



Province of Alberta

The 30th Legislature
Second Session

Alberta Hansard

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Day 41

The Honourable Nathan M. Cooper, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

The 30th Legislature

Second Session

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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

9 a.m.

Wednesday, July 8, 2020

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

The Deputy Speaker: Good morning, everyone.

Let us pray. Lord, the God of righteousness and truth, grant to our Queen and her government, to Members of the Legislative Assembly, and to all in positions of responsibility the guidance of Your spirit. May they never lead the province wrongly through love of power, desire to please, or unworthy ideals but, laying aside all private interests and prejudices, keep in mind their responsibility to seek to improve the condition of all. So may Your kingdom come, and Your name be hallowed. Amen.

Please be seated.

Orders of the Day

Government Bills and Orders

Second Reading

Bill 33

Alberta Investment Attraction Act

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Minister of Economic Development, Trade and Tourism.

Ms Fir: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I'm pleased to move second reading of Bill 33, the Alberta Investment Attraction Act.

Bill 33 enables the creation of an investment attraction corporation called the invest Alberta corporation. The bill establishes the corporation's board of directors and provides the legislative framework for the use of specified financial tools, regulation-making powers, and other operational limits.

In our government's blueprint for jobs we reaffirmed our commitment to Albertans that we would focus our work on creating jobs and growing the economy. This legislation follows an extensive process begun shortly after we formed government to address shortfalls that existed in Alberta's investment attraction efforts, namely an exodus of investment that occurred almost exclusively under the previous government's tenure.

If I could draw the House's attention back to the election, which simultaneous seems yesterday and so long ago, our platform identified many of the areas where investment fell under the previous government. Our platform provided the following statistics whereby investment fell under the previous government: by 7 per cent in agriculture and forestry; 10 per cent in manufacturing; 21 per cent in construction; 27 per cent in finance, insurance, and real estate; 35 per cent in transportation; 36 per cent in utilities; 65 per cent in retail trade; and by 61 per cent in the oil and gas extraction sector. Overall, my department has identified that foreign direct investment fell by over a third under the previous government.

We were elected under a mandate of jobs, economy, and pipelines. That mandate still holds true today. I would say that it is even more critical in the face of the crisis in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic and what will be a challenging recovery. The market for global investment will be extremely competitive in the coming years. Jurisdictions large and small will be fighting for the same pool of investment, which will likely be curtailed for some time. Alberta needs to be able to compete on the world stage with other jurisdictions that are also chasing down the same investors.

This is partially why this agency will focus on attracting investment into key industries. I would like to speak to each of those industries.

Over the last five decades we've seen the energy sector build Alberta into one of the most prosperous jurisdictions in the world. We've seen hundreds of billions of dollars of revenue that created the wealth that transformed Alberta into an economic jet engine and, truthfully, pushed us into the ranks of the G7. Could the metro of Montreal, the highways of Ontario, or the Waterloo-Toronto corridor have been built without the hard work that Albertans have put in to extract energy and move it from coast to coast and beyond? That industry is under attack. All members of this House know it. The difference between the government and the opposition is that we will do something to address it.

Agriculture: one of the oldest industries in the world, and certainly one that is foundational to the creation of this province. For over a century this province has grown crops and livestock to feed the world. We have the most innovative and productive agricultural sectors of any jurisdiction. Alberta's food and beverage processing industry was the largest manufacturing employer in the province in 2018, employing 263,000 people and accounting for \$15.2 billion in manufacturing sales. More than 22 research and innovation facilities in the province specialize in crops and cereals, poultry and swine, biomaterials and food safety.

In 2018 Alberta exports of primary and processed agricultural food products totalled \$11.6 billion. Alberta produced 31 per cent of Canadian wheat, 29 per cent of canola, 48 per cent of the nation's barley, and 20 per cent of Canada's oats. Alberta led the nation in cattle and calf inventory, accounting for more than 40 per cent of Canada's total. Those numbers indicate the tremendous growth that our province has seen in agriculture, but it is really a small piece when compared to the truly massive potential we could see come to fruition. The world will always need to eat. Our population will continue to grow, not just in Canada but around the world, and we will see technology and innovation play a huge role in Alberta filling that need for a long time to come.

Tourism is another industry identified as a sector for growth. Another pillar of our economy, tourism is the fourth-largest employment sector in our province. In recent years Alberta's tourism economy has seen nearly 37 million person visits, \$8.9 billion in tourism expenditures, and contributed \$7.3 billion to our provincial GDP and \$1.2 billion in tax revenue to the three levels of government. Importantly, it also employs over 120,000 Albertans.

Obviously, those numbers will look very different this year due to the pandemic. However, we will be shortly reintroducing our 10-year tourism strategy, which will be implemented in three phases: response and providing the sector with immediate relief now, which we have done through the abatement of the tourism levy, which will provide up to \$27 million in relief to the tourism industry; relaunch and supporting the sector through recovery; and rebuilding and positioning the sector for growth, which includes complete implementation of the 10-year tourism strategy. That strategy is projected to take one of Alberta's biggest sectors to its full potential and new heights as committed to in our platform.

Economists in my department prior to the pandemic projected that our 10-year tourism strategy will create between 70,000 and 140,000 jobs if fully implemented. To explain, their economic modelling projects that the number of direct jobs specifically in the tourism sector would increase from 68,000 direct full-time jobs to about 140,000 direct full-time jobs. Currently there are about 127,000 direct, indirect, and induced full-time equivalent jobs in tourism. By expanding to \$20 billion, there will be about 268,000 direct full-time equivalent jobs.

Technology services are another key industry that we will be targeting. I know the members opposite seem to think that they had it all figured out and that their programs were going to solve the problem, but the tech industry actually saw more investment in the year that their programs were frozen for nine months. As the economic recovery plan showed, we are taking serious actions to help the tech sector. Prior to the pandemic I named an Innovation Capital Working Group to develop recommendations on the best ways to attract investment into early-stage tech start-ups.

The tech sector isn't really a sector in itself. In reality, all sectors are or are becoming technology and innovation sectors. From 2016 to 2018 global start-up growth soared, adding \$2.8 trillion to the world economy, and technology was the key driver. Furthermore, the world economy is moving towards a fourth industrial revolution. Technologic advancements are transforming the way businesses and people interact across sectors, and digital technologies are now seen as critical determinants of economic growth and international competitiveness.

Since the 2019 budget the Alberta Enterprise Corporation, an agency under my ministry, has invested more than \$54 million in funds in Alberta tech start-ups, which is more than the annual budget for the previous AITC and IDMTC credits combined. As part of the economic recovery plan we are recapitalizing AEC with \$175 million and introducing an innovation employment grant, which will make Alberta the most attractive place in Canada to invest in technology and innovation. Alberta is already an important player in the technology sector, and this province has a strong presence in artificial intelligence, big data, geomatics, and others. We have a huge opportunity to attract investment into those areas as part of our economic recovery, and that's what our agency will pursue.

[Mr. Hanson in the chair]

As I mentioned already, the technology and innovation sector affects every sector of Alberta's economy, making it a broad enabler of economic growth and diversification. This is particularly true in the energy and agriculture sectors. Additionally, the technology and innovation sector creates new efficiencies and increased capacity in other areas such as health and education. These efficiencies have been essential in those areas' responses to COVID-19.

Some jurisdictions in Canada and in other countries have an arm's-length government agency or corporation dedicated to investment attraction activities. Some of these activities, by virtue of their complexity, require more attention to manage such as sovereign wealth funds and large private equity funds. Our invest Alberta agency and the upcoming full investment and growth strategy will target technology investors for Alberta.

9:10

Alberta also has huge opportunities in the financial services sector. Alberta is forecasted to spend \$1.1 billion in digital transformation of financial services by 2022. Edmonton is one of Canada's leading centres for asset management and banking entrepreneurship. Four of western Canada's largest financial institutions are headquartered in Edmonton, including one of the country's largest institutional investment fund managers and western Canada's two largest banks.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

The University of Alberta has been making significant investments into research and development of fintech, bolstered by its cutting-edge artificial intelligence and machine learning research.

Alberta's financial services sector includes six major Canadian banks with capabilities for research, sales, trading, investment banking, and corporate banking. Alberta is home to the headquarters of a number of regional financial institutions that offer similar services as the major Canadian banks. In addition, 75 per cent of the top 20 global investment banks have branch offices in Alberta. We can build on that foundation and leverage even more investment and success in the sector.

Aerospace and aviation is the final but certainly not the least important sector that we are focusing on. Alberta already has large advantages here as well. WestJet, one of Canada's largest commercial airlines, is headquartered in Calgary. Flair Airlines, a low-cost commercial carrier, is headquartered in Edmonton. Foremost, Alberta is home to one of only two Transport Canada-approved remotely piloted aircraft systems, also known as unmanned aerial systems, test ranges. We've seen defence contracts come to Calgary because of the advantages in unmanned flight systems. Edmonton International Airport recently announced that they are going to be the first unmanned flight delivery hub in Canada and among the first in North America.

My colleague the Member for Calgary-Fish Creek recently passed legislation around supporting our aviation sector, and I was in close contact with our major airports and airlines throughout the COVID-19 pandemic and will continue to be through our economic recovery. Alberta is well positioned for aviation investment.

To put us on equal or greater footing with our competitors, creating the invest Alberta corporation is an essential and logical step. We identified a number of key actions in the plan to make this happen, which included creating an investment attraction agency. This legislation is making this commitment a reality. Now more than ever we need to attract job-creating private-sector investment from across Canada and around the world. No one could have anticipated the devastating consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic and the resulting energy price crash. Investments into Alberta's many industries help drive our economy by creating certainty, supporting existing jobs and creating new ones, expanding business opportunities, accelerating innovation, and increasing exports. We may face new challenges on our path to recovery, and Alberta must be prepared.

The legislation to create the invest Alberta corporation is essential as we begin to reopen our economy. The corporation will play a pivotal role in our economic future to help restore investor confidence. It will target key growth sectors and provide concierge service to the most promising investors in those sectors. It would also lead an aggressive global marketing strategy to restore confidence in our province as a place that offers a talented workforce with skills and expertise across many industries, highlight Alberta's experience in the research and innovation sector and new technologies, and demonstrate that our province is still one of the most competitive and attractive investment destinations in North America. The corporation will help to increase investment in Alberta's primary industries – energy, agriculture, and tourism – and encourage investment in our high-potential sectors such as technology, aviation and aerospace, and financial services.

Our government began laying the foundation to stimulate economic growth and attract investment by lowering business taxes to by far the lowest in Canada and cutting regulatory red tape. We continue to do more to encourage investment growth in this province. We are taking steps to eliminate barriers to investment in statutes and regulations to show national and international investors that our province is nimble and attentive to the needs of business and that we will bring jobs to Alberta.

The legislation to create the invest Alberta corporation is being introduced at a time when Alberta businesses and Alberta's

economy need it most. We've seen investment fall, and this is a concrete step in our plan to bring it back. Investment attraction is essential to keep Alberta's economy moving. New investments stimulate sector growth that ultimately leads to jobs across the province. Competition for investment is high, and Alberta must be able to compete with other jurisdictions in Canada and abroad. An investment attraction agency would be one more tool in our provincial tool box that would give Alberta a competitive edge to attract and retain high-level, high-impact investment prospects.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Are there any other members wishing to speak to Bill 33?

I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-West Henday.

Mr. Carson: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It's an honour to rise this morning and speak to Bill 33, the Alberta Investment Attraction Act. I appreciate the words that the minister shared though I don't agree with many of the things that the member spoke of, which probably isn't a surprise to you, Madam Speaker.

Looking at the legislation before us and seeing some of the releases that came out yesterday after this legislation was introduced, specifically a CBC article discussing the fact that this corporation's budget, if this legislation were to pass, is about \$18 million over three years, and, you know, that's a lot of money in some respects. I think that any time we're spending any amount of money we need to ensure that there's transparency there and that we have the opportunity to review how that money is being spent.

Along with that we saw the introduction of an investment office in Houston, Texas, where this Premier is giving an opportunity for a patronage appointment for the member who stepped down so that he could fill a seat. That's kind of par for the course for the UCP. We've seen that with the war room, the incredibly unaccountable war room: \$30 million a year for which we've seen no results, you know. We're waiting for anything to come back in terms of finding these enemies of the state, as the government might call them, that are attacking our oil and gas industry, but unfortunately for that \$30 million a year they've come up with absolutely nothing other than botched social media posts and just a failure across the board.

This Premier is offering this member who stepped down for him over \$9,000 biweekly to attract investment to our province, and I hope that works, Madam Speaker. I question whether it's going to work and whether that person was the right person for the job, but it is what it is with this government. The Premier continues to make those patronage appointments to pay back people that have helped him in the past.

Just quickly looking at the legislation here on page 7, 11(1). It talks about: "the Corporation shall, as soon as practicable after the end of each fiscal year, submit a report to the Minister regarding the activities and operations of the Corporation during the preceding fiscal year," which is good to see. I don't think we saw this in the legislation that created the war room. It's something that we were calling for very often as there was no accountability in that war room for \$30 million a year and no requirement that they report back to us what they spent their money on, whether it was effective, or any of that.

Mr. Nally: Point of order.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. associate minister of natural gas.

Mr. Nally: While I appreciate the insightful dialogue on the war room, we're here to discuss Bill 33. If we could spend more time on that, that would be appreciated.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Ms Ganley: Madam Speaker, I think we've had this conversation several times, and certainly we had it yesterday several times as well. It has been stated that a broad latitude will be given. This bill is about investment and attracting investment. In fact, the minister herself raised the comparative records on the attracting of investment, so the fact that we're speaking to that is absolutely relevant. In terms of the war room, it is absolutely relevant. It's an international laughing stock. In a time when we have limited funds to potentially spend to attract investment, we're spending them on this. So I think it's clear that the member was on point and ought to be allowed to continue.

The Deputy Speaker: Now, while I wouldn't agree that the member was necessarily on point in the debate on all matters, I would certainly agree that a large amount of latitude has been given during this debate. The hon. member knows that, and I know the hon. member is certainly focused on debating the matters in this bill. I do not find a point of order, but I do look forward to the debate on this bill by the hon. Member for Edmonton-West Henday.

Mr. Carson: Well, thank you, Madam Speaker. The point that I was trying to make, just to bring it back, is that I appreciate that now we have Bill 33, the Alberta Investment Attraction Act, in front of us in part, in my opinion, because of the failure of other decisions that this government has made. When we look at the failure of the war room to attract new business to our province, to convince other jurisdictions that we are the place to invest money in, you know, it may have led us to this.

9:20

I'm thankful that the government is finally doing anything other than what we've seen previously, the \$4.7 billion, which is now being fast-tracked under this government because of their complete failure to do anything about bringing new investment to our province, to diversify the economy. The fact is that that \$4.7 billion is going to help large multinational corporations, friends of this Premier, but the problem is that it doesn't help the small and medium-sized businesses on the ground, whether they are established businesses or if they're start-ups, that are just trying to get any support from this government, who have absolutely decimated all programs for small businesses.

We look at some of the decisions that this government has made. The minister referenced in her talking points pieces like the Alberta investor tax credit, which offered a 30 per cent tax credit to qualified individuals or corporations who invest in eligible Alberta small businesses. That was something that we were extremely proud to work on with small businesses, industry stakeholders, Chambers of Commerce across the province. When this government came in on a promise and an election campaign to diversify the economy and create jobs, unfortunately that was one of the programs that they decided to cut. Moving further to the capital investment tax credit, we had invested, under the NDP, \$70 million towards this program to spur economic diversification and job creation.

Once again, these programs are more beneficial potentially specifically to the government because we can actually go back and look at the record of these programs and recognize whether they were working, and if they weren't working, then we could tweak where needed. But the fact is that this government came in, got rid of all of those programs for small businesses and people trying to get their companies off the ground and left them with nothing, and on the other hand, took all of that money that should be going to

small businesses in our province and handed it over to primarily multinational corporations. We saw that money taken and used to have stock buybacks for these large corporations, to take that money to actually move out of our province and back into the United States. So that's very concerning for us.

Once again, I appreciate that this government is potentially doing something, though I'm not convinced this is going to do what they say it is, based on the appointment of people in the Houston, Texas, office. But, hopefully, like I said earlier, it does work out in the end. We can only hope.

Looking further to the investment climate that this government has created, you know, this used to be – government has members in their own caucus who right now are talking about separatism. I have my opinions on that, and I'm very concerned about what that says to the investment community about the instability of this government in terms of an unwillingness to recognize the importance of being a province under our federation and the importance of creating stability for these investors. So that's also very concerning. We even had members opposite earlier this week talk about how Brexit was something that we should be looking to emulate, and that's very concerning because we saw millions and millions of dollars if not billions flood from the economy because of the instability of such a conversation of separation.

Now, just looking further to some of the other decisions that this government has made, even in the postsecondary field, that affected employers and employees, the elimination of the STEP program, the summer temporary employment program, that supported employers to hire students so that they could gain access to knowledge and experience in their field of work: well, this government didn't see that as being beneficial. They took that money and gave it to, once again, multinational corporations who are already doing quite well and continue to do so.

We've seen a history from this government of taking money that should go to small and medium-sized Alberta businesses that are trying to get their foot in the door, trying to get, you know, their business off the ground and totally give that money to large corporations, who need it much less than they do. It really seems that this pattern is because this Premier, in his leadership race, made a lot of promises, whether it was to corporations or individuals that donated to his leadership contest. At the time he promised that we would see who those corporations were, but unfortunately . . .

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. member, I hesitate to interrupt, but we have veered off track and then some. I would kindly ask that we get back to the debate on Bill 33.

Mr. Carson: All right. Well, thank you, Madam Speaker. Once again, just looking back to some of the decisions that this government has made that have affected our tech industries and our agriculture industries and tourism industries. Once again, this government announced \$18 million within this bill. But I look back to not that long ago: November 20 is when this article came out speaking about the fact that Alberta Innovates was laying off 125 employees because this government made the decision to cut \$76 million from their budget. So, on one hand, we have this bill talking about \$18 million going back to try and attract some of the investments that they've lost over the last year, and then on the other hand we have \$76 million cut from Alberta Innovates.

We look at some of the programs that were cut through that \$76 million: one of them being the Alberta entrepreneurship incubator program, another being the Alberta small-business research and innovation initiative, another being the Alberta innovation voucher and microvoucher programs. These are all incredibly important, whether they were for small businesses or people with ideas that

needed support to incubate those ideas. The fact is that this government turned their back on these people, Albertans that were trying to start up something to support their own communities.

Looking at some of the other programs, industry associates programs and product demonstration programs: potentially products that had gone through the process of being developed and were ready to go, and all of a sudden this government comes and cuts the funding that they once received for demonstrating how valuable Alberta products are.

I look back over the last four years, and I remember going through a committee process where, once again, we talked about the value of value-added in the agrifood processing or agrifood business across the board. I remember at the time members of the Wildrose opposition and NDP government agreeing that much more needed to be done to support those important organizations within our province and within our economy. When they got in to government, they went and cut those programs. Those are program cuts that are hurting small businesses in our community, people trying to start up, hurting farmers who are trying to get their products to market. Across the board it is hurting every industry. That's concerning.

You know, the minister talked about – I believe the quote was “an exodus of investment . . . exclusively under the previous government . . .” Well, we look at this government's record, and in May, of course, we've been going through a pandemic, but unemployment was at around 15.5 per cent in May. Even before the pandemic we saw a loss of 50,000 jobs under this government. So for them to pretend that it's been all rosy since they came into power is completely ridiculous. It's very frustrating to try and have conversations about the importance of investment and the importance of investing in small and medium-sized and large businesses when they won't even recognize or accept the fact that they have a part to play in this and they've completely failed Albertans and the business and investment community across the board.

Looking back once again to some of the programs that we had brought in and this government's, the UCP government's, willingness to cut: the loss of the interactive digital media tax credit. We had put money forward, invested money in postsecondary, not only to create spaces for students in the interactive digital media field, which is so important right now. This government likes to talk about diversification, but everywhere they turn, they see money that could be taken away, in this instance from students that are trying to get their foot in the door in the digital media industry. In that same program we offered funds to people, whether they be – you know, some of the most talked about are our video game industry people in our province. We've seen great successes here in Edmonton alone with BioWare and Beamdog, and this government decided once again to cut those very important investment programs.

This UCP government talks about the fact that we have the lowest taxes across Canada, across North America, but they fail to recognize that programs like the interactive digital media tax credit are widely accepted and available across Canada.

Mr. Nally: Point of order, Madam Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. associate minister of natural gas.

Point of Order Items Previously Decided

Mr. Nally: Standing Order 23(f). I've counted at least eight references to the budget, and I stopped counting after eight. You

know, if we could talk about Bill 33, the Alberta Investment Attraction Act. Unless the member intends to put forward a motion to rescind the budget, you know, we need to really focus on Bill 33.

9:30

Ms Ganley: Madam Speaker, I don't know if we're going to proceed through the morning in this fashion, but certainly when we're talking about investment and the attraction of investment, the government is using money – government money, public money – to attract investment, which is a laudable and important goal. We all agree that it's a laudable and important goal, but when we talk about the record of the attraction of investment and using money in the budget to attract investment, the budget itself is quite clearly relevant. The government is standing up here and admitting that government money can be used to impact how the economy operates, and now they're saying: oh, you can't speak about the budget and the way in which we've used other money to attract or not attract investment because it's irrelevant. The argument is ridiculous.

You said yesterday that speakers will be given an incredible, wide latitude, and that was when someone was speaking about something that was far, far, far more divorced from the point than this. I think, Madam Speaker, that perhaps if we could just be allowed to make our points – this is the very first speaker on a bill that was introduced two days ago – that might be nice.

The Deputy Speaker: I certainly appreciate the recognition of previous events. However, it may be not totally relevant. You are correct in the fact that a large latitude has been given. There is no point of order in this regard.

However, I think I could, finally, lastly, say to the hon. member that his arguments need to relate to the bill at hand. While the Official Opposition House Leader has been able to make that argument on your behalf, I do certainly think that the speaker himself should be able to tie those together. I know that you have that skill set, hon. member, and I look forward to seeing and tying in your arguments to the debate on Bill 33.

Debate Continued

Mr. Carson: Okay. Thank you, Madam Speaker. I will do my best to not talk about the points that I already have.

The fact is that this government has failed. We see Bill 33, Alberta Investment Attraction Act, a year after this government has come into power, with very little consultation. We still wait for reports. This government said that they were consulting with the tech industry. We have heard nothing on that matter. When we talk about other ways that this government has been trying to attract investment and failed – cuts to Alberta Innovates, cuts to the STEP program – across the board, these are all things that this government has done to hurt the investment opportunities within our province.

They are not stand-alone issues, whether we're talking about the changes to health care that this government is talking about, privatization. The ability of workers to come here and make a living is an important part of the investment attractiveness of our province. For you to say that the issues that I'm speaking about, other investment opportunities and the loss of investment because of the decisions that have been made by this government – it's frustrating for me, but I can appreciate that you've made a ruling.

Finally, I would just wrap up by saying that when we look at the decisions that this government has made that have hurt our competitiveness from province to province, specifically looking at the interactive digital media tax credit, every other province or almost every other province has up to 40 per cent tax credits or

salary coverage for these corporations. This government decided that the 25 per cent that we had, which is lower than any other province, was not the decision that they wanted to follow. Once again, this government can do as they see fit, but I do not believe that that has increased the investment opportunities for Alberta businesses in our province.

I would just wrap up by saying that this legislation is too little, too late from a government that promised jobs to Albertans in the election and has deeply failed them over the last year. The decision to place who they have in a Houston, Texas office, in my opinion, was not the right decision. I think that they should have thought about that decision a little bit more, but hopefully the person that is sent there to try and bring investment to our province will do a better job than our Premier has in his travels across North America.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a) is not available. Are there any speakers wishing to speak to the bill? The hon. Member for Cardston-Siksika.

Mr. Schow: Thank you, Madam Speaker, and good morning. It is a pleasure to rise today to speak on Bill 33. I am very excited about this bill, the Alberta Investment Attraction Act, by our hon. Minister of Economic Development, Trade and Tourism, who is doing a tremendous job on behalf of Albertans. Let me get a "hear, hear" for our minister of economic development and trade.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear.

Mr. Schow: Am I right? Am I right?

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. member, a caution here. Comments are to come through the chair. Please proceed.

Mr. Schow: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I am proud, through you to that member, of her honourable work because I tell you that this province is so desperately in need of it. It's in need of a kick-start. We are still reeling from four years of debt, deficit, and dumb decisions, frankly. I'll tell you that listening to the member opposite and his remarks over the last however long he spoke for, which, frankly, I thought was too long because he didn't really say a whole lot of anything of real substance – I would implore that member to be more like the Member for Edmonton-City Centre, who comes to this chamber prepared to talk about the legislation. Though we may disagree vehemently on these pieces of legislation, I think that the Member for Edmonton-City Centre has good points to make on behalf of his constituents. I would implore the member who just spoke to maybe be more like some of his colleagues.

With that said, this province is certainly in need of a boost. It's in need of some passion to attract investment. It's in need of someone to go out and solicit business to come to Alberta to sell all of the great things, the features, and the benefits that we have to offer. I'll tell you that under the previous government, four years of that was enough to dissuade anybody from even thinking about coming to Alberta, and those who were already here just packed up and left by the hordes because they realized that for at least four years – heaven forbid longer. I'm glad the wonderful people of Alberta made that decision. We couldn't sustain that trajectory.

Let's talk about some of those failures, Madam Speaker. Let's talk about Bill 6 for a moment. One of our most important sectors – I see that you may rise to call me to order. I would like to say before you do so that this bill does intend on attracting investment to Alberta, including bolstering our agricultural sector, so this certainly is a salient point. Let's talk about Bill 6 for a moment. We saw under the previous government that investment fell by 7 per

cent in agriculture and forestry; 7 per cent. I have cow-calf producers. I have cattle feeders. I have dryland farmers, irrigation farmers. I don't know what the number is, and I'd actually love to speak with the hon. minister of agriculture about the statistic of what the farm gate sales are, but I believe during our election campaign I heard Ian Donovan, a previous member of this Legislature, say something around between, I think, \$3 billion and \$4 billion a year in farm gate sales in Cardston-Siksika alone. This is important to the constituents of Cardston-Siksika and agriculture producers, who desperately need a government that supports them and not one that attacks them.

We need a government that supports that industry. We need a government that understands that regulatory burdens on our cow-calf producers, on our cattle feeders, on our farmers and ranchers across the board, are just going to hinder the industry and progress, and it's going to put them behind the eight ball when trying to be competitive in international markets.

Now, let's talk, then, a little bit about the carbon tax. Madam Speaker, the carbon tax was something that this NDP government implemented without any consultation from Albertans. And they want to talk and yell and cast aspersions upon members of this side of the House because for some reason... [A cellphone rang] I wonder whose phone that is.

Mr. Eggen: That's got to be a UCP phone.

Mr. Schow: Must be. That ringtone, am I right? Anyways. Moving on. I'll deal with that one later.

In any event, Madam Speaker, let's talk about the carbon tax. This is something the members opposite love to talk about. They love to throw shots across the aisle at members on this side of the House, talking about a lack of consultation. What about the carbon tax? It was the single largest tax increase in the history of our province, implemented by a government that did not have a majority of popular support from the electorate. Granted, they won the most seats, so I understand that and respect that. It was a tax that hurt Albertans across the board. It doesn't matter if you were a senior. It doesn't matter if you were a single or a dual income family. You were paying the carbon tax. That's good old thanks to the NDP.

9:40

There was another economic failure. You know what that led to? More investment failure. More falling of investment. Things like manufacturing, 10 per cent; construction, 21 per cent; finance, insurance, and real estate, 27 per cent; transportation, 35 per cent. I hope the members opposite are listening because these are their numbers. Here's a big one: utilities, 36 per cent. A whopper in retail and trade, 65 per cent. Shame, Madam Speaker. Shame. What a bizarre world we live in wherein that's acceptable to the members opposite. They stand by that record, stand in this Chamber and try to tell us how poor a job we're doing, when this is the record that they stand by. These are dramatic failures of investment fleeing the province at unprecedented numbers.

Then you look at another number. Six – one, two, three, four, five, six – credit downgrades, Madam Speaker, under the worst Finance minister in the history of this province. Shame. Shame. [interjections] I hear the NDP heckling as they usually do. It's about as good as it gets in this Chamber. I will give credit where credit is due. Nobody can heckle like the NDP.

Then we talk about debt, new debt. Granted, the previous government prior to the NDP had a debt, but we're talking tens of billions of dollars added. If I am an investor looking at Alberta from outside, I am talking about the need to have a long-term view of

what's going to happen in a province where the debt crisis is spiralling out of control.

Mr. Feehan: Why don't you release the heritage fund report?

Mr. Schow: Again, I hear the members opposite heckling us, when we have added debt to this province to fight a pandemic, and they've asked us to spend more. Madam Speaker, we're talking about... [interjections]

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. member, it's a bit of a theme happening here this morning. Perhaps an argument could be made that we're veering a little bit too far away from Bill 33. I would just ask that we focus on the debate at hand as I'm certain those points are going to tie to it very, very quickly.

Mr. Schow: Thank you, Madam Speaker. They most certainly are. This is a compare and contrast. That is the point I'm trying to make here. I'm talking about that we have seen investment flee in record numbers, and the purpose of this bill, Bill 33, the Alberta Investment Attraction Act, does the opposite, something I wish members opposite had taken into consideration when they were in government.

While I understand that there might be some concerns about the direction of my remarks, it is certainly germane to this topic, specifically with the reality that we are dealing with a problem that we need to fix, which is unemployment, trying to relaunch our economy after a devastating health crisis, Madam Speaker. These measures must be taken, and they must consider all the factors.

Again, I do talk about things that need to be addressed, like business taxes. We're lowering the tax rate of businesses to 8 per cent. That was a longer span that we were looking at. Now we've done it in a shorter span to send the message that Alberta is indeed open for business and looking to bring people back to Alberta from other parts of the country and attract new business from different parts of the world.

Again, I applaud this member, the hon. Minister of Economic Development, Trade and Tourism, for her efforts in this because I support Bill 33. I think it's a good measure. I think it's a good bill that's well-intended, addressing an existential problem in our province, which is the need for new investment.

I understand that people across the aisle and even people in the Conservative circles might have concerns about riding the oil and gas wave. I think it's an important sector that we must support, but I don't disagree that there is a need to diversify the economy. The reality, Madam Speaker, is that governments don't diversify economies. We create an environment that is attractive for diversified business to come to Alberta. Take a look, for example, at Amazon. We're looking at 700 new jobs in this province from a company that has seen us as an attractive place to be. I would venture so far as to say that that business probably wouldn't have even given us a second thought under the previous government.

We were elected under a mandate of jobs, economy, and pipelines. That mandate still holds true today, and I would say that it's even more critical in the face of this crisis that we face in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic and what will be a challenging recovery going forward. The market for global investment will be extremely competitive moving forward, Madam Speaker, but Alberta is an international player, and we understand this. We understand that we can play a role in international markets, and we have to manoeuvre and position ourselves and sell that. That's what this bill looks to do. Jurisdictions large and small will be fighting for the same pool of investment, which likely will be curtailed for some time. Alberta needs to be able to compete on that stage with other jurisdictions in chasing down the same investors.

Not only do we as a government have a responsibility to create an attractive environment for investment to come here, but I know that Albertans, the ones who voted us in to be government, it is them who we can rely upon to come up with the great ideas, who are resilient, hard-working, capable, principled people. I trust them. I trust their decisions. I trust their ingenuity and their ideas and their innovations to help propel Alberta to become and maintain a position as one of the most competitive jurisdictions in the world. Our job as a government is just to remove the barriers and create a situation that will attract new investment to this province.

Madam Speaker, again I applaud the minister. I encourage my government colleagues and my colleagues across the aisle to support this piece of legislation because in supporting this piece of legislation, you're supporting the future of an Alberta that is competitive on a world stage and an Alberta that will stay there in perpetuity.

Thank you very much.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. members, Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available. I see the hon. Member for Lac Ste. Anne-Parkland.

Mr. Getson: Yes. Thank you, Madam Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise this morning and talk about this bill. The Member for Cardston-Siksika articulated quite well that there's a difference between our side and the former government side. I couldn't help but think of some words of wisdom if you can allow me to indulge as there's been a wide breadth given all this morning for the Member for Edmonton-West Henday.

Now, some of the members may be more well read than I am, but I just couldn't help thinking of a couple of phraseologies that I've heard before. First, there was this gentleman by the name of Mike Myers. Some may have heard of him as an Austin Powers character. I'm trying to understand where these folks are coming from, and for some reason I keep hearing in the back of my mind: I don't speak freaky-deaky socialist. That's all I was thinking of because the lens that we're looking at when you actually have business development taking place and you're setting up offices all over the world and you're spending money to attract business, that is one of the pillars of every single foundation, every corporation I've ever been involved with. You have folks called business development engineers. You actually have to go out and attract business. You do have competition, and you do have to promote your different pillars of your economy within your corporation. So to say that appointing someone to go to our largest customer, who is actually Texas, our largest trading partner in the U.S. – and Texas is it. Why would we not send somebody there to bolster business?

The other character that came to mind, you know, from the days before Yosemite Sam and Elmer Fudd had to give up their firearms, was Foghorn Leghorn. This is what came to mind: "This boy's more mixed up than a feather in a whirlwind." Again, it's understanding that perspective of where they're coming from versus how the rest of the world actually operates. When we're talking about artificial intelligence, what we're looking for is applied applications.

9:50

I can tell you full well that the Associate Minister of Natural Gas and Electricity and I had a chance to see an Alberta company that was very innovative in that aerospace industry developing and utilizing artificial intelligence with a practical application. Again, they're producing drones that are autonomous. They're made in Alberta, all the ingenuity, and they're four years ahead of what Boeing is doing right now down in the United States trying to come up with those autonomous vehicles. These are the types of innovations that need to be fostered.

Thank goodness for the Minister of Economic Development, Trade and Tourism understanding that it's not just sitting on the sidelines, picking a couple of winners and losers, hailing the socialist mantra of everyone's equally poor, and driving industry down. The same members opposite will gleefully cheer and jump up and down when we have impediments and blockages like we have in Keystone XL right now. They actually revel at the fact that we've had to invest in major industry that they've poisoned investment in for so many years and driven away, and now when we start having to expose ourselves and actually show how much we actually care about that industry to keep it driving forward to make sure there still remains investor confidence, they're jumping up and down with their buddy Bill McGowan and saying that this is a great thing to delay it. Talk about shooting yourself in the foot.

An Hon. Member: Gil McGowan.

Mr. Getson: Oh, I'm sorry. Gil McGowan. I'm not quite as closely associated as you folks are with him. I just hear the news points.

The other one that came up was when we were talking about agriculture. I'll tell you what. We have a great agriculture industry. When I came up with Motion 501 in the first sitting of the session, we had a division on that. The folks opposite couldn't get the concept around actually having trade and transportation utility corridors. You know, some of the biggest impediments that I've heard in the petrochemical industry is actually access to market, and that comes down to logistics. We can't get our stuff to market, so we're hamstrung with the oil because everyone apparently is antipipeline though they have no relevance or understanding of what it is. The Member for Cardston-Siksika gets it. Our folks get it. That's why it was one of those elements.

We have such an atrocity taking place that we're a laughingstock. Talking about laughingstock, how about the fact that you have to send a small, little skimmer, a little boat, out of Vancouver to go all the way around the continent to get it to the east coast? You want to talk laughingstock? That's what this ideology has driven us into. We have to get behind our industries. We have to grow this. We need Economic Development, Trade and Tourism to do it. We need those departments to be put in place, and we need to actually foster growth, applied applications, applied technologies, not something to sit there.

Talking about BioWare – I heard the Member for Edmonton-West Henday talk about them – I'm a big fan of BioWare. Fantastic news story. EA Sports bought them out. They're doing really well. Those folks have reached out to the capital region caucus. We're definitely going to be meeting with them. Again, what I'm finding is happening is that when we as MLAs actually engage with the business community, you start knitting these different groups together. Let's take Pegasus, for example. Let's take the Villeneuve landing network on the aerospace. These are the folks that we start gluing together, and you look at what synergies can happen when you actually fully support your industries.

Not the platitudes. Not hiring companies from Ontario to change light bulbs and shower faucets and everything else. If the members opposite want to stay on point, I would really love for them to support this, and then I can stop thinking about *Looney Tunes*.

The Deputy Speaker: We are in second reading of Bill 33. I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-City Centre.

Mr. Shepherd: Well, thank you, Madam Speaker. I appreciate the opportunity to rise and speak to Bill 33, the Alberta Investment Attraction Act, during second reading. I'd like to thank the Member for Cardston-Siksika for his compliments on, I guess, my debating and arguing skills, my preparation for coming in to speak to things

in this House. He cautioned one of my colleagues that perhaps he should take that example. I would suggest that perhaps he himself and the Member for Lac Ste. Anne-Parkland might also consider doing so. We've seen some very vast discussion on this bill this morning, and certainly not all of it, I think, would rise to the quality to which members sometimes claim to aspire.

That said, I appreciate the opportunity to speak to this bill and indeed to respond to some of the thoughts that have been brought forward by members on this bill so far when we are talking about a bill which is about bringing investment to Alberta. Indeed the Member for Cardston-Siksika talked about the fact that Amazon was looking at investing in the province of Alberta and suggested that they would not have considered doing so during our time as a government. Again, that member may wish to do a bit more research before he makes his arguments in this House given that Amazon, in fact, did build a fulfillment centre here in Alberta, which opened in 2018, and then at the end of 2019 announced that they were going to build another. That was under our term in government, Madam Speaker, just to set the record straight on that front.

To be clear, Madam Speaker, indeed there have been challenges for Alberta in attracting investment for a number of years. A lot of that came about due to the crash in the worldwide price of oil and the fact that previous governments had placed us in the position of incredible dependence solely on that industry and had failed to in any way prepare for the fact that that boom would not last forever.

During our time in government indeed we had to look at: how do we attract other kinds of investment and support other kinds of industry and help promote Alberta businesses around the world and attract investment back here? We did that in a number of ways. Certainly, we've had a lot of discussion this morning about the tech industry. Our government put a lot of work into supporting that, in helping support businesses in Alberta to attract capital and investment back here: trade missions to San Francisco, the opening of a trade office there, space where Alberta businesses could go to meet with investors to help bring capital back to Alberta and help bring investment back here. I would say, Madam Speaker, that the work we did to help support investment coming back for the tech industry has a far better track record of actually bringing investment back than their corporate tax cut, which has done not a thing to help a single tech start-up in this province because they don't make a profit. They're just getting started.

Now, I appreciate what the minister had to say about how part of the work of this new investment Alberta corporation would be to help attract tech investment to the province. That would be part of their consideration alongside energy, alongside agriculture, and other important industries, but tech would be included as part of that. I appreciate that. That's an important thing. In talking about that, she also made several references to the tax credits that our government had brought into place that were also for that purpose and also intended to help build that growth.

Now, I would note, however, that I would have some disagreement with her about the success of those credits. Indeed, just this past Tuesday as we were talking about bringing investment to Alberta in a bill which is intended to do this and the minister's own remarks about what has indeed been successful in bringing investment to Alberta, particularly in the tech sector, which this bill is intended to support, in that discussion with the Public Accounts Committee indeed individuals from her own department noted that in 2018-19 that program, the Alberta investor tax credit, issued \$15.6 million in tax credit, which contributed \$72.5 million in investments raised. Indeed I would say that that is more investment that has been brought from the tech industry than from their

corporate tax cut, which was all this minister said was needed as of last year.

I'm glad to see that the government indeed went out and consulted with the tech industry, that they had their innovation working group to look at how we bring more investment in, which this bill is aimed at doing and is another piece of. I appreciate that they have moved forward on two recommendations, which I assume were in that report, but we do not know because that report has not been made public. Certainly, as someone who has a significant portion of the tech sector in Edmonton in my constituency, I would hope that we can see that report released publicly. I would appreciate the opportunity to see what that innovation working group in fact reported to the government and how that is perhaps reflected in what is being done here in Bill 33 or indeed in the employment innovation grant, which we've heard much discussion about and many announcements but of which we know absolutely no details so far.

Now, the minister has also spoken about how this is important because she was saying that the tech sector growth last year was phenomenal during a time when, in fact, the programs that we brought in were frozen. One of the things I think we need to remember when we're talking about investment, as we are with this bill, Madam Speaker, and bringing investment for the tech industry and supporting also, I'm hoping, start-ups, not just bringing other big tech companies into Alberta, which in itself is a good thing, but also encouraging local entrepreneurs to grow companies and build them from the ground up – when you are dealing with that section of it, it is a question of growth and building momentum. That momentum began to be built, as I noted, with the very numbers from her own ministry, folks in her own department, at Public Accounts this week. That provided the momentum to get it started.

10:00

Through 2018, as those credits were getting going, that's what helped many start-up companies, as they themselves noted at Public Accounts, get going and build the momentum that, in fact, allowed them to see that phenomenal growth in 2019. The fact that they shut off the engine in 2019 and allowed the vehicle to coast: well, that vehicle coasted to those record numbers because of the momentum that was built by the same tax credits that they shut off. It is, of course, important.

Again, I give the minister credit for listening to the voices of the tech industry that spoke up, which we worked to try to help amplify, for sitting down and speaking with them and working with them to find something that would provide that momentum and that support. I look forward to seeing the details of that, and once I've seen them, I can judge whether or not that's going to be a better program and whether that will be more successful. Certainly, I will support anything that is going to help support that industry.

Again, as we talk about this bill, we do not deny that it is important to bring investment back to Alberta or to continue to build investment in Alberta, and that is going to take many shapes and forms. Indeed, the oil and gas industry in Alberta is going to continue to be an economic driver; how large remains to be seen. There are a lot of global factors, which we simply cannot control. As much as this government may choose to believe that it can, certainly the efforts it has made in that regard so far have not been terribly successful.

The \$30 million energy war room, which was intended to try to build our image, as the invest Alberta corporation is, has not done much of a job of that at all. It's been a source of embarrassment, frankly. You know, members from government have been talking about a laughingstock; certainly, that was what the energy war room was.

As we talk about this bill, about investment, and about creating this investment corporation, which is, I suppose, perhaps, making up for the failure of that energy war room, I do have to question how this is supposed to work, then, with Invest Alberta, which was the section that we created as a government within economic development and trade, which, I would note again, is a ministry that our government resurrected after it had been shuttered by previous provincial governments, Conservative governments, to show that we recognized the important work that needed to be done to support investment in Alberta and indeed to support businesses in going out and building new markets outside of Alberta, which is something that I have not heard much about in terms of this new corporation that this government is looking to form.

Indeed, it is important that we look for investment to bring in. Absolutely, Madam Speaker. However, it is also important that we work on building businesses that are going to build out into other markets. I do not see this government talking about that or hear them talking about that nearly as much. There is an obsession with trying to find the next big major capital, like we had in the past, certainly, with the energy industry, but that is not something that we can rely on forever.

There is great value in investing in Alberta companies to help them grow and build things here at home as well. Too often what I see from this government is that they are more interested in giving away large amounts or spending large amounts to send people out to attract big corporations from outside of Alberta than they are about providing actual, tangible supports for small businesses in Alberta or small tech entrepreneurs or people that are building the businesses that are going to drive our economy and that are going to provide jobs for Albertans in the future.

Again, what we have here is that it seems to be a duplication of the work that's being done in Invest Alberta. Is Invest Alberta, then, going to be wrapped? Will it be shut down and then that work taken on by this corporation? Is there going to be a duplication of work, or is there some way that these two pieces are going to work together? That's one question that I would put forward, and perhaps as we have the opportunity to move on and debate on this bill and we move into Committee of the Whole, that's something we can get some further clarification on from the minister, how she envisions that these two pieces, one within the ministry and one outside the ministry, are going to interact and how we're going to ensure that it's not creating additional red tape in what is, admittedly, important work. As we've seen with the energy war room, on which we were spending \$30 million a year, simply throwing money at these things and appointing a few friends and cronies of the government does not success make.

Now, certainly, the Member for Calgary-Lougheed was a capable enough MLA when he was here, and I respected him, as I did all the members, but he has no particular expertise in any of the areas for which he is now going to be paid \$250,000 a year. Of course, I'm sure he has the thanks of the Premier for having stepped aside to allow him to take his seat in this place. I suppose we now see what that thanks is worth.

It is my hope that as we see the formation of this corporation and the nine members that will be appointed to its board, we're going to see a good deal more thought given to the level of expertise of the individuals that are going to be heading it, that we'll be giving a great deal more thought to ensure we have individuals who, in fact, have knowledge directly of the specific industries they are being sent out to promote, that they have a history of job experience in this kind of work: sales, diplomacy, advocacy.

Albertans have good cause to sort of ask about the value for money that they are getting from the decisions this government is making in how it looks to attract investment to Alberta. As my

colleague from Edmonton-West Henday noted, so far the corporate tax cut, that \$4.7 billion corporate giveaway, has yielded not a single additional job in this province of Alberta. We have seen jobs pick up and leave the province. We have seen companies take that money and go to invest it elsewhere. What value are Albertans getting for this investment? While they have rushed into their full cut-down to 8 per cent, Albertans have good reason to ask what they are getting for that, particularly as they are then seeing their services cut: education, health care, social supports.

To be clear, Madam Speaker, attracting business to Alberta is not just about the lowest tax rate. Indeed, I can tell you that when Invest Alberta sends folks out to talk to people and get them to invest in Alberta, it's not just a conversation about the low tax rate. They want to know what we have in terms of a skilled workforce, and to be clear on that front, again, what we see with this government, at least in the tech industry, is that they want to start a visa program to bring more people in from outside Alberta who have the skill set.

The Deputy Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available. The hon. Member for Lac Ste. Anne-Parkland.

Mr. Getson: Yes. Thank you, Madam Speaker and to the member opposite. Here is one of the MLAs that I have a ton of respect for, quite honestly. We may get a little crossthreaded in some of our ideals or where we come from, but he always has very salient arguments.

One of the items that I want to touch upon from the member: he was talking about why there was a flight of capital and why some of these large corporations have actually left. When you look at what was taking place in the political landscape – and I'll talk about the energy sector for a bit because, again, as members opposite may acknowledge at this point, I do have some understanding of it since I came from there.

There's a gentleman by the name of Gwyn Morgan. I'm not sure if they've heard of him, but he put out quite a few different articles on why they had to move or looked at moving their headquarters. Again, this was something that pained Gwyn Morgan because he was very much a patriot, very much Canada first, Alberta first, developed the EnCana Corporation, which then became Cenovus, et cetera. What they were looking at was because of project uncertainty and a lot of the regulatory issues that were taking place both federally and provincially at the time. He didn't hold it against the new CEO of that company for having to take the move of their headquarters down to Denver, where they could actually invest, make sure there was continual return on investment, and get full choke for the value of what they're producing. Again, when you're getting such deep discounts for the Canadian product and you simply cross the border and you're getting full value for your products, that was part of it.

10:10

When you look at the Gateway project, there were tons of folks who were up and down protesting. Gil McGowan, again, was one of those folks protesting against the Gateway project and Clipper and every other project. When those folks actually claimed victory at this point, I think their jaws hit the ground just as bad as anything in one of those cartoon characters I was explaining about earlier. They couldn't believe that finally that was it.

Well, Enbridge finally had enough, Madam Speaker. They ended up buying and acquiring Spectra, the largest gas producer in North America. They were the largest pipeline company in Canada. Now they're basically the largest. They got tired of it. Quite honestly, the Gateway project was ahead of Clipper when we were looking at

building the Clipper project. Gateway got delayed because there was more of an impetus to try to get our oil going north and south of the border, so that project has been on the books for 15 to 20-ish years. It finally got to the point where you can't even build across your own country and get to ports. With the changes in the tanker bans taking place, all the bad press, and everything else, Enbridge finally said, "Enough" and bought up Spectra. They're going to go take and play in the States.

When you want to talk flight of capital, it's not just in the last couple of years. This has been an ongoing thing. But during those times when the Liberals got voted in again, that was about the last tipping point. We can point to Teck as an example of all the blockades and barricades that were going on in places. When you keep having this civil unrest, this churn, these regulatory issues that are happening, that's when these types of things happen; that's when you're poisoning the well.

When we're talking diversification and transformative – now, the aerospace industry, with the Villeneuve landing network, Madam Speaker, again, talking about one of those pillars: this group is led by Mayor Hnatiw from Sturgeon county. Villeneuve Airport itself is actually an international airport tied in with the EIA. There's a consortium there from around the region that actually ponied up, put some money in the pot, and paid for a consultant out of Kissimmee, Florida. I was privileged enough to be on the call with this because, again, it's from my area and very much we're trying to support the economy. This one little airport, when they were looking at it, can generate \$65 million to \$115 million a year. It's simple. We start utilizing the technology that we have. We start taking the transferable skill sets. By the way, all those energy sector folks – this is coming from the consultant's mouth – can transfer quite easily over to this. This is a global stage. These are global markets that we can do.

If we stop polluting and stop poisoning the darn well, we've got the resources, we have the wherewithal, and we have transferable skill sets. We're sitting on the doorstep of the world, Madam Speaker, literally because, on a great circle, we're closer to everybody. Alaska used to be a major, major, major port for the world until Russia actually opened up the airspace and for some undisclosed fee allows aircraft over them. Edmonton is on that great circle. We're literally on the doorstep, gateway to the north, gateway to the world. When you start talking aerospace, it's a global industry. Trillions of dollars go into defence. Billions of dollars a day are spent literally on the aerospace industry, and it's not just passenger traffic.

The Member for Edmonton-City Centre: again, I appreciate the points he's bringing forward. He does have some good questions, and I'm looking forward to that same debate of understanding how the structure will work between the different boards. But, again, when he wants to start talking about flight of capital, all they have to do is look in the mirror and see that every time they're polluting that energy sector and adding doubt and questions into industries, this is the cause of it. There is flight of capital because folks don't know where we're at. That's why we're pushing so hard to make sure regulatory processes make sense, to make sure the folks know how to get through the hopper and that we do support all of the pillars of our economy.

The Deputy Speaker: Any other members wishing to join the debate on Bill 33 in second reading? I see the hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Ms Ganley: Thank you very much. Yeah, I'm incredibly pleased to rise and speak to Bill 33. I think that when we're talking about investment targeted to create diversification, this is an area about

which I am incredibly passionate. I think it's incredibly important that we're bringing this forward.

Now, of course, as is typical – I'm not saying that this is a criticism – in a bill of this sort, the details are not in the bill itself, so those would be worked out in regulation. Of course, those details are critically important. So while I'm supportive generally of the intent in this bill, I will admit to some lingering concerns about what the details will actually look like. One of the reasons I have those lingering concerns is that this bill represents a complete reversal of position for this government. You know, six, eight months ago the Minister of Finance rose in this place and referred to economic diversification as an unnecessary luxury. This, a bill which is aimed at economic diversification, obviously – sorry; I guess I'm probably not supposed to hold the bill; I don't know if that makes it a prop – represents a one hundred per cent reversal in this government's position. That's good. When we learn new things, we should change positions. I think that that's good. You know, I actually have a comment from an Albertan that said: I would have a thousand per cent more respect for this UCP government if they could just stand up and say that we learned some new things and that we changed our position. You know what? I totally agree. I totally agree with that point, because I think this is a good bill. But I think it's necessary to point out that economic diversification takes a while to get going.

My hon. colleague the Member for Edmonton-City Centre used an incredibly good analogy on this when he referenced, you know, sort of a car that's moving and that it'll continue to coast for a certain period of time on that engine. In fact, we heard that in Public Accounts. We heard from a number of individuals within the nonpartisan civil service, individuals out there working in these sorts of spaces, just how important the investments our government made in terms of the tech sector and in terms of those sorts of things were and how those investments, you know, go into the company and they kind of start to spur growth in the area. You see afterwards the impacts of that growth. So through 2019, as a result of the policies of the NDP government, there was great growth in this sector, and then we started to see that fall off.

I can tell you that when a company, especially a new company, comes to a new province, whether they're relocating to that province or whether the intention is to start up a new headquarters, there's a whole bunch of paperwork and documents that have to be done, and that boring stuff is done by lawyers. I, of course, speak to a fair number of lawyers on a regular basis, and, you know, a lot of those lawyers were talking about companies that had intended to open offices here, that had intended to move here, that would have created jobs, that would have grown the tech sector, and those companies didn't come because the UCP government changed directions and didn't think they were important. Not only did they signal sort of with their dollars that that wasn't important by withdrawing the funding; they signalled it with their words as well by calling economic diversification an unnecessary luxury. So that had an impact. It had a negative impact.

Certainly, the intent of this bill is good. My concern is that if the government had learned this sooner, if they had listened to people out there working in these sorts of sectors sooner, how much further ahead would we be, and how much more would we have to move forward with? Essentially, this kind of stop/start that the government has done has created a situation where the investment fell off from the investments that we had made, and now they're trying to bring it back. To borrow an analogy from my hon. colleague: it's always harder and it requires more energy to get the car moving again than it would to simply have kept it moving in the first place.

I think that those things are absolutely relevant because, going forward, it is this government that will be in charge of how this money rolls out. I'm also concerned because the investments we see in the tech sector are sort of roughly half of what we otherwise would have seen. Members from both sides of the House have referenced that we have some incredible expertise available and some incredible room to grow in the AI sector, and that's absolutely correct. I'm really glad to hear the members on the UCP side recognize that. What I don't understand is why, having said that that was an unnecessary luxury for the better part of a year, they're not willing to also admit that they've learned something and reversed their position.

My hope is that moving forward with this bill, it will have those positive impacts, and I think it will. But I think we do need to consider it in the entire context. Again, it is my belief that when you're talking about diversification, when you're talking about attracting new industry – and it's not just my belief. I say that it's my belief because the UCP have disputed it for so long that it feels like it's not a fact, but it is a fact. It is a fact that new companies that are starting up are not generating profit in excess of half a million dollars a year. So those new companies that are not generating in excess of half a million dollars a year are not assisted by a cut to the corporate tax rate. The thing that we seem to lose often when we debate these issues in this place is that the corporate tax rate applies to companies generating profit – profit – in excess of half a million dollars. Certainly, those sorts of changes don't impact growth industries. They don't impact new businesses because new businesses are not generating profit in excess of half a million dollars, so they are untouched by those policies.

10:20

Especially in a climate like the one we have today and have had, I think, sort of on and off since 2014, when oil prices initially began falling, it is much, much, much more effective to do this sort of investment than it is to do those sorts of cuts. In fact, with those sorts of cuts, you know, if you had taken that money that was spent on the corporate handout and invested it in something like this, how much more of a benefit would it have had? The actual impact over the course of – and I'll only count prepandemic because once the pandemic hit and the oil prices fell, I think it is unfair. I deeply wish that the UCP had considered the facts this much when they were talking about us when we were in government. But I do think that the hitting of the pandemic and the falling of the oil prices have had an impact far over and above what this government could have had, so I will recognize that, though members who were here in 2015 will recall that they repeatedly blamed the then Premier, the now Leader of the Opposition, for the fall in global oil prices. I will not repeat that because I think that it is intellectually dishonest to do something like that.

But even before the pandemic hit, even before oil prices started falling again, we saw this government preside over a loss of more than 50,000 jobs. So it's clear – it's clear – that what they did was not working. We saw huge companies take those mass profits that were given away to them and leave the province, invest in other places, in other provinces, in other countries. So this will definitely be better than that, but as was said by that Albertan and by many that I've talked to, you know, I think that perhaps a little dose of humility, a little willingness to admit that they were wrong and they've changed their mind might be helpful.

Turning, then, to areas in the bill, certainly it's structured in a fairly standard way. It's a very short bill, as these things have a tendency to be. I actually remember a very similar bill that was introduced by us to do a very similar thing, that was mocked, derided at great length by UCP members, and I'm amused by the

similarities between this bill and that bill. In fact, there are startling similarities. One might say that the structure is almost identical. I am glad, again, to see the creation of this corporation given that, again, there will be a board appointed and there will be a chief executive officer appointed.

I'm concerned about what those appointments are going to look like, because one thing we've definitely seen from this government is that appointments are not merit based; they are not diversity based. They seem to be friends and insiders based, and certainly I'm sure the members opposite can stand up and speak at length about the fact that one time I appointed a judge that had made a donation to the NDP. I would care to point out that I also appointed a former Conservative Premier as a judge. So I don't really see – the point isn't to exclude people that have the same values as you. The point is to allow everyone to have an equal opportunity. So when we're talking about appointments, it's not about who got appointed; it's about who didn't get appointed or who didn't even have a chance to compete. Having collapsed the open application process, having collapsed the ability for all Albertans to put themselves forward to join these sorts of boards, I think the UCP has done itself an incredible disservice. There are Albertans out there who are not hard partisans, who are not their friends, who have talents and skills and the ability to contribute to their province, and they ought to be permitted to make those contributions and to put themselves forward.

I will stand by my record any day in terms of appointments I made. There were certainly people who were supporters of ours, there were people who were supporters of the former government, and as I've said, there was one who was a former Conservative Premier and who, in my view, was an excellent appointment. I think that people with good values can be found everywhere, and I wish the UCP would consider that.

I am a bit concerned, especially in light of the other hijinks we're seeing. You know, this government has doubled down repeatedly on positions they've had around AIMCo and around pensions, and that worries me. It worries me with respect to these appointments, because this government is so, so deeply committed to sticking to its narrative and its rhetoric and its ideology regardless of the facts on the ground that I am a little bit worried. We've seen this with AIMCo. We recently saw that on the 30th of June the audited financials for the heritage trust fund were meant to come out. They didn't come out, presumably because they would have demonstrated more investment errors made by AIMCo, which would have caused people additional concerns about their pensions. Those things are coming out, hopefully, on the 13th, but I do note that they were delayed.

We've also seen the government delay the release of their own financials, blame the Auditor General, and then the Auditor General popped up and said: hey, it wasn't me; I didn't ask for this. I think that that speaks to a certain tendency to hide things, that I think is of concern. My hope is that the appointments to this will be based on merit, will be based on generating the best for all Albertans and not based on who is friends with whom. So far I think we haven't seen a really good track record on that.

[The Speaker in the chair]

Again, I am hopeful. I am hopeful that this bill indicates a change in direction. I wish that the UCP would acknowledge that change in direction because it would make me feel a certain amount of more confidence if they were willing to say: "Yes. We did believe that economic diversification was a luxury. We did believe it was garbage and worthless and we threw them all away, but now we've

learned better, and we'll do better." That would make me feel a lot more confidence.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Hon. members, Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available. I see the hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs has risen to speak.

Mr. Madu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I wanted to pick up on some of the things that the Member for Calgary-Mountain View has said with regard to Bill 33, Alberta Investment Attraction Act. The truth of the matter is that the members opposite can sit in this particular House and pretend for all they care that they care about investment, businesses, and trading. But I can assure you that folks out there, watching us in this particular Chamber from their various homes, know the NDP for what they are. This is a group of individuals that ran this particular province for the last four years, from 2015 to 2019. During that period they devastated our economy. They pursued policies that picked winners and losers. If the particular proposal doesn't fit their ideological world view, they kill it. They would not even entertain it. They would not even consult on it in the first place. I am so proud of the Minister of Economic Development, Trade and Tourism for putting forward the Alberta Investment Attraction Act.

10:30

Mr. Speaker, let's just quickly run through their record while they were in office in case they have forgotten. When they came to office in 2015, the entire provincial government debt was \$12.9 billion. That was the entire province of Alberta's debt in 2015, \$12.9 billion. By the time they left office, in a short four years they had saddled this province with more than \$70 billion in debt – more than \$70 billion in debt – and they sit in this particular House every single day and pretend as if they understand what it means to run an economy.

When they were in office, you know the number of Albertans that were unemployed consistently from 2015 to 2019? One hundred and eighty thousand Albertans. They did not do anything. There was no dent in the level of unemployed Albertans throughout the four years that they were in office. Mr. Speaker, you know what else they did? They pursued policies that chased investors, with their capital in the tens and tens of billions, out of our province to jurisdictions that were friendly to investment, trade, and businesses.

I live in Edmonton-South West. A lot of business owners, small-business owners, and people who spend their entire life's savings in building new businesses live in my constituency. I can report to this particular House that I door-knocked on virtually every single home in the southwest. I came across these folks, and they told me all the time that if they had a choice, so long as the previous NDP government were in office, they would choose a different jurisdiction to invest, away from this province, the heartbeat of Canada's free-enterprise economy. All of a sudden, those who take risks to create new opportunities no longer found our province a place to invest and take a risk.

You know what else they did, Mr. Speaker, while they were in office? Deficit. For every single year they were in office, they ran a deficit in the billions of dollars: their very first year, if I recall, \$6.9 billion; second year, \$8.6 billion; third year, \$10 billion; and the last year, before we kicked them out, \$6.9 billion. Successive deficits every single year: those were their records. And they sit in this particular House and call business owners pickpockets. Those were their words, not mine. That is how they describe businesses.

Mr. Speaker, we would not take any lessons from these folks when it comes to investment and businesses.

The Speaker: Hon. members, we are at second reading of Bill 33, the Alberta Investment Attraction Act. Is there anyone else wishing to speak? I see the hon. Minister of Children's Services has risen.

Ms Schulz: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. As I was sitting here this morning and listening to this very animated debate, I felt like I wanted to respond to some of the comments made by the members opposite. I was very glad to hear, encouraged to hear that the Member for Calgary-Mountain View does support the intent and the direction generally of this bill as I think what I had heard from the Member for Edmonton-City Centre a little earlier – I thought I was going to have to start explaining how legislation interacts with policies and investments that government makes and how this legislation enables this action to happen, this investment agency to start up. In fact, it's the policies and investments that we're also making that come together to show our businesses, our investors, people who want to start coming back to Alberta that we are serious, that we mean business, and that we are about to take action.

We've been listening to the members opposite talk about all the things that they did over the last four years, and I'm really not certain if they've forgotten their record or if they've purposefully blocked it out, Mr. Speaker. You want to talk about flight of capital? You want to talk about jobs lost? A hundred and eighty thousand jobs lost. I can tell you that I heard it every single day for years, day after day, the importance of jobs, the economy, supporting our energy industry. This is about supporting that, but it's about more than that.

I heard the member opposite talking about that we only listen or support people who share the same beliefs as us. Mr. Speaker, we go back a year ago. We ran on a platform. We listened to Albertans. We talked about jobs, the economy, support for our energy industry because that's what we heard from Albertans. The vast majority of Albertans then supported that platform and that plan in the last election.

If we're listening to the vast majority of Albertans who think the same as us, it's because we have a shared focus on the importance of creating jobs, making sure people have opportunities, making sure that we can maintain the Alberta spirit of entrepreneurialism and innovation and creativity and harness that to create a better future for all Albertans – for me, for my neighbours, for my children – making sure that they have a future here, an opportunity to stay here, and that that same Alberta innovation and entrepreneurial spirit that created such a strong energy sector can then help us support investments and jobs not only in energy but also, as the Minister of Economic Development, Trade and Tourism spoke to, agriculture, tourism, tech, aerospace and aviation, financial services. It's not just about energy, but that matters to Albertans because we have been blessed with resources.

We have an exceptional record when it comes to our energy industry, and we have nothing to be ashamed of there, Mr. Speaker. You know, the member opposite, the Member for Calgary-Mountain View, also said that we've changed positions. We've been talking about diversification of the economy for as long as I've been involved, and we've said that over and over and over over the last two years, that that is hugely important. But we're also not going to apologize for supporting our energy industry. Let's talk a little bit about that. They say that it's a change of position. It's not a change of position.

What we did, Mr. Speaker, was that we heard about the Alberta investor tax credit and all of the reasons why it wasn't working for investors, why it wasn't working for job creators. Let's hear a little bit about that. Dr. Jack Mintz, University of Calgary, chair of the economic recovery council, said, "The AITC had a budgetary cost of \$13 million annually before its abandonment." He continued to

say, “It cannot be concluded that the credit was leading to an innovation revolution with investors in only 160 companies using it.” My other favourite is: the tax incentives didn’t draw the much-needed hundreds of millions of dollars from noninvestors becoming investors, so in that sense it didn’t move the needle considerably at all. That was a quote from Werner Biegler, president of Alberta Council of Technologies.

So, Mr. Speaker, it’s not a change of direction. That’s what we are here to do. As elected representatives we listen to Albertans, we listen to investors, we listen to job creators, and when something isn’t working, we fix it. It starts with this legislation. It continues through our tech sector investments . . . [interjections] I know I can hear the members opposite disagreeing with me. I don’t know if I’m surprised or not surprised that they don’t like the measures that we’re introducing. I really can’t figure it out from speaker to speaker across the aisle.

What I do know is that they would rather introduce a tax credit that’s so convoluted, bureaucratic that it doesn’t have a single successful applicant for the first six months. That’s what happened with the Alberta investor tax credit, Mr. Speaker. I think what it’s really symbolic of is their love of red tape. And I can tell you that we heard that it’s not just in jobs. It’s not just in the economic industries. It’s also in everything from child care to education. We heard it across the board. I know you disagree. You would rather have things so convoluted, so bureaucratic, so much red tape that we stifle innovation, that we stifle creativity, that we really hamstring the economy. That’s what we saw: 180,000 jobs, Mr. Speaker. That’s how many jobs left this province over the last four years. Hope for the future, positive outlooks for jobs: that didn’t exist, not over those last four years.

And, yes, we’ve had a pandemic. Our government is not only responding in general to support innovation in the tech sector. That’s why our relaunch strategy, announced last week, did identify that we need to diversify our economy, that we are going to have sector-specific strategies for, obviously, energy, oil and gas, agriculture, tourism, tech, aerospace and aviation, financial services.

10:40

Let’s talk a little bit more about real, tangible action. I heard the Member for Edmonton-City Centre say: I just want to see some real, tangible action. Mr. Speaker, I encourage them to just take yes for an answer. Just, you know, listen to what’s being shared by the Minister of Economic Development, Trade and Tourism. Let’s talk about the technology and innovation approach, which will bring investment and create jobs in technology-related sectors ranging from energy, agriculture, artificial intelligence, and digital media, hugely important. These are things that we heard from Albertans. These are things that are going to help jump-start our economy, get people back to work, and bring Alberta back to its rightful place as a leader in this country as a place to live, to build your career, to raise your family.

Mr. Speaker, this approach will build on the industry’s successes and diversify into up-and-coming areas. That includes immediate actions and long-term strategies that help bring investment, economic growth, and good jobs to this province. It’s about marrying the short-term investments with the long-term, big-picture strategy. That is what the Minister of Economic Development, Trade and Tourism is working with along with the Minister of Finance, the Premier: listening to those investors, listening to those job creators, and then acting on that.

We’ve also committed \$200 million of pandemic-related funding supports to small and medium-sized businesses here in this province. That is real, tangible action. That is listening to Alberta’s

small and medium-sized businesses, hearing what they need, not duplicating efforts, not writing blank cheques but targeting those supports based on the gaps that were left by other programs offered by the federal, provincial, and municipal governments. That is what the minister undertook. She listened. She delivered, Mr. Speaker, real, tangible actions.

We’re also introducing a new innovation employment grant, which will make Alberta the most attractive place for technology and innovation investment in the entire country, Mr. Speaker. Recapitalizing the Alberta Enterprise Corporation will also provide much-needed venture capital into the early-stage technology sector to encourage growth, \$175 million. There’s more information to come.

Let’s talk diversification again. This is not a flip. This is not a change in direction. This is what we’ve said all along. The AEC only invests in companies that diversify the economy, Mr. Speaker, so we remain committed to diversification.

We remain committed to supporting our oil and gas sector. We remain committed to getting our province back on track, to creating jobs. That’s what we need. We’re not just listening to our friends and our supporters; we’re listening to the vast majority of Albertans who voted for jobs, the economy, and supporting our energy industry in the last election. If that’s listening to our friends, we’ve got a lot of friends in Alberta, Mr. Speaker, because they want to see our province back to being the leader in Canada for jobs, opportunity, and being the best place in this whole country and North America to build a life, to grow your career, not just in oil and gas – not just in oil and gas – to harness the creativity, the entrepreneurial spirit, the roll up your sleeves, work hard, think outside the box spirit of Albertans. That is what this plan does.

I hope that the members opposite – I think I heard a couple of them say that they may support this approach, that they believe that this is a great first step – understand that this legislation is going to enable us to begin down this path of bringing investment back, but it’s also a combination of things: we have legislation, we have exceptional policies, we have investments. We are not afraid to listen to Albertans and to address when something is not working and then reinvest that funding in something that will.

Mr. Speaker, with that, I would like to move to adjourn debate.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Bill 21

Provincial Administrative Penalties Act

[Adjourned debate June 17: Mr. Nielsen]

The Speaker: I see the hon. Member for Lethbridge-West has risen.

Ms Phillips: Yeah. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This is my first opportunity to speak, I guess, at second reading. It is my only opportunity to speak to this bill. I want to thank the government for bringing forward Bill 21, the Provincial Administrative Penalties Act, given that we have a shared value here, and that shared value is, of course, public safety balancing our individual liberties.

This is a long history of a conversation after the introduction of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms that enumerates our legal rights, Mr. Speaker, our individual liberties with respect to our freedom from unreasonable search and seizure, our right to procedural fairness, to due process, to a timely process through the courts or through administrative avenues. There’s been a long jurisprudence on this matter, and that is rightfully so. However, it’s kind of one of those situations where if we knew then what we now

know about the balance between individual liberties and our right to procedural fairness and so on and the rights of everyone else to safety and security of the person as we drive down the road, it's possible that we would have avoided some of the long history of lower courts, the Supreme Court, and others litigating this matter of impaired driving over the years.

One of the reasons, too, Mr. Speaker, that we have had this long conversation over these matters is not just because the introduction of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms in 1982 changed the legal landscape and much of our individual relationship and the defining of our individual liberties with respect to the legal system but also because we have had a great deal of cultural change in those exact years on the topic of impaired driving.

The reason why we have had that cultural conversation is because of the important, difficult, sustained, and, I think, foundational work of civil society, in particular Mothers Against Drunk Driving and their contributions to all of our well-being, all of our safety, on standing up for so many years and saying: "Enough. We must have cultural change to keep ourselves safe and to keep our children safe, and your individual liberty to do whatever you want with your property, you know, a vehicle, and with your own individual self – that is, the ingesting of various substances – must be balanced with community safety and with our ability to go freely about our business in our lives and not have to be afraid for our safety or our children's safety." This has been an important contribution to all of our well-being for the entire country and in the United States as we have changed our views of how we conduct ourselves, how we conduct our social relationships and our relationship with the impairment substances, in MADD's case, over those years anyway, a specific reference to impairment by alcohol.

As a result of that important work that they have done, we now have a scientific consensus around how to measure blood alcohol impairment. We now have examples in other jurisdictions of how to best proceed in a timely fashion, what is most effective for ensuring that we have a deterrent effect for these things. There's not just the social opprobrium that has been a cultural conversation, but there's also a very large legal stick that is used and that over the course of many years has now resulted in the seizure of one's vehicle. We know that for many of us, your vehicle is part of your individual identity. It's a part of the way that you get to work. It's one of the largest purchases you make. Your entire economic and social world revolves around, in many ways, the access to that vehicle and transportation.

What civil society, particularly MADD and other folks and certainly medical officers of health over the years – experts, scientists, researchers, and others – have been able to do is get us to a place where we know now what the most effective ways to deal with the scourge of impaired driving are. We share that value with the government side, and that is why we thank them for bringing forward Bill 21.

10:50

We need to make sure that we do, however, balance those individual liberty pieces with the social and economic and hardship considerations of the effects of impaired driving. We don't want to be in a situation where we are eventually getting into a world of more Charter challenges because what that does is that it sort of stops progress on this file. You know, it might make a few lawyers rich, but it doesn't necessarily make our roads safer. I think the shared goal on both sides of the House is the latter public policy goal as opposed to the former, so we want to make sure that we get this right with respect to any changes that we make.

I think it's fair to say, given what's been happening in other jurisdictions, in particular the B.C. model, with respect to moving

some of the consequences for impaired driving into the realm of administrative penalties, that that has been demonstrated to be effective by and large. I mean, it's always really tough to specifically measure deterrent effect and so on, but we believe or it is widely believed, I think, and certainly Mothers Against Drunk Driving and others have demonstrated that it has been more effective than the previous systems. I think, because we know that this is an area of continuous improvement both on the science side but also on the ongoing litigation side, that that is a virtuous change, and we certainly look upon it favourably on this side of the House.

You know, part of our support here comes from the fact that the science with respect to alcohol and alcohol impairment is very settled. These are things that we have long lines of science on. We know exactly, you know, even down to our weight, our age how alcohol may impair us in the use of a motor vehicle, so this model that provides for a roadside appeal on a second machine and access to a swift appeal with an adjudicator, we believe, provides enough procedural fairness and protections of individual liberties. Again, Mr. Speaker, you want to make sure that you don't just end up in court because the focus has to be here in keeping roads safer. So that's good.

But, I mean – and this is no fault of the government – the science with respect to impairment by cannabis is not settled, right? There are many, many things we don't know about the dosage levels of that particular substance, how it is ingested because there are so many different ways. You know, you only drink alcohol in one way, but there are different ways that this particular substance is ingested, as we know. The way that one measures the level of impairment is still outstanding. Now, there has been much promise on the research related to this. That's good, and there needs to be a lot more work done there. Certainly, there is no question that we need folks who are impaired by those substances off the roads just as much as we do any other impairment by any other substance.

With cannabis legalization now we have a brand new field of potential litigation, and drawing from some of the lessons over the last 20-ish years of litigation on the matter of alcohol impairment, there are some specific ways in which it is very likely that we could avoid some of the litigation of the past and focus on that element of safety, which is our shared value. But there is an uncertainty because there's more reliance on the observations of the officer. We know that memory observations can be fallible, much more fallible than what that test says when it says .5 or .8 or whatever the case may be. There's more reliance on tests that are not validated the way that tests for alcohol impairment over the last few decades have been validated, researched, and so on.

[Mr. Hanson in the chair]

There needs to be some enhanced procedural fairness requirements built into our consideration there, once again, not because we don't share the value of ensuring that we don't have impairment on the roads but because if we don't ensure that we have those procedural fairness requirements, we may end up in a situation where we're focused more on having to litigate this thing rather than the job of ensuring that officers have the tools they need, that the administrative legal system has the tools that they need to keep roads safe, and that also, importantly, individuals have the tools they need to be making the right decisions, right?

That education component is also really, really important because, as I said at the outset, there have certainly been increasing legal sanctions and consequences for alcohol impairment to seizure of vehicles and so on and so forth, but there's been a parallel track of a cultural change and an education component that one could argue has been just as important in that we now understand our

individual liberties to be circumscribed by certain good decisions before we get behind a wheel.

We do have some concerns with the procedural fairness requirements around the cannabis impairment. I think it's worth a conversation at Committee of the Whole with the government on this with respect to what their thinking is around these aspects related to procedural fairness and some questions that perhaps we could ask in order to be more helpful and contribute to safer roads and fewer instances of impairment of any kind within the province of Alberta and, importantly, making sure that when we do have instances of impairment, those people are taken off the road in a quick and expeditious fashion, that there is a sanction that is commensurate with the level of harm or potential harm, certainly, that can be caused by the impaired operation of a motor vehicle, of any kind of impairment.

We need to make sure that we can do that and that we've answered all of the questions that are possible right now. There is going to have to be, as there has been around alcohol impairment, I believe, a continuous improvement around what we know about cannabis impairment and how the law responds to that within the context of transportation safety. I'm sure this will not be the last time, Mr. Speaker, that we are having this conversation in this Chamber or in other Chambers across the country or in other jurisdictions as they also move forward with cannabis decriminalization of various kinds.

We will, Mr. Speaker, be proposing some amendments. We have ensured that they are thoughtful amendments so as to not detract from our shared values of increased safety by decreasing impairment on our roads but allowing for the fact that there may need to be extra steps or different kinds of steps with respect to cannabis than there are around alcohol simply because of the newness of this conversation and what we know about it.

We need to make sure that people have access to all the information that they need, Mr. Speaker. When we say "people" we have a number of different actors within this system. We have people who are driving down the road who may have a prescription for cannabis, right? We need to understand a little bit more about that. We certainly know quite a bit about various pharmaceuticals, also legal substances, and their effect on our impairment. Those are conversations we often have individually with our doctors and so on. They're part of clinical trials, et cetera, but we don't have as many of those answers with respect to cannabis. It's people in terms of drivers when we say that we need to make sure people have all the information they need. There is that education component as well. Also, law enforcement. We need to make sure that we've got the right tools for law enforcement.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, Member.

Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available. I recognize the Member for Edmonton-City Centre.

11:00

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I was appreciating the comments from my colleague from Lethbridge-West, but it did sound like she may have had a few more to make just to wrap up her thoughts on the bill. I was wondering if she would be able to continue.

Ms Phillips: Thank you to the hon. member. I think just to conclude, as I said, law enforcement needs the right tools, too, especially given that there's a level of subjectivity and observation and so on that is involved with a measurement of impairment by cannabis. There are just some really very defensible reasons for that, but we need to make sure that we don't get wrapped up, then,

in Charter challenges because of that element of observation and a sort of qualitative analysis, if you will, that is not provided by the quantitative evidence of, you know, anything over .5 or .8 or whatever the case may be.

To conclude, Mr. Speaker, I know myself having seen people and families suffer from the devastating effects of uselessness and senselessness of the grief from people being killed by impaired driving. I have, over the course of my life, seen that great sadness and great – you know, it just doesn't make any sense, right? There's a senselessness. There's an avoidability. There's a tragedy. I would venture a guess that pretty well everyone in this Chamber knows some family who, over the years, has been affected by impaired driving. And thank goodness that we've had the last 20 years or more of advocacy from folks like Mothers Against Drunk Driving so that now it is not a question of how we teach our kids about that activity. There's not a question about the fact that it is an indefensible activity to undertake. I am very moved and convinced by the work that MADD has done over the years.

I think it's important, though, to realize that around some of the changes that are proposed in Bill 21, the administrative penalties model that is being contemplated here has had an effect on road safety, but that effect is oftentimes from the interlock program, which requires a breath sample before the person can drive. It might be wise to use the current administrative sanctions for cannabis-impaired driving but maintain either the criminal process or slightly longer timelines to ensure access to counsel because this area remains much more uncertain. It's in terms of the proof piece where the uncertainty is, not necessarily the problems associated with a high level of impairment. There is proof for the fact that when you have a high level of impairment from cannabis or any other substance, you have a dangerous person behind the wheel. That's not in dispute.

The fear is that if you don't have the right model around that cannabis piece, then you might end up with a situation where you're releasing drivers that maybe one ought not to or convicting those that one ought not to. Both situations are a contravention of our individual liberties, of the expectations that we have in a civil society governed by laws that we are free from a legal system that may result in wrongful convictions. We try as hard as we can at every step of the way to make sure that people who have done the bad thing have the consequence that has been laid out by either Legislatures or parliaments, depending on the infraction, but people who have not done the bad thing have access to every ability to not have to pay a debt to society for something that they didn't do.

In that vein, Mr. Speaker, I will conclude my remarks. I hope that we can move together with the government side on our shared values of ensuring access to timely justice, ensuring safety for our roads, building on the work of the last two decades. Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, Member.

Any other members wishing to speak to Bill 21? I will recognize the Member for Calgary-East.

Mr. Singh: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I stand today to provide my comments and support for Bill 21, the Provincial Administrative Penalties Act. This is a crucial piece of legislation that will improve the lives of Albertans in many ways. I would like to applaud the minister for taking action to adopt a proven method of saving lives while ensuring Alberta's prosecutors and courts can clear a huge number of backlogs to prosecute serious criminal matters and our police are safeguarding our province instead of doing paperwork.

The bill seeks to modernize how we deal with many matters by creating a simple, fast, and fair user-friendly model that can be navigated online. As we carefully look at our current system, the Alberta Transportation Safety Board, and Alberta administrative

licence suspension, the design does not respond properly with the current volume or with matters as we require. The introduction of safe roads Alberta will increase the efficiency of our court system, help to alleviate the current backlog of cases, and keep our roads safer with even more stringent penalties and fines for impaired driving infractions.

Mr. Speaker, once safe roads Alberta is implemented, it is expected to free up 8 per cent of courts' time, eliminate 1,200 complex and multiday trials, free up 30,000 more hours of police time, and ensure that prosecutors and law enforcement will be able to focus on protecting Albertans and keeping our streets safe instead of being tied up in the courtroom. Our new system will restore critical capacity to Alberta's justice system by creating a streamlined, fast, and fair method to resolve noncriminal first-time impaired and traffic disputes. The system will aid law enforcement professionals by allowing them to focus on serious crimes and saves Albertans who have received a ticket from having to take time off work and go through a complex court process.

Under our current system when the officer has reasonable grounds to believe that a driver has committed an impaired offence, it consumes between five to eight hours of police time per file to issue an administrative penalty under the Alberta administrative licence suspension. The penalties include an immediate 15-month suspension, a three-day vehicle seizure, and criminal charges. If the driver wishes to dispute their licence suspension, they must appear in person at a registry to file a notice of appeal with the Alberta traffic safety board within a month of the incident. They must also appear before a three-person panel, which takes an average of five months to schedule and resolve.

Our government knows that impaired driving is a scourge that remains a leading cause of death and injury for Albertans. Provinces like British Columbia and Manitoba have demonstrated that there are better ways to deter noncriminal first-time impaired drivers. Experience in those provinces has proven that simple, fast, administrative consequences can effectively save lives while restoring capacity to our overburdened court system. Our Provincial Administrative Penalties Act is an important part of our continuing effort to clear the backlog in our justice system that was left by the previous government. When this bill is passed, Mr. Speaker, it will allow an officer with reasonable grounds to issue an administrative penalty called the immediate roadside sanction fail, which triggers the same 15-month suspension as before but increases the vehicle seizure time to 30 days, issues a thousand dollar fine, requires the driver to complete mandatory impaired driving education, escalates these penalties for repeated offenders or if bodily harm or injury occurs. Police can typically issue the process in under an hour. These increased penalties will further discourage driving under the influence and will keep Albertans safer.

Some may say, Mr. Speaker, that this may in turn negate their right to have a day in court, but I beg to disagree on that as immediately provisioned sanctions are not new in Alberta, like fines and vehicle seizure. Nevertheless, anyone could file a review and will continue to have recourse at the Court of Queen's Bench.

This does not decriminalize impaired driving, Mr. Speaker, but rather is strengthening our provincial sanctions in all respects. Offenders or anyone causing bodily harm or death will also be criminally charged in addition to receiving provincial sanctions. While we make the process fast and simpler, more offenders will be detected, sanctioned, deterred, and kept off the street, which makes it safer for Albertans.

11:10

This dispute process is also drastically simplified. Drivers can now access a website to pay their fine and request additional time

to ask for a review of the sanction. Drivers will no longer wait for a month or longer or incur costs from travel or time off work to resolve a traffic dispute, with the online traffic dispute system. On the other hand, in the case a request for review is filed, it will be sanctioned within four weeks, and the written decision will be provided within a month of the issuance of the notice. This will divert nearly two million traffic tickets from Alberta courts and free up court time for criminal matters while taking away the necessity for thousands of Albertans to visit courthouses simply to pay tickets or schedule hearings.

Another major improvement that our government is introducing is removing the requirement that the driver is to show up in person for the review. There are now phone and video options for attendance. Under this model, Mr. Speaker, the management and processing of tickets is expected to cost less than the current system. At the same time, it will be self-funded as it will be offset by the revenue generated through fines, while the current resources being utilized to manage these millions of tickets can then be devoted to address serious justice matters and returning our police to the communities.

This is something that my constituents in Calgary-East are happy to receive as they will be feeling safer, and at the same time they will not be forced to take an absence from work to pay a ticket or attend hearings on a day off. Mr. Speaker, a scheduled hearing will cost them at least half a day's work, while attending the hearing will cost another half a day at the least, not to mention travel cost. Some of them are living break even, month to month, so even a little relief on expenses is a big help for my constituents.

The approach our government is taking reflects what we have heard from consultations with a wide variety of stakeholders and groups, who are supportive of our changes. This includes strong support from Mothers Against Drunk Driving, who have witnessed the success of similar initiatives in British Columbia and Manitoba. In the words of the MADD Canada CEO, "streamlined administrative options for certain offenders have proven very effective at reducing impaired driving and saving lives."

Mr. Speaker, the British Columbia model that our act is based on has led to a lowering of the rates of impaired driving incidents, dropping by 36 per cent from 2011 to 2018, and a reduction in impaired driving fatalities of 54 per cent from 2010 to 2018. It is a model that was introduced by a British Columbia Liberal government and has continued to work successfully under the current NDP government. I hope the opposition will acknowledge this success and join our government in supporting this bill. By modernizing and streamlining our administrative resolution system, our government is taking action to allow police resources to be directed where they're most needed.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, Member.

Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available. Are there any members wishing to speak?

Okay. Any other members wishing to speak to Bill 21?

Seeing none, are we prepared to call the question, then?

[Motion carried; Bill 21 read a second time]

Bill 27

Alberta Senate Election Amendment Act, 2020

[Adjourned debate July 7: Mr. Nally]

The Acting Speaker: Are there any other members wishing to speak to Bill 27? The Member for St. Albert.

Ms Renaud: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise and speak to Bill 27, Alberta Senate Election Amendment Act. I'd just like to add to some of the comments that have been made by some of my colleagues and to reiterate some of the main messages. I think that it's important, when we're discussing Bill 27, to acknowledge the fact that it comes immediately following Bill 26 and that the two pieces of legislation together allow hundreds of thousands of dollars to be raised and spent to influence public opinion on political matters, with limited oversight and transparency and really only the Premier's permission in terms of the question that is posed to electorates.

You know, it wasn't that long ago, actually, that we debated – I think it was Bill 13 about Senate elections. It sort of begs the question: how many times are we going to have to revisit this to make more changes? It also begs a further question: why are we making these changes? Has the Premier's cabinet decided that this doesn't do enough to stack municipal elections so that there is an advantage for people that are within his realm or domain?

The changes to the Senate election law – let's be clear about this – allow for third-party advertisers to have a Senate election advertising account to keep referendum and Senate, local and provincial issues separate. I would suggest once again that this is a way to skirt oversight and to reduce the amount of transparency. This is truly a pattern with this government, with a huge aversion to sunlight, sunlight that actually demonstrates exactly who is donating, who is supporting the candidate. Then when you see the legislation or the changes that come out after the fact, you can see very clearly: ah, this lobbyist or this person who was a generous donor to this candidate or this party ended up lobbying for changes and, voila, here are some changes to legislation, or here is a new direction that we're going. That is the case. It happens. Why not just put it out there? Let's be clear about that. Let's have oversight.

We did have oversight to a number of – we added, actually, quite a bit more oversight when we were in government in terms of election financing and oversight with an independent Election Commissioner. Now, you might remember that that person was summarily fired through legislation. The government says: "No, no. We didn't fire him. We were just finding efficiencies. We were just going to save \$200,000 on his salary. It was a small office of only five investigators, but really we didn't need that oversight. It was about finding efficiencies." Meanwhile, you know, they're spending \$30 million on a war room that puts out all kinds of interesting content, not to mention some of which is climate change denial.

Anyway, we lost an independent Election Commissioner, which, I would argue, added another level of transparency, and it also encouraged – I think it sent a message to Albertans that not only do we take it seriously in terms of getting big money or dark money – and by dark money I mean that you don't know exactly where it comes from – but we are doing everything that we can to create open, as fair as possible, transparent elections. That independent officer was that position that would ensure that we would continue to go in the right direction without going backwards to the wild west of Alberta elections, but here we are.

I think that most of us in this place will remember the unprecedented firing via legislation of the independent Election Commissioner while there was an ongoing investigation into the conduct of the UCP during a leadership race. I think it's really important to remember that. When it happened, I know that for members on this side it was hard to watch. I've never seen political interference happen that close, up close and personal. We watched it happen, political interference. There was an investigation in a leadership race by an independent officer, and then there wasn't.

Then it was: well, no; we'll transfer this to the Chief Electoral Officer, and that person can hire this person should they choose.

The Acting Speaker: Member, we are currently on Bill 27, the Alberta Senate Election Amendment Act. I would encourage you to speak to that, please.

Ms Renaud: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would say that I am speaking to oversight in terms of the changes that are in Bill 27 in terms of election financing. In this case it is the election financing of a Senate candidate and that Senate candidate is attached to a political party, so I'm talking about the structure of oversight and transparency in the province and what has changed recently. Those are why my comments are directed a little bit backwards looking, looking at the changes that have been made.

11:20

Done via Bill 22 we saw in that debate – again, I think it was about four hours; I can't remember exactly. Of course, those were the days where we saw time allocation after time allocation, where the government decided that we no longer needed an independent officer to monitor election and election financing, really, you know, the job being to look at ensuring compliance with the Election Finances and Contributions Disclosure Act as well as the Election Act. So that was done. I think it's important to note that the UCP leader, the Premier, was actually out of town in Texas at the time that there was time-allocated debate on that. Again, to take that a little bit further, we all remember – well, actually, I'm going to skip over that part. We talked a little bit about the reason that that was done.

Amending Bill 13, which is going back, that is the legislation that was brought in around the Senate election. At the time they capped donations to senatorial candidates and campaign spending at \$50,000, and they changed the required number of signatures from 1,500 to 500 signatures. Again, I would argue – I've certainly never collected senatorial signatures, so I don't know how difficult that process would be, but it seems to me that if you are looking to represent an entire province, a larger number of signatures supporting you would be a good thing. In any event, that changed already. Also, again, Bill 13 had the requirement that the senatorial candidate be affiliated with a federal party. It seems to me that that alone would necessitate additional oversight. Not so with this government. Also, provincial parties can spend \$100,000 on each candidate.

Now, that happened already. So we're making some additional amendments to the bill that made these changes. Again, this is why I keep going back to, you know, it's already been set. All of these things have already happened. There's been an introduction of more dollars, more dark money, blending it now with local municipal elections. There's a reduction of oversight in terms of an independent Election Commissioner that has the ability to watch and see what's happening to make sure that every person, either donor or candidate or supporter, is following all of the rules. That's gone.

[The Speaker in the chair]

I had a look back again. You know, I couldn't remember right offhand all of the Senate elections, so to really understand Bill 27, Alberta Senate Election Amendment Act, to really understand why these changes were necessary and what is the history of Senate elections in Alberta and also what are the risks that this amendment and, of course, the original bill posed, I had a look back at some of the senatorial elections since, I guess, the 1980s.

I also want to comment on – I tuned in a little bit last night and watched one of my colleagues talk about some of the issues related

to these two pieces of legislation, Bill 26 and Bill 27, and in it about what are the risks of introducing more dark money and more organized money, more lobbyist money, and what are the risks to furthering the agenda of having the people that represent us here in the Legislature but also in Parliament reflect the diversity of our province and our country. I think she spoke very eloquently about what some of those risks are when you start to introduce big money.

So I had a look backwards at the different Senate elections. Some of you will recall that in 1989 Stan Waters, a Reformer, was the person that was at the top; in 1998 it was Bert Brown, another Reformer; in 2004, Bert Brown again – this time he was a Conservative – and in 2012, Doug Black, who is also a Conservative. I mean, you can sort of see some things that are similarities, I guess, right? I wasn't sure about all of these folks. I didn't know if there was some diversity here that I maybe didn't know, so I actually had to Google search all of these folks to see, you know, what were their backgrounds, where they came from, what their positions were, what their affiliations were, and who their supporters were.

Mr. Speaker, I can report that, you know, just on the surface now, given that this was just a Google search – I didn't spend a whole lot of time going back and reading through all of the things they'd written or spoken about – there was not a lot of diversity. So I would argue that these exercises in Senate elections – I won't even get into the role of Senate elections since the '80s. I would suggest that maybe there is something that we could do around this process in terms of financing and this entire election process, something that we could do better so that the end result is increasing diversity.

Truly, I think I hear it from members on both sides, that we want this place to represent the diversity of Albertans in terms of age, gender, backgrounds, cultural backgrounds, religious choices, all of these things. I think that when we are represented properly in this place, when we actually represent Albertans and we look like Albertans, then I think we make good decisions. Looking back at these Senate elections, I would suggest that maybe we have some work to do.

Anyway, I would like to also note that although I don't think any piece of legislation that comes to this place isn't worth our time or our effort or our research or our debate, I do think that we have a limited amount of time that we are here. We have a limited number of pieces of legislation that we can look at, that we can debate, that we can pass. I would suggest that given this really unique time in history – we are in the middle of a global pandemic. We have seen commodity prices just steadily going down for years. We have seen enormous changes in global economies, in our own economy, enormous pressures. We have hundreds of thousands of people that have lost work or had reductions to employment. We have all kinds of issues ahead of us, not to mention the issues and the challenges that were in front of us before that have not gone away, and they are related to climate change.

So to see that again we are focusing on elections, consolidating power, maintaining power, bringing big money back into elections – and this time what is very worrisome is the tangling of Senate elections and referendums, tangling those with municipal elections, that on the surface seem to be the most nonpartisan that we have. I know that the mayor of St. Albert has said on a number of occasions that one of the things that she appreciates in the city of St. Albert is the nonpartisan nature of municipal elections there. You know, I appreciate that comment. I appreciate the fact that people run for council, and they're not affiliated with a party. They're running on their ideas, and people are voting for them based on their ideas, not based on the colour of the pin that they're wearing and not based on the platform that they are aligned with. It's based on their own ideas. I would say the same for the mayor in St. Albert, that we had

a really healthy contest. Certainly, you could probably identify where people aligned, but on the whole this was about ideas and about a vision for the future of the city.

Mr. Speaker, I'm concerned. I'm certainly concerned that we are looking at bringing in issues that I believe are meant to distract, that are meant to bring dark money into politics. We worked really hard over the last few years – well, not the last year but the four years before – to limit the amount of money that trickles down into elections, especially dark money and third-party advertisers, where it's very difficult to see, actually, who is controlling the strings. It makes it easier when you have that kind of oversight. When you see a piece of legislation or a change in regulation, when it comes out of nowhere, you understand where that comes from. For example, let's say, if we saw a piece of legislation that allowed employers to apply for minimum wage exemptions because they've been lobbied by Restaurants Canada, we could understand: oh, look; this is a lobbyist that donated, you know, tens of thousands of dollars to this particular candidate.

Mr. Speaker, I would suggest that oversight, at the very least increasing oversight as it relates to Bill 27 and most definitely to Bill 26, needs to happen. It is my sincere hope that all members of this place will agree with me. They certainly did when we sat on the Select Special Ethics and Accountability Committee, when we talked about transparency. They agreed then, apparently not now.

11:30

The Speaker: Hon. members, Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available, and I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-North West has risen to provide a brief question or comment.

Mr. Eggen: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I appreciate the opportunity to both provide some small comment and a question as well in regard to this bill and the hon. member's analysis of it. I was very pleased to see that the hon. member did a bit of research on the history of senatorial elections here in the province of Alberta. I certainly have watched these past elections as well, and I can just provide some insight on it on an anecdotal level. You know, they were run concurrently with provincial elections at least once, maybe twice or even more than that.

I remember one in particular, which I was participating in as well, of course, as a provincial candidate. They had the senatorial race going on at the same time, and maybe it was just a coincidence – I don't know; like, there are only so many colours you can use for your signs – but the person that was running for Senate at the same time, at least in my constituency, had campaign signs that were almost exactly the same as the Conservative signs, right? So by an exponential number of a thousand there were these vaguely Conservative signs everywhere. Of course, they didn't follow the protocols that I do in my constituency, which is to only put signs on people's property that have said that they would support me. Instead, they had a blue blizzard across every boulevard and every stop along the way and crushed on the roads, floating down the alleyways and so forth. It confused people. People would say: "Well, you know, what's going on, Dave? What's with all these signs everywhere?" So I'm not sure exactly what their intention was, but it was an interesting coincidence that they did have signs that were almost exactly the same during an election and just adding a layer of chaos, at least on the streets of Edmonton-Calder at that time.

The second point is obvious as well, Mr. Speaker, and that is: what is different from all of those other elections that we had before? In other words, we have had the capacity and the space to have Senate elections in this province for a long time, and we've had quite a number of them over the years, right? She's enumerated

quite a number of them. So why do we need to go back and change the legislation? What's different about this legislation than what we had for all the other ones? The only difference that I can see – and perhaps the hon. Member for St. Albert can help me with this – is that this bill adds a whole lot more capacity for money to be put into the election – right? – in fact, putting more money into the election that would exceed probably the money that people would spend in some constituencies for the provincial election.

So, again, back to my original point around the blizzard of blue signs blowing across my constituency in the past, with the Senate elections and so forth: is that the difference that we're voting for here with this bill? Is it simply that we're adding a whole lot more money into the equation? You know, that's not particularly democratic, I don't think, right? I mean, correct me if I'm wrong. I don't think that people asked for that. It's not like the travelling show that went around looking for a fair deal. I don't suppose people were breaking down the doors saying: hey, put lots more big money into Senate races; that's what we need here in Alberta, for sure. I seriously doubt it; in fact, I can almost guarantee that that wasn't the case at all. I don't know. Did the hon. member see anything else in this bill besides these changes that I've enumerated here right now?

The Speaker: The hon. Member for St. Albert has approximately 40 seconds remaining.

Ms Renaud: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. I don't profess to know why they did this at all. All I see in this piece of legislation is – it's my own opinion – a distraction. Like you said, it's exactly that. It's an attempt to add more dark money to this process. This isn't about a person's ideas or local representation or every person looking at the pool of candidates to decide that this is the best person to represent me and the ideas that I have in my community; this is about big money. Let's be clear about that.

The Speaker: Hon. members, is there anyone else wishing to join in the debate this morning? The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View has risen.

Ms Ganley: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I am pleased to rise and speak to Bill 27 here in second reading. Certainly, my hon. colleagues have made several comments on this bill before now, but I think that I have a few things to add on this. I mean, what's really relevant is what my hon. colleague from Edmonton here was just saying, which is that we've had these elections before, so why exactly are we here? I think that one of the things, definitely, that this bill is clearly doing is importing another avenue to spend money. Of course, this bill comes with a package of bills, shall we say, that for some reason have chosen to travel together though not be in the same bill. That package of bills includes several methods by which additional money can come back into politics. I think that it's worth taking a few minutes to talk about why that's a concern for me, because this is a conversation that Albertans have a lot around political action committees and why they need to exist at all or why certain people need to have a right to participate in the democratic process.

Generally there's a lot of dark money that flows through a political action committee, or there can be, and that's a concern. We should be deeply concerned about money influencing our opinions in ways that we don't understand. I think that we need only look south of the border to see the ways in which this can become a concern. Now, south of the border the costs of campaigns are much, much higher than they are here. I mean, I would argue that already the costs of campaigns up here is a bit out of reach for a lot of folks, and I actually think that's bad for democracy, but south of the

border, like, it's the same thing on steroids, like a hundred times over.

The result is that with some of the rules around even things like patents and who can develop drugs, you can see an impact on the health of the population because there's so much money in politics. These giant drug companies have huge lobbyists, and they put in all these little rules that make it very, very difficult for generics to be developed or, you know, for people to get access to medicines that they need unless somebody jumps up and says that, well, this is private-sector innovation and it's so much more important. Actually, a lot of the innovations we've seen recently have come from the public sector on this. In addition, those companies do not need to charge that for drugs; they spend more than twice as much on marketing than they do on research and development, so that is definitely not what it's about.

But we see this in a number of different areas. States have difficulty regulating certain things because there are so many rules around them. There are little pieces and little bills here and there that have been passed, basically, in exchange for donations. I think that's exactly what we want to keep out of politics because fundamentally democracy should be about ideas succeeding, not money behind ideas succeeding. Certainly, this points towards a fundamental challenge that we have presently with our democratic system, and that is because there are fewer and fewer people working in media, and there are a whole host of reasons for this. You have fewer and fewer independent journalists that are expected to churn out more and more articles. The result is that there is a lot less analysis that goes into it, not because the journalists are not doing a good job but because they simply have too much work.

11:40

The result is that when they present an article – and journalists, I believe, always strive for balance. I think most journalists are very ethical people who try to do their job in the best way that they can, and they strive for balance. Balance winds up being, because they haven't got the time to do the research and sort of see what surrounds it, presenting position A and presenting position B as though both of those positions are equally valid, but oftentimes they're being presented where one position is that the Earth is flat. It's a balanced article because they say, you know: person A says, "The Earth is round," and person B says, "The Earth is flat." Well, the thing is that person A has a lot more evidence and a lot of other people supporting their position. Those two positions are not equally valid positions. One of them ought to be questioned, but the public – fair enough – doesn't necessarily have an enormous amount of time to engage in these issues because, if they're like me, you know, you work your 10 to 12 hours at your job, and you go home. You have kids, and you have dinners to make. It's challenging. It's challenging to keep up with life. I think modern life is getting even more so, and I think we lose something when people don't have time to engage in those issues, to talk over their fence with their next-door neighbour about: "Hey, did you see this? What do you think about that?" I think it leads to hyperpartisanship.

But coming back to the money which is in the bill, the point is that the context in which we exist is a context in which there is a lot of information available to people but not of great depth. I have spent a lot of time knocking on doors. I believe that people are interested. I believe that they want to engage, but they don't necessarily have an enormous amount of time to devote to doing that, so they rely on the media in certain ways, and because the media only tells certain stories or only tells certain stories in certain ways, people who are legitimately trying to engage in a good and valid way wind up with limited information.

In this context of limited information, money has an extreme influence because it can push out campaigns, because it can be used to purchase – I mean, there have been books. I took an entire course once on, basically – the textbook was entitled *How to Lie with Statistics*. You know, it's out there. It exists, and one of my passions is looking at: how was this research conducted? What was the control group? How were the statistics analyzed? What was considered in designing this study and gathering this information? People don't just – well, sometimes they do – go out there and say something dishonest anymore. There are entire centres out there now literally devoted to the distortion of data. In that environment the influence of money is extreme. That undercuts our democracy because it means – nobody is standing out there on the street corner saying, "My vote is for sale," but what happens is that this money goes into these huge studies at places like the Manning centre, and these studies come out and they influence people's opinions because people don't have time to look in depth at the study and see how deeply and completely methodologically flawed that study is. As a result, it impacts their opinion. Dark money does this sort of thing. It has that influence on elections. Fundamentally, in my view, that is an undercutting of the democratic process.

In that case, why do we need money at all? Well, I still think that in some instances we do need that advertising. Why? Because knocking on doors is hard work. You know, I spent, I mean, years knocking on doors, but just in the gathering of data leading up to the election, over a year: three times a week, and by the end of the election, every day for hours and hours and hours. I still only made contact with roughly a third of the people in my riding. I can tell you that almost everyone in this room has had the same experience knocking on doors. Yes, it is necessary to advertise somewhat because some people you can't contact directly. I wish you could, but you can't always, so it's necessary to be able to expend that money and to be able to contact those people. But we have to be really careful about this, right? It's really important to have rules around who can spend money and where they can spend money and where the reporting is done in terms of who their donors are. I think that all of those things are incredibly important.

In terms of political action committees there have certainly been questions like: why do they need to exist at all? But here's the thing. If you have a group of parents who are concerned about the education of their children and those parents want to get together and say, "Hey, we care very deeply about the education of our children; it's very, very important to us; we want to have a campaign, and we don't want it to be a partisan campaign; we want everyone to be involved in our campaign," they should have the right to do that. They should absolutely have the right to do that. So it is important that outside actors, people who are not political parties, be allowed to spend money to advertise during the campaign. The question is: how do we regulate that to ensure that it has a positive benefit and not a negative benefit? Those individuals, those, in this case, hypothetical parents, who are coming together to say, "We're concerned about the education of our children, and we want to launch a campaign about how important education is to us," those people have the right to engage in the political process in that way. It's absolutely fundamental to democracy that they be allowed to do that.

It's a complex balancing of interests when you're dealing with this sort of thing, and what I think about this bill is that it gets that complex balancing of interests a little bit off the mark. It brings money in in a way that's not super transparent. I'm not saying that, like, this is terrible, that it's horrible; I'm saying that I'm concerned that in an area where a complex balancing of interests is necessary, particularly an area where it has an impact on the fundamental

democratic rights of the people in this province, it is my view that, in this instance, this does not strike the right balance.

I honestly have to question why we're doing this at all. We've had senatorial elections before. We don't really need a bill on this. There are – and every government suffers from this – way more good ideas than there is time to legislate them or money to fund them. There always are. I'm a little bit curious why, in this moment when Albertans face a pandemic, when we face a massive economic decline, when people are terrified and out of work and worried that their loved ones will become ill – I kind of feel like this is playing to sort of the weird Wexit base in a way that I just don't really think is a useful use of our time. I think it's a concern to me that this is what we're doing with our time right now.

I guess that's my position on this bill. I think it strikes the wrong balance. I don't think it's necessary. I think it is here for political communications reasons only. I think it's meant to rile up a group of people that the UCP is very familiar with, people who support separation from Canada, which is, in my view, a terrible idea. It's designed to rile up those people and keep the conversation about that instead of moving the conversation to the conversation we should be having, which is: "How do we support the economy? How do we support people in getting back to work? How do we combat a pandemic that is likely to be with us for a significant period of time, an unknown significant period of time, while simultaneously restarting an economy that is struggling not just because of the pandemic but also because of a global drop in the international price of oil?" That's the conversation we should be having. The conversation should be about: "in this environment of scarcity how do we ensure that everyone has access to health care, that everyone has access to education? How do we ensure that people are working, that they're able to get the job they need to pay their mortgages and feed their families?"

11:50

Those are the conversations that we should be having, and I feel like this bill is a bit of a distraction from those conversations. That's why I think that in addition to not striking the right balance, it's also not the right time to be dealing with this, and that is all I have to say about that.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Hon. members, Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available. I see the hon. the Associate Minister of Red Tape Reduction has risen.

Mr. Hunter: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. You know, I actually will take my hat off to the hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View. She did a whole lot better than some of her other colleagues. We often talk and we'll stand up and we'll do a point of order and talk about 23(h), (i), and (j), yet there are actually 12 subsections in there, and her other colleagues probably – I was just actually looking to see who would have the record of contravening some of those subsections.

You know, it's interesting that the members opposite continue to use this concept or this word called "dark money." I did a quick little Google search here. These are actually some stats from down in the States, but I'm sure that if we took those stats, they'd probably be very similar to the stats we would see here in Canada. Union donations to political movements down in the States, \$217 million in 2019-2020: carpenters' and joiners' unions, \$14.6 million; American Federation of Teachers, \$8.6 million; American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees, \$7.3 million; National Education Association, \$6.4 million; national nurses union, \$5.1 million. I could go on and on.

Mr. Speaker, the truth is that the hon. members are being hypocritical when they talk about how this is supposedly dark money. This is actually a way for political organizations to be able to communicate messages to the people, and that does cost money. I do remember in 2015, when I was first elected, having some of the MLAs – they're not here today, and perhaps this is the reason why they're not here today – bragging to me about how they'd only spent \$330 on their election, bragging about the fact that that's all they had to spend. The truth is that they actually did not get elected themselves. They probably got elected on, as they liked to call it, the orange wave.

Now, that is not normal, Mr. Speaker. The truth is that normally you have to be able to go out and articulate the points, your platform. This is why what we did was that we articulated 375 platform positions to Albertans, and we told them what we were going to do over the next four years. They, in record numbers, voted for us to be able to get that done, and we have been working hard to be able to get that done.

Mr. Speaker, in terms of this bill being able to provide people with a better understanding about who their Senator options are, it's not a bad thing. Now, I would imagine that there are certainly some people out there that spend the money in a way that I wouldn't expect they should, and I think that that's probably indicative of all sides of the spectrum. We can probably show examples of that, but the large majority of the money that is spent on being able to communicate with the people is done in the interest of being able to help them understand what their platform is, what they would like to be able to do.

As you know, Mr. Speaker, I would say that the large majority of the people in this House that ran for the right reasons. They got in here because we were trying to fix Alberta for our children and grandchildren to be able to make it a better place. I've heard many people stand up in this House and speak about the importance of working for future generations. I can hear the members heckling on the other side. It's interesting that the members opposite would heckle about something like that. This is actually a time when I think that they should say, you know: "Yeah. I agree with the hon. member. I agree that we got in here to do the right thing, to be able to actually speak for Albertans, to help them, and to be able to make it a better place for our children and grandchildren, for future generations." Instead, they heckle.

This bill is a simple bill of being able to help the process, to send a message also to Ottawa that we can actually choose our own Senators, that we can have the opportunity to be able to provide that representation in the Senate. I always applaud that, Mr. Speaker, and I think that the members speaking against that show the level that they have stooped to in this House.

The Speaker: Hon. members, there is no time remaining under Standing Order 29(2)(a).

We are on the main portion of second reading. Is there anyone else wishing to join in the debate this morning? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie has approximately four minutes prior to noon.

Member Loyola: Yes. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate you taking the time to recognize me. Because I have so little time, perhaps I will comment or reflect on what was contributed by the Member for Taber-Warner.

I think that it's important for us to really get a grasp on what it is, the arguments that we are making here. This is about money influencing how people would potentially vote. This is what this is all about. I agree with the Member for Taber-Warner. We did get elected by our constituents. We care about our families. Actually, very soon after being elected, I remember having a discussion right here on the steps of this here very Legislature with the hon. Member for Taber-Warner. We were talking about how we care about our families, right? I don't know if the member remembers that discussion, but I recollect it very well.

You know, we have different points of view. We have different points of view. We need to respect this, of course, but I have no doubt that every member in this House is here because they honestly believe in the fact that we need to build a better Alberta for our children but for everybody, for all people here in Alberta. Now, the fact is that we have different perspectives, and we believe that we get there in different ways, but at the end of the day we need to discuss fundamentally that each piece of legislation that comes before this House, Mr. Speaker, needs to be fair. This is what we're debating here.

The reality is that when you don't have accountability for the money that is entering into the democratic process and there is no transparency, this sets it up so that the process becomes unfair. There needs to be transparency. We need to know where this money is coming from, who is putting the money in. Ultimately, with bills 26 and 27 this is our fundamental problem. We're calling on this government to say: how is this fair? I don't understand how the Member for Taber-Warner can get up in this House and say that we're trying to do our very best for the people of Alberta and then argue against transparency, because this is the true fundamental issue that we're trying to bring forward in this House when it comes to these particular bills.

Now, I remember the Member for Taber-Warner . . .

The Speaker: Hon. member, I hesitate to interrupt, but pursuant to Standing Order 4(2.1) the Assembly stands adjourned until 1:30 this afternoon.

[The Assembly adjourned at 11:59 a.m.]

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