.

I mean, it's great that we're reducing outdated legislation within the corporations act, but how many jobs has that created? At this point, I would have to argue, it only created one, the Associate Minister of Red Tape Reduction, his job. That doesn't help my constituents who currently find themselves being bogged down with more debt because they're getting charged interest on their utilities. They're not able to pay their mortgages. We may now potentially start finding ourselves with major projects that could be getting built here in the province getting held up because, well, we reduced red tape to speed it up, and in our rush to get the approval, it gets bogged down in the courts again.

I do look forward to more of the discussion as this goes forward. I'm pretty sure that there will be some amendments coming forward that, I think, will help to strengthen, you know, Bill 22 and, as I said, make it less bad. I can tell you right now that currently, as it's written, without any amendments being proposed, I'm going to have a very, very hard time supporting it.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

I see the hon. Minister of Transportation has risen on debate.

Mr. McIver: Yeah. Mr. Chair, I just thought I'd respond briefly to some of what I heard. Let me assure the hon. member over there that the Associate Minister of Red Tape Reduction is very active in helping to make Alberta a more efficient place for job creators to succeed here and, as a result, create more jobs. I think that the hon. member suggested that the other ministries could do this stuff without the Associate Minister of Red Tape Reduction, and I suppose, on some level, that might be right except it wouldn't be nearly as effective.

10:20

In my ministry, for example, we work with the Associate Minister of Red Tape Reduction. We're working together to get to the goal of reducing one-third of all our regulations, and without that constant working relationship, without that constant being held to account, I don't believe we would get nearly as far. I'll let other ministers speak for themselves, but I would respectfully like to let the hon. member know that the Associate Minister of Red Tape Reduction is making a big difference for our government but, more importantly, for the people of Alberta.

You know, the hon. member made mention of getting approvals faster. Well, boy, I think he made that kind of sound like an inconsequential thing. The fact is that in today's world, when an investor is looking for a place to invest money and to create jobs and to create tax revenue should they make money, it's very seldom, probably almost never, that the only place they're looking is Alberta. They're looking at Alberta, other provinces, states in the U.S., other continents. Frankly, what it has to do with is if somebody wants to invest money, whether it's a large amount or a small amount, not having to wait can make the decision on whether they invest here or somewhere else. I'd just like to share with the

hon. member that the Associate Minister of Red Tape Reduction is helping that happen. We're creating that business-friendly atmosphere that will create jobs.

I keep hearing subtext from the other side that it seems like they're offended, Mr. Chair, that there are profitable corporations. I always hear them talking down and poorly about profitable corporations and: why would you want to help them? Well, unprofitable corporations go out of business, and the jobs that they provide go away with them when they go out of business. When unprofitable businesses aren't profitable, then many times they can't afford to invest in real estate and technology, and, essentially, at the end of the day, in jobs.

Unlike the other side, we're kind of fans of profitable corporations. In fact, we kind of want Alberta to be a place where unprofitable corporations can become profitable and where profitable corporations can become more profitable. I know the other side is offended when sometimes the shareholders, who actually own the companies, get paid, but it's kind of like it's not that much different than if you buy a home and you sell it for more than you bought it for. You're happy about that, and the shareholders of a corporation, that buy the property of that corporation, are happy. You know what often happens then? They keep that corporation running, and they keep employing Albertans.

Sometimes, if they're successful and profitable, they sell more of whatever it is they're making, selling, doing, producing, whether it's legal work, whether it's oil and gas, whether it's agriculture, whether it's meals at our restaurants, whatever it happens to be. You know what happens when they sell more meals at the restaurant and they sell more oil and gas and they provide more legal services? They need more lawyers. They need more cooks. They need more cleaners. They need more accountants. They need more labourers. They need more professionals. When they need that, you know what? They have to hire somebody, and an Albertan worker gets to look after themselves and their family and send their kids to school. [interjections]

I can't believe the NDP is heckling me because I'm talking in support of Alberta families, people being self-reliant. Again, the hon. member can't help herself, Mr. Chair. The thought of Albertans getting a job and being successful and supporting themselves and their family makes the NDP crazy.

Ms Pancholi: What about child care?

Mr. McIver: See? On this side of the House we're actually replacing the old child care system with a better one. Our minister has explained that in this House many times. But the hon. member can't actually stand hearing about our policies being designed to make it possible for Albertans to get jobs in Alberta, to look after themselves, to look after their families, to pay their mortgage, and to spend money in the grocery store, the gas station, the flower store, wherever it is, and create more jobs for more Albertans.

Somehow the NDP despises that. They despise companies making money, which is the thing that allows them to hire Albertans to support themselves, to spend more money, to create more jobs for more Albertans. You see how that works? Well, I think everybody listening at home understands how that works. Our side of the House understands how that works. The NDP member so angry about the idea of creating opportunities and self-reliance that she still can't stop, Mr. Chair. It's unbelievable how angry the NDP is about Albertans having jobs and being able to support themselves.

I'm happy to stand here as long as I need to while the angry, angry NDP can't stand the idea of our policies getting out of the way of creating jobs for Albertans. I mean, they just can't. It's no

wonder that Albertans fired them. They actually despise the idea of Albertans being self-reliant. They despise the idea of corporations or any other companies providing jobs for Albertans. They despise the idea of Albertans saying: "I've got a good idea. I'll start a business. I'll create a corporation. I'll hire other Albertans and pay taxes, which support schools and hospitals and children's services and roads and all the things that Albertans care about." This policy...

Ms Pancholi: How's it working so far?

Mr. McIver: It's working great, thank you very much.

This policy is designed to do that. Now, the NDP during their time, Mr. Chair, killed more jobs than almost humanly possible, starting with their first bill they passed, which was the carbon tax, which made everything more expensive, that by most expert opinions took away in the neighbourhood of a minimum of 20,000 to 26,000 jobs right away, many of those jobs from Albertans that depended upon those to look after themselves, to look after their families. [interjections] Mr. Chair, this is fantastic.

The Deputy Chair: I hesitate to interrupt the hon. Minister of Transportation. I, as everybody else, enjoy a good heckle every once in a while. However, hon. Member for Edmonton-Whitemud, I would ask that you perhaps keep some of those comments to yourself, especially as, again, they ride the line with regard to comments that could very easily be called out of order for causing disorder. If the hon. member does have comments to make, perhaps she could, obviously, wait for her opportunity to speak after the Minister of Transportation. In Committee of the Whole, as we all know, people can even speak more than once.

If the hon. Minister of Transportation could please continue.

Mr. McIver: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I appreciate that. I think that if I'm making the hon. member across the aisle angry, I'm probably saying the right things. I'm probably saying things that are in support of Alberta families and in support of Alberta jobs and in support of profitable Alberta corporations, that provide jobs for families and workers and opportunities for people to better their lives and look after their children and to spend money, that create more jobs for more Albertans. I know that actually angers the NDP, as they've made very, very clear while I've been speaking tonight, but I have to say that we're not angry about that. We're happy about that. This is what we came here to do, to create opportunities for jobs and Albertans.

Mr. Chair, one of the big jobs of government is, really, to get out of the way of business to provide those opportunities. That's part of what this red tape reduction plan is about and this red tape reduction bill and the red tape reduction minister. It's about creating those circumstances where, when someone wants to create jobs for Alberta workers and Alberta families and they're deciding between Alberta and another jurisdiction, it's going to be easier for them to choose Alberta, to choose Alberta to be a place to provide jobs and opportunities, mortgage-paying jobs, for people.

Mr. Chair, we have a lot more work to do, but I have to tell you that I believe we're on the right track. I believe Albertans sent us here to do this. Albertans rejected the antibusiness, anti worker-friendly attitude of the NDP that drove north of \$35 billion out of this province to other places, other jurisdictions, Europe and Asia and the United States and even other provinces, because the NDP made it clear they were not business friendly. You can't actually be against business and say you're for workers because where do workers work? They work at jobs, which are businesses. The NDP hasn't quite connected those dots. They claim to be for workers, but they're against the places where workers work. I know. It doesn't

make sense to me either, Mr. Chair. I can see how much you agree with this though I will for the record make it clear that you haven't said anything. But the folks on the other side, particularly the angry ones that were trying to talk over me when I've got the floor, do not accept the fact that cutting red tape is one of the many, many things we need to do.

10:30

Our work is not near done yet. We have to dig out of the COVID situation that we're in. We've got to dig out of what were negative and single-digit energy prices that we are in. But I can tell you what, we are working hard to put this province on a path where we can dig out of that and create more jobs and more opportunities for more Albertans so that their children, when they grow up, can stay in Alberta and have a good mortgage-paying job and raise their family here instead of having to leave in droves, as many did when the NDP were in government, Mr. Chair.

That's what red tape reduction is about. It's a piece of the puzzle that matters. It's a piece of the puzzle that is designed to create jobs and opportunities for Albertans to stay here and make money and spend that money and create more jobs and more opportunities for more Albertans. That's the kind of momentum we're trying to create, which is exactly the opposite of the negative momentum we had through four long years before Albertans fired the NDP for not doing exactly that.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. minister.

Are there any hon. members looking to join debate on this matter? I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-South has risen.

Mr. Dang: Thank you, Mr. Chair. It's my pleasure to rise tonight and speak to Bill 22, the Red Tape Reduction Implementation Act, 2020. Oh, jeez. I mean, it's a 170-something page bill that addresses so many different ministries, addresses so many different pieces of legislation, and makes sweeping changes. I mean, some of them appear to be relatively inconsequential, but some of them are indeed quite consequential.

I think it's important that we actually address the legislation and we actually address the issues in the legislation and we actually address things like fundamental changing of environmental monitoring, fundamental changes to things like municipal reporting and municipal responsibility. Things in this bill, things like how it's repealing energy efficiency, changes to the Vital Statistics Act, changes to the Safety Codes Act, changes to the Surface Rights Act: there are just so many actual, different issues in this bill.

Mr. Chair, that's okay. I mean, certainly, I'm opposed to omnibus legislation. I think that, certainly, we should break out legislation so that this place has an adequate opportunity to discuss each of those issues. Indeed, for example, the Vital Statistics Act: we are debating that in this House on a different bill right now. I guess the question is really: why did the government choose to have this brought forward in two separate bills?

It's interesting because in the press release and in the press statements that were made around the release of this bill, Bill 22, Red Tape Reduction Implementation Act, 2020, the associate minister of red tape was the one that was introducing this bill, and he provided the briefing to the media and, of course, Albertans. Many questions were asked around many of these important pieces of legislation, things like environmental monitoring, things like energy efficiency, things like safety codes amendments or the Surface Rights Act. All of these are real issues for Albertans.

As the Minister of Transportation rose in this place and said, these are all pieces of different parts of the puzzle. They're all pieces of different parts of the puzzle that address things like: how

are we going to try and get Albertans back to work? In my opinion and, I think, in Albertans' opinions, this government is actually failing at that. Before the COVID pandemic this government had actually already lost over 50,000 jobs, over 50,000 jobs before the pandemic had even started. But now we know that this is a piece of the puzzle that the government wants to use to try and pull themselves out of that hole, pull themselves out of the economic disaster they've created, pull themselves out of the situation where Albertans are not able to work and do not have supports that they need. This is a piece that the Minister of Transportation has risen in this place and said is so essential. This Associate Minister of Red Tape Reduction is doing so much great work that he wouldn't be able to do it without the support of the Associate Minister of Red Tape Reduction: those are the Minister of Transportation's words in this place.

Now, Mr. Chair, the very pressing concern I have around that, then, is that it appears the Associate Minister of Red Tape Reduction has nothing more than, actually even lacks a cursory knowledge of the individual components of this bill. When this bill was brought up in the media briefing and to the public, a number of technical questions were asked by members of the media. Indeed, in this place we have seen a number of technical questions asked by my colleagues as well, whether in question period or tonight or at other points that this bill was debated, to the Associate Minister of Red Tape Reduction regarding things like "What is the justification around changes to the Emergency Management Act?," including "Why are we changing some of these things in statutes when it can be done – why are we changing some of these pieces here instead of in the statutes amendment act?" Or when we're looking at the Emissions Management and Climate Resilience Act, why are we looking at some of these changes?

It turns out that the Associate Minister of Red Tape Reduction is unable to answer even a single one of those questions, whether it is here in this House or out in the media with the public. It becomes abundantly clear that the Associate Minister of Red Tape Reduction does not appear to actually understand the individual components, the individual clauses, and the individual acts in the bill. I mean, I'm pretty sure that that's something that Albertans will be disappointed about. I think it's something that Albertans will be disappointed about because they will struggle to understand why we are bringing in this omnibus piece – I believe it's over 175 pages – of legislation under this minister, who has tens of millions of dollars in his portfolio.

Albertans will struggle to understand – in the Minister of Transportation's words, if his role is so essential in helping to understand these individual components, why can the minister not explain any of them? Why is the minister unable to actually stand in this place and speak to the Marketing of Agricultural Products Act? That is one of the bills that is changed by this legislation. Why is the minister unable to stand in this place and explain any of these actual changes? It becomes clear that each of these individual ministers is the only one that knows what is happening in this bill. The minister of agriculture is the only person who understands what is happening for the agricultural products act on the government bench. The Minister of Energy is the only person who understands the Mines and Minerals Act being changed in this bill.

It becomes abundantly clear that the Associate Minister of Red Tape Reduction, even though other members of the front bench have said that he is so important and his role is so important, has actually not been consulted and not actually been involved in any of the individual changes to reduce the red tape. The question then becomes: what is the role of the Associate Minister of Red Tape Reduction? The Associate Minister of Red Tape Reduction gets up in this place and says that he is driving forward these changes, that

he is solely responsible for ensuring that all ministries do this work, that he is solely responsible for making sure that this type of work moves forward. It's going to be so important for making sure that we have more jobs for Albertans. It's going to be so important to make sure that we recover the economy. It's going to be so important to make sure that they pull themselves out of the 50,000 jobs that this government lost before the COVID pandemic. It's so important that we do this that the minister cannot explain a single clause of his own bill.

The minister cannot explain a single item in his own bill with regard to issues such as the Municipal Government Act, because when asked, the minister simply says: oh, please refer to the Minister of Municipal Affairs. When asked about the Oil Sands Conservation Act, the minister says: please refer to the AER or the Minister of Energy. It becomes clear that it does not seem to be the case that this legislation is necessary. It does not seem to be the case that cabinet needs this additional body spending tens of millions of dollars of Albertans' money to simply say: well, I introduced a bill that was the sum work of all of my colleagues.

It appears the Associate Minister of Red Tape Reduction has not done any of that work himself, has not done the homework to understand any of the work, has not actually bothered to read any of that information, and instead has deferred all of the work in this bill, all of the information that is encompassed in 175 pages in this legislation, which is, again, a very lengthy bill and quite unusual in terms of an omnibus piece of legislation – it touches so much because when you include things like vital statistics to safety codes amendment to the Recreation Development Act, you're touching a lot of different pieces of information, and that can be very complicated.

Mr. Chair, that is the very reason that in this place we do indeed have actual, different ministries, that there are ministers of things like Transportation, ministers of Finance, ministers of economic development and trade, ministers of labour, ministers of environment. We have all these different types of ministries because they have subject matter expertise. They're able to understand and recognize in their portfolios where there may be an opportunity to do reductions of duplication, where there may be opportunities to increase efficiencies and do those types of changes. Of course, we commend the government when they are trying to do those types of things. We may disagree on the extent to which they should be doing it. We may disagree on what we consider a duplication or consider red tape in this case.

10:40

But I think it is becoming abundantly clear that the Associate Minister of Red Tape Reduction's goal, the stated goal of that ministry, is not being accomplished, is not actually being achieved because of that ministry. It becomes abundantly clear that it's every other minister pulling the weight. The question again is: does that justify the creation of both this bill and that ministry and that minister's portfolio? It appears that Albertans are not getting good value for money.

Indeed, it actually appears that if the Minister of Transportation is correct that his ministry is able to make some these changes himself and if the Minister of Finance and the minister of labour were able to make those types of changes themselves and were able to bring the subject matter expertise – when the associate minister of red tape is asked about any of the changes in this bill; for example, things like: what are the technicalities around repealing Energy Efficiency Alberta? If those technical details that are repealed are entirely encompassed by the minister of environment's portfolio and the ministry of environment's staff and the ministry

of environment's expertise, then what actual added value did the Associate Minister of Red Tape Reduction bring to the table? It turns out nothing. It appears that the Associate Minister of Red Tape Reduction is a layer of added bureaucracy and added red tape to create nothing other than extra paperwork and bring in this omnibus piece of legislation.

All of these individual changes could have been brought forward by the subject matter experts, which are the individual ministers on that front bench, the ministers who are being paid and have files that exist to make sure that they are able to understand the complications and would have been able to explain to Albertans, explain to this House, explain to the media why things like the Recreation Development Act is being repealed, why the Safety Codes Act is being changed around administrative penalties, all those types of questions around things like why the Surface Rights Act is amended by the board's ability to hear cases with claim values up to \$50,000 instead of \$25,000, all those types of questions where the Associate Minister of Red Tape Reduction stands in this place and continues to defer and continues to say: "Please ask the relevant minister. Please ask the relevant minister. We do not have the answer. The government does not have the answers. It is only the relevant minister that does."

It becomes abundantly clear that basically what the Associate Minister of Red Tape Reduction is doing is acting as a switchboard and saying: "Please go to this other minister. Please go to this other minister. Please go to this other portfolio." It becomes abundantly clear, Mr. Chair, that that's basically the definition of red tape, duplicating the efforts of certain ministries in this government. And in this case, we appear to be duplicating the efforts of almost every ministry in the government.

It's fairly clear to me, Mr. Chair, that there's no need for the Associate Minister of Red Tape Reduction, that this bill, while it touches on so many things and while in some cases it may have credible reductions in duplication of work and may have credible efficiency finding, in many cases they can be amended through other pieces of legislation that are already before this House such as the statutes amendment act, such as the Vital Statistics Act amendment that we're going through, such as other pieces of legislation, or ministers who would actually be able to answer those technical questions about what it would be to bring it forward themselves.

It becomes abundantly clear that this piece of legislation seems to be a make-work project. It seems to be a project that is designed to create busywork for the Associate Minister of Red Tape Reduction. It's designed to bring in this additional layer of bureaucracy. It's designed to bring in this additional layer of red tape. It's designed to bring in essentially an excuse to justify the minister's existence, and I think that's very concerning. I think it's concerning for a government that touts their fiscal credibility and touts their fiscal acuity, Mr. Chair.

I think it's pretty concerning that they would go out of their way to try and create a very expensive ministry to create additional bureaucracy, create additional jobs for friends and donors, and hold up that work of the government, because that is essentially what the Associate Minister of Red Tape Reduction is doing. The Associate Minister of Red Tape Reduction is saying: well, before you can go in and find all those efficiencies yourself and do that, you have to come through our ministry first. That's what the Minister of Transportation has said, basically, that he has to co-ordinate with the Associate Minister of Red Tape Reduction and all of his efficiency findings.

Basically, what we're saying is that if we're delaying this process, we're making it less efficient. We're making government less efficient. Indeed, government shouldn't have to be at the whim

of the Associate Minister of Red Tape Reduction when they want to make these types of changes. They shouldn't have to wait for the Associate Minister of Red Tape Reduction to actually go out and read his notes. It's so abundantly clear that the associate minister did not even understand what was in the bill when it was introduced and likely still does not understand what is in the bill.

We should have been seeing this come forward from those individual ministries. We should have been seeing the reasonable changes hidden in this 175-page omnibus bill. There are reasonable changes. There are changes that repeal expired pieces of legislation that, for example, have not applied since the '80s. There are changes that do things such as removing cabinet approval for certain actions that basically never happened. There are some changes in here that are actually good changes.

Mr. Chair, the concerning thing is that the Associate Minister of Red Tape Reduction, the minister sponsoring this bill, who is receiving tens of millions of dollars to do this, cannot explain any of those changes, cannot actually speak to any of those changes, cannot actually understand what is happening in these changes. I mean, that's pretty disappointing. It's pretty disappointing that Albertans are going to have to pay extra to get less. We could have got all of these changes without the Associate Minister of Red Tape Reduction. We would have likely got all of these changes without the Associate Minister of Red Tape Reduction. Indeed we are actually looking in this place at a miscellaneous statutes amendment act, which many of these changes could have fallen under, right? We're talking about things like repealing expired legislation that no longer has an application. That is something that, basically, by definition, should be falling under a miscellaneous statutes amendment act, right?

Mr. Chair, it's clear to me and I think it's clear to Albertans that the minister is looking for a role, that the government is looking for an excuse to continue to have the Associate Minister of Red Tape Reduction. We know that red tape reduction was this key plank in the government's platform, right? It was this key idea that the government wanted to bring forward. I suspect that perhaps the Premier and the government are a little bit disappointed that they found out that there was actually no role for this ministry, that there was actually no need for this ministry, but having allocated tens of millions of dollars to it and having allocated a minister to it and having allocated all these resources to it, they had to come up with something. They had to come up with a bill that they could introduce and say that they're doing all these amazing things.

Mr. Chair, Albertans will see through that. Albertans will understand that basically they're not getting the value for money. For the Finance minister to stand in this place and say that he is using his fiscal acuity to manage the government's finances and navigate through this difficult economic time and then go and waste money on the Associate Minister of Red Tape Reduction and allow the Associate Minister of Red Tape Reduction to basically waste tens of millions of Alberta taxpayer dollars so that there can be a busywork project for a platform plank, I think that is basically the definition of irresponsible, right?

I think it's irresponsible for the Minister of Finance not to go into cabinet and say: we do not need this ministry; we can make these changes without this ministry. I know the Minister of Transportation said: well, the Associate Minister of Red Tape Reduction is pushing forward so hard with these changes for us and is making sure we are querying this. Is that not also the definition of what is the Minister of Finance's job? Does the Minister of Finance and President of Treasury Board's job not include trying to oversee government finances and making sure there isn't inefficiency? Does the President of Treasury Board no longer oversee and make sure that there is approval of all the spending of

these funds and there is fiduciary responsibility being carried out? Is that no longer the Minister of Finance's job? Or does he simply justify to himself that the Associate Minister of Red Tape Reduction can do this on top of and duplicate that effort to double-check his work? Does the Minister of Finance not trust his own work, or does he agree that he needs to create this additional bureaucracy, create this additional red tape, and delay the process and cost Alberta taxpayers more? That's basically the question that Albertans want answered. That's basically the question that the opposition here wants answered. We want to understand why it is that the government, which prides itself on trying to reduce red tape inasmuch as they created a ministry for it, does not even have the insight to be able to understand that this is by nature a duplication of effort and by nature a duplication of processes and by definition a creation of additional red tape.

We know this omnibus bill, again, Mr. Chair, is extremely unusual, right? It's extremely unusual for an omnibus bill like this to address so many different pieces of legislation unless it's a miscellaneous statutes amendment act, which we have before this House, and many of these pieces of legislation could have gone under it. It becomes pretty clear that perhaps the Associate Minister of Red Tape Reduction has been tasked to deal with some of these miscellaneous statutes but they didn't want to put it in that bill because they needed to find work, as it were, for the minister, and they needed to justify the budget of the ministry. They needed to justify why the minister existed.

I think that if that was indeed the government's goal – and I would not wish to speak for the government – if indeed the government's goal was to justify spending millions of Albertans' dollars on red tape reduction, on duplication of effort, and on creating additional bureaucracy between the ministries, if that was indeed the government's goal, I wish that, perhaps, they would have given the minister actual briefing notes on what he was introducing. I wish they would have given the minister an actual technical briefing on the individual clauses he was introducing, the individual bills he was touching on. Then the minister would have been able to rise in this place – and perhaps he still will be able to in the future – and explain why this legislation is required, explain the individual bills he is touching on. Perhaps he could hopefully explain to Albertans what types of changes are coming to Energy Efficiency Alberta. Mr. Chair, I've read many parts of this bill. I've read the bill, and unfortunately it appears that the minister has not, right? It appears that the minister, when asked in this place, when asked in the public by the media, again and again the minister decides to defer to other ministries, right? He decides to act at that switchboard to redirect, to say that only the subject matter experts will have this information.

10:50

If that is the case and indeed if that is the truth, then the question again becomes: what is the point? What is the point of this legislation? What is the point of this minister? What is the point of this ministry? It is simply a waste of money. It is simply a waste of Alberta taxpayer dollars. It is simply a waste of this Assembly's efforts because we are not able to get the actual answers from the sponsoring minister, and indeed we rely on the government's ability to have other ministers answer on his behalf. It becomes abundantly clear that this minister either is not doing his job or simply is not reading the briefings or is not being provided the briefings. Whatever it is, Mr. Chair, whatever the case may be, it's disappointing. It's disappointing because Albertans expect value for money. I believe that when they voted for this government, they expected a government that would be financially responsible. Instead they have a minister who basically is running around as a paper boy, an errand boy for the other portfolios.

I think that's pretty disappointing, but I look forward to hearing further debate.

The Deputy Chair: Hon. member, as we all know, you had the opportunity to speak many times at committee, and I would just recommend that the hon. member try to focus his comments directly on the bill in debate and perhaps not on the minister or the ministry.

I see the hon. Minister of Finance has risen.

Mr. Toews: Well, thank you. That is a difficult act to follow, what we've just heard there. It's interesting, Mr. Chair, even your comments, because from what I could make out from the member opposite and, in fact, from what I can make out from the comments to date around this bill, this red tape reduction bill, Bill 22, I've not heard concern about the substance of the bill. In fact, there's not been one item where there has been a rational, logical suggestion for change or legitimate concern with the substance of the bill.

It seems, Mr. Chair, that the members opposite are offended that our Premier actually appointed an Associate Minister of Red Tape Reduction to focus on reducing red tape for Albertans and Alberta businesses, red tape that the members opposite, when they were in government, added layers and layers and layers to, which impeded Alberta businesses. It impeded Alberta nonprofits. It added cost and time to Alberta families. It seems, again, that the members opposite are offended that we have an Associate Minister of Red Tape Reduction dedicated to the very important task of reducing red tape on behalf of Albertans and Alberta businesses.

Mr. Chair, the work that our associate minister does is incredibly valuable, not only valuable to this government and to the individual ministries, but it's incredibly valuable work on behalf of Albertans. We have an associate minister who works with the other ministries identifying red tape that needs to be removed, regulations that need to be modernized, regulations that are redundant, regulations that add cost and burden to Alberta job creators, to Alberta nonprofits, to every aspect of our society here in the province.

Mr. Chair, I just need to rise this evening and reaffirm – reaffirm – our Premier's decision to appoint our Associate Minister of Red Tape Reduction, who is doing an excellent job working across government and across ministries at modernizing our regulatory environment in this province and identifying red tape that needs to be removed and assisting every ministry in moving the meter, which will make life better for Albertans, which will make life better for Alberta businesses, which will lead to increased investment and increased job creation, something the members opposite have no idea about, Mr. Chair.

With that, I adjourn debate.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. minister.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Bill 25

Protecting Alberta Industry from Theft Act, 2020

The Deputy Chair: Are there any comments, questions, or amendments on this matter? I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview has risen.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I'll keep my comments fairly brief. It's interesting that the government is bringing forward this bill. I mean, "interesting," maybe, is not the right word. The theme of this bill has been brought forward a number of times through this House.

In fact, I recall when it was brought forward I believe it was around 2012. An iteration of this bill did come through when I was a new member at the time, Mr. Chair. It came through a private

member's bill. This is going to take some significant recollection to come back to a bill from 2012, but I do recall that there were some concerns with the bill as it was written then. I'll start off by saying that the spirit and the intention of the bill: I don't know if there's anybody in this place that will not recognize the value of wanting to ensure that we are protecting especially our folks – industry, businesses, private households – in rural Alberta because we know that there is a market for scrap metal. I recall hearing story after story about businesses that had been raided or looted, you know, with the thieves going after the scrap metal and then selling it.

The issue really was: how do we protect those individuals, again, whether they are businesses or families in communities, especially in rural Alberta? I mean, we've talked many times in this place about protecting rural Albertans and how, just because of where they live, it's a challenge, if they are being robbed and if they are present when it's happening, of getting a quick response from the RC or from others to be able to provide assistance. We know that it's a serious risk for individuals. We know that this will send a strong message, especially for thieves that are trying to take advantage of especially vulnerable Albertans. Really, for that reason, it's significant that we do support this bill, that I will be voting in favour of this bill.

We just saw, in fact, I believe a week ago, a couple of weeks ago, there was the police making an arrest on a ring of catalytic converters that was sizable in this province. I think that if there's a way to protect Albertans, then we're definitely in favour of it. With this bill, if I'm understanding it correctly, it will ensure that scrap metal transactions are documented. This really does safeguard individuals and ensures that scrap metal dealers or those that accept it have the proper provisions and parameters in place, I mean, not that they would intentionally accept materials that they may know were taken unlawfully. This is, again, to protect everyone from that.

With that, Mr. Chair, I will take my seat. I just wanted to comment briefly on this bill and that I will be supporting it.

11:00

The Deputy Chair: Thank you.

Are there any hon. members looking to join debate? I see the hon. Member for Calgary-West.

Mr. Ellis: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. We're getting late here. I'll just be very brief. I'd like to thank the hon. member for his comments in regard to this bill. You know, I can tell you, regarding the importance of having accountability in that particular industry and having that necessary documentation, that even as far back as when I was a young constable in the Calgary Police Service, copper theft and metals of value have been an issue. For sure it even predated me when I was a young constable back in the day.

That being said, it is great to see a piece of legislation that is on the floor. I certainly support it, and I certainly encourage all members of this House to support that. With that, Mr. Chair, I ask that we rise . . .

Mr. Jason Nixon: No, no, no. We need to take a vote on it.

Mr. Ellis: Oh, sorry. My apologies, sir. I'll sit down. Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any hon. members looking to join debate at this time?

Hon. Members: Question.

The Deputy Chair: Are you ready for the question on Bill 25, Protecting Alberta Industry from Theft Act, 2020?

[The clauses of Bill 25 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

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

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Deputy Chair: Any opposed? Carried.

I see the hon. Deputy Government House Leader and Minister of Transportation has risen.

Mr. McIver: Thank you, Chair. At this point I move that the committee rise and report Bill 25 and rise and report progress on Bill 22.

[Motion carried]

[Mr. Milliken in the chair]

Mr. van Dijken: Mr. Speaker, Committee of the Whole has had under consideration certain bills. The committee reports the following bill: Bill 25. The committee reports progress on the following bill: Bill 22.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

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

Hon. Members: Aye.

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

I see the hon. Minister of Transportation has risen.

Mr. McIver: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Thank you for recognizing me. I want to thank members from both sides of the House for their contributions in debates this evening and the progress that we made. It's after 11. We've had a fairly full day. At this point I move that the Assembly adjourn until 9 a.m., Wednesday, July 8.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. Minister of Transportation. I will say that it is sometimes difficult to recognize you without your moustache.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 11:04 p.m.]

Table of Contents

Government Bills and Orders

Second Reading

Bill 30	Health Statutes Amendment Act, 2020.....	1783
Bill 29	Local Authorities Election Amendment Act, 2020.....	1784

Committee of the Whole

Bill 22	Red Tape Reduction Implementation Act, 2020.....	1798
Bill 25	Protecting Alberta Industry from Theft Act, 2020.....	1804

Alberta Hansard is available online at www.assembly.ab.ca

For inquiries contact:

Editor

Alberta Hansard

3rd Floor, 9820 – 107 St

EDMONTON, AB T5K 1E7

Telephone: 780.427.1875

E-mail: AlbertaHansard@assembly.ab.ca