



Province of Alberta

The 30th Legislature
Second Session

Alberta Hansard

Wednesday evening, July 15, 2020

Day 45

The Honourable Nathan M. Cooper, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta
The 30th Legislature

Second Session

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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

7:30 p.m.

Wednesday, July 15, 2020

[Mr. Milliken in the chair]

The Acting Speaker: Please be seated.

Government Bills and Orders Committee of the Whole

[Mr. Milliken in the chair]

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

Bill 21 Provincial Administrative Penalties Act

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

Mr. Feehan: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I appreciate the opportunity to rise tonight to speak to Bill 21. Some of my comments this evening have been a little bit pre-empted by the conversations last night between myself and the minister at second reading of the bill or earlier in Committee of the Whole perhaps, so I will take just a brief time to kind of reiterate some of the comments so that I can give context to an amendment which I'll be bringing forward this evening.

I think the overall comments that we have been making about Bill 21 are generally our overall support for the notion of taking any steps that we can take to reduce the incidence of drunk driving on the roads and reducing risk to people both in having accidents and fatalities, and we're happy to see this kind of attempt to make a change, move forward. We certainly appreciate that there's been work done to work closely with groups like Mothers Against Drunk Driving to ensure that the efforts that are being put forward are being put forward with support from the community, especially a community that cares so much and has done so much in this particular area.

I know that I expressed my thoughts yesterday about the fact that this particular model is one that's closely aligned with the B.C. model introduced a few years back, so we have some ideas and some evidence about the potential for success in implementing this model. You know, it's also fairly consistent with lots about what we know, that action taken directly and swiftly in terms of inappropriate behaviour tends to be a good model in reducing that behaviour. I know that in the past we've seen – it's been cited that this model was correlated with a 36 per cent drop in DUIs in the province of British Columbia and a 54 per cent drop in fatalities, which is an incredible improvement. It's made everybody very excited.

On the other hand, I did comment yesterday that statistics can be a funny thing, particularly when they're presented in a singular manner of that nature, that there has been a drop, and I don't doubt that there's been a drop. But I also noted that if you look at the Stats Canada data on the issuance of DUIs, since 1986 the number of DUIs has been going down across Canada fairly consistently. The graph line is one of those ones you just sort of love to see because it's kind of not in dispute. The trend line is consistent over many years, and it's consistent across provinces. So we know that there has in fact been a decrease in the issuance of drunk driving charges in Canada. There actually isn't anywhere on the graph where it

demonstrates a particular drop in relationship to the introduction of this model in British Columbia.

So it just leaves us wondering: are we seeing a good social trend based on the hard work of groups like Mothers Against Drunk Driving and the commitment of so many citizens of the country to not drive after they've been consuming alcohol, or are we seeing the success of a model? The evidence of a single stat doesn't prove that because it doesn't separate the compounding influences in the statistical analysis. The only way that we can ensure that we, in fact, have a successful model is to be able to keep data that separates out those two influences, that looks at: is there is a general decline in the very inappropriate behaviour of drinking and driving overall? If we can do that, if we can separate that out – there are statistical models and methods that can do that, but one of the things that would facilitate our understanding of the success of this model is keeping good data as we go along.

Now, I've already made that argument, and I know that the minister has spent a moment to suggest that somewhere in the future there may be a discussion here in the House about the nature of data collection. I think that we can work together on that. I think it's a very important topic, and certainly I would like to support the minister in the success of this project, so I'd like to add a little bit more on the data collection tonight.

One of the things that you've heard me talk about many times in this House, if you pay any attention to the things I've said, is the fact that statistics are a great place to find evidence of some kind of a systematic differential application of a law, and that is that while the law remains exactly the same for all persons, it may actually have a differential application to people based on a number of things. Last night I was suggesting, for example, that in this particular case the punishment of having your car removed if you happen to be in an oil and gas work camp two hours away from the closest town is a very different kind of punishment than it is losing your licence in downtown Edmonton or downtown Calgary or any of the other cities and towns where there's public transportation and so on. Even though the law is consistent and is without prejudice in its design, it doesn't mean that its application has equal effect on the people involved.

One of the other areas that we know that we've been asked to seriously consider in this House by many members of the black and indigenous communities is whether or not the laws that we bring into the House have a systemic bias against people of colour. Again, they're not saying that it's a first-order prejudice – that is a law that explicitly says that it will be applied differentially to black and indigenous people – rather, they're looking for the underlying systemic biases that just are inherent in laws from time to time. Not because there is an intent to be prejudicial but because of a variety of structural realities, it gets applied differentially. We hear from members of the black and indigenous communities fairly often – and I think, you know, all of us in this House can say that that's something that's been true, particularly under the Black Lives Matter and indigenous lives matter banners – that their reality day to day is just felt to be very different than the reality of an old white guy like me.

You know, I can say that every time I've been stopped – and it has been more than once – by a police officer, I deserved it. I knew what it was that I was doing, and I appropriately got a ticket or perhaps a reprimand. But I know that there is a common saying in the black community that they have the experience of being guilty of driving while black, meaning that they get stopped more often for reasons that don't seem to make sense just because they somehow have been identified in the application of the law. It's very frustrating. I certainly have never had an ID check walking down the street, but I can tell you that indigenous people tell me all

the time that they have had ID checks just while walking down the street. That's where we have to say: okay; there's a statistical method of identifying those underlying differential applications of law.

7:40

In this particular case, I think there is concern and there is fear amongst the indigenous community and the northern community and other identifiable communities that this law may be differentially applied to them, because they are being stopped more often, and not stopped more often because their behaviour is different, that their behaviour warrants that, but stopped more often because that is indeed the practice that they have experienced, that they do get stopped more often for these kinds of issues and therefore are much more likely to be charged even though their actual consumption of alcohol may not be any different than nonblack or nonindigenous people or their driving under the influence of alcohol may not be any different than nonblack and nonindigenous people. But the likelihood of their being stopped and therefore the likelihood of their being charged is differential.

One of the things that we could do, then, is that we can use, you know, the great advantage we have nowadays of keeping statistics and analyzing statistics to identify whether or not there is that kind of inherent structural bias simply by using the information to see: is there a differential? Is there a differential between a person who is black, a person who is indigenous, or a person who is nonblack or nonindigenous in the terms of the likelihood of their being stopped in the first place? And if they are stopped, is there a differential in what percentage of them receive charges versus what percentage of them are given a warning?

There's some great power in the use of statistics. We can use it to identify problems in terms of the application, we can use it to identify risk factors, and we can use it to identify new programs moving forward that will actually address the problems that had been identified in the analysis of the statistics.

As a result of all of that, I am here tonight to talk about the need to have data that collects information on who is being stopped, who has moved from just being stopped and given a warning or a check, moving from just being given a check to being given just a warning to being given charges to actually having their car removed. Four different steps, all of which may be differential in terms of its application, and the only way that we know that is that we actually keep stats to do that.

On that, I have an amendment to bring forward this evening to ask that some data be gathered to allow us to do this important work moving forward.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member. We'll just give it one second for me to grab a copy of it and for the Government House Leader to get a copy.

If you could please read it into the record. And for the benefit of all those in the room, this will be referred to as amendment A6. Please go ahead.

Mr. Feehan: Thank you, Mr. Chair. The amendment to Bill 21, Provincial Administrative Penalties Act: on behalf of the Member for Calgary-Mountain View I move that Bill 21, the Provincial Administrative Penalties Act, be amended in section 44(29) by adding the following immediately after the proposed section 88.1.

88.101(1) A peace officer who issues a notice of administrative penalty to a driver under section 88, 88.01, 88.02, 88.03 or 88.1 must, immediately after issuing the notice, record, in accordance with the regulations, if any, the prescribed class of race or ethnicity of the driver.

(2) On or before March 31 of each year, the Minister must publish, in a non-identifiable form, all information recorded under subsection (1) during the calendar year that immediately preceded that year.

(3) For the purpose of subsection (1), the Minister may make regulations

- (a) prescribing classes of race or ethnicity, or
- (b) respecting the manner in which a peace officer records a driver's prescribed class of race or ethnicity.

The intention here is just simply for us to know some facts about the application of this law. It's very important that we do that because we know that people who are black, people who are indigenous have a different lived experience with regard to the application of the law. They are asking us to work with them in a nonracist manner to help them to identify when those laws are differentially applied so that we can work on the systemic underlying bias inherent in that differential application and resolve it such that somewhere down the road we can quite clearly and happily say that the application of the law is equal and does not reflect the colour of your skin.

I think that's something that all of us here in this House would love to see happen, and we just need to give ourselves the tools to do that. We just need to give ourselves the ability to identify when, in fact, there is a differential. Now, we can say: no, we just expect all officers to be nonracist. But as I've identified before, it's not necessarily just about bad judgment on the part of officers. That's something that we have to really be clear about here. This isn't an investigation of police officers' behaviour. This is an investigation of a systemic problem.

I've described this in my work with students in my social work classes. They come into my classes, and they often say to me, you know: "I have no prejudices, I'm not racist, and I think I'll be a good social worker as a result." Then I say to them things like: "Tell me about how many of the friends that you have are people that would be identified as nonwhite people." And very often they go: "Well, I've got lots." I say: "Name them." And they go: "Well, there's that guy I see on Saturday every once in a while at the market." You know, I'm being silly, but the point is that often while they've made no overt prejudicial judgment and taken actual action to be differential, as it turns out, if they actually count their friends and say, "In my inner circle, my 10 closest friends, what percentage of them are nonwhite?" very often the answer is zero. They are often stunned at this little exercise in the classroom. They're stunned because they did not make a choice to be racist.

What we're trying to teach them is that circumstances have led you to such a situation that while you didn't make a racist choice, you made a differential choice. You made a differential choice based on who it is that you sat next to in classes all the time. Well, you happened to sit next to the kids that kind of looked like you and that you felt comfortable with when you first walked in the room. You needed to find somebody to make yourself feel comfortable, so you sat by somebody who's the same age and same skin colour and other things that just naturally make you go, "I think I can talk to that person," whereas a gaggle of people who come from a particular ethnic community may sit together for the same reason: I want to be able to sit with somebody who I can chat to and talk about the theories in the social work class and that kind of thing. So they may sit together.

I walk into a class as a professor of social work, where we absolutely, adamantly say that we must practise from a nonracist perspective, and find myself looking at a class where the four people who are identifiable in terms of skin colour are all sitting together and perhaps sometimes slightly apart from the rest of the class. Pointing that out to the students is shocking to them, that

sometimes you actually have to walk into the class and say: I'm not going to sit beside the person who looks like me, is the same age as me, and probably is like me in a lot of ways, but I am going to go and sit beside the person who might teach me something new, who might inspire me to think differentially about the theories I'm about to learn because they come from a different perspective. It requires an active, nonracist participation.

That's what this amendment does for us. This amendment gives us the chance to notice that the class is split across race lines, that in this case the application of the law split across race lines. If we gather this data and we ask the police officers to just identify, "Is this an indigenous person? Is this a black person? Is this a person from the Philippines?" or some other identifiable marker and then at the end of the year we analyze the differences between the frequency of all of the aspects such as the number of people that were stopped in the first place, the number of people that were given a warning, the number of people that were moved to charges, and the number of people that were convicted and there is no statistical difference, then good on us; we've done a good job. Thank you very much.

7:50

I must say, though, that I really doubt that would be true, and the experience of black and indigenous people is such that they would tell us that they don't believe that would be true either. They think that the stats would say that you have a statistically significant difference between group A and group B. If you do, you actually got a small victory in the fact that you kept those stats. The small victory is that now you know you have an issue. You've identified a problem, and now you have the potential to identify the risk factors that led to that problem and to the pieces of resolution, which will help you to eliminate that problem from the application of the law.

In this particular case, I'm just asking for the work of police officers to help us be nonracist. Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods has risen to debate.

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. I'm pleased to rise to add to the debate on Bill 21, the Provincial Administrative Penalties Act, on amendment A6, which I believe we are currently on, which, moved on behalf of the Member for Calgary-Mountain View by my colleague for Edmonton-Rutherford, would allow the government to develop regulations to begin collecting really important race-based data, data that could then be used to analyze and identify any potential issues or perhaps confirm that there are none, as the Member for Edmonton-Rutherford suggested could be a potential outcome. But I agree with his assessment that, were we to talk to the experiences of black and indigenous people, that's not likely the end result we would see.

While I've risen in support of this amendment, I strongly wanted to encourage the government to consider support for this amendment. As I read it, it allows the government to take time to create regulations. It comes into effect if those regulations are drafted, ideally in consultation with impacted communities. Then they would come into effect. It reads: "in accordance with the regulations, if any, the prescribed class of race or ethnicity of the driver."

The reason that this amendment has been put forward today is because of the importance in the collection of race data, disaggregating that, and learning from it. We've in fact seen a trend within policing systems across Canada over the last 10 years, seven

years with a specific focus and an interest on it most recently with the rise of the Black Lives Matter movement that we are seeing in this current moment in time, with what we've seen in police stops in and around the province, just thinking about the example of Chief Allan Adam. Making sure that we have the data and are facing the challenge in front of us of making sure that we are confronting systemic racism and systemic bias within our systems, within our laws, within our policing I think is really, really important.

I would note, in support of this amendment, that the collection of race-based data is happening in a number of ways in other jurisdictions in different places. The Ontario Anti-Racism Act mandates race data collection "to identify and monitor systemic racism and racial disparities for the purpose of eliminating systemic racism and advancing racial equity." That's from a piece of legislation passed in Ontario specifically to address issues of racism and bias. The reason race data is collected is to help identify those statistical anomalies that the professor for Edmonton-Rutherford has talked about a few times in this House but also because race-based data has been shown to bring about reform.

In other jurisdictions where they've collected this data, it often leads to change, particularly when that data is made public. Alberta is actually known for its public dissemination of data. We have some really strong work – I believe it's the Ministry of Service Alberta that leads it – in open-data initiatives, sharing information and making that of use to programmers and others to be able to do analysis on it. When we have that disaggregated race data, we will be able to see if there are disproportionate higher rates for indigenous people, people of colour. We will be able to see if there is that differential application of the law happening in our province.

Given that the Provincial Administrative Penalties Act is being opened up in this very specific way, I think that this amendment is an excellent opportunity to come across party lines and to support the equal application of the law and to support making sure that we are looking at the data that we need to and making the best decisions that we can. Collecting the data will help quantify if there are any problems, and as part of the debate under Bill 21 – I know that members of my caucus have made this point – we have heard from some stakeholders who are concerned that there may be less review of some of the stops that are being changed in this legislation.

We had previously introduced some amendments that would have tried to guarantee some more opportunities for a review of the cases that involved the most judgment by police officers. Those amendments did not pass. We are now here on A6. But that allows us the opportunity of this amendment, to allow that race-based collection of data. It is critically important for us to understand if police stops are done in an impartial manner or not across the province. Now, the amendment wouldn't, of course, solve the problem, but it might help us to understand an important aspect and take meaningful steps to address any issues of bias, any identified challenges that we may have in our system or to develop new programs.

I'm a really big fan of data-based decision-making, having information, as much information as you can. In fact, I'm known as quite a nerd in my caucus and the printer of things and the studier of things. The collection of race-based data I think would improve our province and improve this piece of legislation.

I would note that the discussion of race-based data has reached my attention not in the matter of policing – and I share this anecdotally – but in the COVID-19 response. There are actually quite a few groups that are calling for the better collection of race-based data in COVID-19 diagnoses, exposures as well as the financial impacts of COVID-19 in our communities. There's a lot of current commentary right now that there is a differential impact of COVID-19 in our society.

I've certainly heard this probably coming more from the United States, U.S.-based news sources, but also I know, actually, that a couple of unions are running campaigns at the moment to encourage the government to include race-based data so that when we evaluate our COVID-19 response, we'll be able to look at how that response impacted different communities. That impact, we know, can be different, and it's only through having those statistics and being able to look at and take that critical examination that we can truly identify what those systemic biases and differences may be and set about working to resolve them.

I've heard from this government a commitment to antiracism. They've made those statements in the House. I think that this amendment allows an action to be taken, and it leaves the ball in the government's court to consult on and to develop regulations for how this would look. I would suggest that the opposition caucus has presented the government with an opportunity to accept this amendment and to add some very positive measures to this legislation.

8:00

I certainly support this amendment moved by my colleague from Edmonton-Rutherford. I very much appreciate his comments on this topic. At one point in his comments he made a joke about: if people are listening. I want to let him know that when he speaks in this House, I'm always attentive because I find it very informative, and I love that he's able to bring in his experience as an educator and, in turn, educate those of us here in the House through his remarks and bill debate. I appreciate that.

I want to give some appreciation to the Member for Calgary-Mountain View, who created this amendment and has been working on these issues quite diligently, and thank her for the work that she's done on the amendment.

That being said, I hope that I've presented a compelling case for the government caucus that this amendment is an opportunity. Time can be taken to develop regulations, to work with the community. This isn't something that needs to be implemented immediately.

It is a narrow application. The larger commentary around the collection of race-based data can still be had, but specifically when there is a penalty for a driver under sections 88, 88.01, 88.02, 88.03, or 88.1, now we will start to build a base of data upon which we can, again, do that analysis and identify biases, problems, opportunities for new programs so that we can get to what is our goal, which is, you know, the equal application of the law and a system that does not have those systemic biases. But we need to measure it in order to change it, and this is the opportunity to measure.

I hope that all members of this House will speak in support of this and, if not speak in support, will vote in support. With that, I will conclude my comments, Mr. Chair.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member, and thank you for clearing up the record with regard to Calgary-Mountain View as well.

Are there any other hon. members looking to join debate on amendment A6 to Bill 21?

[The voice vote indicated that the motion on amendment A6 lost]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 8:03 p.m.]

[Fifteen minutes having elapsed, the committee divided]

[Mr. Milliken in the chair]

For the motion:

| | | |
|--------|--------|---------|
| Carson | Feehan | Hoffman |
| Dach | Gray | Renaud |
| Dang | | |

Against the motion:

| | | |
|--------------------|---------------|------------|
| Allard | LaGrange | Pon |
| Armstrong-Homeniuk | Loewen | Rowswell |
| Copping | Long | Toews |
| Ellis | Madu | Turton |
| Glubish | Nicolaides | van Dijken |
| Gotfried | Nixon, Jeremy | Wilson |
| Issik | Panda | Yao |
| Jones | | |

| | | |
|---------|---------|--------------|
| Totals: | For – 7 | Against – 22 |
|---------|---------|--------------|

[Motion on amendment A6 lost]

The Deputy Chair: Moving back to the bill, Bill 21, are there any hon. members looking to join debate on Bill 21?

Seeing none, are you ready for the question on Bill 21, Provincial Administrative Penalties Act?

[The remaining clauses of Bill 21 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

The Deputy Chair: Shall the bill be reported? Are you agreed? All those in favour, please say aye.

Hon. Members: Aye.

The Deputy Chair: Any opposed, please say no. That is carried.

8:20

Bill 27

Alberta Senate Election Amendment Act, 2020

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

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. I appreciate the opportunity to rise in Committee of the Whole and speak to Bill 27, the Alberta Senate Election Amendment Act, 2020. I realize that there's already been substantive debate on this particular piece of legislation. Based on listening to the debate that's happened in this House, I have very, very strong concerns around Bill 27 because it's my view that the Alberta Senate Election Amendment Act and the changes that it makes to third-party advertising is going to do a disservice to our democracy. I will remind those viewing at home or reading *Hansard* that after this debate is concluded – Bill 27 has its pair, which is essentially Bill 26, and between those two it allows hundreds of thousands of dollars to be raised and spent to influence public opinion on political matters. I'm very concerned about the amount of transparency that is in place across these bills.

The change to the Senate Election Act allows for third-party advertisers to have a Senate election advertising account as well as a referendum advertising account as well as a general election advertising account. So with the changes in bills 26 and 27 we are looking at a situation of having a single third party being able to have multiple advertising accounts. For the Senate election the spending limit will be \$30,000, but for some of the other third-party spending accounts the totals get much bigger. I'm very concerned about the donation amounts and people being able to donate across multiple accounts as well as just more corporate money, more large

donors, people who can afford to spend thousands of dollars influencing elections and influencing our democratic process.

So with my comments at Committee of the Whole on Bill 27 to help frame my comments, I would like to introduce an amendment at this time.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member. If you could please read it into the record and then continue with any comments you'd like to make.

For the benefit of everyone here, this will be referred to as amendment A1.

Ms Gray: Amendment A1. Thank you, Mr. Chair. I move that Bill 27, Alberta Senate Election Amendment Act, 2020, be amended in section 15(9) by adding the following immediately after clause (b), and it would be clause (b.1), by adding the following after subsection (5):

(5.1) No third party shall, directly or indirectly, use a Senate election advertising contribution for a purpose other than for the payment of Senate election advertising expenses.

I'm pleased to speak to my reasons. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

What I'm attempting to do with this amendment is to make clear that even though a single third-party advertiser may have a referendum advertising account, a Senate advertising account, and a general advertising account, if and when they are collecting donations for a Senate election advertising contribution, a restriction that the money collected can only be used for Senate election advertising expenses to preclude the possibility of somebody donating to, let's suggest, a more general PAC that may have campaigns on multiple fronts at the same time because of course these elections can all happen concurrently as the legislation between bills 27, 26, and 29 are currently designed to work together.

I believe that this is a fairly straightforward amendment that simply allows somebody who is giving a contribution to a particular type of election advertising account, to a third-party advertiser, to know that their donation or their contribution will only be used for that type of expense. This addresses the same kind of democratic principles that I've recently heard the government caucus espouse around Bill 32, people being able to have that informed say about what happens with the money they provide. This is a very different context, but given the government caucus' fervor in defending these principles in Bill 32, it strikes me that that would make this a very clear and easy amendment for the government caucus to support. To not support this would be to support somebody giving a Senate election advertising contribution and having that used for an entirely different purpose, which not only would go against the intent of the person donating but, I believe, really blurs the lines and confuses and negatively impacts, potentially, our democracy going forward.

We need this distinction to be added. We need to make sure that this is clear going forward, and we may want to do similar amendments so that the related pieces of legislation can work together.

I really have concerns about those third parties having had their spending amounts dramatically raised, changing the amounts people can contribute, and now the fact that they can have multiple campaigns. I mean, to be clear, third-party advertisers have existed in our system, the difference being that now they can have multiple types of election accounts. Previously they could only have a single type. It was limited to a much lower overall ceiling, \$150,000, for third-party advertisers for general campaign election accounts. Of course, at that time you could only use that money for a general

election. Now there will be, potentially, simultaneous referendums as well as Senate elections.

What this amendment seeks to do is really just provide that clarity so that when someone is donating to a particular type of campaign and there is a third-party advertiser that is running and operating in multiple types, the contributor knows that when they give to a Senate election advertising campaign, that's what their money will be used for and spent on. I would not want to see the scenario of somebody donating to a third-party advertiser, thinking that it was going to support a friend or neighbour running for Senate that they are pleased to support, and then finding out that their money actually got spent on a referendum to do with pensions when it was not their intention to financially support the position of that third-party advertiser. This is the scenario that I think this amendment works to resolve.

Truly, I look at it and I see something very, very straightforward, which I look forward to hearing the government caucus, hopefully, respond to. It's common sense to me that if somebody is giving, essentially, a political donation, in this case to a third party wanting to influence the public discourse, the money they give to a particular source be used for the purpose for which they are giving it. I hope that I have framed this discussion well enough to convince all members of this Assembly to support what I think is a very reasonable amendment to the Alberta Senate Election Amendment Act, one that will improve Bill 27 and will help move the debate of this Legislature forward.

With that, I will conclude my comments, Mr. Chair, and hope that all members will vote in support of amendment A1 to Bill 27. Thank you.

8:30

The Deputy Chair: Thank you.

I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung has risen to debate on amendment A1.

Mr. Dach: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Glad to rise in favour of amendment A1, the amendment to Bill 27 moved by the Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods. I hearken to say that what we see in Bill 27 is a large step backwards to what some in the conservative movement in this province might see as the, quote, unquote, good old days. I happen to have lived in this province all my life, and I've seen, of course, the hegemony of Conservative parties, with one interruption by us last campaign election period. That hegemony switched gears, you know, in 1971, when 35 years of Social Credit rule was upset when, of course, Peter Lougheed with the Progressive Conservatives took power.

I graduated from high school in '75, after the first four years of Lougheed's reign, and believe me, Mr. Chair, in that period of time money flowed and money flowed freely, corporate money and private money, indeed. There was an attitude prevailing, which seems to be resurging now in certain conservative quarters, of going back to those days where money should be invited openly, and how dare we do anything to curtail or put any red flags up about how that money is used or how it's used to influence our elections? For this particular case Senate elections would be the platform that we're talking about, but bills 26 and 27 are kind of in tandem, where money is being put back into the political process for Senate elections and also for other election matters.

In this particular case what we're doing with this amendment, Mr. Chair, is to set clear guidelines, to say clearly that the public has a right to know exactly what's going on with the money that's being raised for a specific purpose and that it is actually being applied and used only for that specific purpose, that being the Senate election advertising expenses.

You know, I think back to last term when I was sitting in a Public Accounts Committee meeting, and one of the old guard of the Progressive Conservative Party, a former high school mate of mine, in fact, somebody who described himself as the last of the PC's privateers, the former Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster – I'll never forget his absolute dismay and shock when I was debating and arguing in favour of having oversight over money that was coming into nomination meetings, and he was absolutely dumbfounded that we would think that the public has any business interfering, in his words, in a private club. That's the type of attitude that prevailed then and, I think, is still pervasive in certain conservative circles now when we come to talk about the re-entry, the reinvasion of private money into the electoral process, in this particular case in the Senate elections that are proposed by Bill 27, that private money can be brought in and not just small bits of pieces of it, Mr. Chair, but very big gobs of it.

So this amendment is a way of saying: yes, indeed, there is a large degree of public interest and a large right on the part of the public to know exactly who has been raising this money and making sure that it is not somehow, under the table, moved over to another purpose other than what it was donated for and to enshrine that requirement in law, in the legislation by adopting this amendment here in this House.

We are battling an uphill battle, Mr. Chair, here to try to put some clarity and try to shed some light on this massive flood of money that the UCP government is inviting back into our electoral politics, whether it be by way of the Senate Election Amendment Act, whether it be by municipal government changes to allow money to enter into that process, whether it be entering into a referendum debate. In all cases we're talking about hundreds of thousands of dollars combined in different platforms to enable private interest to influence the electoral process.

In fact, Mr. Chair, the process that we talk so dearly about in this Legislature, the democratic process, is founded upon an electoral process that not only should be seen to be fair but should actually be fair. When we were government we actually did make steps and changes that went a long ways to ensuring that money did not influence the outcome of our elections. That is something that was widely accepted and endorsed by our electorate. They certainly are aghast, I think, right now at the measures being taken by this government to unabashedly reinvent money into the political process.

We probably think as Canadians that we are somehow different from the United States electoral system, where money runs roughshod over the electoral process, where political action committees are able to dictate major policy measures within the United States, whether it be gun control or social policies. In this country we – we were, at least, trying to set an example in Alberta during our reign that the electoral process was to be left to individuals and not to those individuals or corporate interests which have the biggest and deepest pockets.

This is one small measure. I wish we could do more right now. I certainly know that on this side of the House we're going to be railing against the introduction of big money into our electoral process whenever the opportunity affords it by bringing forward amendments such as this. I encourage all members of the House to support this very reasonable amendment, to show clarity and to let the public know that we hear them, and we are certainly not opposed to making sure that their dollars that are donated to advertise during an election or Senate are used only for that purpose and not somehow slid away to support another element of the electoral process.

I encourage all members to support the amendment and look forward to every opportunity of shedding light on how money is

invited back into the electoral process by this current UCP government, to go back to the so-called glory days of the Conservative era, which, in fact, was infested with money dedicated to purposes contrary to the public interest.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other hon. members looking to join debate on amendment A1?

[Motion on amendment A1 lost]

The Deputy Chair: Moving on to Bill 27 proper, Alberta Senate Election Amendment Act, 2020, are there any hon. members looking to join debate? I see the hon. Member for St. Albert has risen.

Ms Renaud: Sorry. No. Never mind.

The Deputy Chair: Are you ready for the question on Bill 27, Alberta Senate Election Amendment Act, 2020?

[The remaining clauses of Bill 27 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

The Deputy Chair: Shall the bill be reported? All those in favour, please say aye.

Hon. Members: Aye.

The Deputy Chair: Any opposed, please say no. That is carried as well.

I see the hon. Member for Calgary-West has risen.

Mr. Ellis: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. I move that the committee rise and report Bill 21 and Bill 27.

[Motion carried]

[Mr. Milliken in the chair]

Mr. van Dijken: Mr. Speaker, the Committee of the Whole has had under consideration certain bills. The committee reports the following bill: Bill 27. The committee reports the following bill with some amendments: Bill 21. I wish to table copies of all amendments considered by the Committee of the Whole on this date for the official records of the Assembly.

8:40

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

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

Hon. Members: Aye.

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

Government Bills and Orders Third Reading

Bill 27

Alberta Senate Election Amendment Act, 2020

The Acting Speaker: Hon. members, are there any hon. members looking to join debate? I see the hon. Member for Calgary-West, with 20 minutes, just to be clear.

Mr. Ellis: Yes. I'm going to move this on behalf of the hon. minister.

Mr. Speaker, thank you very much. I rise on behalf of the Minister of Justice to move third reading of Bill 27, the Alberta Senate Election Amendment Act, 2020.

Renewing the Senate election law restored Albertans to a leadership role in pushing for democratically elected Senators. This legislation requires a few updates to keep Senate elections running smoothly and efficiently. If passed, Bill 27 would make minor wording and housekeeping changes to the Alberta Senate Election Act to ensure consistency. This bill would also give the Minister of Municipal Affairs the same directive-making powers he has during the municipal elections when a Senate election is held in conjunction with a municipal election. For example, these ministerial powers could be used to address such matters as adjusting notice requirements to align with local media publications and dates, adjusting polling station requirements due to unforeseen local circumstances, or adjusting ballot box requirements. Now, although the changes Bill 27 would make are minor, they further strengthen the legislation and further solidify Alberta's work to strengthen democracy in Canada.

I request that we move third reading of Bill 27, the Alberta Senate Election Amendment Act.

Thank you again, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member, for moving third reading.

Are there any members looking to join debate? I see the hon. Member for St. Albert has risen.

Ms Renaud: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise and speak to Bill 27, Alberta Senate Election Amendment Act, 2020, in third reading. As my colleague said just a few minutes ago, I think that as we're debating or talking about Bill 27, it is important also to note that it is making its way through this place at the same time, around the same time as Bill 26 is as well. I think that when you consider some of the significant financial changes that will be ushered in as a result of Bill 27, you need to think about what also is coming as a result of Bill 26. There is the potential for these two pieces of legislation to introduce, as we've said again and again, a lot more money, a lot of dark money in the sense that we don't really know where it comes from or what the exact purpose is. It has the ability to fundamentally change elections and, I think, you know, to add to that, election outcomes.

Bill 27, the Alberta Senate Election Amendment Act. You know, I've said that I understand that this government has decided to expend a fair amount of human capital, I guess, and legislative time on introducing these changes. I would suggest, just given the time that we're in, that we actually have some time until the next municipal elections occur. There is some time. I would question: why is it that this is such a priority for this government? I think that I am led to believe, or I believe, actually, that it is about the money. With these two pieces of legislation the government has given themselves and their friends, really, the ability to introduce a lot more spending than the current limits allow.

So if you add the two things together, you've got, like, another \$30,000 for a Senate election, \$500,000 for a referendum, and, obviously, unknown amounts for local elections as we've still not understood what that's going to look like.

So I would suggest, you know, that they keep telling us, Mr. Speaker, that this is only to make things run smoothly and these are only minor housekeeping changes and, really, this is about strengthening democracy. But I actually don't really buy that. I think that people should choose their representation based on an alignment of values, an alignment of vision for whatever that office might be, whether it's municipal elections, whether it's people that

are running to sit on a school board, whatever that might be. Campaigns need to be campaigns, and the people running in campaigns need to be about the issues, not about the money and the dark money.

I think we've all seen – you know, sadly, in this day and age we're just bombarded with information, whether it's online, whether it's on our phones, whether it's on different social media applications and platforms, television, obviously. We are bombarded with information that tells us that when it comes to elections, not just in our country and not just in our province but around the world, it happens quite frequently that people with a lot of money find loopholes, find ways to influence the outcome of elections. I'm not talking about cheating or people voting that are not eligible to vote. I'm talking about influencing the voter.

You think about democracy. In an ideal situation that should be about an individual voter being asked a question: who is the person that you believe would most likely represent you and your values and what you would like to see happen? It shouldn't be about who has the biggest advertising campaign and who's going to post articles on your Facebook feed every three minutes for the next two months or who is going to bombard you with radio ads because they have a lot of money or digital billboards or maybe going to drive around with a truck with a big billboard. They're going to say: well, you know, it's not really us. It's third-party advertising, somebody like, let's say, Rebel media, that would choose to target a couple of candidates.

That's the kind of stuff that dark money finances. That's the kind of thing that I think when we sat down – after being elected in 2015, one of the first things that we did with Bill 1 was to look at election financing around elections to make them as fair as possible. Now, was it perfect? No, absolutely not. I don't think any piece of legislation is ever perfect. I think that's why we're constantly reviewing and proposing amendments. But I think it's important to know that we did try to. The goal really was simple. It was to level the playing field so that every single person involved in that election had equal opportunity. So if there was a cap on spending, that applied to everybody.

What this piece of legislation does in terms of Alberta Senate elections and, you know, obviously, referendum elections – and let me just be clear here. Again: the NDP hates referendums and democracy. No, we don't. What we don't like is bringing big money into elections and then just convoluting the issues and creating enough cover so that money goes back into advertising, the same kind of money that we tried to take out in terms of levelling the playing field.

But going back to this, when we brought in Bill 1, we wanted to do everything that we could. Certainly, there is more work to do. But that is why we capped donations, so that every single person had the ability to donate the same amount to wherever they wanted to. We also ensured that corporations and unions didn't have the ability to influence the outcome of elections. Is there more to do around PACs? Of course there is. But I think these two pieces of legislation, when taken together, particularly Bill 27, take us backwards because it is about big money.

You know, government will say that this is really just about making sure that whatever person is sort of promoted to the Senate or assigned to the Senate will be representative of the wishes of the people of Alberta. Well, I would suggest that when you're spending that kind of money and you're blending it in with other elections and referendums, there's not a whole lot of clarity there to begin with.

Anyway, the other thing I would like to talk about is – I've said this before – in a four-year term, if you look at all of the sitting days that we have, there isn't a lot of legislative time in terms of focusing

on, you know, some of the work that needs to get done. I think any government would tell you, Mr. Speaker, that there isn't enough time. There are so many things to get done. There are so many things to review and update and check. It's probably a nonstop process of trying to decide which is most important and which should take precedent over the other and what kind of activity needs to happen. What do the people of Alberta need the most? What needs to be done? What potentially causes the most harm?

8:50

I would suggest that during this time that we're in right now, where commodity prices are awful – you know, thankfully, they're not negative anymore, but they're awful – people are struggling. Thousands of people have lost their jobs. There's uncertainty. We don't know what's going to happen in September with the children. We are in the middle of the worst public health emergency in over a hundred years. There's a lot of uncertainty and fear, obviously, there. There are all kinds of things going on. So I would suggest that to focus the time and the attention that we are on electing Senators when we really don't know if the outcome will be exactly what the government wants, is a bit of a risk. We're investing all of this time and money to do that? Really? You look at the track record. I think we've had – if you look at all of the Senate elections that we've had in Alberta, there hasn't been a lot of success. I think that there have been 10 elected and only about half, I believe, have been appointed.

I would suggest that this is about money. This isn't about what's best for Albertans right now. This isn't about what they need right now. This really doesn't – I don't know. I'm sure that people are getting the telephone calls and e-mails that my office gets about the things that people are concerned about right now. I've not received one that said: "Holy cow. We really need to reform the Senate election legislation because there is not enough money being invested into advertising to get someone elected when we don't know whether or not they'll get to sit on the Senate." That's not a priority. That has not been a priority in my office. I don't know about the other offices. I'd certainly be happy to hear if that's not the case, but that's not what's happening in my office.

What I'm hearing is that people need jobs, people don't have jobs, people don't know about school, people don't have child care, people are really worried about child care, and poverty is a huge issue. All of these things are a huge issue. Not one constituent that I can recall has talked to me about the need to have more money involved in Senate elections in Alberta. Not one.

I would go back to the very premise of, I think, democracy in this province, in Canada, for sure. It's sort of this ideal picture that we have that each one of us, each Canadian that is eligible to vote, has the same vote. Our votes all matter. We should be choosing the person that best reflects our values and best reflects back to us the vision that we have for our province, our municipality, our town, our country. We all know this about elections, that it makes it a whole lot easier to get elected or re-elected if you have a lot of money, particularly if you have a lot more money than your opponent.

This is why I'm concerned about this piece of legislation. I know when I spoke – I think it was in second reading that I read some of the press release that the AUMA had shared. They were very clear about what some of their concerns were and – they were far more eloquent than I am – why they believed it was so important to protect local elections, to not introduce more money, to not introduce other issues that were unrelated to those specific elections, whether they were to elect trustees to school boards or whether that was to elect reeves, mayors, councillors, whatever that might be. I would encourage people to have a look at the AUMA

site, to have a look at the things that were laid out. The principles that they laid out were actually very good. They talked about, you know: we make these decisions; we look at legislation based on these core principles or core values as they relate to municipalities and municipal elections.

I don't believe that this piece of legislation – I would suggest Bill 26 as well, but since we're focused on Bill 27, I would suggest that Bill 27 doesn't go anywhere near meeting the principles that were outlined by the AUMA. They do introduce dark money. It does change the way local elections are held. We all know it. When there are tens of thousands, hundreds of thousands of dollars introduced into whatever campaigns, we know that it tips scales. We know that it gives more people power to influence, that it becomes less about equality and ideas and expressing those ideas one voter at a time and it becomes more about the power of money and advertising. That certainly worries me.

Again, I would like to remind the House, not that I think it matters to them because I've said it a few times, that, you know, we've already spent, we've expended some legislative capital already on Senate issues, which leads me to believe that we didn't – obviously, government didn't get it right the first time. Maybe they thought that they needed more power in terms of money to ensure that they had an advantage – I'm just hypothesizing here – because I think that things are not going well for this government. I actually know that things are not going well for this government, so I believe that, once again, this is another step to try to exert power where they have no business exerting power, Mr. Speaker.

Again, I will not, obviously, be supporting Bill 27. I believe in democracy. I believe that every voter should be as important as the next voter. I think that money, big money especially, has no business in particularly local elections, provincial elections. I would suggest, you know, to look back. All of the big money that was used to get the other Senators elected and then some of them appointed: if you look at what that did, again, going back to 1989, the elections from '89 to 2012, we elected – who came in first? They were all men. I would suggest that there was not a lot of diversity there, and there was a lot of the same organization and the same money behind these candidates.

If indeed we are truly committed to democracy, equality, fairness and we're actually dedicated and we believe in the importance of diversity and introducing diversity into governance, not just at a local level in our towns and municipalities and not just on school boards and not just in the province but federally as well, if we believe that our Senate should reflect the diversity of Canada, then I think that if you look at the history of what we've done in Alberta, you would agree with me that – you know what? – maybe we need to rethink this, that we're not quite getting there. We have not, clearly. We have not at all. Yeah.

I'm going to conclude my remarks fairly soon, Mr. Speaker. I just wanted to say that I think that one of the most – and I've come to appreciate this more and more as we go. I've come to appreciate that one of the most important things in this place is actually transparency. I think it's an easy word to say. It's a lot more difficult to say that you are doing everything that you can to be transparent and to ensure that if people ask questions, they can get answers like: "Who funded this? Where did this money come from? Who does this lobbyist represent? Who backed this candidate?" All of these things are about transparency, and I don't believe that Bill 27 in any way strengthens the transparency in this province as it relates, in this case, to Senate elections because it introduces a lot more money into this process, and it reduces our ability to truly tell who is doing what.

I would also suggest that this government does not have a good track record in terms of transparency and oversight. Let's not forget

that they summarily, through legislation, fired the person investigating them. I do believe that it is important to remember that.

With that, I'm going to take my seat. Thank you for allowing me to speak on Bill 27.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other hon. members looking to join debate?

Ms Goodridge: On 29(2)(a)?

The Acting Speaker: There is no 29(2)(a) on this. There will be, however, 29(2)(a) available after the next speaker.

I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-West Henday has risen with 15 minutes. Then there will be five minutes of opportunity for 29(2)(a) after.

Mr. Carson: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's an honour to rise this evening and speak to Bill 27, the Alberta Senate Election Amendment Act, 2020. I share many concerns with the previous speaker, my colleague from St. Albert, in my concern that instead of spending time recognizing that we are in the middle of a pandemic, on ensuring that there is adequate funding for child care, which this government has desperately failed on, ensuring that there are proper procedures and guidelines in place for the re-entry of students into the education system coming very, very soon, instead of talking about that and ensuring that those processes are in place, we're talking about a bill before us, Bill 27. You know, the government likes to talk about how they are – I believe the member who introduced it this evening called it housekeeping changes, but I would beg to differ, that it is not simply housekeeping changes. We see through this legislation and the other pieces through Bill 26 and Bill 29 the idea of the re-entry of massive amounts of money from this UCP government or the allowance of that money to be re-entering into our political system, which is very concerning.

9:00

I think back even to the last American election, of course, the election of Donald Trump and even before that, but the idea of things like Cambridge Analytica and the ability of organizations, often not transparent organizations, that are working behind closed doors for whatever issue is willing to pay them the most amount of money at the end of the day. We're seeing a shift in elections where, really, it comes down to the ability to harvest, collect, and use people's information. I would say that the development of the Cambridge Analytica story was quite insidious, and the prevalence of ideas like gathering and harvesting people's information, whether it be through text messages, as we're starting to see more and more, in this situation – you know, all parties in the province are using that. But even more insidious: the idea of an organization like Cambridge Analytica or some of these Facebook organizations that have not been transparent up to this point collecting people's public information on the Internet.

It's very concerning because in most cases people don't recognize that it's actually happening. So through the Cambridge Analytica scandal, I would call it, that happened, anyone that had a Facebook profile that had posted anything to the public had their information collected and, in many cases, used against them to try and convince them to support a certain way of thinking. It's very concerning that at the same time as we should be working to strengthen our democratic principles and the idea of democracy in our province, this government is actually opening the door for more money to be spent on data collection in this manner.

We saw a very reasonable amendment that just came before the House from, I believe, the Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods,

recognizing that if we are going to allow this money, which I do not support, to re-enter the system, it needs to be accounted for, and in that case, ensuring that if, as this government says, this money is only to be spent on election advertising, it is not spent on things like data gathering and data harvesting because that is a massive concern. Once again, through Bill 27, not only that bill but the other two bills before the House, bills 26 and 29, there is a massive amount of money coming back into the system with very little accountability attached to it.

As has been stated, our first piece of legislation when we were in government, elected in 2015: we brought forward election reforms, and some of those, very important ones, had to do with donation limits. We moved to \$4,000 per individual per year from \$15,000 and \$30,000 during election years. Well, we see through changes in Bill 29 that it is going to change immensely the ability of people to donate, you know, more than \$4,000 but, in many cases, donate to as many people as they want that amount of money or \$5,000 in that instance. It's very concerning. What this government is saying is that if you're willing to put up that money, then they're willing to accept it, and that is the exact opposite direction that we should be going in.

I've stood in this House before, and I've said that I recognize the importance of election advertising and the ability of candidates to gather money and that in many cases people can vote with their wallet. Obviously, on election day the most important thing is that one person, one vote, but they should have the opportunity to support a candidate that they want with limits. But what this government is proposing through these pieces of legislation is that those limits be essentially removed in a lot of cases and, you know, even more so in Bill 29. When we look at Bill 27 and the ability of organizations, third-party action committees to donate this money and let it happen, it's very concerning.

You know, not only in the previous American election and many before that for decades and decades have we seen the prevalence of super PACs and the ability of corporations and organizations to donate any amount of money that they'd like to whichever candidate or idea that they want to see supported. It should not be something that we're willing to allow in Canada, by and large.

The government is talking about that this is strengthening democracy, the idea that Senate elections strengthen democracy, and, you know, on that point I can appreciate that if we were actually talking about electing a Senator, then maybe we'd have a different story. I would still be opposed to the spending limits that they're putting in here and the unaccountability that is in here and that there's no transparency in here, but if we were actually talking about the fact that Alberta was now able to actually elect their Senators and the federal government was forced to accept those elections and the election results, that would be an entirely different situation. But that is not what we have here right now. The fact is that even if we go through an election process for a Senator, the federal government has no responsibility to actually follow through and appoint the person that was elected, quote, unquote, in our province.

Really, what this is is the government allowing more money to come into the system. I really appreciated the words of the previous member, the Member for St. Albert, in the idea that Bill 1 strengthened the legislation. The election reforms that we brought forward strengthened the system in our province, not only from accountability for money and further spending caps on election periods and candidate spending limits and third-party advertising spending caps – those are all things that we took action on – but even with all of those things in place, I also, like the previous member stated, believe that we could have done more.

But what we have before us this evening in Bill 27 and the other two election reform bills is the opposite. This government is saying that they want more unaccountable money to be brought into the system. They want to allow more money to be allowed to be spent without accountability, without standard auditing practices.

We kind of saw this coming if we look back to the leadership race of the UCP and the fact that – and I've raised this in the House before – the Premier, at that time, running for the leadership of the UCP, promised his own party and all Albertans that he would be accountable and he would show his numbers on who donated to him, where the money came from, if it was even Canadian money, because in the case of leadership races in the UCP, as far as I know, that money could come from anywhere in North America and possibly even further. We asked, or the public asked, for accountability, and the Premier, running for the leadership at that time, promised that that would be the case. But here we are a year later, and still nothing has been brought to us.

I, once again, am not entirely surprised that when the UCP had the opportunity to fix spending limits and impose increased transparency, whether through Bill 27, Bill 29, Bill 26 – they had the opportunity to increase transparency, but they went the opposite direction in most cases.

It's very concerning, Mr. Speaker, the idea, once again, that money is able to buy elections. We see it, and both the UCP and the NDP have brought up the idea of, you know, advertising being used against them. We saw in the previous provincial election that specific candidates were targeted with very hateful comments that did not add any value, in my opinion, I suppose, but in most opinions, to the idea of democracy or the idea of ensuring that issues are front and centre to the debate. Instead, they were personal attacks used against candidates from whatever party it may have been. That is not how elections should be decided. It should be about ideas. It shouldn't be about sound clips or anything else. Once again, looking back to the idea of Cambridge Analytica, it shouldn't be who's able to spend the most amount of money to collect as many people's information off of social media platforms as they can.

9:10

I truly believe – and I've knocked on thousands and thousands of doors since I was first elected in 2015 – that it should be about those grassroots movements, but elections are quickly moving to the opposite direction. They are quickly moving to be who can pay consultants the most amount of money to harvest people's information, and that is, I would say, counter to democracy and counter to the values that we as elected officials and as citizens of a democratic society should hold true.

While the government tries to say that this is about, you know, housekeeping in the Senate Election Act and they try to say that they're strengthening what is before us, it is simply not the case. It's very frustrating because we know that this Premier, above all else, is fantastic at making friends with a lot of money. He is also very good at making sure that they feel that their money was well spent, so when we talk about allowing Senate candidates to accept this money with no paper trail and no accounting, that's very concerning for us.

Once again, I believe that we need to get back to the basics of grassroots democracy. It should not be who can make the coolest Facebook page and convince the most people against another idea. I suppose that's one way to do it, but what we're seeing is much more insidious than that. We're seeing organizations that are unaccountable across Canada using people's information against them, using targeted advertisements against them, and I am very concerned that, through Bill 27 and the other bills before the House,

that is exactly what this UCP government is asking people to be able to do or ensuring that they're able to continue doing that and spending more and more money.

I have to, once again, reflect on the conversations that happened through Bill 1 and, I think, even through subsequent amendments to the way that we participate in democracy in Alberta, conversations with the Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods and the important work that that member did as the minister to ensure that there was increased accessibility, whether it be increased advance voting days that voters were able to go to any advance poll instead of having to go to the poll where they lived in, ensuring that there were mobile polls at emergency shelters and support centres for those experiencing homelessness and poverty. These are all incredibly important moves that were made by that member and by the NDP government to ensure that no matter who you were, how much money you made, where you lived, that you would have the opportunity to vote.

We are not seeing through any of the bills before the House that that is being strengthened through the proposed changes that this government is making, and that's very concerning to me. Instead of ensuring – once again, we look at Bill 29. Still the government has not made the decision to ensure that municipal candidates have to have their financial statements in before election day, so we're finding out after the fact who has actually paid for these people's campaigns. That's very concerning. Once again, this government, instead of actually strengthening the process, strengthening transparency, and even ensuring that we're strengthening the caps on how much money could be spent, is going the opposite way.

I would, once again, reflect on that many members before me have spoken to the fact that there are much bigger issues that we should be focused on. I just went through my constituency e-mail. There was not one e-mail about Bill 27, not one e-mail about Senate elections, and definitely not any e-mails about the need to add more money into Senate elections or any election in that matter. When I talk to people, in many cases they would like to see less money being spent. They would like to see fewer e-mails, fewer text messages to their phones, fewer lawn signs, fewer billboards, but this government is doing the exact opposite of that. There is going to be much more of that, of which I'm sure my constituents are going to be very concerned, and we will see many e-mails about that fact but not about the fact that before there wasn't enough money in Senate elections.

With that being said, Mr. Speaker, I will not be supporting this. [Mr. Carson's speaking time expired] That works.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

I see the hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs has risen on 29(2)(a).

Mr. Madu: Thank you so much, Mr. Speaker. I just wanted to rise to speak to Bill 27 in light of some of the comments that have already been made by members opposite. I think that it is important, you know, for us to remember that one of the reasons why the members opposite are opposed to Bill 27 and some of the bills that we have put forward before this particular House that will ensure that the people eventually get to decide their elections is because even though in listening to them you would think that that is their focus, their interest, in reality they are pursuing the interest of their union masters. By the way, in the last election the Alberta Federation of Labour and their union allies spent upwards of \$1.8 million to campaign against the Conservatives. That is exactly the type of dark money that we want to get rid of in politics.

You would not hear them, the members opposite, talk about the influence of their union bosses on our elections, but they are quick

to talk about how ordinary citizens across this particular province deserve to have their voices heard, not just by coming out to vote or seeking election but by also supporting the candidate of their choice across our province. That they have a fundamental quarrel with, all part of the narrative if you carefully listen to them. At the heart of their anger, the NDP anger, is the fact that we on this particular side are empowering ordinary citizens to be able to run, seek elective office, have the tools to be able to vote as they would like, and be able to support the candidates of their choice against their union bosses.

You know, Mr. Chair, the Alberta Federation of Labour president spent \$1.8 million and, by the way, under the changes that were made by the NDP when they were in office. They like to talk about the influence of third parties in our election. The blunt truth is that the commitment of those of us on this particular side is to cap third-party contributions to \$30,000. That is a platform commitment, and we are going to follow through with that. You know why? To make sure that the dark money they talk about all the time has no place to influence our elections.

Mr. Chair, I mean, the members opposite need to pay close attention to one thing. They like to talk about diversity, you know, people from different cultural groups and women being able to participate in our elections. The truth, again, is that in the last election we, the United Conservative Party, ran more women than the entire NDP caucus combined. If the NDP were also to pay attention – all they need to do is to take a look at this side of the aisle – they will see strong, successful women and minorities across various cultural backgrounds on this side of the aisle.

You know, I know this because in my own constituency of Edmonton-South West I took on one of the NDP's most established candidates, who, by the way, came after those of us in Edmonton-South West and asked the people of Edmonton-South West to vote as if their skin was not white. This is the same political party that would want you to believe that they are the ones that speak to minority rights, but their established candidate . . . [The time limit for questions and comments expired]

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

Just for the benefit of all those in the House, “chair” is the reference that you would use for an individual, either myself or the hon. Member for Airdrie-East, regarding “Madam Chair” or “Mr. Chair,” during Committee of the Whole, and then in second and third readings the correct reference would be “Mr. Speaker” or “Madam Speaker.”

Are there any other hon. members looking to join debate on Bill 27?

Seeing none, the hon. Minister of Justice and Solicitor General has the opportunity to close debate.

9:20

Mr. Madu: Mr. Speaker, waived.

The Acting Speaker: I hear that it has been waived. Therefore, we will move on to the question.

[Motion carried; Bill 27 read a third time]

Bill 26

Constitutional Referendum Amendment Act, 2020

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

Mr. Ellis: Why, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to rise on behalf of the Minister of Justice to move third reading of Bill 26, the Constitutional Referendum Amendment Act, 2020.

Our government has spent the last year talking with Albertans about a variety of topics. Through our conversations and through the Fair Deal Panel Albertans have told us that they want more say in what kinds of initiatives government puts in place. They want us to clean up Alberta's politics and strengthen our democracy. This is what we promised to do, and now we are doing it.

If passed, Bill 26 would allow referendums to be held in Alberta on more topics beyond constitutional matters. Referendums enhance democracy by allowing citizens to participate in the process by voting on specific issues, giving them a real and direct say on issues and laws that affect them. This would allow us to ensure that our government-led initiatives and programs actually meet the current and future needs of Albertans. This act would allow the government to hold referendums on a number of government-led initiatives or matters of public interest before they are implemented. This would include some of the recommendations of the Fair Deal Panel.

Mr. Speaker, Albertans have told us that they want a bigger say and a stronger voice in the matters that affect their day-to-day lives and the future of this province. This bill does just that.

I request that we move third reading of Bill 26, the Constitutional Referendum Amendment Act, 2020. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any hon. members looking to join debate on third reading of Bill 26, Constitutional Referendum Amendment Act, 2020? I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-South has risen.

Mr. Dang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise tonight and speak to Bill 26, the Constitutional Referendum Amendment Act, 2020. I think it is very rich what this government is introducing and has spoken to about Bill 26 tonight and previously in this place. Certainly, we know that this bill does nothing of the sort in terms of strengthening democracy. Instead, it is sneaking big money back into politics, it is allowing dark money to be used in politics, and it is hiding the truth from Albertans and hiding the realities of what we are seeing happen to Albertans. This Premier and this government spoke about how they wanted a citizen-driven process, and instead of that, we are seeing corporations and companies being able to spend up to \$350,000, being able to raise up to half a million dollars without disclosing any of that information. Just like in this Premier's leadership campaign, Albertans may never know what the money is being spent on in Alberta to change how they think, to change what they believe, and to affect the democracy that we see in this place.

This isn't about strengthening democracy. Instead, this is about the Premier being able to set the rules for referenda as he chooses, it's about the Premier being able to set the question for referenda as he chooses, and then it's about the Premier's big donor friends being able to spend up to \$350,000 without telling Albertans a single thing about where that money came from or where that money is going. It simply shows that we are bringing democracy back into the shadows. This government is trying to bring democracy back into the Dark Ages, and it's trying to hide from Albertans the realities of what should be open democratic processes.

Mr. Speaker, Albertans should be free to organize themselves and fight for the issues they believe in, not just the ones that this Premier chooses to approve and agree with. But at least now it makes sense. It makes sense what this government has been doing. It makes sense why this government gave \$4.7 billion away to already profitable

corporations. It makes sense why this government is Americanizing our systems. Indeed, those companies that are already profitable now have larger handouts, can take that money and spend up to \$350,000 of it, give up to \$500,000 of it without disclosing a single detail to the Alberta public. Whether they are spending that money to support the Premier's leadership campaign or whether they are spending that money to change Albertans' minds on democratic issues and democratic reform, we will never know.

Just like this Premier never disclosed what happened in his leadership campaign and just like this Premier couldn't run a leadership campaign without getting the RCMP involved, Mr. Speaker, we will never be able to see what will happen in these referenda. We will never be able to understand because this government is deciding to allow dark money into politics. This government is deciding to allow corporations to hide their books from Albertans, is allowing corporations to make donations that are completely hidden from the sunlight, and the reality is that this government is no longer ensuring that democracy is sustained and strengthened in this province. This bill does nothing of what they are purporting it to do. This bill does nothing, in terms of what they are purporting, to strengthen democracy. Instead, it completely weakens our systems. It weakens our democracy, it weakens Albertans' trust in democracy, and it weakens Albertans' ability to understand what is actually happening when they go to the ballot box.

There is going to be so little oversight with this bill, there's going to be so little democratic process, there are going to be so few checks and balances that the reality is that Albertans cannot be reasonably expected to understand what is happening when corporations are spending their \$4.7 billion in political advertising. This government claims that they are against dark money. This government claims that they are against hidden powers trying to influence and make the moves in politics, but instead, Mr. Speaker, we see the exact opposite of that in Bill 26. We see the exact opposite of those words in Bill 26.

Mr. Speaker, we say it many times in this place and I've said it many times in this place: indeed, actions speak louder than words. The actions that this government has been doing are very clear. We've seen time and time again that this Premier has refused to release his donors from his leadership campaign. This Premier has had the RCMP forced onto his leadership campaign. This Premier is now refusing to tell Albertans, in third-party advertising campaigns during referenda, who will be spending that money, who will be raising that money, where that money will be coming from. Will it be coming from out of province? Will it be coming from foreign-funded nationals and organizations? We will never know because this government is supporting dark money in politics. This government is supporting hiding that information from voters, hiding that information from Albertans, and it is not being transparent at all with our democratic process.

Mr. Speaker, I think that it is very clear that every single member of this place should vote against this bill. It is very clear that this bill is an attack on our democratic principles, is an attack on our institutions, and is an attack on the way that we do democracy in this province.

With that, I would implore every single member of this Assembly to vote against Bill 26 in third reading. Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

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

Ms Goehring: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise this evening to discuss and debate Bill 26, Constitutional Referendum

Amendment Act, 2020. This is definitely a piece of legislation that is concerning. I know that when we were government, I was very proud of our very first piece of legislation, taking big money out of politics, stopping unions and corporations from being able to donate. That was something that was very important. It was something that we heard door-knocking, that the people of Alberta wanted big money out of politics. Now we see that this UCP government is doing exactly the opposite. This piece of legislation as well as Bill 27, that was just passed, brings big money back into politics. There's quite a big concern about what this means.

I know that when we made that decision in 2015, it was based on what Albertans were telling us, that they wanted to see this type of political advantage taken away. What it essentially means is that those with the biggest pockets have the biggest voice, and that was something that I know, when I was campaigning, I heard loud and clear.

9:30

I'm not really sure why this piece of legislation is being brought forward, especially right now, in the middle of a pandemic, where my constituents are asking about things like health care. They're asking about child care. They're asking about jobs, things like supports for small business, the arts. Those are the things that Albertans are talking about. Those are the things right now that Albertans are worried about, care about, not whether or not big money can be brought back into government elections. It's certainly not something that I'm hearing a concern about. Right now globally people are talking about this pandemic and what the economic impact is and what the government's strategy is to fix that, not about ways to bring big money back into politics.

So I can say, Mr. Speaker, that the timing of this just seems completely baffling, especially when the work of the Select Special Democratic Accountability Committee hasn't been completed yet. Why we're bringing this forward right now, when we don't have the work from this committee done, is very confusing to me. It just doesn't make sense, why this is coming now, when we don't have direction from that select special committee. I suspect that this will once again be brought back to debate once they have the recommendations. It's just very concerning.

In the time that we are in right now, looking at so many that are impacted negatively by COVID-19 across Alberta, across Canada, across the world, people are desperate, people have lost their jobs, people are worried about child care, and people are worried about what's going to happen to their children when they go back to school in the fall. Why we're having this debate right now: it doesn't make sense other than that the UCP is trying to sneak big money back in when they're hoping that people are focused on other things. I know that I've heard many members in this House on our side talk about the lack of people worrying about this right now. It's not top of mind for the majority of Albertans. They're talking about everyday life impacts, things that matter to them and their family like: how are they going to pay the bills? How are they going to keep their small business from going under? That's what matters right now.

With all of the attacks that we've seen from this government on things like our health care – specifically, I can speak to the arts file – that is very concerning, that there are people struggling, pleading with this government for help and support, yet we're in this Chamber debating about big money, dark money being brought back into politics. It's concerning, Mr. Speaker. I know we've been asking: why now? Why is this coming through at this time? We've asked: who did you speak to? When there is this select special committee that has been created, why don't they have a say in the plan with this legislation? It just doesn't make sense.

And I can say, listening to the debate, that I haven't heard those answers come from government to explain: why now, who they spoke to, why it's coming before the recommendation of the committee. It's just concerning. I mean, it's not surprising because this seems to be the pattern of this government, to try and push things through, try to do things in the shadows. So bringing dark money back, unfortunately, is not surprising; it's just very discouraging that it's happening when we should be talking about really important things like getting Albertans back to work.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I will wrap up my comments and thank those for engaging in a debate, and I look forward to hearing further. Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other hon. members looking to join debate on Bill 26? I see the hon. Premier.

Mr. Kenney: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: I hesitate. I apologize. That is my mistake. We do have 29(2)(a) available should there be any hon. members looking to take the opportunity for five minutes of questions or comments.

Seeing none, then, moving back to third reading of Bill 26, are there any other hon. members looking to join debate on Bill 26? I see the hon. Premier has risen.

Mr. Kenney: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to enter in debate on third reading of Bill 26, Constitutional Referendum Amendment Act, 2020. Let me begin with some historical context. In the earlier part of the last century, in the 1920s, during the progressive period and the government of the United Farmers of Alberta in this place, Alberta went through a dramatic series of democratic reforms, including the adoption of referendum legislation that allowed governments to initiate referenda as well as citizens to initiate referenda and indeed to allow citizens to recall MPs, to force by-elections if their local representatives had lost the confidence of a critical number of their constituents. However, over the ensuing decades these reforms were all gradually repealed.

Many of these reforms stayed on the books in other western provinces and U.S. states that had similarly been influenced by the then movement of progressive prairie populism. In recent decades there has been a renewal of this spirit of democratic reform. For example, it was a New Democrat government in British Columbia which circa 1992 re-established the right of citizen-initiated referenda, government-initiated referenda, and the right of recall through the British Columbia Recall and Initiative Act. Saskatchewan circa 1991, under a Progressive Conservative government, adopted similar measures, which were subsequently retained by NDP governments. This bill, Mr. Speaker, represents a part of a very deliberate effort by this government to renew that tradition of democratic decision-making, of which there has been an abeyance for far too long in our province.

Mr. Speaker, circa 1990, members may recall, there was great contention over a series of proposed constitutional amendments incarnated in the Meech Lake accord and later the Charlottetown accord. Members may recall that Albertans were deeply frustrated with what appeared to be a federal constitutional agenda overwhelmingly preoccupied with the constitutional aspirations of Quebec as opposed to the west in general or Alberta in particular. In response to that frustration the then government of Premier Don Getty responded by bringing forward the Constitutional Referendum Act, which imposed an obligation on the Lieutenant Governor in Council – i.e., the government – to submit to Albertans, through the form of a referendum, any proposed constitutional

amendments to the Constitution of Canada. This was to give Albertans the final say on whatever the Alberta government negotiated with the other provinces, territories, and the Dominion government with respect to prospective amendments to the national Constitution. That act has never actually been used. Of course, there was a subsequent national plebiscite on the Charlottetown accord but held under federal law.

Mr. Speaker, that was the basis of the statute which we seek to amend in this place tonight, the Constitutional Referendum Act. It was essentially a response to the deep frustration in Alberta about the constitutional agenda of the late 1980s, early 1990s. However, following the repeal of the referendum act, I believe, in the 1950s under the Social Credit government, Alberta has not had a law, a statutory mechanism, to govern a broad democratic consultation of the people through a referendum. We've had many referenda in our past.

It's odd. I've been on the side of the Official Opposition. I was Leader of the Opposition in this place. I served in the Official Opposition in the federal Parliament for, I think, nearly a decade. Normally when I would intervene on a debate of this matter, I would begin by studying the relevant history.

Yet in all of the debate I haven't heard a single reference to the history of direct democracy in Alberta from the opposition. I think that maybe that's because the NDP has always been opposed to direct democracy as a reflexive ideological position. Mr. Speaker, they call themselves the New Democratic Party, but they're actually against the purest form of democratic expression, which is direct democracy, because their idea of democracy is actually a complete contrivance. It's a complete play on words. What they mean by democracy is the state using its coercive power to confiscate people's property and then redistribute it. That's what they call democracy.

9:40

Mr. Speaker, the real meaning of democracy, from the Greek words "demos" and "kratos," means that the people govern, the government of the people, and there is no purer form of government of or by the people than referenda. We have had referenda in this province in the past on a number of issues, I think, most recently in 1956, if I'm not mistaken, on daylight savings time, for example. We subsequently, as I earlier mentioned, did have a national referendum in Alberta – was it in 1991, '92? – on the Charlottetown accord. It's not exactly as though we've been overdosing on direct democracy in this country or this province. We seem to have one about on average every 15 or 20 years.

But referenda are one of the most common tools of democratic decision-making. The very earliest form of classical democracy, in Athenian Greece: the polis, the people, would come together and vote on matters of public importance through referenda. In many jurisdictions around the world, many different political and constitutional traditions, referenda are a mainstay of democratic decision-making. For example, in Switzerland, one of the arguably best governed and most prosperous countries on the face of the Earth, the local Swiss states hold referenda very frequently. South of the border, Mr. Speaker, many U.S. states have both government and citizen-initiated referenda on the ballot every time voters go to the polls.

Mr. Speaker, just in Canada in recent history British Columbia, Prince Edward Island, Ontario, and other jurisdictions have had referendums on whether fundamentally to change their electoral systems from first past the post to some form of proportional representation. One of the differences between the hard left that runs Alberta's NDP and the mainstream New Democrats in other provinces is that while this Alberta NDP is reflexively – they have

a reactionary opposition to democratic decision-making by the people. Their counterparts in British Columbia don't share that ideological hostility to popular decision-making. I know why the NDP in Alberta feels that way, because they know that the vast majority of Albertans are common-sense conservatives, so they dare not give power to the people to decide in a province such as Alberta. But in British Columbia, politics is a little bit more nuanced, a little more complex. The NDP there held a referendum on proportional representation. They had the confidence to let the people decide. People, by the way, chose to retain, for the second time in British Columbia, first past the post.

Here's the point. Referenda are not new to Canadian politics. On some of the most important issues in our history – for example, on the question of conscription during the Second World War a very hugely important national vote was held. This is deeply embedded in our history. I just heard a member say that this is an attack on our democratic institutions. No, Mr. Speaker. Direct democracy, including referenda, including referenda initiated by government, is indelibly a part of our political history. Our Mother Parliament, the Westminster Parliament in the United Kingdom, has of course referred to the people direct democratic decisions through referenda on uniquely important matters: 1973, I believe, the joining of the European Commission, which later became the European Union; and then, in 2016, the referendum on leaving the European Union. In other Westminster parliamentary democracies, Australia and New Zealand, referenda again are frequently used as the ultimate form of democratic decision-making.

Alberta in this sense is actually an aberration. We are an outlier when it comes to democratic systems around the world in not having a legal mechanism for referenda, for the people to make the ultimate decision on important matters. That is why we have brought forward Bill 26, the Constitutional Referendum Amendment Act, 2020, which takes that law I mentioned earlier, which the Getty government proposed and was adopted by this Assembly, to require referenda on prospective constitutional amendments – essentially, what this does is to broaden that to allow for referendums of a nonconstitutional nature.

What does that mean? I know to some people this may all sound like just legalese. Let me break it down. Mr. Speaker, this government was elected on a commitment to hold a prospective referendum on amending section 36 of the Constitution, which is the principle of equalization, a commitment that was recently reinforced by a recommendation of the Fair Deal Panel following extensive consultations with Albertans. That referendum, because it would be framed as a potential amendment to the Constitution, would be held under the status quo circa 1990 – what is it?

Mr. Madu: The year 2000.

Mr. Kenney: The year 2000? Okay. It was amended then, the Constitutional Referendum Act.

Similarly, we committed in our platform to hold a referendum in October 2021, concurrent with the next municipal election, on the constitutional entrenchment of property rights. That, again, would be a constitutional amendment facilitated by the 2000 constitutional amendment act.

But, Mr. Speaker, there may be other issues where, in the wisdom of this Chamber or the Lieutenant Governor in Council – namely, the duly elected government – we may want to consult with Albertans. I see my colleague the Minister of Service Alberta has been consulting Albertans on daylight saving time. That's something that affects absolutely everything. It's something on which our government does not have a democratic mandate to act. We've had, I think, two referendums in Alberta history on daylight

savings, so this may be an issue where we want to go to the people. Right now we do not have the legal means to do so. The NDP, in their reactionary opposition to peer democracy, doesn't want to allow us to go to the people on daylight saving, but we may decide it's the appropriate thing to do. This bill gives us the power to do so.

Similarly, Mr. Speaker, the Fair Deal Panel has recommended that the government implement an Alberta pension plan like Quebec has had for 60 years. Now, I know the NDP is absolutely reflexively against this. They believe Quebecers are capable of managing our public pension system, they believe that Justin Trudeau and Bay Street can manage Alberta pensions, but they don't believe Albertans can manage our own pensions. Now, there are valid arguments for and against that that deserve serious scrutiny, and I absolutely grant that there are strongly held and valid views for and against that proposition. Our view is that, ultimately, that decision should be made not by the NDP or by Justin Trudeau but by the people of Alberta, and the only way that we could have a legal mechanism to hold such a referendum is through the adoption of Bill 26.

Now, the NDP says that actually all this is about is the Premier trying to impose his agenda on Albertans in an antidemocratic power grab. Mr. Speaker, I don't know. That is a classic NDP through-the-looking-glass parallel universe of total irrational illogic. What this bill seeks to do is to disempower the government and to empower the people. It's to take power from the government to make decisions and to entrust that power to every adult Albertan, 3.7 million to 3.8 million Albertans over the age of 18, every one of whom could exercise their universal franchise to make decisions referred to them by the government.

But, no, that's not the NDP's idea of democracy. Their idea is that only the cabinet should decide or at most only the 87 people in this Chamber. On most matters that's how our Westminster democracy works, but on certain matters, particularly where the government may not have a mandate, it's not only appropriate but, I think, obligatory in a democratic sense for the government to go to the people. That's what this bill permits us to do.

Now, they whinge, Mr. Speaker, that, oh, the Premier and the cabinet are going to decide what the referendum questions are. Well, I want to issue a trigger warning – I want to issue a trigger warning; they're welcome to leave the Chamber lest they be offended – because I'm about to say something that is probably difficult for socialist ears to hear. We will be bringing forward legislation this fall to introduce citizen-initiated referendum legislation. We will. We have a committee of the Legislature starting on that right now. Now, they say: oh, the Premier wants to write all the referendum questions. Under the NDP there never were any referendum questions. They never trusted the people.

9:50

We all know they were an accidental government that won that 2015 election because of a lucky vote split. They will never ever – ever – get a majority of the vote in this province, so they know they could never win a referendum on anything in this province, which is why they're against these things.

But a citizen-initiative referendum, Mr. Speaker, allows the people to write the question, the people to determine what will be put on a ballot for pure, democratic decision-making through referendum. We had this in Alberta, I think, well, between the late '20s and – again, I think it was repealed in 1956. We had a citizen-initiative referendum law. They have a citizen-initiative referendum law on the books in Saskatchewan. I don't believe it's ever been used. They have a citizen-initiative referendum law next door in British Columbia, retained by the mainstream New Democrats over

there, who are much more confident about democracy than the Alberta left.

Mr. Speaker, in British Columbia the people used the citizen-initiative referendum law a few years ago when there was an effort by the then Liberal government to harmonize their provincial sales tax with the GST into an HST. There was a bit of a democratic uprising, and the then Liberal government, arguably, was not listening to their own voters or the people of British Columbia. So people went around, and they collected tens of thousands of signatures. They triggered a referendum, and they won that referendum vote. They stopped, they repealed the harmonization of the PST with the GST in British Columbia. Heaven forbid. Democracy broke out in B.C., and the NDP there has not repealed the citizen-initiative law.

So when they say that this is about the Premier trying – no, Mr. Speaker. On some matters the government – I'll give you an example. On daylight saving time, potential Alberta ownership of the Alberta pension plan, Alberta governance of the pension plan, and perhaps many other issues the government may choose to consult the people, but we will also empower the people to force a consultation of the people, and I predict right now the NDP will be against that, too, just as they will be against – I predict it right now – our recall legislation.

Well, I don't even need to predict it because there have been various private members' bills in this place over the past decades to bring in recall. They were all defeated with – I've got to admit it; no, the Minister of Transportation is not here – the Progressive Conservatives. Oh. I shouldn't say that. Excuse me. I take that back. I repeal it. The Progressive Conservatives and the New Democrats were in cahoots to go against recall, Mr. Speaker, and the whip knows about that.

Mr. Speaker, the NDP has created this dystopian picture that this bill is all about dark money and Alberta bringing back dark money. The contrary is true. In fact, obviously, to have referendums, you need a legal framework, including for how money is spent. Now, a bunch of citizens can't run a pro or an anti side on a referendum vote for free. They've got to get their message out. They've got to print brochures, maybe run some ads, and get online and do some events. That's called democracy, and the bill imposes a spending limit on that.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

I want to be very clear. The bill before us says that all of this activity will be done in full compliance with the Election Finances and Contributions Disclosure Act. I cite section 7.1.

For greater certainty, the Election Finances and Contributions Disclosure Act applies to every referendum held under this Act, irrespective of whether the referendum is held in conjunction with a general election under the Election Act, separately on a date provided for under section 5(b) . . . or in conjunction with the general elections under the Local Authorities Election Act.

Madam Speaker, the requirements for disclosure, the ban on corporate and union contributions, the limits on contributions, the limits on spending: they're all in here. Yet we just heard from the member from Edmonton. She talked repeatedly about how this was bringing, quote, big money, dark money into politics, that the NDP had banned corporate and union contributions, and that this seeks to bring them back.

Madam Deputy Speaker, either the NDP members who've spoken have not bothered to read the bill, or perhaps their staff have completely misled them. I'll be charitable. Let's say it this way. Option B is that their staff completely misled them about the contents of the bill. Option C is unthinkable, and it would be unparliamentary for me to assert that they actually have deliberately

misled the Chamber. I know that's not true. They would never purposely mislead the Chamber, so it must be that either they have not read the bill, or they've been completely misbriefed on it, because what the bill does is it retains the ban on corporate and union contributions that apply to general elections, and the bill, in the provision I just read, applies that to the financing of referendum campaigns. That is not an opinion. That is not spin. That is not a line. That is the law.

In section 7.1 – and it is incumbent upon members, if they're going to vote on a bill, to at least have a modicum of accurate information about what it actually says, which in this case is to apply the ban on corporate and union donations to the conduct of referendum campaigns. Again, I just read the provision. There are a bunch of New Democrats here. If they can find a provision that is not consistent with what I just asserted, it is their responsibility to raise that. But they won't. They won't because they can't. They can't because all they seek to do is to drive fear, division, and disinformation into Alberta politics while what we seek to do is to drive the refreshing air of democracy into Alberta politics through referendums, Madam Deputy Speaker.

Now, they talked about – the Member for Edmonton-South said that this bill will, quote, bring democracy back to the Dark Ages. Back to the Dark Ages. The Dark Ages. Well, I suppose that if you imagine Periclean Athens was in the Dark Ages, that might make some sense. Madam Deputy Speaker, what we're seeking to do is to give the people power to make decisions directly on important matters. How is that regressive? The NDP pretends that they are progressive, but they oppose democratic progress in this province. They think a tiny number of elected individuals or elites should make all of the decisions for the entire population and that the general population should never directly be consulted. Like I said before, they're not the New Democratic Party; they're the Old Autocratic Party.

By the way, I just have to rebut a couple of points. The Member for Edmonton-South said: the Premier never disclosed his leadership donors. Madam Deputy Speaker, that is untrue. If it was said outside this House, it would actually be defamatory because it's an allegation that I broke the law. In fact, my leadership campaigns scrupulously complied with the Election Finances and Contributions Disclosure Act. Indeed, that includes a ban on corporate and union contributions.

Madam Deputy Speaker, since they are so concerned about dark money, big money in Alberta politics, they should be very pleased to know that a new day will dawn shortly, when amendments are brought forward to the Election Finances and Contributions Disclosure Act to finally get big, dark money out of Alberta politics. I cite our platform on which we were elected:

To strengthen democracy and accountability in Alberta, a United Conservative government would make sweeping democratic reforms

including removing

big money from Alberta politics by imposing a \$30,000 limit on donor contributions to political action committees,

also known as third-party expenditures,

and by closing the '[Alberta Federation of Labour] loophole' by prohibiting groups formally affiliated with political parties from running [political action committees].

I should further say, because one of the members opposite spun a conspiracy theory that we're going to be bringing foreign dark money into referendum campaigns, that, Madam Speaker, we further committed in our platform to

approve a law banning foreign money from interfering in Alberta politics, making it illegal for foreign entities to finance third-party advertisers (also known as political action committees).

Isn't it rich, isn't it ironic that the NDP would accuse this government of trying to open the door for foreign money to come into our politics when they refused to close that door, Madam Deputy Speaker? And we all know why. Because they want their allied green, left, billionaire foundations in the United States to continue to pummel the oil and gas workers of this province. We won't permit it, and this fall we will make it illegal for the NDP's foreign friends to come in here and attack our energy industry by financing those campaigns. We will make it illegal for their formal legal affiliate – the Alberta Federation of Labour is a constitutional affiliate of the NDP. They have seats on the board.

10:00

This Mr. McGowan, who recently accused the elected government of Alberta of being a bunch of Nazis, trivializing the Holocaust: the very same Mr. McGowan sits on their governing board, and he spent \$1.8 million through a third-party expenditure, in legal terms, when clearly he was spending it by, for, and on behalf of the NDP, Madam Speaker.

We will close that loophole that has allowed political parties a back door to infect our politics with big money. Madam Deputy Speaker, over the past three years NDP-affiliated unions spent – get this; fasten your seat belt – \$4.8 million on politics to support their NDP friends and to attack the free-enterprise parties in this province. One of them, I think the Health Sciences, over \$2 million; the ATA, \$1.9 million, if I'm not mistaken. How dare they stand up and talk about big money in Alberta politics when they and their friends are the biggest money we have ever seen.

Madam Deputy Speaker, I am pleased to inform the socialists that this fall the party is over. We are going to shut down the big money, the millions of dollars, because there will be a \$30,000 limit on how much donors can contribute to political action committees, and that will include referendum campaigns. Yes, that will include referendum campaigns.

Bill 26 is one important additional step as part of the most sweeping agenda of democratic reform in Alberta political history. It is supported by Bill 27, the senatorial election act. The NDP allowed the Senate Election Act to lapse. Why? Because they want Justin Trudeau picking who represents us in the upper House of our Parliament. We Conservatives instead want every Albertan deciding who represents us in the upper House of Parliament, and that's why we'll be having Senate elections in the fall of next year. Again, the NDP: against democracy. This government: for democracy.

We will be bringing forward this fall citizen-initiated referendum legislation. The NDP will vote against it, declaring their opposition to allowing voters to determine the most important issues. This government will bring it into law. The NDP: against democracy. This government: for democracy. This fall we will bring in recall legislation, reinstituting it – it was repealed in the 1950s – giving an ultimate tool of accountability for Alberta voters. The NDP will vote against that democratic accountability. This government will bring in that ultimate democratic accountability.

Madam Speaker, in the fall we will bring forward amendments to the election finances disclosure act, getting big money out of Alberta politics by imposing a \$30,000 limit on how much can be given to political action committees. The NDP will vote against that democratic reform. This government will vote in favour of getting that big money out of Alberta politics. This fall we will bring forward an amendment to stop the AFL loophole, where the NDP gets to spend millions through the back door, through their loony left ally, Gil McGowan. They will vote against closing that loophole; this government will oppose that loophole.

Madam Speaker, again, it was this government that brought in a motion recognizing the right of members to vote freely on nonconfidence matters in this House, something the NDP never did. They had members flee their caucus complaining about being bullied because they wouldn't vote in lockstep with the government on every single matter.

Madam Speaker, I am proud to stand here as a leader of a government that is bringing in the most sweeping democratic reforms in Alberta history, and we will implement them regardless of opposition from the undemocratic and reactionary New Democratic Party.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. members, Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available. Any members wishing to speak?

Any other members wishing to join debate?

Seeing none, would any minister like to close debate? All right. The hon. Minister of Health.

Mr. Shandro: I'm happy to close debate.

[Motion carried; Bill 26 read a third time]

Government Bills and Orders Second Reading

Bill 30 Health Statutes Amendment Act, 2020

[Adjourned debate July 14: Mr. McIver]

The Deputy Speaker: Any members wishing to join debate in second reading of Bill 30, the Health Statutes Amendment Act, 2020? I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

Member Irwin: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It's an honour to rise in this House. I've not had the opportunity to speak yet to Bill 30, and there's a lot that I would like to say. Before I do so, I often like to start my remarks by acknowledging that we are still in the midst of a pandemic. You know, I feel like we've lost a little bit as a collective in this province of our reminders of thanking and applauding our essential workers, front-line workers, health care workers, which is quite fitting when we talk about the content of this bill. To all those front-line workers, those essential workers: whether you're in a hospital or you're in a grocery store, you're so valued and you're so loved by many of us, and we appreciate you.

Particularly I want to talk about health care workers. I want to just express, you know, our true support for health care workers right now. As we all know, we are seeing an uptick in COVID cases right now, and as someone who got a COVID test not too long ago – I'm asymptomatic, of course, but we know we're being encouraged to do one – I just was very blown away by the workers that I spoke to while getting that test, just their dedication and their willingness to really try to battle this pandemic as best they can.

Of course, I can't not talk about our doctors, and I'll talk more about them in a few minutes. We know that Alberta's doctors have been through a whole heck of a lot in a few months, and they've been through a whole heck of a lot in the midst of a pandemic. It started just prior to the pandemic with Bill 21 and the ripping up of their contract, and since then it's been an ongoing show of absolute disrespect to those doctors. As a result, we're seeing countless doctors fleeing our province. What I'd like to do is talk about some of the aspects of Bill 30 that I fear will just worsen the situation with doctors, with health care workers, and really start to erode some of the fundamental values that many of us support, including public health care. Like I said, I've not had an opportunity to speak to a lot of the elements within Bill 30, and I'm happy to do so.

10:10

You know, we've heard a lot of debate tonight already around some pieces of legislation, Bill 26 and Bill 27. At least on our side of the House we're not hearing from Albertans about Senate elections, about the need for changes to financing in municipal elections, as an example. I know that my esteemed colleague from Edmonton-West Henday talked about the fact that he went through his e-mails and did not find a single one asking for changes to the Senate.

What are we hearing? I, too, follow my e-mails closely, and the issues we're hearing about are concerns about health care, concerns about education, mental health supports, housing. So when I take the time to analyze Bill 30 – I know the Premier was very much disparaging me and my colleagues, noting that we aren't likely to be reading our bills and to be doing our homework, and he said a lot of other things that were quite troubling. I don't have time to speak to all of them, but I can assure you that on this side of the House we do our homework, and we read those bills, including Bill 30, which is a huge bill, including all the other bills like Bill 32 that are giant bills, many of them omnibus bills that would in fact merit many separate bills if we really wanted to give them the fulsome debate that they deserve. Of course, that's not this government's style, is it?

All right. Let me talk about a few of the aspects that I find most troubling. Well, the first one is the fact that we've got a government, a UCP government, that is making changes to a public health care system that is world class in the midst of a pandemic. It's a time when we need system stability. It's a time when Albertans need to know that if they need the health care system, they can rely on it. We truly know, as I said earlier, that lives depend on this. We truly know that a second wave is possible. So why is it that this government is choosing to prioritize attacking public health care at a time when the need for public health care has never – never – been higher?

I've said this many times in this House. I remember saying this earlier, when we first started to realize what this COVID thing was, what this pandemic was. You know, my hope would be that it would call upon us, particularly as legislators in this House, to analyze the systems that we have around us and to recognize, you know, this mantra that we've had of being in this together, that it would really compel us all to look at how we could better support humans. This pandemic has really shown how critical it is that we support each other. We do that through investing in people. We do that through investing in public health care. We do that through supporting our public health care workers. We do that through investing in education and supporting our education workers and not firing 20,000 mostly educational assistants in the midst of a pandemic.

You know, one of my hopes would be that not only would we really question the systems around us but that we would change those systems for the better, that we would acknowledge that we can't continue to exist in a system where so many people are being left behind. One of the quotes that's really stuck with me from the beginning of this pandemic was this idea that, you know, the biggest tragedy will be if we come out of this pandemic unchanged. I worry that it's going to be worse. In fact, we're going to come out of this pandemic in Alberta in a worse state, in a much worse state, because we're attacking the fundamental systems, the public systems that have made us the prosperous province that we are today. When I say "prosperous," I'm not just talking about financially prosperous. I'm talking about well-being, right? Within Bill 30 some of these very structures are being attacked.

Bill 30 streamlines the chartering of private, for-profit clinics like surgery clinics. It's this creeping privatization that we see in Bill 30 that's quite troubling. You know, what else have we seen when it comes to privatizing health care in this province? The privatizing

of lab services, again – it's got to be the catchphrase – in the midst of a pandemic, the privatizing of lab services that have never been more needed.

The privatizing of clinics. Just the other day I sat in the private members' bills committee and debated Bill 204, which is basically the selling off of blood. You could argue again: privatizing of blood services. Right? There's this continued pattern from this government of moving away from the public good.

Of course, it's in more than just health care. We see that with the selling off of parks. And, of course, I know the Minister of Environment and Parks will argue that parks aren't being sold off, but we know they certainly are being delisted and being tendered, potentially, to third parties, which, many would argue, is being sold off, right? We see this with so many elements of the public good in this province.

What else? Again, with this privatization, this allows the government, this allows that minister, the Health minister, to enter into agreements with private companies to administer medical clinics, putting doctors on salary. It's going to introduce very much the profit motive in the operation of doctors' offices. What does this mean for doctors? Again, I'm talking about the same doctors who've been disrespected so many times by this government to date. So many times. This will start a corporation creep in the public health care system, and again those resources that are so needed to support the public system are diverted.

I want to just quote for you for a minute from Friends of Medicare. Friends of Medicare have been strong supporters of public health care for a very long time, and they've been really sounding the alarm, along with many other folks, about some of the changes within Bill 30. They say that this minister is justifying Bill 30 by, you know, talking about it being modernized, right? He's said that in this House many times. They note the following:

Albertans will not see a modernized health care system with these proposed changes. Instead, we are being fed the same . . . old strategy of cutting and privatizing, dredged up directly from Klein's "Third Way" handbook . . . If the minister is serious about his commitment to public health care, he could modernize by expanding our public health care system to include areas [like] pharmacare, dental [care], and vision care. But instead . . . "modernization" [is being] levied as yet another UCP code word for the further privatization of our health care.

If modernization equals privatization, myself, my colleagues, and a whole heck of a lot of Albertans are not interested. We're interested in a strong, publicly funded health care system . . .

Mr. Jason Nixon: Hear, hear.

Member Irwin: . . . that leaves no one behind. Absolutely.

Mr. Jason Nixon: Absolutely.

Member Irwin: I worry very much when I, you know – and I hope the Minister of Environment and Parks will stand up and perhaps elaborate on his commitment to a strong public health care system.

Again, these are fundamental values that Albertans hold, that Canadians hold, right? We know that belief in a strong publicly funded health care system is something that defines us.

I want to talk a little bit about some of my other concerns. Now, again, you know, we've talked about the creeping privatization, two-tier health care, but it's also about the UCP's war on doctors. Just today we heard from this minister that despite his ongoing attacks on doctors – so what has he done? He's ripped up their contract. He's continued to attack doctors . . .

10:20

Mr. Jason Nixon: Point of order.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader on a point of order.

Point of Order

Allegations against a Member

Mr. Jason Nixon: I rise, Madam Speaker, under 23(h), (i), and (j). Lots of rulings in this Chamber, lots of discussion over the years and even in the last few days on the difference between talking about what a political party and/or a government is doing or the direction that they're taking, in regard to a party or saying a party's name. For example, when we point out that the NDP is misleading inside the Chamber, that's been deemed to be appropriate, but if I was to say that that member, even though that member is misleading the Chamber, if I was to point that out, that would be inappropriate if that was the case. In this case here, again, directly accusing the Minister of Health of attacking somebody is clearly getting very close to that line and crossing that line, and repeatedly doing it will certainly cause disorder inside this Chamber. I can assure you of that. We are already seeing it now. Second, it's certainly unparliamentary.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Official Opposition House Leader.

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I'm happy to rise on this. It is not a point of order. This is an issue of debate. We have seen in this Chamber today, repeatedly, members talking about what other members have intended. In fact, there was a point of order earlier today, that I argued, where the Minister of Community and Social Services accused the Member for St. Albert of creating fear. I called a point of order on that, and the Speaker reminded me that that is not a point of order, that it is a matter of debate in this place. He ruled as such. This is the exact same scenario, just in reverse. As it is not a point of order, I certainly hope to continue to hear the Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood's comments following your ruling.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. members, thank you for your input into this point of order. There are words in this Chamber which we use that do certainly cause disorder and can sometimes become very personal when we maybe skirt the chair or become a little bit more direct in the way in which comments are directed. I will not find a point of order in this case, but I will express caution in the words that we use moving forward.

I will ask that the hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood continue with the last one minute and six seconds of her debate time.

Member Irwin: Thank you, Madam Speaker, and I will be cautious with the way I continue in my debate today.

Debate Continued

Member Irwin: You know, I was starting to say, before I was interrupted, that this is, in fact, a government that has multiple times attacked doctors, and the way they've done that is through tearing up doctors' contracts – right? – through undermining their credibility, through pushing a lot of doctors out of this province. In fact, the hon. Leader of the Official Opposition ran through earlier today the entire list of communities that have lost doctors, and that list was a lengthy one, a number of rural communities – Athabasca, Lac La Biche, Westlock – and the list goes on. People are worried. People are rightly concerned about the loss of doctors and the future loss of doctors, so for this government today to . . .

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

Ms Gray: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I believe that the member was on a train of thought, and I wanted to ask or comment to the member. I know that she's worked in rural communities. I know that she worked outside of the Edmonton area when she was working, I believe, in the education field as a teacher. It's my understanding that the impact of rural doctors leaving is a particular focus right now and has a very unique impact in rural communities. As someone who's lived in one of these areas, I was hoping to hear her perspective if she would be interested in continuing.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

Member Irwin: Thank you, Madam Speaker, and thank you to the Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods. Absolutely, and I was just starting to say that, you know, for this government today to basically say, "After all the disrespect we've shown you, now we're basically telling you that you can't leave" – because they're seeing, absolutely, the impact of their approach in dealing with doctors. Doctors are leaving. That's a fact. That's an absolute fact, absolutely.

You know, having spent, actually, most of my life in rural Alberta – I grew up in rural Alberta. I grew up in Barrhead. I lived in Camrose and Forestburg and taught in Bawlf. I know everybody has heard about all the cool rural places that I've lived in. I truly have lived most of my life in rural Alberta. Now, of course, I find myself in the big city.

But, you know, a couple of things that the folks that I knew well in rural Alberta really appreciated were public health care and public education, right? The loss of doctors in some of these communities is huge, particularly when you talk about doctors resigning their obstetrics privileges. I know there were examples, when we heard about this happening, of people reaching out to me on social media saying, like: we already have to drive X number of kilometres if we're having a baby. So the loss of obstetrics privileges in a number of these communities is just going to mean that that's even more challenging. That's just one example, obstetrics, but if you're already in a remote community and you've got a bit of a journey to access a doctor and that same community is losing their doctors, that's a safety issue as well.

Again, these are troubling developments at any time, but what are we in? We're in the midst of a pandemic. I feel like I've said it so many times today. Truly, I started my comments by saying that this is a time when we should be absolutely bolstering our public health care system. We should be attracting more doctors. We should be encouraging, you know, folks who work in lab services and nurses, RNs and LPNs. We should be encouraging them. We should be supporting them. Instead, how are so many health care workers feeling right now? They're feeling discouraged. They're feeling disheartened. They're feeling like they have a government that doesn't have their backs and, in fact, is often stabbing them in the backs, right? That's how they're feeling, and those aren't my words, truly. If I'm getting correspondence from health care workers all the time, I can't imagine that folks across the aisle aren't getting that as well, right?

I'm hopeful that we'll be able to introduce some amendments to Bill 30 in coming days because there are a lot of very troubling elements in this bill, and this is an opportunity for this government to really kind of consider deeply what future they want for this province. If they want a province that continues to undermine

public health care, that continues to attack health care workers, that puts patients at risk, then, yeah, you're headed down that path, but I'm hoping – and I'm looking at the members across the aisle – that some of those MLAs will stand up and talk about what they're hearing when it comes to the public health care system. Perhaps they're hearing things that are different than me, but I'm doubtful. I'm truly doubtful.

I'm going to urge this UCP government to really think about this and to really think about the tone that they're setting for the future.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health.

Mr. Shandro: Well, thank you, Madam Speaker. Maybe I'll start at the beginning of the hon. member's . . .

The Deputy Speaker: Minister, you should take your seat.

Mr. Shandro: Oh. Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: My apologies. If you speak, you end up closing debate, and that is not the will of the Assembly from what I gather at this point.

So I will ask if there are any other members wishing to join debate on second reading of Bill 30. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

Mr. Feehan: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I appreciate the opportunity to address Bill 30. I was ready to speak last night when we adjourned, so I will take a little bit of my time to respond to some of the things that were discussed last evening and try to articulate, as best I can, some of the concerns that I have with the nature of Bill 30.

I was of course going to start with an opening line about the Americanization of medicare just to dispense with the Pavlovian jeer from the government side of the House, but I've decided not to go in that direction because it distracts from what it actually is that I'm concerned about when we talk about Bill 30 and when we talk about health care.

10:30

Now, what I do want to preface my remarks with seriously is the fact that I am both very proud and very concerned about the existence of a strong health care system in our country. Of course, much of what I have to say is rooted in the seriousness with which I take health care.

As you know, I have been an instructor in the Faculty of Social Work, and one of the things that we talk about with many of the concerns and issues that social workers will find themselves dealing with is the underlying root causes of those concerns. From that kind of research across many professions well beyond social work – in fact, we kind of borrowed the literature from health professions – is a concern about the social determinants of health. The argument there is that health care is a much broader concern than simply a question of “Do we have good surgeries? Do we have good medication?” but, rather, a concern about the complex interrelationship between people's well-being in a variety of areas in their lives and their effects on health. You know, I'm often arguing for us to improve our health care system by improving the structural barriers that exist in people's lives that actually lead to them coming into the health care system.

I do share the government's concern that health is an expensive part of our budget in this province and one that we should take very seriously and ensure that the money is used wisely. As such, that is why I often advocate for poverty reduction strategies to be employed by the government, because we know that as we reduce

poverty, we actually reduce the use of health care. As we reduce all of these kinds of systemic barriers to people living a happy and healthy life – in early childhood, for example, by having access to good early childhood education and so on – we reduce costs to health care. I certainly share the concern that we need to pay attention to the costs for health care.

But I am concerned that Bill 30 doesn't actually deal with the issues in a way that I think will be ultimately productive. I am concerned that we not do anything to the system that we presently have that will reduce or negatively affect the vast majority of people who access the system. We know that in the 2019 ranking of health care systems across 195 countries Canada was given a score of 88 out of 100, which actually put it in the top 10 per cent of health care systems in the world. So we have the starting place of: while we certainly have work to do and improvements to be made, we actually have a system that's worth preserving, that has demonstrated positive results overall. That doesn't mean there aren't problematic areas or that things could certainly be improved with concerted effort by the province of Alberta.

But let's start with: the system as it is constructed actually is one of the best in the world and, in fact, the best in history. You can't go back in time and find a place where the type of health care that is available now and is as accessible as it is now has ever been available anywhere else in the world to the degree that we now have in the modern world. In fact, the only countries that actually did better on the 2017 ranking of health care are countries that typically spend more of their national budgets on health care services than Canada does. We know that there are some real benefits to putting some money into the health care system.

Of course, you know, we are concerned that in some places they do use a greater degree of privatization to provide the services to the citizens in their countries in order to prevent costs to the government, but we know from the international comparisons that that is not systemically better. We don't see those countries that allow greater degrees of privatization doing significantly better overall. Certainly, you can always find an example of some aspect of one procedure that might be better in one place or another, but that kind of cherry-picking wouldn't give you a good view of: where is it that we see the greatest good for the greatest number of people?

I, of course, am very worried or cautious about the move toward any kind of privatization if, in fact, it's going to lead to the problems that we see in other countries, like in the United States, where there are issues of people not being covered at all by health care systems or, in the United States again, where the federal government actually spends more dollars per capita on health care than we do in Canada because of some of the problems that get created when privatization occurs. That's why we get nervous as we watch the government make these moves bringing more private bodies into the delivery of health care.

I know that the government is suggesting: well, there's no actual privatization in this bill. I know that they're suggesting that – they are simply saying that while we retain the single-payer system in the country, we will actually have delivery through private health care services under this bill and have suggested that, of course, that has occurred already in the province of Alberta and occurred when the NDP was government. I guess those are some of the things I want to address in my first chance to speak to this bill. I have other things that I will speak to, but I just want to express some of my concerns about that.

Partly it comes from the fact that I had an opportunity as a private member to bring forward a private member's motion to debate the protection of the single-payer, universally accessible health care that is available in Canada, in Alberta, just a chance

for the government to stand up at that time and say exactly what they apparently are saying now, that they actually do support single-payer health care services. But, unfortunately, their committee denied even the ability to have that discussion in this House, so you can see why I'm nervous. The stats don't really tell us that it's a good way to go, and the government has already indicated to us that they actually don't want to stand up and say that they support a universal, single-payer health care system when they had an opportunity to do so. I'm just giving a context of why I'm worried about the bill in the first place.

Now, I know that the idea here is that we will introduce corporations into the system that perform a different function than the corporations that we presently have in the system have performed. I think that's the point that I want to start with in my first sally at this Bill 30, and that is that we have had corporations, absolutely, who have been involved in this process, but the vast majority of those corporations have been of a particular sort of corporation, and that is that they are professional corporations.

What you actually have is people whose job it is to actually deliver health care services. That is what they do. That is what they went to school for, usually, for doctors and particularly specialists, for 12 to 15, 16 years for many of them, so they are clearly highly educated and knowledgeable about health, focused on health as the issue, the outcome that they seek when they construct the corporations that they have and when they engage in practice. They belong to associations such as the AMA or other kinds of associations, depending on what the nature of their job is, that have articles of ethics, who do supervision of practice and other factors, which lets you know that health is the primary focus and that good health outcomes are the desired result of all of the effort that is put forward by them. You know, there are some assurances in those multilayers of the structure of the system that health is actually what it's all about.

10:40

What I'm concerned about in this particular case is that the shift, while it seems minor, is the beginning of an opening of a door, a thin edge of a wedge, if you would like to say, in which people who are now entering into the system are not people with training on health, are not people with professional associations that are ethics bound and focused on good, positive health outcomes. In fact, they're essentially management and finance corporations that are involved in the health care system now. You know, good on them, I guess, but the fact is that the focus of those kinds of corporations is different. You haven't gone to school for 17 years to ensure that people survive heart attacks. Instead, what you've gone to school for is to learn how to maximize profits.

There's concern within the Official Opposition that sometimes there's a conflict between the two, that there's a conflict between: how do you maximize profits, and how do you actually provide good medical care? If we introduce that into the system, then we have to worry that there needs to be some oversight or some kind of mechanism to ensure that health remains the primary and central and, in fact, should be almost the exclusive focus of any kind of health operation.

We are a little concerned here in this particular situation that this other motive has been introduced. There are examples, particularly the American example – of course, we refer to America; none of us can live a day without watching the dramatic influence of the American mindset on what's happening here in Canada. We see that, in fact, there are very often times when that profit motive does alter the health outcome motive; for example, you know, when a drug company in the States buys a drug from another company and then suddenly increases the cost of that drug by 2,000 per cent simply because they can do that and there's money to be made in

that way. Of course, it clearly doesn't help the health care of the people involved in the system. It's just an example of the concern that's there and why we're a little bit nervous here.

Now, one of the things that also protects us from the conflict in that profit is that doctors in the province have the option and have had the option since the introduction of health care to work in the public system or to not work in the public system. That has never been denied them. They have the right to do that, yet we see almost no doctors doing that. We see very few circumstances where doctors say, "I am not going to work in the public system; I am going to exclusively work in the private system for profit," because their focus is on health and because health isn't a singular reality. Health is connected to a variety of other issues and concerns.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available. The hon. Minister of Health.

Mr. Shandro: Well, thank you, Madam Speaker. I'm very happy to rise under 29(2)(a) not just to address the comments of Edmonton-Rutherford but for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood as well. Maybe I'll start with her comments related to her concern about having stability, especially during the pandemic, the need to have stability in the system, and that Albertans need to know that the health care system is going to be there, that they can rely on it. My question for our friends opposite is: then why fight for waiting lists? Why fight for less care in the system and not support us trying to have more publicly funded access to services in the system right now?

I note that the hon. member also referred to – it was very scary the way it was pronounced, Madam Speaker – private, for-profit clinics. My question for our colleagues opposite is: that how they would refer to their family physician's office? When they go and see their family physician, when they go see a primary care physician, do they go into that clinic and say: wow, this is a private, for-profit clinic? They don't because this is totally disingenuous.

Almost all of our 10,800 physicians who work in the system are doing so not as employees but as private and – cover your ears – for-profit businesses. These physicians are operating as independent businesses. They're vendors to us as government to provide patient services. It's what they wanted when medicare first came to Canada. The physicians did not want to be employees; they wanted to be independent businesses to provide those services, most of them still on a fee-for-service basis here in Alberta.

Now, the hon. member also mentioned Friends of Medicare, but, look, Madam Speaker, I think the NDP have to do more, have to do more to be able to try and find advocates in the system who can speak for patients rather than Astroturf groups for the unions that are created for and funded by the unions to advocate not for access, not to fight for a publicly funded system, but to fight against non-unionized workplaces in the system. It's a shame. It's a shame that that's the focus of Friends of Medicare. That's the focus of the NDP because they answer to one stakeholder and one stakeholder only. It's the unions. They don't fight for protection of a publicly funded system. They're fighting to protect waiting lists, and it's unfortunate.

Now, the hon. member also asked: why can't the Minister of Health also expand public health care? Unfortunately, the hon. member totally missed it when we announced, as part of Budget 2020, a capital investment as a part of the Alberta surgical initiative of \$100 million. This capital investment, through my colleague as well the hon. Minister of Infrastructure, we are investing in our hospitals, our publicly owned hospitals through AHS for us to expand the number of operating rooms that we have in our publicly owned system as well, Madam Speaker.

As well as saying that while the NPD are fretting over these – gasp – privately owned independent businesses being able to operate surgical facilities, the same facilities that while they were in government, they funded as well, these 42 clinics, Madam Speaker, that provided during the NDP's time 15 per cent of our surgeries in the system – they funded it, yet now they're being disingenuous and attacking these incredibly important partners in the system for us to make sure that Albertans have the care that they need.

Quite frankly, it's so disingenuous because the hon. member many times in this room has asked me about access for women to health care, having no idea that if we were to shut down the chartered surgical facilities, we would be drastically – drastically – limiting the access that women have to care in Alberta by closing two incredibly important clinics that provide access to women, to the care that they need in Alberta, Madam Speaker.

Now, last, the hon. member started talking about the relationship that we have with physicians and the new physician funding compensation framework, Madam Speaker, and used the phrase that we tore up the agreement. The government executed a negotiated termination clause. There was a termination clause that was – they're laughing because they know it's true. They're laughing because they know it's true, and they know that they're being disingenuous about this. Governments previous had negotiated a termination clause . . .

The Deputy Speaker: Are there any other members wishing to join debate on Bill 30 in second reading? The hon. Member for Edmonton-West Henday.

Mr. Carson: Well, thank you, Madam Speaker. It's an honour to rise this evening and speak to Bill 30, the Health Statutes Amendment Act, 2020. It was interesting, the comments that the Health minister just made around the idea of the NDP as an opposition party having to find better advocates for the system, the words that the minister used. I find that quite ironic, first of all because the physicians have come forward to speak with the Health critic, who has been doing an incredible job on this file of assuring physicians, while this government is ignoring them to the best of their ability, that somebody is listening. I appreciate that member's work.

But the fact is that through the work of the Member for Edmonton-City Centre, the Ministry of Health critic, he has had the opportunity to speak with many physicians, both in rural and urban communities. He's had the opportunity to bring forward concerns of pros from universities in Alberta who focus on health care in the system. This government has gone to great lengths, this Premier specifically, to try and discredit these members and these physicians, these important health care providers, in our community. This Premier has gone and attacked them personally, naming them, because he didn't believe in what the concerns that they were bringing forward are.

So I find it quite disingenuous for . . .

10:50

Mr. Ellis: Point of order.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-West.

Point of Order

Allegations against a Member

Mr. Ellis: Thank you very much. I rise under, of course, 23(h), (i), and (j). I think, as the House leader mentioned earlier, it's been fairly regular to indicate that the government may attack somebody

– I know that has been a previous ruling by the Speaker in the Speaker's past – but that hon. member specifically said that the Premier has attacked a particular person. That can be certainly, I would argue, abusive and insulting language likely to cause disorder within this Chamber and, of course, imputes false motives upon the hon. Premier. So I ask that he apologize, withdraw, and that we continue on.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. This point of order is very familiar. I believe we had a very similar point of order just called. I would suggest that this is not a point of order but a matter of debate, with the member getting colourful with his language. I would suggest that the member be allowed to continue with his remarks.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. members, it does sound familiar, not that long ago, as noted by the hon. government whip. Hon. members, I will again express caution in the words that we use and which might be inflammatory, especially when making what appeared to be accusing remarks. It's not helpful, because we're all going to get along this evening, and we're going to get out of here at a reasonable time, I'm sure.

I know that the hon. Member for Edmonton-West Henday has a great rest of his speech planned, and I ask you to please proceed with the cautions expressed.

Mr. Carson: Thank you, Madam Chair. I appreciate that caution. I apologize if it created any disorder.

Debate Continued

Mr. Carson: The point I was trying to make is that during press conferences that this government has held, they have personally named physicians in this province who have come out against their plans. So when the Health minister says, "Well, why can't you find any advocates?" well, number one, these physicians are working as hard as they can, as desperately as they can, to take care of their communities, both rural and urban, in the midst of a global pandemic, which has affected so many communities across this province.

On top of that fact, the other point is that when these people, these physicians and health care providers, come forward, they're confronted – and this has been raised through media reports and social media – on their own doorsteps, in their own driveways by the Health minister. So it is quite concerning that on one hand when somebody does speak out, the minister or whoever it might be tries to discredit these physicians, these members of the health care community, and on the other hand the minister asks why none of them will come forward.

Now, the timing of this legislation is also incredibly important. As these physicians and these health care aides and nurses and providers are doing their best to support our communities through a global pandemic, this government brings forward and imposes legislation against them, telling them, well, maybe not specifically through this legislation, where they can work, you know, how they can work there, if they're allowed to leave, telling them that if they do leave because of the decisions by this government, they have to find a replacement for themselves. I mean, this is completely against the Charter. I imagine that quite soon this will be sent to the courts, and we will see how that ruling is made.

This is not new. This is not a new direction from this government. We know that the UCP – it's a plan that might be working for them; we'll see how it pans out – thrive in chaos. In the midst of this global pandemic this government is trying to impose strong, you know, things against physicians in our province. It's very concerning for me.

Once again, across this province, not only in health care, this government is trying to impose their antiworker agenda. It doesn't matter if they're in health care, if they're construction workers trying to get paid for overtime, if they're parents with sick children expecting time off and paid leave, something that this government committed to but went back on that decision after telling the public: "Don't worry. We have your backs. If you need paid leave because you have a family member that's sick, if you have a child that's sick, you will have that paid leave." It didn't happen, Madam Speaker. It's not surprising that here we are in the midst of a pandemic with a government that is attacking the very foundation of our health care system.

It has been raised several times. Some of these communities are being directly affected by the decisions of this government and by the actions of this Health minister, hospital resignations or clinic closures in several specifically rural communities – Athabasca, Rocky Mountain House, Canmore, Cochrane, Okotoks, Peace River, Rimbey, Westlock, Three Hills, Bragg Creek, Drayton Valley: the list goes on, Madam Speaker – and those members are sitting in this House today silently. I can only imagine – well, I can't imagine what those conversations with the physicians in their community are. I imagine a lot of unreturned e-mails. Those physicians and those health care workers are reaching out to their MLAs, and when they don't get responses, they reach out to the Member for Edmonton-City Centre, the Health critic, who has been doing an incredible job of advocating for these physicians in such a difficult time, when it seems like no one in the government is willing to listen to them.

These physicians were willing to sit down at the table – and they were sitting at the table – to negotiate compensation, and instead of going through that negotiation process, this government decided, through legislation, once again, quite different than the story that the Health minister is telling, to rip up those contracts or give themselves the power to rip up those contracts. It has been very frustrating for those physicians.

I remember quite clearly – well, maybe not that clearly since I forget which community. I believe it was in Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre or Olds that there was a meeting brought together, a town hall meeting brought together, by the community because of concerns of their physicians' compensation or physicians potentially leaving or clinic closures. You know, I watched almost the entire town hall on Facebook, and many of the community members were saying, "Boy, I wish the Member for Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre was the health care minister," and everyone seemed to agree at that point. Well, the physician that was there – I believe that is who it was – said: well, I talked to him on the phone, and he said that becoming the Health minister is where good politicians go to not be politicians anymore. With the actions of this Health minister, I can see that becoming the case very, very shortly.

Mr. Ellis: Point of order, Madam Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-West.

Point of Order

Allegations against a Member

Mr. Ellis: I rise again under 23(h), (i), and (j). You know, I guess what concerns me here in listening to the hon. member talk is that

I'm not really hearing a debate of the bill itself. What I'm hearing is just personal attacks against the Health minister. To say that this doesn't cause disruption or disorder within this Chamber I think is not accurate. I certainly would highly recommend that this hon. member debate this bill, which is why we are here in this Chamber, and stop with just the personal attacks against the health care minister. I don't think that's becoming of this House, and I certainly don't believe it's becoming of any member of the opposition or member of this government to make personal attacks against people.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

Member Irwin: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Just as the hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods argued earlier, this is certainly not a point of order. The member was actually using the words of the Minister of Environment and Parks when a point of order was called. I would like to ask that we allow that member to continue to share his points of view on Bill 30.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. members, in this case I would tend to actually agree with the arguments of the government. We are veering off the topic of Bill 30 in a roundabout way and talking more about the minister or persons or whatever.

Anyway, hon. member, I'd just ask that you steer back to the bill. Please continue.

Mr. Carson: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I appreciate that reminder. Once again, it's important to have that reminder every once in a while, so thank you for that.

11:00

Debate Continued

Mr. Carson: Once again, I'm just trying to lay some of the framework of how we got here, because those town halls were happening months ago. Instead of actually coming up with a plan to get back to the negotiating table with these physicians, the government has done the opposite. They've told these physicians that if they won't work within the framework that they've been given by this government and that this government is trying to impose on them, they are going to force a new framework on them. It's very concerning.

You know, the UCP over the last year have gone on and have been quick to generalize that physicians in our province get paid more per capita, but they also ignore the factors that have led to that result, one of the most important being the high cost of living in this province. That goes for many industries, whether we're talking about other instances of government workers or if we're talking about construction workers. Traditionally, up until the last five years, construction workers have been some of the highest paid across Canada, once again because of the cost of living not only in urban centres but in rural communities. It's an important decision.

As a government we should be doing the best we can to support physicians and construction workers, whoever it might be, to go work in these rural communities, but it is not the right decision to unilaterally try and force them into those communities. If they make the decision to move away, instead of going through a process of finding a new physician that wants to work in that community, this government is saying that they will force somebody out there or, if they're already out there, that they will force them to find a replacement. So instead of negotiating in good faith, this government is forcing their hand, which is very concerning.

The Member for Edmonton-Rutherford made a very good point. If we're talking about bringing down health care costs, we have to look at the root causes. I remember back to budget deliberations, I believe, in the first budget that was brought forward. Of course, we didn't have any of those during this next budget because the government didn't feel any need to be transparent about the estimates process, which is another story. I questioned the seniors minister about why they were making the decision to cut important supports for seniors, some of those supports being chairlifts, compression socks for those with high blood pressure, those with diabetes, and the minister said: well, that money is being redirected. It's very similar to the story from the Children's Services minister about money for child care in our province, which is another stabilizer and equalizer of economic opportunities. That minister used the same wording: redirected funding. Well, it's been redirected out of her ministry, so we're wondering where the money is going. That hasn't been transparent up to this point. It's very unfortunate because, once again, if we were preventing and using preventative medicine, then we would be able to reduce these costs, but we have seen very little from this government on that front.

I can tell you that during the campaign in 2015 and again, even more so, in 2019 I had so many people come to me saying that they were concerned about the direction of this government even with the big cardboard cut-out health care guarantee promise by the leader of the UCP. They were concerned about the direction of this UCP if they were to become government. Here we are. They're changing in the middle of a pandemic the way that we are funding our physicians, the way that physicians have the ability to move through the province and interprovincially. Their nightmares are becoming reality, Madam Speaker. I don't know what I'm supposed to go back and tell them, because we can only do so much.

The fact is that this government has a majority government in this House. They, if they so choose, will pass this legislation even with all of the physicians coming forward to say that they will not be able to work within this province because of the changes that this government is making. The private members in this government in those rural communities who are being affected the most are virtually silent on this issue. When those physicians come forward, they're being told that they're being unreasonable or that the fact is that we need to bring those costs down. Once again, this is not a good time for that. There's no doubt. This Premier has said very clearly that a fiscal reckoning is coming, but we could have a lot better negotiations. We could have come to a better place if we simply sat down at the negotiation table and went through the process like it is supposed to be.

The fact is that while this government says that they support a single-payer universal health care system, their actions are proving quite the opposite. At the same time as they are redirecting funding from the Children's Services ministry, as they're going back on their commitment to invest in AISH to inflation, something they supported when they were Wildrose opposition, values they seem to have forgotten as they became government, as they took power, and as a new leader came in – it's very frustrating that at the same time that those programs are being cut, we're seeing the acceleration of the \$4.7 billion corporate handout. Instead of supporting children, instead of preventative medicine and opportunities for prevention in investing in seniors, investing in child care, investing in education, this government is handing that money that was once earmarked for those programs to large multinational, in many instances, corporations.

Once again, I would just have to ask: why now? In the middle of a pandemic, while nurses and physicians and health care aides, long-term care workers are doing their best to support our communities through this, why is this government trying to

undermine them? It's not just through this legislation; it's through the words of the minister as that member stands up and talks about how physicians are overpaid in our province and, you know, the Premier at one point not that long ago saying that between surgeries OR doctors are sitting down for coffee. Completely not fair to those physicians because that is not the case. The physicians in our public system are working as hard as they can, and they didn't just start during the pandemic. They have been working as hard as they can for decades and decades. It's very unfortunate to see the Premier undermining the hard work of those health care providers and health care workers.

Now, once again, with the changes we're seeing in here – this is a massive omnibus piece of health care legislation, changing nine pieces of legislation with very little consultation, well, I would argue, with no consultation. Why now? Why are you doing this to the physicians and the people taking care of our communities right now? The fact is that physicians and health care providers do not have much faith in this government.

Once again, going back to the comments right before, I spoke of the health care minister saying: where are your advocates? They are all over. They are in our e-mails. They are on social media. They are not only the health care providers but the patients of those health care providers, saying: "Please stop. Here are stories of my child in the Stollery. Here are stories of my child at the U of A, of my family member, my grandfather, who is desperately needing care."

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. members, Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available. I see the hon. Premier.

Mr. Kenney: Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker. I feel compelled to rise, in part, to refute some patently false claims that were made about me by the member opposite. Unless I misheard, I believe he began by saying that I had personally attacked certain physicians, that I named certain physicians and attacked them, questioned their integrity, and words to that effect. This is patently – patently – and objectively false. I have not attacked any physician at any time. I have not named any physician. When entering into debate on the question of physician compensation, my commentary has been limited to the hard data points about physician compensation in Alberta. I have never referenced a particular physician except in a complimentary fashion perhaps, so why would the member invent that, especially when I'm sitting here and can refute that?

Madam Deputy Speaker, I stand to be corrected if he can cite some quotation, some source where perhaps, while I was sleepwalking, I suddenly decided to launch a campaign of defamation against a particular – it's simply a complete figment of his imagination. Why would he make that up? Why would he invent that? Why?

11:10

Why? It's because it's the classic tactic of the NDP: fear and smear, defamation and division. Without consequence, without accountability, they get away with it over and over again. I'm not going to sit here in silence as they accuse me of something which is patently false. I would ask, when he takes the floor again, that member to retract and to apologize, to do the right thing. I don't know. Perhaps he read something from some third-hand politicized source online or something, and he believed it. We all make mistakes – that's fair, Madam Deputy Speaker – but we should take ownership of them when we do.

This member continued the NDP nonsense about this being privatization. He just said that this was a massive omnibus bill. Again, Madam Deputy Speaker, either he hasn't read it, or he's making stuff up. Here's the bill, people on television: 33 pages.

Thirty-three pages. This is not a massive bill. This is about an average-size bill. A massive bill runs in the hundreds of pages in length. How does he think he gets away with that? It's right here. It's actually 32 and a half pages. Why does he make it up?

He said that this is about undermining the universal health care system. Madam Deputy Speaker, all of the services proposed in this bill, 100 per cent of them, are funded 100 per cent by Alberta Health, by the government of Alberta, by medicare. One hundred per cent. This bill has precisely nothing to do with the private provision of services outside the single-payer universal health care system. How do they think that they can get away with making that up? I think it's become such a deeply ingrained habit for the NDP to make things up, and unfortunately there's an element of their base that buys it, that falls for the fear. I think that when they give speeches like that, as I intimated the other day in question period, it's partly because they send out fundraising e-mails to gullible supporters who actually believe it.

But they can do better. The members here can read the bill, as I did yesterday, saying:

The Minister shall not approve a proposed agreement unless. . .

That is an agreement with a chartered surgical facility.

- (a) the Minister is satisfied
 - (i) that the provision of insured surgical services as contemplated under the proposed agreement would be consistent with the principles of the Canada Health Act (Canada).

It's right there, Madam Deputy Speaker. Not an opinion, a fact. They're going to vote against that.

Again, I challenged them last night. If the streamlining of agreements with chartered surgical facilities facilitated in this bill is so terrible, then why did the NDP permit the operation of chartered surgical facilities during their four-year tenure? Why did they contract out 15 per cent of surgeries to privately operated corporations doing day surgeries? Why is it a dystopian nightmare that ends health care under this government but it was business as normal under the NDP? Could they please explain that, Madam Deputy Speaker?

The Deputy Speaker: Any members wishing to join debate on Bill 30 in second reading? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs.

Ms Goehring: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise tonight to talk to Bill 30, Health Statutes Amendment Act, 2020. I feel like I can't start this evening talking about this piece of legislation without first recognizing the many medical officials that are working so hard right now during this pandemic. I have friends, family, constituents that have been giving it their everything since the very beginning of this pandemic, anticipating what was coming, taking steps to make sure that their families would be taken care of during this time because they knew that their lives would change because they were the front line. Their commitment to serving Albertans was incredible, and it remains incredible.

I have to say that our health care professionals in the province have done an exceptional job in making sure that this pandemic has been as nonescalating as possible. The amount of care that they provide, the testing that they provide has been absolutely phenomenal, and I have to say that I'm very proud to call myself an Albertan and to know so many of these health care professionals that work every day.

In saying that, I can also say that concerns that I've heard from physicians, from health care providers in the province definitely started well before the pandemic. There's been unrest with physicians in this province that started since this government was

elected. I think that for the government members to say that this is fear and smear and that this is coming from us – this is absolutely not coming from us. This is coming from physicians, that I've had phone calls with in February of this year, that were in tears, devastated about the fee guide that was being proposed and the negative implications that that would have directly on their ability to provide patient care. We know that many if not all physicians or people in the health care field get into this field because they want to serve people and they want to take care of people. That's the nature of this profession.

When we're looking at this Bill 30 – I've heard physicians say that, again, it feels like it's another attack on them, and they're unsettled, Madam Speaker. You know, it's really concerning to hear how flip the government can be about this and how dismissive they are about these concerns that are being brought forward. I know I'm hearing them. I'm hearing them from doctors, from nurses, from patients, from families. We're inundated with people that are terrified about the steps and decisions that this government has made so far regarding health care. And to see this piece of legislation – it definitely continues their path that they've created to attack our health care system.

This piece of legislation, Bill 30, is absolutely not patient centred or person centred, for that matter. It's profit centred, and that's something they've been denying. When you have physicians look at this and come to you and explain that this is absolutely opening the door to privatized, American-style health care, I'm going to believe them. They are the experts in this field.

To hear the Premier just now say that this piece of legislation is not an omnibus I think is quite interesting. When you look at the pieces of legislation that this bill changes, there are nine pieces of legislation that are impacted in this one bill. Those are the Health Quality Council of Alberta Act, the Health Professions Act, the Health Care Protection Act, the Alberta Health Care Insurance Act, the Regional Health Authorities Act, the Hospitals Act, the Public Health Act, the Health Governance Transition Act, the Provincial Health Authorities of Alberta Act, nine pieces of legislation all in this one bill. So to say that it's not omnibus I think is interesting, to say the least, Madam Speaker.

You know, I grew up in rural Alberta, and my grandparents aged in rural Alberta, and to hear recently that there are physicians announcing upcoming hospital resignations or clinic closures all across this province is frightening. The communities that have been named are Athabasca, Rocky Mountain House, Canmore, Cochrane, Okotoks, Peace River, Rimbey, Westlock, Three Hills, Bragg Creek, Drayton Valley, Cold Lake, Lacombe, Pincher Creek, Fort McMurray, Ponoka, and Claresholm. That is a significant number of communities that are not going to have the same level of health care access that they had before. What does that mean to those surrounding communities? It means that they're going to be busier. It means that they're not going to be able to get in to see a physician when they need to. It's terrifying to think of the impacts that all of these physicians leaving those clinics or hospitals is going to have, not just in those communities but on the communities that surround them.

To me, when we're talking about Bill 30, the Health Statutes Amendment Act, it simply doesn't make sense why in the middle of a global pandemic we are still going after our health care system in this province. We need to take a step back and listen to the experts, listen to the physicians, fix the mistakes that they made when it came to the fee guide, and really try and just at least stabilize the health care system that we have now. Why they're contributing to more chaos and this potential to move to privatized health care is terrifying.

11:20

They talk about fear and smear. They talk about, you know: don't listen to them. Well, I'm listening to the doctors because, in my opinion, hearing from the experts, hearing from those where this is their profession, listening to the AMA, who had just recently quoted that 42 per cent of doctors are considering leaving Alberta as of July 10 – to me, if I had heard that statistic, I certainly would look at the decisions that had been made to date, and I wouldn't look at doing a complete overhaul of the health care system that we have right now. It just simply does not make sense.

Hearing over and over, Madam Speaker, that our physicians are pleading with this government to have them at the table – they want a voice at the table. They want to be listened to. They want to be part of the solution. Why this government wouldn't take advantage of that is just beyond anything that I can absolutely comprehend. We have physicians coming out saying that they feel threatened by this government, that they've seen instances where this Health minister has shown some less than desirable behaviours towards physicians. They want to talk. They want to be part of the solution. In my practice one of the best ways to come up with solutions is to go to those that are directly impacted, so talking to physicians, talking to nurses, talking to patients, talking to patient advocates.

[Mrs. Allard in the chair]

I know that there have been many groups that have been very vocal on social media. Patients of Alberta doctors have been incredibly vocal about their concerns, pleading with government to listen to them and their stories. A lot of those individuals are parents of medically fragile children, and I think that they should be considered when we're looking at some of these things. I know that there have been numerous constituents that have reached out to me expressing concern about the way that our health care system is going and that fear that with all of these physicians leaving the rural portions of our province, they're going to be coming into other areas, which puts a bigger impact on those other hospitals and clinics all around the province. If they're closing, it means they have to go somewhere else, which increases wait times, increases diagnostic times. It just creates more of a strain on the system.

Why they would introduce Bill 30 right now to, again, offer more instability and more chaos in the middle of a pandemic just simply doesn't make sense, Madam Speaker. I know that right now the way that this is going is very scary, and it's absolutely the wrong path for Alberta. We know that our hard-working doctors, nurses have literally put themselves in harm's way. They are coming to government saying: "Please sit with us. Work with us. We want to stay. We don't want to have to pick up our practice and move it outside of where our children have grown up, where our roots are." But they're feeling that they have to move, and it's something that's frightening.

I know that I've heard over and over that there's a definite mistrust with the Minister of Health and this government from physicians. We know that it's been expressed. It's been debated in this House. We've seen it on social media, and I know that the government is very aware of that. The thing that concerns me is that not only are we still in a pandemic, but there are many predictions that there's a second wave coming. Our health care system, like I spoke about earlier, has responded brilliantly, and they're preparing for that, so why they would introduce this piece of legislation right now, when we know that there's more concern coming, doesn't make sense. We need right now leadership in government, we need leadership in health care, and we need stability. Albertans need to know that their government is taking this pandemic seriously, and

the first thing to do that is supporting our health care system, because ultimately that's what's going to lead to success in making sure that as many Albertans are taken care of and come through this COVID in good health.

I'm just quite perplexed, Madam Speaker, that at this point we're destabilizing our health care system. I know that there are many people all across the province that have expressed frustration. You know, you hear things like patient-centred care, and that's a movement that's happening, where there are families that are involved in advising hospitals how the health care system could be improved at that facility, perhaps at a clinic. Those doctors are listening to patients so that they can improve their practice, but this government isn't listening to doctors about how we can best not only get through this pandemic but work through our health care system and have a system that is actually stable, effective, cost-efficient.

It doesn't need to go to this. It doesn't need to open doors that potentially move to profit-centred care. I don't believe that a patient should have to consider what their credit card limit is to go visit the doctor. It's just something that shouldn't be a concern for people when so many Albertans right now are struggling to make ends meet. They're impacted by business closures, they're impacted by so many different factors right now, and putting one more potential cost onto Albertans is just simply not okay. It's a stressor that can be avoided. If this is legislation that they want to bring forward, I think a robust consultation with physicians is essential.

We hear over and over that physicians just want to talk. They want to be at the table. They want to be part of that discussion. They want to help. So to have them ignored, ridiculed is just simply not acceptable. It doesn't create an environment where there's a trust between the government and our physicians. I know as an Albertan I rely heavily on our incredible health care system that we have, and I know my doctor has been in tears over the cuts and the impacts.

Going to visit my doctor used to be just, "How are you doing? What's going on?" an update, and now it's pleading: "How can they make a difference? How can they get the government to listen?" My doctor says that she's never ever been politically involved before. She has posters put up saying: reach out to your MLA; this is what's happening; this is what the government is proposing. This is something that I've never experienced before, Madam Speaker. To know that doctors . . . [Ms Goehring's speaking time expired]

Thank you.

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

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I was particularly interested in hearing about the Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs' personal doctor, telling about that doctor's perspective. I just wondered if the member would be willing to continue her thoughts about what she's hearing from the people in her life and her constituents around Bill 30 and concerns, generally speaking, around the relationship between doctors and the current government.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Edmonton-Castle Downs.

Ms Goehring: Thank you, Madam Speaker, and thank you to the member for the question. You know, I never thought I would be in a province where this was happening, that health care was in the position that it is right now. It's just simply something that is what I consider to be unimaginable, that we would be in a place today, in 2020, especially in a pandemic, where we're debating Bill 30, the Health Statutes Amendment Act, and in a place where as an elected

official I'm seeing incredible fear and stress put on physicians about: how are they going to be able to provide the health care to their patients that they signed up for? That's what is behind this. The physicians aren't feeling that they have the ability to provide the health care that they signed up to provide.

11:30

I truly believe that physicians get into medicine because they want to help, they want to do better for people, and to say that it's about money and that it's the highest paid – I mean, that is just absolutely never something that I've heard from a physician: "My wage is going to be cut. I'm going to make less money." No, it's: "I'm not going to be able to access and provide the same services to my patients as I have in the past. I'm going to have to cut clinic hours. I'm not able to do the things that I signed up to do." They're worried. They're worried about the seniors on their caseloads. They're worried about that patient that they might see every day. They're worried about people that are going to be impacted in rural Alberta.

We already, prior to this, had struggles all across the country in getting physicians to the level that we need them at. There are already doctor shortages, so to put this in right now, just simply doesn't make sense. It seems cruel to do this in the middle of a pandemic.

Trying to advocate alongside so many patients, so many physicians – they're afraid. I think it's unfortunate that the government is saying that it's because we're getting people worked up. People are taking the time. People are paying attention to what this government is doing. They know what's happening. It's not us going to them. It's people coming to us, saying: "We're afraid. What can we do? What can we do to have an impact on this government?"

I've heard members speak about, you know, the government rolling through things. They have the majority. Really, it doesn't matter what the opposition is saying, what Albertans are saying; they're going to do what they want. This is definitely the case with this piece of legislation because physicians are saying that they haven't been talked to, that they're not listening to them.

This isn't something new. This has been ongoing since the government started to mess around with our health care system, and I just don't understand why. We have thousands of professionals here in the province that are willing to speak, that want to speak, that truly want to make it better, who are simply being ignored or ridiculed. I don't understand how the government believes that it's our actions that are causing this stress. It's clearly the actions of this government that are making this unsettled unrest, strain within this profession.

When doctors are pleading to have a voice at the table, something has gone wrong. Something has absolutely gone wrong when we see that 42 per cent of doctors are considering leaving this province. That is a huge red flag that something is not on the right path. To add this piece of legislation at this time simply does not make sense. The government needs to take a step back and listen to physicians.

Thank you very much, Madam Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Hon. members, we are on Bill 30, the Health Statutes Amendment Act, 2020. Are there any other members seeking to rise on debate? I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-South.

Mr. Dang: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise tonight and speak to Bill 30, the Health Statutes Amendment Act, 2020. I think that a number of my colleagues tonight have spoken at length to the Health Statutes Amendment Act, 2020, and they

have spoken, I think, quite clearly as to why the Official Opposition opposes the majority of the aspects in Bill 30. We know and Albertans know that Bill 30 is simply a major step in this UCP government's rush to bring failing, American-style health care here to Alberta.

Madam Speaker, I think it's pretty clear that this is deliberately weakening the public health care system that Albertans rely on. We're talking about moving things like more surgeries, tests, and other procedures into the for-profit, American-style, private sector. Let's be clear. To be abundantly clear for those listening at home, this is not patient-centred care, it's not person-centred care; it's profit-centred care.

Madam Speaker, I think that when we look at our health care system, when we look at what is happening in our health care system in light of the current global pandemic and, of course, the pandemic that's affecting us here at home, we can see very clearly the shortcomings of American-style, privately delivered long-term care facilities, for example. These privatized, for-profit, American-style facilities have much worse outcomes than our public facilities, and it's coming at the expense of Alberta seniors and their families.

Madam Speaker, it's becoming also very clear that this government isn't satisfied to just give \$4.7 billion away to their corporate shareholders, friends, and donors. Indeed, those friends and donors now have to make money on the backs of sick and injured Albertans. I think this is the wrong path for Albertans. I think doctors agree that this is the wrong path for Albertans, and doctors are very clearly speaking out about this. We've seen the AMA actually sue the Health minister over his actions and his attack on the health care sector. We've seen private individuals, private doctors be accosted by this Health minister on their driveway at their home, right? It's simply ludicrous the types of attacks that this government will make on our health care professionals. Doctors do not trust the Minister of Health. Health care practitioners do not trust the Minister of Health. They don't trust this Premier. They don't trust this government, and they shouldn't trust this government because with this bill we know that corporate profits are going to soar, patients are going to suffer, and taxpayers are going to be left footing the bill.

Madam Speaker, it's very clear that this government needs to do better. It's very clear this bill is not good enough. In fact, it is overwhelmingly a bad bill. It's very clear that this bill is not supported by the vast majority of people who actually deliver health care in communities. We've seen in public surveys that almost 42 per cent of all physicians in this province, the majority of which are in rural areas, are looking at leaving the province. There are hospitals, for example, in Pincher Creek that will have no doctors come the end of this pandemic. It's absolutely shocking the distrust the medical field, the medical professionals that keep Albertans safe have for this government.

Madam Speaker, I think it's very important that we actually consult with Albertans when we move forward with such radical changes to our health care system. When we move forward with such ideologically radical, American-style changes to our health care system, it's important that we actually have the opportunity to talk to Albertans and say: is this for-profit, American-style system that's going to be at the expense of taxpayers, that's going to profit off sick and injured Albertans what Albertans want? Is that what the health practitioners want? Is that the type of system they want to operate in and work in? I think that's very important.

Madam Speaker, fortunately we have measures in this place that we can approach these and have those types of conversations. Fortunately, I have an amendment I'd like to move forward today, actually. I have an amendment, and I'd be happy to wait for, perhaps, our LASS to bring this to the table. I've got the original

here, and I would be happy to move this amendment. Would I be able to read it into the record now, or would you prefer I . . .

The Acting Speaker: Hon. member, this amendment will be known as REF1. If you can read it into the record for us, please.

Mr. Dang: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I would move that the motion for second reading of Bill 30, the Health Statutes Amendment Act, 2020, be amended by deleting all of the words after “that” and substituting the following:

Bill 30, Health Statutes Amendment Act, 2020, be not now read a second time but that the subject matter of the bill be referred to the Select Special Public Health Act Review Committee in accordance with Standing Order 74.2.

Now, Madam Speaker, it's pretty clear that this government hasn't done their homework. It's pretty clear that physicians don't believe this government when they speak on health care. It's pretty clear that this government does not have the trust of Albertans or our health care professionals, whether it's our nurses, our nurse practitioners, our doctors. Whoever it is, it's pretty clear that they don't trust this government. They don't trust this government not to bring in an American-style system, not to bring in a for-profit system that is going to hurt patient care and is going to hurt the average Albertan.

I believe, Madam Speaker, that it's essential that we refer this to a committee that will have the ability to actually go out and speak to Albertans and speak to physicians and speak to nurses and speak to providers and understand what these changes will mean for families and understand what these changes will mean for Albertans.

11:40

Madam Speaker, this is an omnibus piece of health legislation, right? We speak often in this place about omnibus legislation, but this one addresses nine pieces of legislation: the Health Quality Council of Alberta Act, the Health Professions Act, the Health Care Protection Act, the Alberta Health Care Insurance Act, the Regional Health Authorities Act, the Hospitals Act, the Public Health Act, the Health Governance Transition Act, the Provincial Health Authorities of Alberta Act. It's pretty clear that all nine pieces of legislation are essential to how we deliver health care here in this province.

It's pretty clear that this government has not gained the trust of the people they're trying to govern over, right? Indeed, it's so clear that the government no longer has the trust of physicians that today, actually, we found out that the Health minister is directing physicians that they can't leave if they don't want to practise anymore. How ludicrous is that? How absurd is it to actually hear the Health minister say that doctors must give servitude to the people of Alberta and are not able to practise of their own free will? That's actually what this government is doing. That's the level to which the relationship between our health care providers and this government has broken down to. That's the level to which Albertans do not trust this Health minister and do not trust this Premier. It is abundantly clear that this government is unfit to govern on the Health file.

Madam Speaker, it's very clear that when members of this Premier's staff, whether it's the issues management team, the press secretaries, the Minister of Health himself, go after physicians and health care practitioners on social media or in the traditional media, when they attack doctors and they attack individuals on Twitter and social media, and they are acting on behalf of this government, using taxpayer dollars to do this during the workday, it becomes abundantly clear that this government is actually resentful towards our health care providers, is actually intentionally antagonizing

many of these health care workers, and that is absolutely shameful. It's absolutely shameful.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

Instead of going after the people who are keeping us safe, instead of going after the people that are keeping us healthy in the middle of a global health emergency, a global health pandemic, perhaps we should actually talk to them and we should actually talk to the people that provide our health care and talk to the people that receive health care such as Albertans and understand what the impacts and implications of Bill 30 will be and understand what the impacts of Americanizing our health care are going to be in bringing in for-profit systems that are profitable only on the backs of sick and injured Albertans.

That, I think, Madam Speaker, is a very reasonable thing to say. I think it's very reasonable that we need to put the breaks on this piece of legislation, send it to a committee. In this case we happen to have a Select Special Public Health Act Review Committee, something that is already designed to address these sorts of issues, to address these complicated issues in health care, and actually say, “Hey. Maybe we got this wrong. Maybe we need to actually talk to the delivery providers of these services, talk to the corporations that are going to be providing these services, talk to the doctors that are going to be providing these services, talk to the nurses that are practising in these facilities, talk to the pharmacists that are practising in these facilities, talk to the nurse practitioners who are in these facilities, talk to Albertans who reside or receive treatment in these facilities, and actually understand the implications that we're going to have.”

Instead, it turns out, Madam Speaker, that this government did none of those things, right? This government, instead of doing those things – we found out the other day – actually is telling doctors that they must continue to practise even if they don't wish to. In what workplace is it reasonable that you compel an employee to work? That is a very absurd, almost totalitarian action this government is taking. It's absurd because this government is directing physicians to work without their free will.

That, again, Madam Speaker, speaks to the breakdown of this relationship. It speaks to the breakdown of trust. It speaks to the breakdown of the ability for physicians and doctors and other health care practitioners to actually believe that there is a working relationship between them and this Health minister and between them and this government. This government, this Health minister, this Premier's staff have repeatedly antagonized health care practitioners, health professionals on social media and in traditional media. They have repeatedly gone after individual doctors, and indeed this Health minister even went to the home of a physician and accosted him in front of his family on his own driveway. That is the level to which this is breaking down.

Mr. Ellis: Point of order, Madam Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-West.

Point of Order Allegations against a Member

Mr. Ellis: Thank you. I certainly hate to interrupt his Facebook post feed, but I'm going to rise under 23(h), (i), and (j). Again, it's personal attacks against the Health minister. Attack, attack, attack: it's all he seems to be arguing. I really would appreciate – he's also introduced this amendment. I highly hope that he sticks to the argument in regard to the amendment for which he would like to send this to a standing committee.

Madam Speaker, you know, the argument by the opposition is going to indicate that this is a matter of debate, but it is certainly not becoming of this House. It is creating disorder to constantly attack the health care minister, to attack other members within the government side. I'm here representing Calgary-West, as many are representing their own constituencies, to listen to constructive debate on this piece of legislation, and I would highly recommend that this member get to the debate as opposed to just personal attacks against other members of this Chamber.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I will, as the Deputy Government House Leader has suggested, suggest that this is a matter of debate, but more than a matter of debate. This is something that has been incredibly well documented in the media and is in the public awareness, that the Minister of Health did go a doctor's home and on their driveway yell at that doctor. So this is material to the debate as we are talking about changes to the health system and the deteriorating relationship between this government and doctors. So not only is the member on topic, he is speaking factually about incidents that happened. This is not a personal attack. This is a recounting of recent history.

I would suggest that the member be allowed to continue his remarks in this regard as he is contributing to second reading of Bill 30, which touches on these important issues.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs, additional points to add to the debate?

Mr. Madu: Additional information, Madam Speaker, just quickly to add that I think the point needs to be made that it is irrelevant, you know, whether or not what the Member for Edmonton-South is speaking about was documented in the media. The question is whether or not all of those ramblings have anything to do with this bill before this Chamber or the amendment. In my considered opinion, the answer is no. On that particular basis it is a point of order.

The Deputy Speaker: Okay. The hon. Member for Edmonton-South.

Mr. Dang: Thank you, Madam Speaker. In just a very brief summary here, I believe that the comments that I am making are indeed relevant to specifically the referral amendment because I'm speaking to the justification of why the relationship that exists currently between the government and our health care practitioners, who are being affected by the bill, necessitates the referral to a committee to repair these relationships.

The Deputy Speaker: Can we deal with the point of order now and then maybe go back to regular debate in this Chamber?

Thank you for the participation in this extensive point of order. I appreciate the various points of view in allowing me the opportunity to rule on this point of order that has been called. While this is not a point of order and this is a matter of debate, I would seriously urge the hon. member to veer away from comments that could certainly create disorder in this House, which it is and has been done in the past.

Hon. member, you are speaking to a referral amendment, REF1. Please proceed with the debate.

Debate Continued

Mr. Dang: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I will certainly take that under advisement.

Certainly, I think that it is very clear in this place that the Alberta Medical Association, the College of Physicians & Surgeons, and certainly organizations like the United Nurses of Alberta and the Alberta Union of Provincial Employees, organizations that represent a large number of health care employees, whether it is doctors, practitioners, nurses, whatever it is, it certainly appears that the changes that are being made to the Public Health Act, the changes that are being made to the Health Professions Act and the Health Care Protection Act, all these acts – they have felt that they have not been heard.

11:50

It is very clear that these organizations, whether it's the workers or patient advocacy groups, feel that they have not been heard. It's very clear that Albertans feel that they have not been heard because Bill 30, which introduces an American-style, for-profit health care system and paves the way for this American-style health care system in Alberta, is something that is a drastic change to how we deliver health care. It is something that is a drastic change to how we approach health care, and Albertans deserve to have their voices heard. Albertans deserve to have the opportunity to have input on this bill.

Certainly, we have a select special committee on this already. We have a select special committee whose stated purpose is to review the Public Health Act. It's in the name of the committee, Madam Speaker, yet here we are in this place amending the Public Health Act. Why don't we actually give the committee the opportunity to do their job? Why doesn't this government, that struck this committee, that actually created the committee themselves, not actually want this committee to have the opportunity to give input on the bill before we move forward with it? I think that's something that's very concerning. I think it's very concerning because it speaks to the government not wanting these organizations and these individuals to have the ability to have input before we rush forward with this Americanization, before we rush forward with this dangerous ideological program.

It's pretty clear when we're hearing, for example, Dr. Lorian Hardcastle, a University of Calgary professor of health care law who is an expert in this field. She basically has already said that private clinics tend to take less complex, less sick, cheaper-to-treat cases from the public system and that the public system is then left with more expensive and complex cases. Really, it doesn't actually save any money. Indeed, it can cost more money. Madam Speaker, Dr. Hardcastle also talked about how we may find ourselves with a system where basically Albertans are no longer able to access care on the basis of need. Instead, they'll be accessing care on the basis of how much they can pay, and that is what is extremely concerning about this bill. It's that professionals and experts in the field, whether they are practitioners or policy experts, are all raising a plethora of concerns about the rushed implementation of this, the rapid implementation of this for-profit system without a stop to actually talk to the physicians, to actually talk to the nurses, to actually talk to the policy experts and say: "What are the long-term impacts going to be? What are the effects going to be?"

When we see that 42 per cent of doctors, almost half of all doctors in the province, are looking at leaving the province and we're looking at not having the physicians, and then we see that the Health minister has no plan to replace this posting for hundreds of doctors and then directing doctors that they are not allowed to stop work,

that speaks to the concern that we have and why this referral is so important. It speaks to why we need to have the Select Special Public Health Act Review Committee actually go out and speak to these Albertans and speak to doctors, speak to physicians and understand what the implications will be and understand how these changes will affect their practices and professionals' practices. It speaks to certainly that we need to have a more comprehensive review and a more comprehensive talk about this before we rush forward with this Americanization, before we rush forward with this attack on our public system.

Madam Speaker, it is particularly concerning because this government has basically completely stopped talking to the AMA. The AMA has actually started to sue this government over some of those discussions, and that's what's so concerning. When the representative body of doctors in this province no longer trusts the government, then we need to put the brakes on the situation. We need to go to committee and say: "What has gone wrong? Why has it gone wrong, and where are we going with this?"

Madam Speaker, it's very clear that we need to have more discussions on this. It's very clear that the Health minister has lost the trust of doctors in this province, has lost the trust of Albertans in this province, and indeed is actually accosting physicians in their own homes in this province. It's become very clear that we need to put the brakes on this. We need to instead have a reasonable discussion. We need to instead stop and say: what do we want our physicians to have input on?

The Deputy Speaker: Any members wishing to speak under Standing Order 29(2)(a)? The hon. Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo.

Mr. Yao: Well, thank you so much, Madam Speaker. I wish to reply to the hon. members from across the way. Bill 30, to be clear, will strengthen our health system. It will improve access to our health services. It is a good bill. How do I know that? Because I'm listening to the opposition, and they have terrible arguments. They revert to slandering, and that's really unfortunate.

Now, if you mention a group that was unfit to govern, let's talk about the previous government, shall we? The Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo just happens to have copies of his old notes on some things. Let's talk about some wait times that happened under the previous government. Did you know that hip replacements under their watch increased by 10 weeks? It exceeded over a year. Knee replacements were 14 weeks longer under your watch. Hip fractures . . .

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. member, I just will caution you to direct your comments through the chair.

Mr. Yao: Absolutely, Madam Speaker.

Are you aware that the previous government really, really delayed a lot of surgical wait times under their watch? It's really unfortunate.

In the end, this government is doing the right thing. This is a good bill. It's providing things that are going to ensure that our surgical systems are much better, and we're going to correct some of the things that the previous government did.

It's really unfortunate – and I do have to comment on some of the things that the previous member said, the Member for Edmonton-West Henday, on negotiations and how this government addresses negotiations. Again, if we look back at the previous government's conversations with pharmacists when they were negotiating with pharmacists – I just want to remind the members across the way of what they did to the pharmacists. When the pharmacists sent their negotiation team to you, you locked them all out except for two

members, and then you made those two members sign an agreement, and then you made them sign a nondisclosure agreement so they couldn't even tell their own members about what they had just signed.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. member, I'd caution you again to just comment through the chair.

Mr. Yao: Absolutely.

I guess, in the end, the Member for Edmonton-South's amendment is misdirected, and I'm just asking members from both sides of the House not to support this amendment.

Thank you so much.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-South.

Mr. Dang: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I think it's a little bit rich for the member opposite to rise in this place and speak to health care when indeed Bill 30 is going to make these situations worse, right? In Bill 30 we're talking about bringing in systems where it's pay to play. We're talking about bringing in systems that are American style and are not going to actually provide health care to Albertans on a basis of need. Those are not my words, Madam Speaker. That's what Dr. Lorian Hardcastle, professor of law at the University of Calgary, who is an expert in health care policy, is saying about this bill.

It's become abundantly clear that the members opposite do not understand the implications of what is going on in this bill. They actually need to stop and refer this to committee so that we can have a more fulsome discussion, so that we can bring in the experts and actually discuss the implications that are going to happen. If the members opposite cannot see the implications that are going to happen, if the members cannot see through their ideological lens the implications that are going to happen and bring in this risky, ideological, American-style, for-profit health care, then we need to put the brakes on.

We need to go to committee. We need to actually talk to the physicians, the 42 per cent of physicians who are talking about leaving this province because of this government's actions, the 42 per cent of physicians that are going to be leaving hospitals virtually empty because of this government's actions, the 42 per cent of physicians that are personally being attacked by this Health minister and by this government's issues management team on social media, Madam Speaker. Those physicians actually deserve a voice at the table. If this government doesn't see that, if the members opposite don't believe that, then it's becoming a pattern. It's becoming a pattern that this government does not want to hear from Albertans, that they are barrelling forward with risky, ideological projects. They're barrelling forward with risky Americanization.

Instead of actually looking out for Albertans, which we are all trying to do in this place, and instead of actually making sure we have a system that works for Albertans, Madam Speaker, what's happening is that the profitable corporations that this government has already given more than \$4.7 billion away to are now going to be making money on the backs of sick and injured Albertans. This isn't patient-centred care. This is profit-centred care, and that's not what Albertans deserve.

The Deputy Speaker: Any other members wishing to join the debate on amendment REF1 in second reading of Bill 30? The hon. Member for Edmonton-City Centre.

Mr. Shepherd: Well, thank you, Madam Speaker. I appreciate the opportunity to rise and speak to amendment REF1 on Bill 30, the Health Statutes Amendment Act. As both a member of the Select

Special Public Health Act Review Committee and the Official Opposition critic for Health, I support this referral amendment, and I'd like to talk a bit about why.

Now, I am familiar with what Bill 30 does. I know that the Minister of Health was disappointed earlier today in question period. He felt that I hadn't been raising it. Well, I've been waiting for this opportunity and certainly look forward to having some interaction within the Committee of the Whole, which will give us, I think, the chance for some extensive questioning, and I have a feeling we'll have many opportunities to debate this further in the House.

12:00

Now, Bill 30, of course, we know is looking to accomplish a number of things. It is, I'd say, perhaps not itself a massive bill, as the Premier noted earlier, but certainly in amending nine different pieces of health care legislation, while the bill itself may be 33 pages, it has wide-reaching implications. I would indeed say that this is an omnibus piece of legislation regardless of how thick the actual bill might be.

That said, this bill, as we've been talking about quite a bit so far tonight, is looking to streamline the chartering of private, for-profit surgery clinics. That's one of the main things here. It also involves the moving of the Health Quality Council of Alberta, their reporting, from the entirety of the Legislature to simply being under the aegis of the Minister of Health, something that I find quite concerning and will speak more about at a later point in debate.

It also is looking to reconfigure the regulatory colleges, to increase that to 50 per cent public representation. Generally public representation is a good thing; some real concerns when it is in the hands of a government that has shown it has real problems with finding proper appointments, when it tends towards cronyism, and indeed has shown such antagonism towards so many of the health professions in the province of Alberta.

It also makes provisions for the Minister of Health to make it easier, it says and the government would claim, for him to be able to set up alternative relationship plans with doctors. This is where we get into more of what I want to talk about tonight, Madam Speaker, on this referral amendment and why it should go to committee. For this minister to say in any way that he wants to help physicians in the province of Alberta is absolutely laughable. Having watched his performance and indeed the performance of this entire government since they first introduced the bill that allowed them to tear up the master agreement with physicians last fall and up until then, it has been utterly disingenuous. To suggest that anything this government is doing is to help physicians: physicians don't buy it, and neither do I.

Now, within this bill is one of the other pieces that I do want to talk about more tonight, and that is that, when we're speaking of agreements, this bill gives the government the ability to enter into an agreement with a private corporation, so an actual corporation, not an actual doctor who is running that corporation – we're talking about a corporation with a group of shareholders, none of whom could actually be a medical professional – to allow them to bill directly for medical services. Now, my concern here, Madam Speaker, is because we have seen that this government seems to have a real preference for those corporations over actual individual doctors and health professionals. There is a litany of examples in ways that we can talk about this. It's unfortunate the low regard in which this government, indeed this Premier, seems to hold physicians.

Now, he's been talking quite extensively – just to touch on this because he's been discussing this in regard to the bill. I did want to address this here as we talk about why this bill should be referred to committee. Now, this Premier, with a bit of a chortle and a smile,

talks about physicians being the 1 per cent. The 1 per cent, Madam Speaker. Now, the actual data that is published under the health care insurance plan of the gross billings in the province of Alberta – while this minister is threatening his sunshine list, this data is already published. It breaks it down by profession.

Let's talk about family physicians, who are one of the largest bodies of physicians in the province of Alberta and who have been bearing the brunt of the impact of what can only be described, frankly, as attacks by this government through the sweeping changes that they forced through with their physician funding framework after tearing up the master agreement with the physicians in the province of Alberta. Family doctors average in gross billings \$305,542. Gross billings. From that average cost and overhead is about 30 per cent; that would be \$91,662, Madam Speaker. By the way, those dollars are creating jobs in their communities. They are hiring people in communities across Alberta, including rural communities, creating income for commercial landlords, have agreements, contracts with other service providers in their communities. They are contributing to their local economy.

After those costs, that leaves about \$213,879.40. The 1 per cent, Madam Speaker, according to this Premier, living high on the hog. From that, of course, we've got to remember that none of these doctors have vacation pay. They're not paid if they take sick leave. They're not paid if they take parental leave. They have a number of other costs and other things that they have to take care of, so they are taking home even less than that. They are taking home, many of them, less than this Premier's main paid Twitter troll. He calls them the 1 per cent and laughs.

Let's be clear about what we're talking about when we're talking about these situations with physicians and the opportunities and the offers they want to make. Of course, many of those physicians are also paying their student loans, Madam Speaker, thousands and thousands and thousands of dollars per year based on the many years of education that they put in to earn this income.

Now, the 1 per cent – let's be clear, Madam Speaker; there are doctors who are amongst that 1 per cent. There are doctors who are very well remunerated in this province in some aspects of it. Many of them are going to be the ones who are running the kinds of private surgery clinics which this government wants to invest more in. Indeed, I would dare say that many of them are probably the ones who actually have the ear, shall we say, of this government behind the scenes and in the closed rooms. That is your 1 per cent, not the family doctors who are being ground under the heel of this government.

Now, speaking of corporate care, what have we seen with this government in terms of how they have approached the remuneration of physicians in the midst of a global pandemic? Here's one example. In the midst of a global pandemic Albertans are anxious about protecting their health, and doctors are making heroic efforts to adapt their offices and their practices to be able to continue to practise and be there for their patients, to ensure they still have access to care and supports. What did this government do to help? Did they follow the lead of other provinces and quickly move to support those family doctors and their communities with proper billing codes to be able to provide virtual care? No.

What they did was they launched a partnership with a massive corporation, with Telus, to offer virtual walk-in clinic care in direct competition with Alberta's actual family doctors, access to doctors that patients had never met before, who weren't even necessarily located in Alberta. The agreement, Madam Speaker, that they signed with Telus, the kind of agreement they want to expand the ability to create, paid Telus twice the amount per visit than they were paying to actual Alberta family doctors in their communities,

who pay commercial landlords and hire Albertans as staff, to provide virtual care to the patients they've been serving for years because this government is more interested in large corporations than it is in actual individual family doctors, who, yes, do incorporate.

But there is a difference between the individual family doctor who has a corporation and a corporation like Telus, who bought a set of clinics, actually, across Alberta, some rather nice and swanky ones that have some membership fees and all sorts of private stuff. There is a difference between these two, and for the Minister of Health to earlier get up and talk about, "Well, gee, obviously you don't support private care," there are obviously some gradations and nuance here of which this government is willingly oblivious.

Indeed, they aren't content with just that. Now they've also contracted, it seems, with Rocket Doctor, a telehealth consultation company in Ontario. I remember how often we heard government members complain about companies being hired from Ontario to come and install light bulbs. Well, they're perfectly happy to send money to an Ontario company to look after Albertans' health rather than actually supporting Alberta doctors to do that work.

12:10

Here is my concern. This is what we are talking about, Madam Speaker, when we talk about increasing corporate care, when we talk about the impacts of this government's decision-making in that we are seeing – I just saw a tweet today. The family doctor, Dr. Carly Crewe, who was recognized as the best family doctor in the province of Alberta, one of the Sundre doctors who were driven to withdraw their hospital services because the sweeping changes forced through by this government made it financially unviable for them to continue to offer the hospital services and continue to run their clinic, one of the most respected rural clinics and training centres in the province of Alberta. Know where Dr. Crewe is now? She is working in the Northwest Territories because she needed to take a break from the constant attacks, chaos caused by this government.

When we talk about our concern about increasing privatization in this system, this is what I am talking about, Madam Speaker, that this is a government that seems to be obsessed with depersonalizing care in the province of Alberta. They would rather listen to businesspeople and corporate shareholders than the people who actually provide care to Albertans. They can talk about how they want to improve the system, but their actions show that they are utterly disingenuous about that, cherry-picking statistics, misrepresenting every aspect of their so-called negotiations with physicians in the province of Alberta.

When they are talking about these corporations that they want to be able to sign agreements with to provide medical services – you know what, Madam Speaker? – those corporations will get binding agreements. Those corporations do not get agreements that can be torn up simply at the whim of the health care minister. I'm pretty sure those agreements aren't going to come with the caveat that the minister can simply announce a brand new health care bulletin that's going to change the rates because he feels like it. This government respects corporate shareholders more than it does actual doctors. It will provide them with surety, individuals who are going to be far closer to the 1 per cent that this Premier chooses to mock doctors with. They are of more value and worthy of more respect to this Premier, this minister, this government than the actual family doctors who have worked to build their clinics, to serve their communities, to bring services to their towns. As we've said, they're not content to just simply give that \$4.7 billion corporate giveaway; they want them to be able to make profit off of Albertans' health as well.

That's the first of my concerns with this bill, Madam Speaker, and why I think it needs to be referred. I look forward to the opportunity to debate much, much more on this bill and indeed get into the details of the Saskatchewan surgical initiative on which this government is basing its plan and the issues that were there and see if this government has made plans to make sure we don't fall into the same pitfalls or those of the health resources clinic in Calgary or any of the many other failed ideological experiments that we have seen from Conservatives because this goes back a long ways in Alberta. It is déjà vu.

I look forward to the opportunity to continue this debate and to continue to look at those concerns.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. members, Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. The Member for Edmonton-City Centre is always a compelling speaker in this place. I wanted to just entreat him to maybe highlight what the second issue was going to be because he's left us hanging. The first issue that he flagged is so concerning to me that I may not be able to sleep tonight without maybe a hint of what his second concern will be. If the member would be so kind.

The Deputy Speaker: Sleep is very important.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-City Centre.

Mr. Shepherd: Certainly. Well, thank you, Madam Speaker. I do appreciate the opportunity to continue on debate and perhaps talk a little bit about what some of the other concerns are that are going to be coming up. Actually, I think that probably one of the next things I'll talk about will be the private surgical facilities, but I do just want to take a moment to note another thing here.

While we are talking about family physicians and corporations, an interesting thing occurred to me, Madam Speaker. This Minister of Health is very fond of standing and talking about the wonderful job he did on April 24 of trying to clean up a small amount of the mess he made, as he was under pressure from members of his own caucus for the damage he was doing to health care in their actual areas, as their doctors were preparing to leave. He likes to brag about how he removed the cap on the rural, remote, northern program.

Now, an interesting thing there: there used to be two components to that program. There was the flat fee that was paid to an actual physician living in and working in the community, and then there was the top-up amount, a percentage amount that's added on for anyone who's billing for a service provided in that community. Now, for many rural communities that flat fee disappeared, but the minister raised the cap on the variable fee.

So I find it interesting. Perhaps they can clarify. If this is not the case, I would be happy to hear it. But it appears to me that a corporation that perhaps, say, sets up a set of franchise clinics across a few different rural areas will all of a sudden be able to charge that variable fee on every service that one of their employed doctors provides. By removing the cap, the interesting thing is that many doctors that lost the flat fee reached out and said to me: "You know what? I don't bill enough that I'll actually be able to take any advantage of the increase in the variable. I will never hit that cap." You know who might, Madam Speaker? A corporation that has multiple doctors working for them on salary and can suddenly make additional money because the minister raised the cap, perhaps knowing in advance that he was going to be bringing forward Bill 30. As we've seen, again, this government is not interested in helping actual individual physicians or even small clinics. This is a government that likes big corporations.

This is yet another example where this government takes every opportunity to undermine even as they smear and attack and criticize and misrepresent our community physicians, who, again, are far from the 1 per cent, unlike many of this Premier's more favoured corporate friends and allies, but are, in fact, the individuals who are building communities, who are the heart of their communities, and, unfortunately, who we are now seeing driven out of province, even as the Minister of Health tries now to work with the CPSA to build himself a nice hook to be able to try to pull them back.

This is why Bill 30 – for all the pretty words and all the claims that this government brings forward, fundamentally I do not trust them in their intention. I do not trust that this will be the last step on that road to greater corporatization, to greater privatization, to aspiring to that lofty goal that previous Conservative governments have chased after like the lost city of gold. But what goes around comes around, and it seems that every once in a while they've got to take another swing at that brass ring.

This government claims, as the Premier signed on his giant Coroplast sign, that they only intend to ever protect health care.

The Deputy Speaker: Any other members wishing to join debate on the referral amendment? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise this evening to join in the debate on Bill 30, the Health Statutes Amendment Act, 2020, speaking to REF1, a referral that would have the bill not be read a second time "but that the subject matter of the bill be referred to the Select Special Public Health Act Review Committee in accordance with Standing Order 74.2."

12:20

Madam Speaker, as a member of the Public Health Act Review Committee as well as an MLA representing my constituents in Edmonton-Mill Woods and the Grey Nuns community hospital, which is in the heart of my community, I rise to speak in support of this referral amendment. Although this is my first opportunity to join in the debate, having reviewed the legislation, which amends nine pieces of legislation, having contacted and talked to constituents in the health care field, and having heard the debate from my colleagues, I have significant concerns around Bill 30 that I think could be appropriately addressed at the Select Special Public Health Act Review Committee, where we would have the opportunity to hear from experts and to examine more closely some of the issues within this Bill 30.

Now, I would like to acknowledge that we are currently in the middle of a pandemic, and our health care professionals are very, very occupied at the moment making sure that Albertans – our families, our communities, our neighbours – are able to be kept safe and that when they are not, they are receiving the care and treatment that they need, whether it is COVID related or otherwise. I want to take a moment to just say thank you to all of the health care professionals and all of our front-line responders who are currently in the middle of this emergent health situation.

I would like to acknowledge that given that it is a pandemic, I think that Albertans in general and health care professionals specifically have less capacity to be able to tune into the debate that is happening here tonight, at nearly 12:30 in the morning, as well as to follow the coverage and to be able to assess what this may mean for them and their own health professions. The timing of this legislation, during a public health crisis, is certainly of concern to me.

By moving this discussion into the committee setting, not only would we be able to have guests attend, but we would also have more time to be able to review the legislation, to hear from people in a socially distanced way, because we're now able to Skype to have people in to our committee meetings, which, I think, has been working very well as long as people unmute themselves. I think that we can apply that to the process of Bill 30 debate.

Now, given that this is my first time to speak to this, I want to start with some fundamentals. I think that this pandemic and dealing with COVID-19 has, for me and for many Albertans, just reaffirmed the need for a strong, responsive public health system in order to respond to situations like this. We've seen Albertans do very well, and we've seen our health care system do well so far. We need to continue to support them. But I'm very concerned about increasing levels of privatization, as we've heard through the debate about this particular piece of legislation.

I would also like to note specifically, while we are debating Bill 30 this evening, that today was the day that the AMA, the Alberta Medical Association, who is the representative of doctors in our province, launched a full ad campaign and put ads in newspapers. The campaign name actually holds a special meaning for many people in this Chamber because it's titled Take Yes for an Answer. The Minister of Transportation is not here, but I have heard him use that phrase.

An Hon. Member: Point of order.

Ms Gray: Oh, I apologize. I apologize and withdraw. I did not intend that but, rather, to point out an anecdote of something I've heard in this Chamber a number of times, which is: take yes for an answer.

This is pertinent to the debate on Bill 30 and this particular referral amendment because our health care professionals and the doctors, I think, have a very important role to play in discussions about our health care system. They are currently feeling like they are battling on multiple fronts, and I've heard this directly from doctors within my own circle and certainly through my constituency office, with the high level of correspondence that the Edmonton-Mill Woods constituency office has been getting on this issue, specifically centred around: the AMA is currently in a lawsuit with this government as a result of legislation that was passed that allowed the government to cancel or, as the doctors have framed it, tear up their master agreement.

That was kind of the starting position of this government. Since then there have been a number of changes to billing practices and structures that have resulted in cuts to many physicians. I understand that some specialty physicians have had significant cuts to their income right now as well as trying to – today was the day that the AMA put an ad campaign in kind of outlining the relationship between the AMA and the government of Alberta since the beginning.

But today was also the day that we found out that the Minister of Health has sent a letter to the College of Physicians & Surgeons of Alberta essentially trying to coerce doctors to practise against their will and not be able to leave. Now, this was the result likely because, based off the government's actions to doctors in the face of a pandemic, 42 per cent of Alberta doctors are considering leaving the province, based off a recent survey. Anecdotally, based on the correspondence I get to my constituency office, that seems accurate. That seems like a believable figure at the moment. There's been a lot of stress and conflict.

I think that these issues and others are ones that we would be able to look into more fulsomely at the Public Health Act Review Committee. So I want to thank the Member for Edmonton-South

for moving this amendment because I think it is the right thing for us to do at this point to be able to truly look at what Bill 30 is doing.

From my initial readings Bill 30 appears to be increasing levels of privatization and private, for-profit care delivery. I have strong concerns with that because academic evidence, experiences in other jurisdictions have shown that for-profit surgical delivery is more expensive. I won't get into details right now, Madam Speaker, because I imagine we'll have other opportunities through debate, but those and other issues are extremely concerning for me.

I would also like to share my concern just around the government changing the way that it makes agreements with doctors, the opportunity for doctors to essentially get employed by nonphysician corporations. Something the Minister of Health said earlier caught my ear because as he was talking, he said – and this is almost a direct quote – that doctors are independent businesses; they didn't want to be employees when public health care was first being delivered. He was saying this as part of a larger argument, but it's interesting to me that Bill 30 would make doctors employees. In responding to something else, he acknowledged that setting up as professional corporations was how doctors wanted to originally be set up, yet now he says that in this House, and then Bill 30 implements that ability for nonphysician corporations to be able to employ doctors. I share some of the concerns that the Member for Edmonton-City Centre was sharing about what that means for our public health care system.

Overall, given that we are seeing that the AMA has filed a lawsuit and taken out full-page ads saying Take Yes for an Answer, pleading with this government to come back to the negotiating table, we have this large Bill 30 changing nine pieces of legislation, including such measures as changing who the Health Quality Council of Alberta reports to so that it's no longer the Legislature or the public but only directly to the minister, which in my mind seems to introduce an issue of transparency and accountability. There's a reason so many things

come through this Chamber, where all 87 of us have been duly elected by the public and entrusted with the responsibility to review these things and to make recommendations. The reconfiguration of different regulatory colleges and the appointment process is something I'd like to have the opportunity to better understand and discuss, and that opportunity would be afforded at the committee.

12:30

I've touched on a few of the initial concerns that I share and reasons why I would support referral amendment 1, and I would encourage all hon. members in this House to seriously consider using our Public Health Act Review Committee to be able to also take a look at the issues contained within Bill 30, to hear presentations from the professionals, to hear presentations from the ministry staff who've been working on these issues, and to allow us more time to be able to debate and discuss.

I look forward to further opportunities to discuss more details about the bill itself and to hear from other hon. members as we join in this debate further, but for now I would like to move that we adjourn debate.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Jason Nixon: Well, thank you, Madam Speaker. Thank you to all members of the Chamber for their hard work tonight. First of all, as per Standing Order 3(1.2) I will notify the House that there will be no morning sitting tomorrow.

With that, Madam Speaker, I will move that we adjourn the House until 1:30 p.m.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 12:32 a.m. on Thursday]

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