



Province of Alberta

The 29th Legislature
Second Session

Alberta Hansard

Wednesday morning, November 23, 2016

Day 51

The Honourable Robert E. Wanner, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta
The 29th Legislature

Second Session

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Party standings:

New Democrat: 55 Wildrose: 22 Progressive Conservative: 8 Alberta Liberal: 1 Alberta Party: 1

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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

9 a.m.

Wednesday, November 23, 2016

[The Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

The Speaker: Good morning.

Let us reflect or pray, each in our own way. Hon. members, let us empower and encourage one another to speak up about issues that are important to us, particularly those issues that are important to the residents we represent. Let us respect the differences of opinion amongst us and use these differences to work collaboratively for the greater good of this province.

Please be seated.

Hon. members, I would just like to take a moment before we proceed with the business this morning. I would like to introduce to members a new person at the table. As some of you know, I'm a bit challenged on the pronunciation of certain names, so I'm sure she won't hold it against me if I don't pronounce this correctly: Aurelia Nicholls. Aurelia was born and raised in Ontario and obtained her undergraduate degree, with a double major in history and business, at the University of Waterloo in 2003. Aurelia subsequently moved to Edmonton, which many of us have also done, and attended the University of Alberta, where she completed her law degree in 2006. Aurelia has been seconded from Alberta Justice, environmental law section, and is working in the office of Parliamentary Counsel as part of our professional development opportunity for the fall sitting. I would encourage all the members to please welcome Aurelia to the table.

Aurelia, I must tell you that this will be an experience like none other. Welcome.

Orders of the Day

Government Bills and Orders

Third Reading

Bill 29

Vital Statistics and Life Events Modernization Act

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Service Alberta and Status of Women.

Ms McLean: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise today at third reading to discuss the amendments outlined in Bill 29, the Vital Statistics and Life Events Modernization Act. While we have debated the details of the bill during Committee of the Whole, I'd like to take this opportunity to provide some real-life examples of the impact these amendments will have on the lives of average Albertans.

The first relates to new parents, Mr. Speaker. Once the online birth registration service is fully operational, new parents will be able to submit the required birth registration information online either at the hospital or at home instead of filling out a paper form that needs to be completed before they leave the hospital. Not only will this give new parents some time to consider important registration information like the name of their newborn; it will also reduce registration errors and increase the speed with which new parents can obtain a birth certificate by giving them the option to order it at the time of registration.

The next example relates to adoption information. Recently a young man, born in Alberta but adopted in British Columbia, contacted vital statistics requesting release of his original

registration-of-birth document. After hearing about the requirement to provide the registrar with an Alberta court order, he decided against pursuing his option as he could not afford the time and expense to obtain a court order. As a result of the new amendments, Alberta will now be able to share this information with B.C.'s postadoption agency, allowing this young man to obtain birth registration information directly through that organization. Individuals born and adopted in Alberta already have this option through Alberta Human Services.

The third example involves the LGBTQ community. As a result of these amendments, an LGBTQ youth working with a social worker can now ask the social worker, with whom they have an established relationship, to complete the required letter of support to assist them in applying for a change of sex. This will make the process more comfortable for the youth and reduce barriers. For the transgender community, once the nonbinary marker is operational, an individual will have the opportunity to obtain a birth certificate with a nonbinary marker instead of a male or female marker.

Finally, commemorative certificates for many happy celebrations will now be possible, like a commemorative marriage certificate for a 50th wedding anniversary.

These are just a few examples of the many ways these amendments exhibit both compassion and inclusivity and positively impact Albertans while demonstrating this government's commitment to innovation in service delivery.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Hon. minister, I wonder if you might read into the record the actual movement of third reading, if you would.

Ms McLean: Sorry, Mr. Speaker. I move third reading of the Vital Statistics and Life Events Modernization Act.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

The Opposition House Leader. Good morning.

Mr. Cooper: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to congratulate the minister on moving third reading of an important piece of legislation this morning. I had the opportunity to speak at some length, as often is my weakness, about this particular piece of legislation at an earlier stage of the bill, and there are many wonderful things in this piece of legislation, as I pointed out at that time. I look forward to a smooth passage the rest of the way.

The Speaker: If the House will allow me, hon. member, I think I recall you saying earlier in the day that your son is very wise because he has recognized you as the person who makes the most points of order in this place.

Are there other members who wish to speak to Bill 29? The Member for Calgary-Mackay-Nose Hill.

Ms McPherson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As one of the cosponsors of Bill 29, the Vital Statistics and Life Events Modernization Act, I'm pleased to rise today to speak in support of the bill. The way government handles vital statistics isn't talked about often, but it's important because every Albertan interacts with the government on vital stats at some point in their lives, whether they are getting married, welcoming a new addition to the family, or dealing with the death of a loved one. It's important that when Albertans have these interactions, they feel included and respected by their government, and that's why it's necessary that we modernize this legislation.

The amendments proposed in this legislation lead the way for Alberta to become one of the most inclusive and compassionate

jurisdictions when it comes to our approach to life's major events. I'd like to highlight some of the key changes we're making to increase the inclusivity and compassion of our vital statistics practices.

The act clarifies that parents can choose any last name for their child. This helps families avoid costly and complex processes when changing a child's name. It empowers parents to use cultural naming conventions like placing the family name before given names, which is a custom in many cultures.

Our government respects the dignity of people with disabilities. The 1928 Sexual Sterilization Act was indicative of the misguided and dangerous eugenics movement. Thankfully, people with disabilities are no longer sterilized without consent simply because they have a disability, but still there are many leftovers from the eugenics movement, like section 27 of the Marriage Act. This section forced people with disabilities to obtain a doctor's note in order to marry. Some of the most important aspects of a fulfilling life for all of us are to be as independent as we are able, to be included in our communities, and to be loved. Like anyone, people with disabilities have the right to fall in love, to marry, to divorce if they need to, to have children if that's something they feel able to do responsibly, and the old legislation removed their decision-making power and left it in the hands of people who in many cases did not know them or only knew them by their labels.

Changing the requirements for people with disabilities to marry is an important step toward honouring their human rights and supporting their access to the same things we all want, a loving partner and a life in which we can enjoy fundamental freedoms. That's why we're amending the Marriage Act to remove the requirement for a doctor's letter for a represented adult to marry the person they love. At the same time we're giving guardians more time to intervene, if they feel compelled to, by extending the notice before a licence is issued from 14 days to 30 days. I know Albertans with disabilities from all over the province applaud this long-awaited change.

We are making changes to help families who have experienced the heartbreaking tragedy of stillbirth and reducing the burden on grieving parents by not requiring them to name a stillborn child in order to register the birth.

We're protecting the privacy of Albertans by restricting who can search for vital records such as registrations of birth, marriage, or death.

We're removing the need for legal name changes to be published in the *Alberta Gazette*, and we are removing the need to provide a reason for requesting a legal name change. These changes will help to protect the privacy and safety of people who are going through major life changes, those who may be transitioning their gender, or people who might be fleeing domestic violence.

9:10

We've heard from Albertans, who expect access to government services to keep pace with modern technology. This act enables a future online birth registration system that will make it easier for parents to register births. The act also paves the way for other services, including online marriage registrations. We are also introducing a new commemorative certificate to commemorate major life events like milestone wedding anniversaries or 100th birthdays, if we should all be so lucky to get there.

At the heart of our government's work is the idea that everyone in Alberta deserves to feel included and to be treated respectfully. I'm proud of this modernization of vital statistics legislation. It moves Alberta toward an even more inclusive and compassionate province.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Under 29(2)(a) are there any questions for the Member for Calgary-Mackay-Nose Hill?

Seeing none, are there individuals that would like to speak to third reading of Bill 29?

Seeing none, is the desire to bring closure to debate, if you're ready?

[Motion carried; Bill 29 read a third time]

Government Bills and Orders Second Reading

Bill 31

Agencies, Boards and Commissions Review Statutes Amendment Act, 2016

The Speaker: The hon. President of Treasury Board and Minister of Finance.

Mr. Ceci: Thank you very much and good morning, Mr. Speaker and members of the House. I rise today to move second reading of Bill 31, the Agencies, Boards and Commissions Review Statutes Amendment Act, 2016.

This legislation continues to implement results of the first phase of our review of agencies, boards, and commissions, also referred to as ABCs. Government initiated the review to ensure that agencies are relevant, effective, well governed, and continue to meet the interests of all Albertans. Phase 1 looked at 135 ABCs subject to the Alberta Public Agencies Governance Act, excluding postsecondary institutions, which will be reviewed in phase 3 early next year.

As part of Budget 2016 we announced that 26 agencies will be consolidated or dissolved, saving \$33 million over three years. My colleagues in cabinet have proceeded with dissolving identified agencies that were established by ministerial order. These entities do not require the repeal of legislation. However, three of the entities being dissolved were established by statute, and this legislation is necessary to dissolve them. The three entities are the Government House Foundation, the Seniors Advisory Council for Alberta, and the Wild Rose Foundation.

An Hon. Member: And anything with that name.

Mr. Ceci: The Wild Rose Foundation.

Though these three entities are to be dissolved in the legislation, the functions will carry on within government or through other existing mechanisms. We do not anticipate any service disruption to Albertans.

The Wild Rose Foundation ceased operations in 2009. Since that time programs and services in support of the nonprofit, voluntary sector have been administered by the Ministry of Culture and Tourism. Government continues to support community-based organizations across this province with matching grants through the community initiatives program, or CIP, and the community facility enhancement program, or CFEP.

The Government House Foundation was responsible for guided tours of Government House. This function is now carried on by the Alberta protocol office.

The Seniors Advisory Council was established more than 25 years ago as a voice for Alberta seniors. The way government connects with seniors has evolved over those years, Mr. Speaker. Alberta now has a strong network of senior advocacy groups and organizations that accomplish the role of the council, including but not limited to the Alberta Council on Aging, the Canadian Association of Retired Persons, the Alberta Association of Seniors

Centres, Seniors United Now, and many other groups that provide effective voices for Alberta's seniors.

The proposed legislation before you also includes provisions to enhance the administration and governance provisions in statutes for the Human Services appeal panels. There are five key changes that are reflected in the Human Services appeal panel statutes and regulations. These include: one, maintaining a quorum of three for all substantive appeal matters and allowing for a panel of one to convene for procedural matters and emergency situations, which will be identified later in regulation; two, the ability to appoint a provincial chair and vice-chairs for each of the panels; three, adding a three-month grace period to ensure no lapse in services when appointments expire; four, defaulting to the maximum term set in APAGA for quasi-judicial bodies, which is 12 years; and five, removal of the maximum cap to total number of panel members for family support for children with disabilities appeal committees. These enhancements are administrative in nature and will facilitate alignment to enable efficiencies in cross-appointments of panel members and consistency within the Alberta Public Agencies Governance Act.

As part of our commitment to openness and transparency this legislation also includes a requirement for dissolved or amalgamated public agencies to disclose compensation if a board member or employee has met the disclosure threshold when the agency is dissolved or amalgamated. To enact this policy direction, an amendment to the Public Sector Compensation Transparency Act is proposed and a regulation will set out the process for doing this.

Provincial agencies, boards, and commissions play a pivotal role in delivering innovative programs and services to all Albertans, which is why we are committed to ensuring that they are relevant, transparent, accountable, and well governed.

Additionally, this bill would amend the Travel Alberta Act to remove the requirement for the Deputy Minister of Culture and Tourism to be a member of the board of directors. We've identified that there could be a potential conflict for that deputy minister as an operational lead of the department and the minister's representative to the board.

I look forward to discussion on this bill and would ask that all members of the House support it. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The Opposition House Leader.

Mr. Cooper: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise this morning and speak to Bill 31, Agencies, Boards and Commissions Review Statutes Amendment Act, 2016. We'll call it the ABCRSAA act for short.

Mrs. Aheer: That's short?

Mr. Cooper: Okay. We're not going to call it that for short.

It is always a pleasure to rise in the House, and I do take a certain amount of pleasure when the government has begun to see some of the light and the truth in Wildrose policies.

Mr. Ceci: Amen.

Mr. Cooper: I appreciate the amen from the minister, and it's great to know that he's seeing the light. He can take some time to step into the light as well.

Oftentimes, Mr. Speaker, we hear from the government constantly, consistently telling us that our financial policies don't work, that we would cut every front-line worker from every ministry to save money. Of course, nothing could be further from

the truth. This bill is an example of policies that include a Wildrose suggestion about shrinking some of the agencies, boards, and commissions and agencies of government all at a time that preserves front-line workers.

9:20

This bill is full of Wildrose savings policies. We've recommended them many times to the government to make government ministries and agencies, boards, and commissions more efficient. They, of course, when speaking about our policies, say that that would be impossible because it would lead to hundreds and thousands of job losses and we would have cut eleven billion dollars. It's just not true, Mr. Speaker, because here we see a common-sense solution that's been proposed by the Wildrose in Bill 31, which shrinks the size of government and will quite likely save money and at the same time preserve front-line services to Albertans.

Frankly, Mr. Speaker, I hope we see more bills like this put forward by the government, and I hope that they'll put forward a bill, like Bill 31, that takes aim at some of the bloat in government. You know, I think we can look at AHS and see that there are significant amounts of redundancies in an organization like that, that spends \$14 billion or \$15 billion a year. There is the opportunity to find efficiencies and redundancies that don't affect front-line services, and the government proved that that's possible through this piece of legislation. This bill shows that it can be done, that less government can provide the same services. B.C., for example, does more with less government spending when it comes to their health services and a number of other areas, and now this government is doing more with fewer ABCs and, hopefully, less spending of taxpayers' money.

Sometimes I get a little frustrated that I have to constantly defend our policies when they clearly work, and we can see that by this piece of legislation. The government likes to attack us when we ask questions about ways that we can find efficiencies, but even though they're attacking, it sounds like there is some listening when it comes to finding efficiencies here. I might just add that this was recommendation 5 in our 2016 Budget Sustainability Recommendations plan.

I do have a few questions, and I'd like to just put those questions out. I recognize, Mr. Speaker, that this particular stage of the bill doesn't really provide the best opportunity for the minister to answer the questions, but I think it's fair that we put some questions out before the House, and then that, I hope, will give the minister the appropriate time that he needs in order to respond to some of our concerns, perhaps at a later stage of legislation in Committee of the Whole, or I'm happy if he reaches out directly to me and I can share those with some folks.

First of all, you know, I'm curious to know how much the review of the agencies, boards, and commissions has cost so far. I know that there were some estimates at the beginning of what the costs were going to be, and I'd love an update for the House on the progress. I also understand that the government sometimes doesn't like to provide the House updates, but I think it's really important in the name of transparency if the minister would be able to let us know where we're at in the process, the costs, and whether or not the review costs are going to come in in a comparison against the savings and just exactly where we're at with this.

Secondly, Mr. Speaker, the review is being done, as I understand it and has been spoken about, in three phases. It would be great if the House could get an update on the timelines and when we can expect the next phases to be finished and exactly what phase we're in and where we're at in that process so that we can have a bit of a sense as to the overall direction of the review of the ABCs.

A third question is: for each of the ABCs that were affected in this review, can the minister provide some more details and explanation behind the closure for the House to review? We want to ensure that there wasn't any mismanagement that's been reported to the people of Alberta and that the actions that have been taken were as appropriate as possible so that we can continue to be as transparent as possible.

Next, I'd just like to touch on the portion of the bill that's dealing with appeal boards. With the implementation of a single person being able to preside over an appeal in an emergency situation, does the government foresee appeals being granted more or less or about the same as the three-person panel appeal board? Obviously, you know, the minister has mentioned that there will be some emergency situations. It sounded like they will make an effort to limit those, but where does the government expect those situations to arise, and is it likely that those situations will be more or less likely or about the same? Will there be oversight to ensure that single-person panels are not approving appeals significantly more or less than the three-person panels?

Mostly, I want to ensure that the system is not being abused in the case where appeals are being granted at a higher rate in single-person appeals and encouraging people to create emergencies that might not actually be, just to try to get their appeal granted. I hope that we will ensure that in the case of an emergency the appeal is not more likely to fail if a single person is the appeal. I'm hoping that we can get some reassurances and that they can be provided to the House, that the single-person appeal will be as effective as a normal panel.

Mr. Speaker, my last line of questioning that I'm hoping we can get some feedback on in committee is around the emergency part of the appeal. The bill states that emergencies will be defined in regulations. It seems we're beginning to see a trend, and I used to keep a list of quotes from former members of the government, including the Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview, the Premier, the Minister of Transportation, and the Minister of Education, from when they sat in the fourth party around this issue of moving concerns that really ought to be in the legislation into regulation. I know that when they were in the opposition, on a number of occasions they rose in the House to speak just to this issue and the concerns that it creates.

We have a significant issue around what is going to be an emergency and how it will be defined, and as the minister mentioned this morning, it's going to be defined in the regulations. Any time that that happens, it opens the process up to abuse. Now, I'm not saying that in every case regulations are abused, but I'm saying that it opens the process up to abuse and to a lack of transparency and to the ability for concerns to be raised in the future. I just believe, Mr. Speaker, that we are in the process of legislating. This is a significant portion of this bill, and how emergencies will be defined is of critical importance to this bill. So it's not something that should just be put into regulation but really needs to be dealt with here.

9:30

I have many questions as to why the government seemingly is continuing to do these sorts of things behind closed doors with less transparency, and it is very concerning. Why does the government want to define emergencies behind the closed doors of cabinet with less transparency? I don't know the answer to that, but I think it's critically important that we bring these things to the House so that we can all have input.

Mr. Speaker, this isn't just about – you know, oftentimes when I speak about bringing things to the House, it sounds like it's important just for us MLAs to know it. But when we bring things

to the House, it's really about being transparent to the people of Alberta and being transparent to the folks in each of our constituencies that may have an interest in this piece of legislation as it may affect them with respect to appeals and Bill 31. I see no good reason why the government could not create an emergency definition here in this bill for everyone to see and debate. It's concerning that the government is hiding behind the closed doors of cabinet to create these definitions.

We have seen a track record or pattern of when this does not work out well already in the short tenure of this government on bills like Bill 6. Without significant encouragement from Albertans and the opposition, it's quite likely that the vast majority of those regulations would have been created behind closed doors. Now we see that they are out there continuing to consult on those regulations, but that's not the case with most regulations, Mr. Speaker. Oftentimes it's the work of concerned Albertans and the opposition who bring these things forward. We shouldn't be having to force the government to be more open and transparent. They were elected on a platform of doing things differently than the former government, and we're seeing them do more of the same.

As you know, Mr. Speaker, I have spoken in this House at great length about the need for committee and for consultations around pieces of legislation like this. You know, there are many really strong things. I still think that on the vast majority of legislation, it would be advantageous for it to go to committee so that experts in the field – and, obviously, many pieces of this legislation are very, very good with respect to the reduction of the overall number of ABCs, but on this emergency piece there's no reason why we shouldn't send it to committee and have some discussion around the definition and really work for a positive resolution on that.

Having said that, Mr. Speaker, I know that you've seen me move a lot of amendments that would send a bill like this to committee. I'm not going to do that this morning, much to the excitement of all members of the Chamber, quite likely. But I would encourage the minister to try to clarify a lot of the questions that we've raised, a lot of the concerns at a later stage in the bill.

I do look forward to being able to support this piece of legislation. However, if the minister is unable to provide that sort of clarification that I think Albertans deserve, it does – you begin to have to weigh the pros and cons of some of the concerns that still are in the bill and the pros of listening to some of our suggestions and ideas around preserving front-line services yet still working to correct the size of government.

Thank you for your time, Mr. Speaker. I look forward to the ongoing debate around Bill 31.

The Speaker: Thank you.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Klein.

Mr. Coolahan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise today to speak to Bill 31, the Agencies, Boards and Commissions Review Statutes Amendment Act, 2106. This bill is part of a larger effort to ensure that the government's agencies, boards, and commissions are relevant, effective, efficient, and well governed. While this bill is a small piece of the overall legislation, it can't be overlooked that there has been some good and important work being done at Government House Foundation, Seniors Advisory Council for Alberta, and the Wild Rose Foundation.

Ultimately, Bill 31 and the dissolution and amalgamations that have already occurred or will occur with the passing of the budget will make the ABCs function more effectively to the benefit of public interest. The proposed amendments will help make people the focus of the good work being done at the agencies, and it will have immediate benefits. I do recognize that this is good legislation,

and it's focused on people and good governance. We don't need to clamour for praise on this, Mr. Speaker.

For instance, Mr. Speaker, proposed amendments will enable effective administration for the Human Services appeal panels through several changes that ensure consistent governance provisions. The Human Services appeal panels provide a fair, impartial, and independent quasi-judicial process for Albertans to appeal decisions made by the department. I think we have heard the proposed amendments from the Treasury Board, but I think I will just reiterate them.

The proposed amendments to the appeal panels include to remove maximum and minimum number of members or quorum per panel, remove maximum length of service as an appeal panel member, provide authority to designate a chair and more than one vice-chair, change authority to designate a chair from mandatory to permissive, remove power to designate the secretary as well as provide a three-month grace period for members to continue after appointments expire if they're not replaced.

A good example of the proposed amendments having an immediate positive impact is the removal of a quorum of at least three members. Currently there must be at least three panel members for all files brought before the panel. Dropping the quorum to one or two will remove unnecessary costs to the department and time delays in the proper disposition of appeals. Mr. Speaker, there are many times when certain procedural matters can be fairly adjudicated with one or two panel members.

Another example is the removal of the maximum of seven appeal panel members from the Family Support for Children with Disabilities Appeal Panel. The FSCD is the only Human Services appeal panel with a maximum number of members. Due to this maximum, when cross-appointments were done in May of 2016, members could not be appointed to this panel. This leaves this panel at a disadvantage, and any increase at all in the volume of cases would place tremendous strain on the other members and delay appeals.

In addition to improving Human Services appeal panels, Bill 31 continues the effort to provide the public with transparency in regard to public-sector compensation. It was identified that the Public Sector Compensation Transparency Act does not provide sufficient authority to disclose compensation related to entities that are dissolved or amalgamated throughout the year. Amendments to the Public Sector Compensation Transparency Act found in Bill 31 will require disclosure of compensation for public bodies that are dissolved or are amalgamated.

Again, Mr. Speaker, the three ABCs in this bill have done good work for the province; however, these boards have either been nonfunctioning or their functions have moved under the purview of a ministry. The Wild Rose Foundation has not been an active board since April of 2009, and the Ministry of Culture and Tourism was assigned responsibility for the foundation at this time. Much of the \$6.5 million that the foundation had was used to support Alberta's Vitalize Provincial Voluntary Sector Conference, a conference used for training Alberta's volunteers. The future of the conference and new ways of delivering training and support to volunteers are being looked at as we speak.

The work of the Seniors Advisory Council has been valuable, and we thank members for their work over the years, but there are a number of organizations that work on behalf of advocating for seniors in this province. The seniors ministry is also working to clarify the Seniors Advocate role, and it is seen as being able to provide some of the reporting and awareness functions previously performed by the council. This is an annual cost savings of approximately \$200,000.

9:40

Also, Mr. Speaker, the Government House Foundation will be dissolved; however, funds will be provided to the Alberta protocol office in order to continue public tours of Government House, keeping this historic building accessible to the public.

While, of course, there are cost savings with this bill, Mr. Speaker, I believe that we should focus on the efficiencies and good governance that is being created in our ABCs with this bill and the fact that this will be beneficial to the public that utilizes these services. As such, I urge all members of the Assembly to support this bill.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any questions or comments to the Member for Calgary-Klein under 29(2)(a)?

Seeing and hearing none, the hon. Member for Battle River-Wainwright.

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise this morning to speak on Bill 31, the Agencies, Boards and Commissions Review Statutes Amendment Act, 2016. You know, I was kind of saddened, I guess, to hear these woeful words from the minister and the other members on the closing of the foundation in 2009, but I have words of encouragement for them. The Wildrose Party started around the same time as that was completed, so there are words of encouragement for you.

I'm also pleased to see that the government is looking for ways to reduce governance and to look for ways to improve spending practices. Just a few short days ago the Auditor General criticized this government because the AISH program was too hard to navigate. The AISH program is systematically failing severely handicapped people who cannot otherwise provide for themselves. There are roadblocks, inconsistencies, and inefficiencies, said Merwan Saher. Anyone who could not fill out the application forms properly or who could not navigate the system was being left in the dust. The assured income for the severely handicapped was riddled with severe issues, which failed a lot of the most frail in our society.

When it comes to the agencies, boards, and commissions that we're talking about today, we're seeing some positive steps, where the government evaluates a system and makes improvements. I know that AISH is not a board, but I'm happy to see that this approach is being used. The point is that we need to step back and evaluate the government's services. There are too many examples of where we need to do this.

For this simple reason alone I'm happy to see that with Bill 31 the government is at least, hopefully, attempting to make some positive changes to the system that is extremely broken. The need for a more transparent system is vitally important so that the inefficiencies are caught. When agencies and boards are held accountable through legislation for their actions and when things are brought to light, then and only then can the changes be made.

I am also encouraged to see that there will be some appeal board changes, especially in the face of emergencies. As we know, the Auditor General found grievous problems with the AISH appeal process. I'm also hopeful that some of the changes in this legislation will make things easier for decisions to be made quickly when emergencies appear.

It's also encouraging to see that this bill will bring about the beginning of a reduction in spending. For far too long this government has had a spending problem. This province spends more per capita than any other province in Canada, and this can potentially start to be curbed with this legislation. So that's where I'm happy with this legislation, which hopefully brings about

further and more changes. By reducing the number of ABCs and by reducing the amount spent on the ABCs where inefficiencies lay, we may begin to see an improvement in how much the government will need in the upcoming budget. One can always hope, Mr. Speaker.

Right now almost 50 per cent of the provincial budget is spent supporting the ABCs, and of course a lot of that is for Alberta Health Services, but I am sure that with the help of the support in this bill, we can now begin the work of finding inefficiencies and improve and tweak the system. Overlapping of the ABCs will be, with any luck, done away with, and inoperative ABCs will be done away with completely. This will likely save the taxpayers hundreds of millions of dollars. That encourages me.

Wildrose has been an advocate for smaller government for a long time, and getting rid of the front-line staff is not the answer. We have never advocated for this even though there may be some that have tried to paint us into that corner.

An Hon. Member: Are you sure?

Mr. Taylor: I'm sure about that. I'm absolutely sure that we've never advocated for that. We want to get inefficiencies out.

We have always run with a premise of getting rid of inefficiencies. Simply correct the doubling-up of services and agencies that no longer have a purpose. That's what I'm sure of. The need for increased transparency and open government is the belief that citizens deserve the right to documents and to proceedings that allow for effective public oversight. For far too long there's been an entitlement of secrecy in this government, and this should not be allowed in any democratic society. We have seen too many instances of abuse of power. People fail to perform their duties, and financial abuse occurs when they are not held accountable. [interjection] I know the minister is pointing on the other side to the third party, but they have to take responsibility now. They've been in power for well over a year and a half, so it's time to own up and start saying: we're responsible.

Transparency also encourages residents of Alberta to become more engaged in the legislation process. I can't stress how important this could be on bills. Take Bill 6, for example. This bill was made better by the engagement of stakeholders, who literally gave me hundreds, perhaps thousands of calls, e-mails, letters. Although it's not perfect, the bill itself, far from it, these farmers and ranchers helped us make that bill better than its original form. Greater transparency was needed on this bill. Too much of Bill 6 was done through regulation after the bill was passed.

So I'm somewhat hesitant but happy to see that the government is willing to start this process. Even though there are some improvements that could be made to this legislation, which, I feel, are important to discuss, my overall sense is that the legislation may be the beginning of improving services, decreasing our provincial budget, and beginning the process of restoring some trust in the system once again. This will hold our government to a higher standard, something that has been needed for quite some time.

This bill isn't perfect, of course. For instance, the bill states that emergency situations will be defined in regulations. I see the need for this somewhat as we never know what will be necessary to add. However, I know that I and other Albertans worry about what the government can do with these regulations. The unknown is what happens, and there are problems at times that arise from it.

Many times this government has said one thing and done another. We see how they've managed to push legislation through without thought to the taxpayers or the elected representatives of this House. I truly hope that this is not one of those times. I truly

hope that some good will come out of the legislation, that emergency situations will be treated as such, an emergency. There's been so much waste. I hope that this will completely improve a broken system. It's time. It's time to start looking for a different way of making things better, just like what the Auditor General said about AISH. So many people are working inside a broken system and all of them working hard but failing to provide assistance to the most vulnerable.

That's sometimes how I view this government. All are working hard but working with a broken system. Take a step back and with the help of others, also known as the Wildrose opposition here, find the inefficiencies and truly put the pieces back for the good of the province. I know you were saddened with the closure of the Wild Rose, so you should be encouraged that we're willing to help. We're here to help. The government has been working hard, throwing money at this program and at that program without a thought to consequences for the taxpayer. For us to pursue action, we must develop a vision. We need a vision, and I sure hope that this government will step back a bit and stop forging on, thinking that money will change everything.

9:50

This bill, I have to say, is a step in the right direction: smaller government; the removal of ABCs that no longer serve any real purpose; the removal of the duplication of the ABCs; and, of course, the one that I hold really near and dear to my heart, reduced spending. I will give this government credit for those items. On this bill I just mentioned, one thing is for sure. The truth of this government's intention for this bill will eventually come out. Let's hope that they are all sincere.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Are there any questions or comments under 29(2)(a) for the Member for Battle River-Wainwright?

Are there any other members who wish to speak to Bill 31? I recognize Bonnyville-Cold Lake.

Mr. Cyr: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is a pleasure to speak today. I have to say that whenever we look at efficiencies within government, this is something that I myself take pride in. I would have to say that this is about Bill 31, Agencies, Boards and Commissions Review Statutes Amendment Act, 2016. From now on I'll be calling them the ABCs, the agencies, boards, and commissions. Now, it's important here to understand that as of November 5, 2016, we have 301 ABCs in Alberta, all working towards one goal, and that's to help Albertans.

I'd like to put some, I guess, understanding behind what it is exactly that we're trying to encourage here in Alberta. I keep thinking of how I can put this into something that I can actually move forward into an example so that I can get a better understanding, and the best way for me is commercial vehicle insurance. Now, as an accountant my past was to sit down with my clients and say: is your commercial vehicle insurance updated regularly? This is important because commercial vehicle insurance is very costly. The reason I bring this up is that almost immediately when you buy a new vehicle or a piece of equipment, you get insurance on it because you have a loan. It's automatic. You need to have it in order to be able to take that piece off the lot. So you go and put it on your policy, and you add it to the cost of that policy. Now, over the years what happens is that this equipment gets paid off, and you have to ask yourself: do I have the appropriate insurance on that piece of equipment?

What happens is that you'll find that you've insured it for more than its value, which means you are actually paying more than you

need to. This is important because sometimes what happens is that you actually will be overinsured for something that you will never get a payout for on the policy. Now, when we're looking at this commercial insurance, you need to be looking at: do I have the appropriate insurance for this? Let's say, for instance, that you have a backhoe, and in that year or several years ago that backhoe's motor died and you can't find a motor for it anymore or its frame is no longer able to continue working. What happens is that usually it will sit in the yard, and they'll use it for parts for other pieces of equipment. The problem is that that backhoe never actually gets taken off the insurance, and when we're looking at this, that means that it's an added cost to the business, which is why I would sit with my clients and say: have you reviewed this?

This is why these 301 ABCs are important in this. We need to establish that it was set up for a purpose, that it has a mandate. At some point did it fulfill its mandate, or has its mandate changed? In this case we have the three agencies. We have the Government House Foundation, the Seniors Advisory Council for Alberta, and the Wild Rose Foundation. They all started with a premise and a mandate. That was to encourage Albertans to move forward. This is something that is important, but over time something changed, and – you know what? – government didn't go in and review in this case the insurance policy to make sure that they were actually functioning the way they were supposed to.

Now, one concern that I did hear from across the other side here was that they are unfunding these organizations and in some cases taking those funds and putting them back into government. I'm not saying that this is not maybe needed, but we do need to ask ourselves: are we creating bigger government out of this? This is a question that I would like the government to answer. It is important that we are establishing that even though we are reviewing these ABCs. Are we actually finding savings here? Is there duplication that we are now moving away from, or are we creating duplication in the government departments?

Now, I understand that it's important that we identify each and every one, and I'm glad to see that the government is moving this forward because this is needed. This is a recommendation that Wildrose brought forward as well, and it's good to hear that the government is actually wanting to look at the opposition's route to saving money. Whether these advisory or decision-making, quasi-judicial, or governing bodies were all formed with the intent to provide Albertans with opportunity, we always need to be looking at how to do it better.

I do understand that we need ABCs. There is a function that they bring, and we need to be looking at each and every one of them. We need to know exactly what each one of them is doing, and it's healthy to have a review. I believe that it's long past the time that we have the review.

It is important that when we start looking at these agencies – you know, my colleague for Battle River-Wainwright did bring up the valid point that if there was an agency out there that would connect with the Wildrose Party, it would be the Wild Rose Foundation, but we recognize that the Wild Rose Foundation also needs to be able to fulfill a mandate, and it is responsible for us as MLAs to be looking at finding ways to reduce the burden on our taxpayers. We need to continually look at reducing the red tape that we are seeing within Alberta, and we also need to be looking at duplication, both of which have been something that the Wildrose has been committed to addressing and moving forward.

Now, I do see that we have about \$33 million of potential savings over three years. I am curious as to exactly why we used three years. That does seem to be an odd time, and it seems like the government does use three years for a lot of its estimated savings or costs. I suppose that if it took three years to wind these three ABCs down,

well, then that would be applicable, but from what I'm hearing, this is something that more or less is going to be done pretty much right away.

10:00

Now, we do need to note a concern that I know my colleagues have touched on. Section 6(3.1) reads:

The quorum to hear an appeal is 3 members, but an appeal may be heard by one member for procedural matters related to the appeal or in emergency circumstances provided for in the regulations

Could someone from the other side elaborate on how they came to the standard provision for emergency meetings? It does seem to be odd.

It would be nice to see exactly how the regulations are going to be rolled out. It does seem that a lot of this does seem to have – when it comes to regulations, an important part of the process when it comes to the bill, it would be nice to have an idea or even an outline of where these regulations are going. This is something that we have not heard from the government with most of the bills that have been brought forward, and this is a concern. Really, it's about the regulations, that really make the difference for a lot of these things being moved forward.

Mr. Speaker, while I say that this is a great move by the government to move forward with this, I do have concerns. My colleagues have brought concerns forward. I do believe that in this case I would encourage all the members of the House to support this bill.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Are there any questions under 29(2)(a) to the hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake? The Government House Leader.

Mr. Mason: Yes. One brief question, Mr. Speaker. The hon. member talked about a concern about wrapping up the activities of these things immediately rather than, say, over three years if I heard his argument correctly.

Mr. Cyr: No. I was asking if you are wrapping them up over three years, or is this something that's immediate?

Mr. Mason: Okay. I guess the question I have is – as the President of Treasury Board and the Minister of Finance indicated at the beginning, a number of these ones that are being terminated have actually not been functioning for several years. They really don't exist except in theory. Is there a reason for delaying in that case? That was my question. I may have misunderstood his comment.

Mr. Cyr: I would like to thank the Government House Leader for the question. My question is: how is it that we're saving \$33 million over three years? You brought up the point that we're terminating these things right now. That is my question. How did you come up with three years' worth of savings?

Mr. Mason: By consolidating some of the actuals.

Mr. Cyr: But why three years?

The Speaker: Hon. members, through the chair.

Mr. Cyr: I apologize, Mr. Speaker. I got flustered. When you talk about savings, this is something that I'm very passionate about.

I guess the question is: how did you come up with three years? Why not five years? Why not six months? Is there a specific reason

that you had chosen that time, and how is it that \$33 million is the savings for that time frame? If the House leader can answer, that would be . . .

The Speaker: Any other questions or comments under 29(2)(a)?

Are there any other members who would like to speak to Bill 31?

I am presuming that we're prepared to move the second reading of Bill 31.

The Minister of Finance.

Mr. Ceci: Sorry about that, Mr. Speaker. Just in response to my colleague and the questions of why three years and why \$33 million, as he probably remembers, I opened my deliberations on this topic by talking about the dissolution of 26 agencies, boards, and commissions, three of which we are talking about today because they are in statute and need to be in this bill to dissolve them. The other 23 were amalgamations or dissolutions that didn't need to be raised in statute because they were created in other ways.

The three years, in particular, speak to the 2016 budget that was introduced in April of this year. It's a three-year fiscal plan, and we identified the savings over the three years of that fiscal plan, introduced in April. That \$33 million is real money that will be taken out of government in addition to the hundreds of millions of in-year savings that we've found in 2015-16, 2016-17. There are real savings in addition to the \$33 million, but the three years responds to the three-year fiscal plan that was introduced in April 2016.

The Speaker: Hon. minister, I may have made a disconnect. Were you speaking under 29(2)(a)?

Mr. Ceci: Yes.

The Speaker: I see. Seeing that any other individuals do not wish to speak to the bill, would you like to bring closure, hon. minister?

Mr. Ceci: No. I think I appreciate the members of the government side who spoke to this and are passionate.

An Hon. Member: How about the other side?

Mr. Ceci: I was going to get to that. I was.

I just want to reflect first on the government's side and thank them all for their understanding of the reasons to do this and ongoing support as we move forward with phase 2 and phase 3.

On the opposition side I know that there are many people who agree passionately with the direction of this government with respect to the removal of monies that are no longer needed for the presentation of organizations that aren't necessary any more. We will be working to get some answers for those people who have asked them, and in Committee of the Whole I'll have a portion of those answers. I won't have them all, but I'll get back to people in writing with respect to other things.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, for the opportunity and latitude.

[Motion carried; Bill 31 read a second time]

Government Bills and Orders Committee of the Whole

[Ms Jabbour in the chair]

The Chair: Hon. members, I'd like to call the committee to order.

10:10

Bill 31 Agencies, Boards and Commissions Review Statutes Amendment Act, 2016

The Chair: Are there any questions, comments, or amendments with respect to this bill? The hon. Minister of Finance.

Mr. Ceci: Thank you very much, Madam. Just with respect to some of the questions that were put earlier, I want to reflect on timelines for all phases of this work that we are undertaking. As members of this House have heard me say, before we started this work, there were 301 agencies, boards, and commissions doing the work of government. The amount of money they were involved with spending on behalf of government was significant, is significant. It amounts to somewhere in the neighbourhood of 20 billion more dollars.

The timelines for the review. We are in the second phase of that review now, where we're looking at the non-APAGA agencies, boards, and commissions. There are 146 of those that we are taking a rather in-depth review of to make sure that they're all providing the good cost of service, quality of service and doing what they were originally set up to do and asking the question: do they still need to be there, or can some other vehicle deliver their work in an amalgamated form, or if they're dissolved, can they be brought back into government or indeed some other way of delivering that service? So that's what we're in now, the second phase of that review.

The third phase is looking at the postsecondary institutions, and that is coincidental with this phase. We're doing that work now, and we're hopeful that by the new year we will be completed and make recommendations on phases 2 and 3.

Also on the agencies, boards, and commissions we're looking at the compensation of the 26 large ABC CEOs and designated office holders. We're looking at that to ensure that the remuneration of those individuals fits with a public-service approach to the delivery of their programs and services. So that work is ongoing as well.

The 26 agencies that have either been dissolved or amalgamated have been reported. You know, they're numerous, obviously. Some of them, as I've shared and as others have shared with you, stopped their functions a while ago, so they're in name only, and we've eliminated those, ensuring that the closures of those 26 agencies or amalgamations in some cases was as appropriate as possible. It's something we've circled back and made sure of. So we feel like we're on good ground that way.

With regard to the single-person appeal panels I can tell you that the part that hasn't seemed to be a concern to anybody is where there's a procedural matter: you know, someone hasn't shown up for their appeal, and the procedure needs to be that that appeal is now closed. We don't need three people to decide that. One person can make that administrative decision and give that judgment, that decision.

But where there are emergencies – and that was the question that was raised, too – and a single person is brought in to hear about those emergencies and those emergencies aren't defined in legislation, we are taking the opportunity to reflect before we put it in a statute. We're not going to put it in a statute because we don't think it would be the right thing to do, to put a definition for emergencies in statute. You can't actually put down in writing an understanding of every emergency a client would experience in their lives. So we're taking the step to gain input from others about how they would define emergencies, and then we'll take that and put it in regulation.

We're leaving that up to the Minister of Human Services to discern after gaining input from knowledgeable people about what

an actual emergency could be defined as, and we're doing that, again, so we don't have to come back into this House, so that he doesn't have to come back into this House at some point and say: "You know, people are showing up for emergencies. We want to help them. We want to review their situation, their file, but the statute won't allow us to do that because it doesn't adequately define all aspects of that person's life that they are experiencing an emergency in." So I think that's the wiser course in this case. Certainly, we'll continue to monitor how that works through the Minister of Human Services.

Other questions: will a single-person panel be as effective as a panel of three, or will people be manufacturing emergencies, when ultimately they're defined in regulation, to get in to see an appeal panel? You know, those and more questions like that really need an experience, really need us to understand through experience, where the problems are before we're making judgment about people or circumstances or raising potential problems that don't exist.

With the caveat that I'll provide more information directly to the member with regard to things like the budget for the ABCs and where we are with that – and I mean the budget for the review process of the agencies, boards, and commissions and where we are with that – and, further, perhaps discussion with that member about any concerns that he has with regard to the 26 agencies that have either been dissolved or amalgamated, I think it's probably a better thing to zero in on as opposed to just saying: how are all of the dissolved or amalgamated agencies doing? Alberta Innovates was four agencies, and we've taken steps to harmonize and make one large agency, a more effective, efficient agency, out of Alberta Innovates than the four portions it had before. So it's continuing to operate.

Lastly, as we move forward, Madam Chair, to review the non-APAGA boards and then the postsecondary institutions, Albertans will always know that we are working to make the agencies, boards, and commissions system better. Where it is not working, we'll make improvements to ensure that there is value for money being provided to Albertans. We took some pains to open up the whole recruitment process to agencies, boards, and commissions through a new boards.alberta.ca website. I heard yesterday that that website has had I think it was 14,000 Albertans either seek it out or apply for different agencies, boards, and commissions as a part of our recognition that, really, the old system of getting appointed to an agency, board, or commission in this province was out of date and not transparent.

So with a lot of pride I say that Albertans, when they know they have the ability to step forward and to help out this province and to give their best, have come out in droves to put forward their names. Now, not every Albertan will be suitable for every agency, board, and commission that needs to be . . .

An Hon. Member: What?

Mr. Ceci: Not every Albertan will be suitable, but many who were suitable had no avenue, had no way in to put their name forward because they, frankly, weren't connected in ways that the previous government required people to be connected. We are making things more transparent, we are making things more open, and that's one small example of how that has occurred.

I'd be remiss if I didn't mention during this debate that I know Albertans are watching us. They're learning lots about our agencies, boards, and commissions. They now know that they can go to boards.alberta.ca and apply and learn more about the agencies, boards, and commissions or put their name forward. All Albertans deserve the opportunity to serve, and a transparent posting and recruiting process is a way to do that.

I hope that that answers some of the questions or all the questions that have been posed to me as the main mover, and I appreciate my cosponsors for this.

I'll turn it back to you, Madam Chair.

10:20

The Chair: Any other questions, comments with respect to this bill? Lethbridge-East.

Ms Fitzpatrick: Thank you, Madam Chair. When I returned to Alberta in 2012, I got involved with several groups, and I began hearing from, certainly, many Albertans in my community but, really, Albertans throughout the province. They were complaining about the number of boards, agencies, and commissions and the amount of money that was going into them, and they didn't seem to see anything visible or tangible to show for all of those ABCs. I listened quite intently, and certainly now our government has also listened. This act to amend is presented, and we're debating it.

This has been an interesting process for me. I watched the dissolving of the three entities, and the one that, I guess, stood out for me was the Seniors Advisory Council, which was one of those entities. I'm a senior, in case you didn't notice, and I'm a member of several senior groups, so I felt that this is where I should really focus my comments in this debate. Initially I felt a little concern that seniors' issues would not be heard if this council was dissolved. Having said that, though, I know that there's a huge network of seniors' advocacy groups and organizations which provide input to the government on seniors, and I know this because I was part of those groups, and I did advocate for seniors as a member of those groups.

The two seniors' groups of which I'm a member are Nord-Bridge Seniors Centre and the National Association of Federal Retirees, and they continue to provide to me feedback, concerns, recommendations. I continue to advocate on these issues as an MLA, issues such as the federal-provincial health accord. I reach out to seniors in Lethbridge-East on a regular basis, in fact at least twice a month, to get their thoughts on a number of issues. I receive plenty of feedback, and that feedback I share with the minister of seniors and whatever other ministry those issues happen to relate to.

Last week I was very fortunate to facilitate a session with representatives from seniors' groups across the province and the Minister of Finance. The purpose was to garner input as part of prebudget consultations. There were about 19 groups represented, and that actually represented tens of thousands of Alberta seniors. The southern Alberta branch of NAFR reported to me their participation in a town hall meeting the week of November 8 in Edmonton with interested stakeholders, provincial government officials, and the Canadian Mental Health Association to share their views on the development of the new federal-provincial health accord.

These are just a couple of examples of ongoing information and issue-sharing that is being done on behalf of seniors. There are community think tanks such as Public Interest Alberta, the seniors' task force, the Canadian Mental Health Association, even the Fraser Institute, who share with the government on a regular basis about seniors' issues.

NAFR actually held eight town halls across the entire country during November to discuss seniors' health care issues. At the Edmonton meeting there were 120 people in attendance. Some of the issues discussed included the federal government's level of financial support to the province's health care and pharmacare strategy, the issue of dementia. The recommendations coming from these may in fact save some money. Long-term care, home care,

elder abuse, palliative care, et cetera, are all issues considered, discussed, and brought forward.

As you can see, seniors' issues are being brought forward from many advocacy groups. Recommendations were given on many of the focus areas given the unsustainable health care costs across the country. Because of this ongoing input from advocacy groups such as the ones I've mentioned, I as a senior feel that the dissolution of the Seniors Advisory Council is a reasonable action, and I stand in full support of this bill.

Thank you.

The Chair: The hon. Minister of Human Services.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Madam Chair. I rise to speak in support of Bill 31, the Agencies, Boards and Commissions Review Statutes Amendment Act, 2016. I will also respond briefly to the question raised by my colleague from Bonnyville-Cold Lake.

Bill 31 includes many things, but it also includes some amendments to legislation and regulations governing Human Services appeal panels, of which there are six. These amendments will make sure that the appeal process remains efficient and that the concerns respecting services are heard in a timely manner and in a fair and consistent manner. These six appeal panels are established by different means. Some of them are in legislation, some in regulation, some established by ministerial orders. They relate to assured income for the severely handicapped, child care licensing. They're under the Child, Youth and Family Enhancement Act, the Family Support for Children with Disabilities Act, the Income and Employment Supports Act, and the Persons with Developmental Disabilities Services Act.

These panels provide a fair, impartial, independent quasi-judicial process that enables Albertans to appeal certain decisions that are made by the department. Last spring we decided that as we move towards more person-centred and more integrated service delivery, we will have these panel members appointed to hear a spectrum of supports, so they will be approved for cross-appointment to these panels. Any panel members can hear about PDD, AISH, income support, a variety of concerns, and look at those things in a more holistic manner. This will also help us manage appeal time because some panels are busier than others, so it will give a consistent kind of workload to the panel members across the spectrum.

Certainly, with these amendments it's our hope they will create administrative consistency with respect to the quorum requirements. Quorum requirements are not the same across the board. Some just require one, some require three, and some say three to seven.

10:30

Chair and vice-chair appointments, the grace period for expired appointments, maximum years of service, and maximum number of members allowed on the panel: I will briefly touch on these changes.

As I said, the quorum requirement will be amended to allow a quorum of three for all substantive matters and a quorum of one for procedural matters or emergency hearings. That was the question of the Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake, so I will address that.

Then the designation of a provincial chair and several vice-chairs will be clarified to ensure that the leadership structure is there to support cross-appointments of the panel members.

We are adding a three-month grace period to all appeal panels, allowing members to continue to serve for a short period of time after their term expires so that the process continues without any disruption.

The references to the maximum length of service will be removed from all pieces of legislation and regulation, and by doing so, what will happen is that the default length of the term, which is a 12-year standard in the Alberta Public Agencies Governance Act, will apply to the term limits. So there will be no limit set in the specific pieces of legislation. Rather, we will default to the APAGA 12-year default term, so they won't be able to serve more than 12 years.

Finally, the cap on the maximum number of appeal panel members will be removed to allow members to be cross-appointed to all six panels. Currently that cross-appointment is not possible for the Family Support for Children with Disabilities Appeal Panel, which has a maximum membership of three to seven members.

The concern regarding the one-member panel, when that will be used: it will only be used for very specific purposes. When determining, for instance, whether a panel has jurisdiction, one member can adjudicate on that procedural thing and make a judgment. But for all substantive matters there will be a three-member panel to hear the merits of the appeal. For instance, for a person with developmental disabilities: the authorizing legislation provides the minister with the authority that they can establish a panel of one member, but in practice that was never the case. It was always a three-member panel. Sometimes people appeal and then they abandon those appeals, so we still need to adjudicate and make a judgment that the appeal has been abandoned. In that case maybe a one-person panel will be able to make that decision.

Then there is the question: what will constitute an emergency? Human Services will be looking at different hearings and will develop a regulation on what constitutes an emergency. That provision will provide us with the flexibility that if somebody is in palliative care or something and their appeal is scheduled for some later date, in case of an emergency, to make sure that the benefits are made available in a timely fashion, we can constitute a panel of one. But I just want to reiterate that in all circumstances appeals will be heard by a panel of three members on all substantive matters.

In short, I fully support Bill 31 and the changes that we have proposed with respect to Human Services appeal panels, and I ask my colleagues to do the same. These amendments will make our panels, our hearings more efficient, more fair, more consistent across the spectrum of our services, and they will allow us to do cross-appointments so that the appeals and concerns of Albertans can be looked into from a more holistic perspective and can be addressed as quickly as possible.

Thank you very much.

The Chair: I will recognize the hon. Member for Barrhead-Morinville-Westlock.

Mr. van Dijken: Thank you, Madam Chair. Bill 31, the Agencies, Boards and Commissions Review Statutes Amendment Act, 2016, appears to be one of those omnibus pieces of legislation. Sometimes omnibus legislation can create some difficulties moving forward. I would suggest that this time we're mostly doing some housekeeping with regard to things that need to be tidied up, agencies and boards that have not been operational for a period of time. I would agree that these are things that government needs to continue to review to be sure that their bodies of governance are relevant to the day and that they are doing the work that's necessary at the time.

I want to thank the ministers for speaking to some of the questions that we've had already. That's very helpful in moving forward in a way that is transparent and open, and it allows us to feel a certain level of comfort with regard to the process that's being moved forward. Reducing the size of government bodies that serve

little or no use at this time is important work to do and also moving forward with some amalgamations where we can see that there's opportunity to tidy things up.

Moving two, three, four bodies under one umbrella can be a very effective and a very efficient way of doing things. With that being said, there is a certain amount of review that has to continue to be sure that that's working effectively also as we move down the road. I know there were some questions with regard to Alberta Innovates moving under one umbrella. The member from the Liberal Party did bring forward some concerns. Again, it's important that we continue to review and be sure that we are providing Albertans with open, accountable, transparent governance in all of these situations.

Following on with the review of agencies, boards, and commissions, the ABCs, Bill 31 is going to eliminate three more that needed a statute in order to be eliminated, and that's a good thing. One of these is the Wild Rose Foundation, a funding agency for volunteers and nonprofit organizations. These volunteers and nonprofit organizations are very important in all communities right throughout the province, so we want to be sure that we are continuing the work that the foundation did.

Programs affiliated with the foundation moved into the ministry in 2009, so the foundation was, effectively, not being utilized. The financial support for this sector is available through the community initiatives program and the community facility enhancement program. While I know that the Wild Rose Foundation was popular with some – and I do love the name; I like the name – I'll be watching to see whether we have covered it with the CFEP and CIP programs, and I think we might. This is where we can recognize that sometimes there is overlap within government and that efficiencies can be gained by moving things and amalgamating things.

10:40

The next agency to be eliminated is the Government House Foundation. I never understood why we needed an agency separate from Alberta Infrastructure to oversee a provincial heritage asset. We don't have an Alberta Federal building foundation per se, so I believe that this is a good move again.

The next ABC to disappear is the Seniors Advisory Council for Alberta. It was set up at a time when we had no seniors ministry. The roles and responsibilities of this body have largely been assumed by the ministry and activism opportunities, as the Member for Lethbridge-East has spoken about, and taken over by other seniors' organizations. I also would agree that the move to eliminate that advisory council is necessary in this bill as we do some housekeeping to tidy things up.

Bill 31 will also make sure that the finances of these bodies that are being wound down will be disclosed.

Now, I mentioned that this bill is omnibus, and there are some things here that have nothing to do with ABCs. The Travel Alberta Act is amended to remove the deputy minister from being mandated to be part of the board of Travel Alberta. It will now be up to the minister to decide if they want their deputy minister there or not, to sit on the board of Travel Alberta. Perhaps the Minister of Culture and Tourism could provide some insight into why this move was made. Fundamentally, I don't see anything wrong with it, but some insight into that could be useful.

The next omnibus part of this bill deals with amendments to six acts, and we received some information from the Human Services minister on how that's moving forward: the Assured Income for the Severely Handicapped Act; the Child Care Licensing Act; the Child, Youth and Family Enhancement Act; the Family Support for Children with Disabilities Act; the Income and Employment Supports Act; and the Persons with Developmental Disabilities

Services Act. The changes to all these laws are said to make the appeal panels transparent and set panel sizes and quorum, important parts of governance.

Bill 31 allows an appeal panel of three people to be represented by one person in the case of emergency and that emergency situations will be defined in regulations. This is a part where I find there is a little bit of a lack of transparency. The minister, I must admit, did speak to it and gave some clarity, but whenever we get to the point in pieces of legislation where we have emergency situations that will be defined in regulations, on this side of the House we can never be sure that all of our concerns are being answered when it's done behind closed doors. So we will trust the government to do what's right for all Albertans in this case.

This makes things nice, clean, simple, and easy to understand. Small "c" conservatives like less government. Keep-it-simple government is part of this drive to small, efficient government, and I would suggest that this is a good thing.

Madam Chair, no red flags come up, from my perspective, with this piece of legislation. I am pleased that this bill does the housekeeping necessary to eliminate three of the ABCs that were already being served in other manners. We look forward to additional ABCs being eliminated or amalgamated, whichever the case may be, to find those effective cost savings and efficiencies.

I must also note, as the Opposition House Leader had noted in his comments at second reading, that it is important that we move forward in a way that is very open and transparent. Accountability is important, not only for members in this House but also to be fully accountable and transparent with all Albertans. I believe that that's the best way to gain trust with Albertans, when they can feel that no political games are being done with regard to agencies, boards, commissions, and the like and that no political games were done in the past, no political games are done in the future. Albertans will reward governments that are open and transparent, I believe.

With that, I would suggest that this bill is a necessary bill to help improve and move towards more effective and efficient government. Thank you.

The Chair: Any other questions, comments, or amendments with respect to this bill? Calgary-Bow.

Drever: Thank you, Madam Chair. I'm pleased to rise today to speak to Bill 31, the Agencies, Boards and Commissions Review Statutes Amendment Act. The ABC review and this act give government the authority to dissolve the Wild Rose Foundation, the Seniors Advisory Council, and the Government House Foundation.

The government is committed to managing the province's resources in a fiscally responsible manner. Our review of agencies, boards, and commissions is identifying what is working and what could be improved and what is no longer providing value to Albertans. As announced with Budget 2016, government has decided to amalgamate or dissolve 26 of the 136 agencies explained in the first phase of our review. Most of this is now complete, but three agencies require legislative amendments for their dissolution. This bill will accomplish that.

I would just like to take a minute to talk about Government House Foundation. The Government House Foundation is a historic site, including promoting the public interest and receiving donations of historic objects and art. I am pleased to say that the Alberta protocol office will continue to operate public tours and special events at Government House, and the foundation's assets will be transferred to the department. The projected cost savings are approximately \$40,000. However, \$23,000 of this would be transferred to the Alberta protocol office to support continued public tours at Government House, so the cost savings would be \$17,000. I would

just also like to say that the board, which has four women and four men, which is great because that means there is gender parity, had four members' terms expiring on April 30, 2016, and the remaining four in 2017.

I just wanted to have my minute to talk about Government House and the great things that it does for the public and for all Albertans and how open and transparent this bill is. I think that we are doing a great job as a government to make sure that there is transparency for all Albertans, and I just would like to ask every member of this House to support this piece of legislation.

Thank you.

The Chair: Any other questions, comments? The hon. Member for Lacombe-Ponoka.

Mr. Orr: Thank you, Madam Chair. I appreciate the opportunity just to speak briefly to this. I won't be long because I along with my colleagues find it quite easy to support the bill. Obviously, it is in the interest of smaller government and savings and efficiency, and of course that's something I think we can all support. I'm glad to support it. I won't repeat a lot of what's been said.

I'm also glad to see that in this particular case, from a culture point of view – I need to refer to the Auditor General's report which identified these items, that flagged the effort on this. I realize that this was attempted once already, and the entries had to be reversed. I'm glad to see that the government is coming back and doing it right this time, getting the process right. I do think that's important when you're dealing with the assets and the procedure, the legal proceedings, those kinds of things. Congratulations to government for coming back and getting it right this time.

Also from a culture point of view, the one question I might have had would be if some of the benefit of these organizations was being lost. In this case it clearly isn't. For instance, the preservation of the asset of Government House and all of the benefits that go with that is continuing and will continue to benefit Albertans, so I appreciate that.

10:50

The Wild Rose Foundation: of course, the support for nonprofits and volunteers is extremely important. I want to continue to say that that needs to be a part of what happens in Alberta because they really are the ones who in many cases are not just the culture makers but also the culture carriers. They do much of the work. They have the vision. They have the donations. They just do a lot of the work, so my thanks and my congratulations to all of them.

The only last thing I might say about the Wild Rose Foundation is: my thanks to the Minister of Finance for clearing up any possible future confusion about the use of the name. There could be the possibility of confusion when we form the next government as to conflict of interest, those kinds of things, so thank you for clearing up the name and making the path clear for us. Congratulations.

The Chair: Any further questions, comments, or amendments with respect to this bill? The hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake.

Mr. Cyr: Thank you, Madam Chair. I do have a couple more questions based on the answers that I got from the Minister of Finance. From the answer that we got, it was \$33 million, to go back to the nuts and bolts on this, over three years. My understanding is that that would mean that \$11 million was, I guess, saved by the dissolutions, amalgamations, and consolidations. I'm trying to get what was said by the minister from the press release that was given out, and I'll quote the press release that was sent out on November 9. "Those agencies were among 26 agencies, boards and commissions identified for consolidation or dissolution in Budget

2016, an initiative that will save \$33 million over three years." Now, I guess there's a little bit of confusion. It makes it sound like because you shut them down, you're going to save \$33 million.

Now, just to be clear here, I heard from the Member for Calgary-Klein that you're going to be reviewing some of the functions that were being done and moving those functions, maybe, into government departments. They can correct me if I'm wrong on this. Is this \$11 million, like, a gross amount for just shutting down the money that you're putting into these different commissions, boards, and agencies, or is this \$11 million in net savings that Albertans and taxpayers will see? This is an important part. We're showing through government press releases that we're going to be saving money because of an action of this bill. I would say that it could possibly be shown as misleading if we're actually either spending the exact same inside of government or we're net zero for savings. If the Minister of Finance could answer this question. Again, it doesn't mean that I won't be supporting this bill even if it is net zero because I do believe that bringing simplicity to our agencies, boards, and commissions is admirable, but I would like to hear a little bit more about the \$11 million.

The Chair: Any other members wishing to speak?

Mr. Ceci: With regard to the savings that have been identified, this bill, that's been brought before, is not the trigger for all that's happening. That started when we started phase 1 of our review, in April 2016. We are seeing those savings in terms of bringing administrative functions back into government for agencies that have been dissolved whose function was still necessary but could be delivered better by government, administrative savings; savings in salaries that have occurred as a result of not needing the executives or the staff who were responsible for either those dissolved agencies or the consolidated ones. So the savings occur as a result of paring back the number of agencies and amalgamating agencies and dissolving agencies.

That \$33 million has been identified over three years. It is monies that won't get spent as a result of the actions, and that's just the start of it, Madam Chair. We still have 146 agencies in phase 2 of the review that are getting examined for similar kinds of opportunities.

Not so much on phase 3, which is the postsecondary institutions. There won't be that sort of direction taken in that area. You know, are they functioning as well as they can possibly function, and do they have the necessary board strength and governance strength they need? We know that there are a number of postsecondaries that are waiting for appointments to their boards and governance structures, and we're working quickly. I know the Minister of Advanced Education is working as quickly as possible to make sure that they have the necessary people in place to continue to drive forward their important mission and function for postsecondary education in this province.

Thank you.

The Chair: Just before I recognize the hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake, just a general reminder that when we are in committee, yes, we've got a little more freedom to move around. But it's difficult for me as chair, when individuals are standing, to determine who actually is standing to speak. So if you want to have a conversation, taking a nearby chair would be appreciated. Thank you.

Go ahead, hon. member.

Mr. Cyr: Thank you, Madam Chair. I guess one of my follow-up questions to this, then, is – it sounds like the government is dissolving these. My question to the Finance minister is: are we moving all of the staff and management into government directly?

Has there actually been somebody that has been, I guess, reduced in the government agencies, boards, and commissions? If not, then it does appear that all we've done is said: we were funding these agencies, boards, and commissions by \$11 million, and then we moved those people all inside the government, but that \$11 million is now saved because they're no longer in there. That, again, is a concern that I've got with this. In essence, my concern here is that it's a shell game. It's just moving around the actual cost to taxpayers to a different part of the government. Has there actually been a reduction in the management and the staffing within these agencies, or did they just actually all move into the government and become government employees?

The Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-Klein.

Mr. Coolahan: Thank you, Madam Chair. To answer the member's question – I think the Finance minister did quite a good job of that, actually – it depends on the agency or the board, and in this case there will be differences. For example, the seniors' advisory panel will be completely dissolved, and some of the functions will move under the ministry, so there are direct savings, as the Finance minister said, as a result of salaries being reduced. I don't think it's the shell game that the member is alluding to. Also, Madam Chair, I just wanted to . . . [interjections] Yeah. That there are no net new positions is the bottom line on that.

Also, Madam Chair, I just wanted to clarify something on the Travel Alberta piece that the member from Morinville and surrounding area alluded to.

Mr. van Dijken: Barrhead-Morinville-Westlock.

Mr. Coolahan: Thank you.

What was actually in the legislation prior to this bill was that the Deputy Minister of Culture and Tourism was automatically appointed to the board. With Bill 31 what we want to do is remove that provision from the act because we thought that there was some potential conflict of interest with the deputy minister sitting on that board as the deputy minister does, of course, participate in policy discussions and finance discussions. So we thought that it was appropriate that we remove that individual from the board.

That's all at this time. Thank you, Madam Chair.

11:00

The Chair: Any further questions, comments, or amendments with respect to this bill? The hon. Member for Barrhead-Morinville-Westlock.

Mr. van Dijken: Yeah. Just for follow-up on that, the way I understood it was that the minister still had the ability to appoint to the board, but maybe I misunderstood the way the wording was. It sounds from the comments that there will not be that opportunity for the minister to appoint the deputy minister to the board. The way the comments were worded was essentially: it will not happen again.

Mr. Coolahan: Madam Chair, the member is correct.

The Chair: Any other questions, comments, or amendments with respect to this bill? The hon. Member for Barrhead-Morinville-Westlock.

Mr. van Dijken: Yeah. Thank you, Madam Chair. I think there is a necessity to also identify some of the concerns that were raised by my colleague for Bonnyville-Cold Lake with respect to one of the agencies that was dissolved. I do know that there are a number of those individuals, if not all of those, who have found a spot within

the ministry now to work. So it can be perceived as possibly saving money by efficiencies in dissolving agencies, but in this respect the majority of the cost of employees under the agency now becomes a cost of government under the ministry, so possibly we're not saving as much as we think we are through this whole process. It's something to be very aware of and to continually work to make sure that we're delivering the services necessary in an efficient and an effective manner at all times for Albertans.

Mr. Coolahan: Just a quick note on a question that was asked previously, Madam Chair. The total ABC review cost is \$800,000, and so far we have spent \$630,000, making this an excellent value for taxpayers.

Thank you.

The Chair: Any other questions or comments with respect to the bill?

If not, are you ready for the question on Bill 31?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

[The clauses of Bill 31 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

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

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Chair: Opposed? That's carried.

The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Mason: Thank you, Chairperson. I move that the committee now rise and report.

[Motion carried]

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

Mr. Rosendahl: Madam Speaker, the Committee of the Whole has under consideration certain bills. The committee reports the following bill: Bill 31.

The Deputy Speaker: Does the Assembly concur in the report? Say aye.

Hon. Members: Aye.

The Deputy Speaker: Any opposed? So ordered.

Government Bills and Orders Second Reading (continued)

Bill 25 Oil Sands Emissions Limit Act

[Debate adjourned November 10: Mr. Yao speaking]

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat.

Mr. Barnes: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Thank you for the opportunity to speak to Bill 25, the Oil Sands Emissions Limit Act. Immediately I'm struck by the fact that once again we are discussing yet another way the government intends to limit this province, yet another way the government is putting its clumsy fingers into the management of our economy, yet another way the government is regulating away our prosperity, yet another way the

NDP is treating Alberta as an obstacle to be managed as opposed to a place of limitless potential to be unleashed.

Madam Speaker, I'm also struck that the government is regulating away the survival of many Alberta businesses, communities, and towns. My goodness, I think of the number of welders, fabricators, and construction people as far away from the oil sands as Bow Island, as Medicine Hat, as Redcliff, as Foremost that provide valuable products and services to the oil sands, that provide valuable jobs for families, for the youth, and here we are limiting – limiting – that opportunity.

Madam Speaker, I think it was actually Liberal leader Laurence Decore who said that the government must be careful that its arms do not become tentacles. Government must avoid the temptation to believe that they can micromanage and command the economy to do their bidding with every tinkering and decree. This government has clearly not heeded such wise advice.

Sometimes I wonder if this NDP government wouldn't actually prefer that they were governing somewhere else, somewhere without a robust oil and gas industry, but instead, alas, they make Alberta in their utopian image. I believe that the Premier said in this House yesterday that business in Alberta would have to – would have to – reposition itself to the NDP's agenda. She used the word "reposition." I humbly submit that it is perhaps the NDP government that should reposition itself to Alberta, to Albertans' communities, families, and needs. But, Madam Speaker, until that happens, we're here to talk about more limitations.

I find it interesting that the NDP's panel of advisers on the newly created oil sands advisory group hasn't even completed its work yet, and here they are charging ahead anyway. The OSAG was supposed to give a somewhat apolitical and legitimate gloss to the NDP's actions, trying to cover this rigid dogma with yet again the appearance of objective analysis, but of course that really didn't materialize, did it? Instead of giving any sort of reasonable expert advice, it seems that hardly a week can go by without yet another member of the NDP-appointed panel revealing their true feelings about Alberta's energy sector.

They started out on the wrong foot with a co-chair, another signatory of the Leap Manifesto, by the way, comparing our industry to a mythical place of doom and evil straight out of a fantasy book. Though you think it might stop there, you'd be mistaken. Madam Speaker, yet another OSAG member insisted that, no, we don't need pipelines. She even sent out a fundraising letter to that effect. Just imagine, an NDP appointee living off the Albertan tax dollar making fundraising appeals for her eco-radical buddies. We are past the point of parody now.

11:10

Finally, I'd just like to note that in response to an economist analysis that we need increased pipeline capacity, the same co-chair of the NDP's advisory group insisted that, no, we don't because of the limits we're putting into place. It is her belief that we must charge towards a future of, and I quote, managed decline. A future of managed decline: fewer jobs, fewer opportunities, less wealth, less opportunities to help our communities and our families. Madam Speaker, I never thought I'd see the day when the Alberta government – the Alberta government – would be talking about managed decline. From this cap itself: \$154 billion of managed decline estimated, never mind all the spinoff.

Madam Speaker, in a province of free enterprise, economic liberty, innovation, and hard work, in a province that brought us the Alberta advantage, in the best jurisdiction in the entire world, here we are talking about how to manage our decline. So perhaps it's not really a surprise that the NDP is charging ahead with our decline even though they don't have the completed analysis of their

advisory panel. We all know what's going to come out of that, and the NDP does, too. If they didn't know, they wouldn't have appointed them. I thought it was interesting that the managed decline comment came in response to a discussion about pipeline capacity. Pipelines in this cap are very much related in that they are capacity issues, wealth issues.

The analysis concluded that even with both Trans Mountain and Keystone XL we would reach maximum capacity within a decade. The same economist also stated that getting Keystone XL would mean a reduction of \$5 to \$6 per barrel in the price differential, the discount that producers here must accept to sell Alberta's product. That's \$5 million to \$6 million every day for tax revenues, for services, for wealth for our employees, for wealth for our investors: managed decline.

But building capacity is not really the goal here, is it? Despite the fact that the world needs our oil and gas, despite the fact that eastern Canada buys 800,000 barrels a day from Saudi Arabia, despite the fact that we produce it here in an incredibly responsible way, and despite the fact that our oil sands contribute a fifth of 1 per cent in global emissions – a fifth of 1 per cent – while supplying the world with ethically produced energy, Madam Speaker, despite all of these things the government feels a strong need to cap.

This government has a remarkable faith, a blind faith, in its ability to create economic growth and innovation, growth for its chosen winners, of course, its chosen winners by decree. They seem to believe that enough central control, enough bureaucracy, enough regulatory hurdles, and enough tax will suddenly create a bustling and booming economic climate. Under their all-knowing and watchful eye they think they can guide production as they see fit. And it seems that each intervention spurs another. Every time the NDP meddles, they create the need for more, and all the while business confidence is in free fall, people are nervous and anxious, investment is limited, and the economy contracts.

Madam Speaker, I had breakfast this weekend with an oil and gas investor, and I was told that when his company buys a field that straddles Alberta and Saskatchewan or straddles Alberta and B.C., before they close on the deal, they ensure that they sell off the Alberta part. They don't want to be part of the managed decline. They don't want to be part of this government picking winners and losers. They want the right to create jobs, take care of their communities, and build wealth for all Albertans.

There is a very real temptation for politicians to enter this building and believe they know best about all facets of the economy and the way that Albertans choose to live, build, and raise their families. Rather than getting out of the way, there's a temptation for a government to insert itself where it shouldn't and create artificial constraints where they ought not be. The government's limitless belief in itself creates limits on people everywhere else. I'd mentioned the jobs that are going to be lost in Bow Island, Medicine Hat, Redcliff, and Foremost, never mind Leduc and Beaumont and Fort McMurray and Sherwood Park and everywhere where this will impact communities and families.

Expanding government boundaries into the space naturally requires other entities, whether individuals or businesses, to feel the squeeze and leave or quit. I'm afraid that, contrary to the NDP's belief that it can create by limiting, that it can encourage growth by constraining, and that it can spur investment by intervening, the reality is that growth is a function of people going about their lives and producing for themselves, their families, and their communities.

We are not going to create lasting economic growth and productivity by putting limits and managed decline on our strongest sectors. In fact, estimates have put our total expected loss as a result of this policy at roughly \$150 billion. One hundred and fifty billion

dollars gone from our economy. These are dollars that can no longer be used to invest, to hire, to donate, to build, to enjoy, to share, to live, to help.

Ironically, while the government boasts about diversification, they may actually be achieving it by driving down our powerhouse industries. They have bought into the myth that we can incentivize growth in smaller sectors by punishing the larger ones.

Madam Speaker, I cannot support this bill. I cannot support further limitations on our economy and on Albertans, who have created such extraordinary wealth, expertise, innovation, and opportunity already. Wherever I go around Alberta, Albertans are telling me the same thing. I reject the flawed idea that government alone can direct us to do better things when I have already so clearly seen what the unleashed potential of Albertans has achieved. We do many things incredibly well in this province, perhaps none better than excellent energy production. It's time that this government respects what people here can do, have done for all of us in Alberta.

Madam Speaker, thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Any questions or comments for the previous speaker under 29(2)(a)?

Seeing none, I will recognize the hon. Member for Grande Prairie-Wapiti.

Mr. Drysdale: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I would like to move an amendment if that's all right. Do you want me to read it now?

The Deputy Speaker: If you could just wait a second until I get a copy of it.

Go ahead, hon. member.

Mr. Drysdale: On behalf of my colleague from Calgary-Lougheed I would like to move that the motion for second reading of Bill 25, Oil Sands Emissions Limit Act, be amended by deleting all of the words after "that" and substituting the following: "Bill 25, Oil Sands Emissions Limit Act, be not now read a second time but that it be read a second time this day six months hence."

11:20

Madam Speaker, I rise today to issue a hoist amendment on Bill 25, Oil Sands Emissions Limit Act, and have the requisite number of copies to do so. The rationale for this hoist is based on a lack of stakeholder consultation and the haphazard rationale to rush this bill into law while the oil and gas industry is facing the ill effects of the NDP world view as well as the low oil prices.

Madam Speaker, I know, in speaking with industry representatives in Calgary, that small to medium-sized oil and gas businesses have not been consulted on this plan. These companies employ thousands of Albertans and Calgarians, and they are vital to the Alberta economy. Why this government has chosen to forge ahead with such a plan when we are facing record unemployment levels within our province has me perplexed. This is a time when we need to be incentivizing all small and medium-sized start-ups. This legislation sends a very poor signal to business. Bill 25 will undoubtedly strand a significant portion of oil sands resources and limit Alberta's economic growth potential by preventing responsible growth once the cap is met.

This bill also favours current players by artificially limiting the size of Alberta's oil sands market. This only serves to stifle competition and create unnecessary barriers to future participants. Additionally, by failing to provide any details on potential regulations, this legislation creates even more uncertainty and risk for investors and further weakens an already fragile economy.

Again, corroborating my point with respect to the lack of consultation, if the government has nothing to hide, then please

finish this legislation within the Legislature, not behind closed doors in cabinet. Transparency has also been a common theme for the NDP. The government must provide clarity around the role of oil sands advisory group membership and how their role will be affected by regulation. Will the group be acting as de facto regulations for all future oil sands development, or are they merely a cover to provide legitimacy to NDP policy?

Madam Speaker, for the sake of all Albertans, I encourage this government to consult appropriately and to take into account the current business climate, that is putting us all at a disadvantage and which is being made worse by this government and the uncertainty that they continue to create.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Any others wishing to speak to the amendment? The hon. Member for Lacombe-Ponoka.

Mr. Orr: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I'd just like to say that I clearly will be supporting the amendment, and I appreciate the member moving it forward. The NDP in this case are setting out a greenhouse gas emissions limit, and my concern with that is that, quite frankly, this cap on emissions does two things. It is a complete business killer, and secondly, it will do almost nothing to actually reduce real greenhouse gas emissions. The cap on emissions is, in effect, not just a cap on emissions. It's a cap on oil sands. It's a cap on Canada's GDP. It's a cap on business. It's a cap on innovation. It's a cap on jobs. It's a cap on the future of Albertans and Canadians. It's a cap on affordable energy, a cap on transportation, a cap on competitiveness. It's a cap on everything we do in our life.

For instance, just this last week, constituency week, while I was home, I had three different business owners come to me and express their frustration with the policies of the government. One of them put it this way. He asked me to come to his place of business. He sat there, and he looked at me and said: "Can you give me one reason why I should not move my business to Saskatchewan today? Everything I do I can do just as easily over there for a lot less cost. Why should I stay here?"

The other business I spoke with is on the edge of insolvency, a small retailer in the area who is struggling because of loss of rent, loss of business activity, essentially on the edge of bankruptcy.

The third one is actually a fairly large business in central Alberta, the owner of which I met with the other day. His comment to me was: "Well, you know what you can say for me? You can thank the NDP for forcing me into early retirement." He had just gotten back from Phoenix. He'd bought a house in Phoenix. He was moving. He's leaving the province.

These are the real realities. This is an antiprosperty bill. It's an antifuture bill. It's a bill that puts up barriers in front of businesses and is literally driving them out of the province. You might think that, well, it's just a couple of small businesses in a small riding. Then I read a week ago today in the *Calgary Herald*, November 16 – actually, it was first published on November 15 – a column by Don Braid, who points out that the number of businesses that have closed in Calgary is staggering. In the range of 11,000 businesses have closed or moved this year in the city of Calgary.

He goes into some details if you want to read it. He calls it "a disaster, a small business extinction unlike anything we've seen in nearly 40 years." He goes into the details: "Two thousand Calgary businesses [have absolutely] closed their doors over the summer." Another 1,800 have moved into smaller digs, trying to survive. "In the first nine months of this year, 11,400 Calgary businesses have either vanished or moved."

These are astounding numbers. Even if you want to add in the new businesses that have started, many of which are people who

have lost their jobs and are trying to create something to stay alive, in the city of Calgary we're still at a net loss of over 4,000 businesses. The reality is that most of the new businesses are not going to be big-time employers. They're not going to have big-time wages to hand out to people. This cap on emissions is part of what contributes to a cap on almost everything that happens in our province. This is self-harming behaviour, quite frankly.

Albeit it's for a cause, to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by .035 per cent, the reality is that it's not going to reduce greenhouse gas emissions in any measurable way. I guess you'd have to forgive some Albertans for feeling that all of this is just a cover for socialist engineering, a grand wealth transfer, a desire to take wealth and distribute it in different kinds of ways, to create some kind of a new fantasy green economy. Who knows where that's going?

The environment minister said on January 11 in Calgary that we may not need the carbon tax forever if we can find ways to reduce emissions. Fine. The suggestion that the tax may not be permanent is an interesting idea. I would suggest that maybe a single province-wide greenhouse gas free day would actually reduce the annual emissions of our province a lot more than a cap on emissions on the oil fields and on business and on our futures actually would.

What would it take to actually reduce our net annual greenhouse gas emissions? How about a greenhouse gas free day or no coffee for a whole day? Just turn the utilities off for a day. Prohibit fuels for a day. Prohibit the creation of electrical power for one day. It would actually reduce greenhouse gases more than this bill will, and I think it would actually even create more awareness of the difficulties of reducing greenhouse gases. It would bring people's attention more to it. If this is about changing behaviour and creating awareness, let's create awareness.

There's another option, too. You know, we can talk about the science of various things. There is pretty good science out there for clean coal. We could actually engage in clean coal and reduce greenhouse gas emissions without putting a cap on everybody's businesses, on their futures, on their jobs, on their lives. There are options out there whereby we could actually reduce greenhouse gas emissions without capping the existence and the future of Alberta's economy. So my challenges are to you that this really is about reducing the prosperity of Alberta while at the same time not effectively actually reducing any greenhouse gases in serious ways.

Thank you.

11:30

The Deputy Speaker: I neglected after the mover of the amendment to offer the provisions of Standing Order 29(2)(a). Does anyone have any questions or comments for this member under 29(2)(a)? The hon. Member for Banff-Cochrane.

Mr. Westhead: Yes. Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. Just a quick question for the member. He suggested shutting down the entire Alberta economy for a day, and I'm just wondering if he's done an economic impact analysis and what that's shown. How much would that actually save, and how badly would that hurt the economy?

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Orr: Thank you, Madam Speaker. A wonderful question, actually. The answer is no, just as you haven't done one on your whole carbon tax thing.

The Deputy Speaker: Any further questions or comments under 29(2)(a)?

Seeing none, is there another speaker to the amendment? The hon. Member for Battle River-Wainwright.

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Madam Speaker, for this opportunity to speak on the hoist amendment today. I rise to speak again in opposition to this ideological bill. There are many reasons why I think that this bill is onerous and why it will not have my support. The government is yet again trying to control industry and impose another cap and hamper investment and create more uncertainty in Alberta's energy sector. Once again, this government is forging ahead without consultation and without feedback from the very panel they asked to determine the law's viability. The oil sands advisory group, chaired by Tzeporah Berman, has not even completed its work, and it won't be complete until February of next year. Sounds like a great reason to put this off, as the hon. member next to me has suggested, until the spring, doesn't it?

We can't possibly trust that the regulation will be fair or positive for the industry. What about all the leases the government has already sold? How do you accommodate for them? Are you planning on using taxpayers' dollars to pay them out, too? Where is this money going to come from?

This cap will cut out any possibility of new investors, and investors' confidence will continue to wane. This 100-megatonne emissions cap has been introduced by this government as one part of their climate leadership action plan. Did the government not consult with all the stakeholders before going ahead and arbitrarily coming up with a figure? The oil sands have been paying for CO₂ emissions under the specified gas emitters regulation levy since 2007. Alberta was the first jurisdiction in North America to put a price on carbon. However, industry was in favour of this agreement and did not see all the funds go towards industry research and development.

The government holds fast to the claim that it has faced increasing investigation over unmanned emissions. All mine sites, in situ sites, primary production sites, and the processing plants will be held accountable by this emissions cap. Alberta oil sands only make up approximately 9 per cent of the nation's total CO₂ emissions, and Canada is about 1.8 per cent of the world's. As China brings on coal power over the next four years, that 1.8 per cent that our entire country produces from all kinds of electricity will shrink. While the 100-megatonne cap will allow 50 per cent growth from 2014 levels, if Alberta isn't producing the energy the world wants because of the cap, our competitors, many of whom have horrible environmental and human rights records, will supply the world with the energy that they need. The world needs more oil, and no other jurisdiction is limiting their production, except here. This hurts our economy on so many levels.

Industry is trying to maintain, and many oil workers are out of jobs due to the strain on the economy. I'm not really entirely sure why the government wants to hamper further production and let other jurisdictions pick up the slack, ones that, frankly, don't have the record that we have. Oil will be produced, and it will be used world-wide. If we don't produce it, someone else will, jurisdictions that, frankly, don't have either the environmental standards that we have here in Alberta nor the mechanisms that will give their workers a fair pay and a safe work environment.

If this bill is passed, I feel the government has missed the mark on trying to cut down global emissions. Jurisdictions outside of Canada that do not have our standards will produce more as a result of increased global demand for oil, but here in Alberta we will be limited. Can you imagine that? Clean, ethical oil limited because of bad policy. This truly needs to be thought through completely. Why not try to rebuild the Alberta advantage and build a strong economy? So much could come from it.

In Alberta we're experts in clean oil production. I believe that we need to place more focus on that and on our technologies that we're good at and export that to the world, sell that to the world. That's

part of diversifying our economy and supporting what our industries already have. We have to ask ourselves: why are we discussing this right now while we have all these problems in our province? What's the hurry? Are we not sending out a negative message to investors that this province is not in support of their investments and all the businesses that come along with that?

Unlike Saskatchewan, all the decisions that the NDP has made over the last year and a half have made our economy worse and will continue to stifle growth while Saskatchewan picks up in this industry. Increases to corporate taxation, emissions caps, increases to personal taxes, the massive carbon tax, shutting down of a valuable industry like coal produces, and destroying contracts: this is so far what the government has done for our province and still has the audacity to say how oil production is the reason for the huge deficit. No. Actions from this government to destroy the industry, department overspending, and the borrowing of billions of dollars to run the province will eventually drive the last nail in the fiscal coffin that we're facing.

Oil will bounce back, but we won't be able to capitalize on it because, frankly, companies are leaving our province. They are leaving. From all over my riding I get word that they're leaving for Saskatchewan or that they're closing up shop and going and doing something else in British Columbia. They are leaving. This government's antibusiness stance is driving thriving businesses to other jurisdictions like Saskatchewan, again, or the States. You look at North Dakota. Have you asked Albertans and leaders of industry for their input regarding your climate change plan?

Some Hon. Members: Yes, we have.

Mr. Taylor: Okay. Good.

Have you asked outside investors what they think of our province?

Some Hon. Members: Yes.

11:40

Mr. Taylor: You know, what I find interesting, though, is that investment now is flowing into Saskatchewan. So if you asked them, how well did you ask them? If they are starting to move their investments and shift to other jurisdictions, I don't think you asked the right questions or maybe listened to what they were saying.

According to the report released by the Fraser Institute . . . [interjections] Okay. I was waiting for that.

The report, entitled *How Alberta's Carbon Emission Cap Will Reduce Oil Sands Growth*, states that placing an emissions cap will cost Albertans between \$150 billion and \$250 billion in revenue due to resources not being produced. This decision will have a severe adverse effect on our economy for years to come. Where's the social licence that this government bought?

Now that the newly elected President promised approval of the Keystone pipeline, in the new year will the Premier be discussing this with the new President, or will she kowtow to the environmentalists she has appointed to the oil sands advisory group? It's a good question. We will soon see if what the Premier has been promising this province will come to fruition or if she is going to be just appeasing us with empty words.

The Middle East, Texas, North Dakota are not – not – placing a carbon tax on their production. The U.S. has elected people at all levels who are prioritizing economic growth – that's something we sure need in this province – over carbon reduction, and they're happy to steal any North American investment they can from us. Many countries will not entertain a carbon tax because they know it will cost jobs. I ask the government to stop trying to control the industry and imposing further damaging caps that hamper

investment and create more uncertainty in Alberta's oil industry sector.

For these reasons I will not be able to support this bill in its present form. [interjections] I know that saddens you guys over there.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Questions or comments under 29(2)(a) for the hon. member who has just spoken?

Seeing none, I'll recognize Spruce Grove-St. Albert.

Mr. Horne: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I believe this is the third amendment to this bill that I've risen to speak on. This one wants to read the act in six months. Now, I find that a bit strange. I know that when I talk to industry and when I talk to front-line workers, what they want is certainty out of the government. They don't want us delaying things for six months on something we've already talked to them about so that we can go back and talk to them again and then do the same thing. That's just a poor way of doing business. So in the interest of that certainty, I rise to speak against this amendment, as I'm sure the Opposition House Leader is surprised to learn.

We need to be able to get investment flowing in Alberta. I know there are lots of people waiting. I had a meeting with an individual just last week who is contemplating whether or not he wants to build a refinery here in Alberta. He actually thought I was a member of the Wildrose Party when he came into my office, which was a bit interesting. What that does show me is that there are people looking at this province, but what they are waiting for is certainty. They are waiting for things like this bill to pass third reading, to get royal assent so that they know what they're investing in. The more we delay on these things, the longer these investors are going to sit idle, and that's further down the road that we're creating these jobs. We need to get Albertans back to work, and quite frankly I can't support delaying this any longer.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Under 29(2)(a), Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills.

Mr. Cooper: Well, Madam Speaker, I am saddened and wounded, shocked by the government members' decision to not support such a sensible amendment, proposed by a colleague of mine from the third party.

An Hon. Member: No colleagues here.

Mr. Cooper: Well, you do know things about changing colleagues.

An Hon. Member: Not on your scale.

Mr. Cooper: Certainly not on the scale that I understand about it, but I think that the results might be similar with respect to this.

You know, I do find it interesting with respect to the comments around investment in refining given that this piece of legislation provides an additional cap or exemption for refining, which may be why individuals are chatting about that. I'm certain that you're not hearing from many individuals or mid-sized companies that are coming to your office speaking to you about making significant and large multibillion-dollar investments in oil sands productions because you're capping their future. While I believe the member when he said that he had someone come speak to him about refining, Madam Speaker, the bill provides an exemption for refining. It is possible that people want to continue to invest in refining, but what they don't want is a cap on the direction of our province. I understand that they want certainty, but they certainly

don't want this certainty. They want a certainty that provides a path for investment in the future, and this doesn't provide it.

It's more than a little disappointing to see the government continue down this path of capping our ability to extract resources out of the oil sands, and it's disappointing that the government isn't willing to stop and wait for their experts. Now, I get that they think that the folks that we on this side of the House often refer to – I get that they don't like those experts, but they've selected their own experts. You would think that they would want certainty from them prior to rushing through this piece of legislation.

It's unfortunate that the member isn't willing to wait six months. It's unfortunate that the government is not willing to wait six months. With respect to refining there already are some provisions in this although I am certain that at Committee of the Whole we will have some significant discussions around that 100-megatonne cap. It's unfortunate that they're not willing to wait for their experts to provide certainty that they're on the right path.

The Deputy Speaker: Spruce Grove-St. Albert, did you wish to respond?

Mr. Horne: Just a quick response. If we're interested in providing certainty, then I would suspect that what the hon. member really wants is not to in fact wait six months for a decision on this but instead to move it to third reading, where he could vote against it. I'm a bit concerned about the strategy of delaying six months longer to provide that certainty to industry. The only conclusion I can come to is that this is little more than a political game.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Under 29(2)(a), Chestermere-Rocky View.

Mrs. Aheer: Thank you, Madam Speaker, and thank you to the member for the comments. I would just like to follow through with the aspect of certainty. I would like a little bit more clarification on that because my understanding would be that in order to have some of that certainty for the industry, we would need to see that panel come forward with some of their discussions. So much of the certainty, in my understanding anyway, would be coming from understanding the direction that the panel is going to come back with regard to the cap because the whole point of the panel being put forward was to make sure that we had an understanding about that 100-megatonne emission cap. It's very hard, I would think, to provide certainty without having the panel coming back with their research and their information. Whether or not we agree that the people that are on that panel are the right people, that's at this point not relevant, but to the government in order to provide that certainty . . .

11:50

The Deputy Speaker: Any further speakers to the amendment? The hon. Member for Chestermere-Rocky View.

Mrs. Aheer: Thank you so much. I am very honoured to stand and speak to this amendment. Thank you to the member for bringing forward this very important amendment to make sure that we actually have the time to look at this bill. There are so many reasons that this bill needs to be put off for at least six months so that we can actually take a look at some of the information that's coming forward. There are so many reasons. Again, I'll reiterate the fact that the panel has not brought forward their information.

This gives us the opportunity to actually bring in more stakeholders into our space, to be able to talk to them. As the member across the way had mentioned, he's had people come into his office to speak to him about that. Can you imagine? Given a

little bit more time, I think that all of us would have a lot more visits from people in the small and medium-sized groups to be able to come back and give us some information.

One of the things I want to say is that the aspect of slowing this down – and we've mentioned this before – is to bring forward an economic impact study. Albertans are on a roller coaster already. They really are. Some of that roller coaster is being imposed by this government. The volatility of the market is further being hampered by the volatility of the policies that are coming forward. A lot of that has to do with the inability to create stability or to create certainty.

Like we've mentioned before, we don't know if this 100-megatonne cap on emissions is even the right number. It was a number that was pulled from thin air. It could be more. It could be less. Who knows? Unfortunately, the panel that's been put together to bring this discussion forward will not be giving us any of that information till February, as I understand it, so how are we supposed to put through a bill that has not had the information brought forward by the panel that was created by the government to actually advise all of us on how that's supposed to work? It seems like a common-sense idea. I would think that the government would have amended their own bill to actually bring this forward, realizing that the panel's information was not going to coincide with this bill going through. It really makes us question the validity of putting this bill through without actually having all of that information.

If you look at the forecasts into 2040, the prohibited production will cost Canadians billions of barrels of prosperity, somewhere in the neighbourhood of 2 billion to 3 billion barrels. I mean, how is that a win in anybody's imagination? I just don't understand it. There are interests outside of Alberta that are laughing at us and literally applauding the government for keeping our oil in the ground and capping our production. There are competitors absolutely everywhere globally that are completely grateful to this government for giving them our piece of the market because what we are not producing here we can guarantee is going to get produced somewhere else.

I mean, obviously, this is not a piece of legislation that is for Albertans because it's actively – actively – hurting the people that live in this province and hurting Canadians. Anybody else in the rest of the world are going: woo-hoo; we get to buy into this market right away. [interjection] I find it appalling that you think it's funny. It's not. This is actually a very serious concept and one that the government doesn't seem to understand. Other people, other nations, other jurisdictions are literally ecstatic that we are not going to be in the market, that our piece of the market is being capped.

This government is actively campaigning against Canadian oil. The panel co-chair, Tzaporah Berman, has actively spoken out and continues to speak out against responsible development, but where's the response to other development? Why is it that our oil and gas and our production here in Alberta is under attack? We should be producing more here, not less, especially if the regulations are in place to make us better. Why would we be giving away that piece of market when we know ethically and responsibly that we are the best developers of this energy? I mean, we should always, always continue to want to do better, work together to do better but not be against the very thing that brings prosperity to Albertans and Canadians. So many people are asking these questions.

I was so surprised at the member across the way. The person that was coming in to look at potentially investing in a refinery was not concerned about the fact that they may invest into something that may also have caps on it, may not be concerned that whatever investment might come into this province – that we have a

government that chooses people to be on a panel that actively works against Alberta and Canadian oil. I'm not sure how a person would feel that there's a relative investment to make there. But, like I said, I would be interested to hear about that.

Again, where is the engagement with the stakeholders? That's really what we're asking for here with not pushing this bill a bit forward. We do have every manner of technical expertise in this province. If you want to know how to get things out of the ground here, this is the place to do it. We have the technical expertise. There's a huge brain drain happening right now. They're leaving our province. There's going to be a time that we're going to want to ramp this up, and where are these folks going to be? We're just pushing them out the door.

What about our small and medium industry? How is the government planning on compensating the leaseholders? Has that mechanism been worked into this? This might be a really good reason to hold off on putting this bill forward. It may not have been something that was thought of when this bill came out on paper.

There are a minimal number of leases that are left over after where we're at with this megatonne cap already. Those are very, very valuable leases. So how is that going to be determined? It might be something worth putting time into and a little bit of space between what's happening right now, the panel coming back to

figure out how that's going to work. How is the government going to compensate for leases that have already been sold?

Mr. Cooper: That's a fair question.

Mrs. Aheer: I think it's a reasonable question.

Again to the member across the way: how do you entice investment? I mean, how do you feel about shutting down economic prospects? We're the third-largest oil reserve in the world and, at least for the moment, the fifth-largest producer. So how do you justify somebody like Karen Mahon, the national director of Stand? The Premier hired environmental lobbyists and protestors to help with climate regulation, evidently to buy a social licence for pipelines. What this government and the federal government fail to remember is that they're not giving enough credit to the thorough and legitimate NEB process. There are no provincial or municipal vetoes.

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

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

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