

# Drunk driving bill altered amid Conservative split

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While opposition to the Redford government's tough new drunk driving legislation leaked out of the Tory caucus on Tuesday, the province announced that many of the most controversial aspects of the law will take months to be phased in as a tracking system for repeat offenders is established.

Bill 26, the Alberta Traf-



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fic Safety Amendment Act, passed third and final reading last night.

During question period Tuesday, Transportation Minister Ray Danyluk said administrative penalties aimed at repeat offenders with a blood-alcohol content of above .08,

the Criminal Code level, are going to come into force first. He said new penalties aimed at those who blow between .05 and .08 — which have raised the ire of some Albertans as well as restaurant and pub owners — will "take a little bit longer."

In the legislature, Premier Alison Redford also emphasized the bill will come into force with "a very extensive public education campaign."

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# IMPAIRED: 'Terribly flawed'

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The government, police, health and advocacy organizations, as well as the families of those killed by drunk drivers, say the on-the-spot penalties laid out in Bill 26 will save lives.

However, the legislation has come under heavy criticism from opposition parties and critics who argued it breaches Albertans' civil rights. Restaurant and bar owners say it will hurt their alcohol sales.

Alongside opposition MLAs, long-serving Tory Richard Marz voted against the bill on Tuesday evening. Marz said he doubts the bill will have the effect his government says it will in cutting down traffic deaths, and more than 90 per cent of his constituents are against the law.

"Everybody is aware of what the premier wants, but I'm also aware of what I think is right," said the MLA for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills.

"In rural Alberta, you can't take the bus, you can't take a taxi. We're a big farming community. If you want to go to town with your wife and have a steak to celebrate your anniversary, and each have a glass of wine — you're probably not going to do that because you could be at risk."

While Marz voted against the bill, NDP MLA Rachel Notley voted with government members in favour of it.

The law, once in force, will give Alberta police the power to impose tough, new administrative penalties for drivers who allegedly have consumed too much alcohol. Penalties will ratchet up for repeat offenders.

For drivers who blow between .05 and .08, the province currently allows police to impose a 24-hour licence suspension. The new legislation would increase that to an automatic three-day suspension and a three-day vehicle seizure for a first offence. More severe penalties would apply for repeat offences.

Alberta Transportation spokeswoman Donna Babchishin said while the law will likely come into force early next year, the sections dealing with penalties for a blood-alcohol content level of .05 and .08 will take several more months to become reality because there is currently no system in place for

tracking repeat offenders at that level.

Criminal Code offenders, drivers who blow above .08, are already tracked for repeat offences. Bill 26 also includes longer vehicle impoundments and mandatory interlock programs for repeat offenders.

Former finance minister Lloyd Snelgrove, who has openly criticized the premier's leadership in the past and wasn't in the legislature for the votes, also called the legislation "terribly flawed."

"With this bill, they're going to treat you as guilty before you even get to court. We can't even say god damn bank robbers are guilty before they get to court. I don't know what other crime there is where you're guilty before being proven guilty."

Innisfail-Sylvan Lake MLA Luke Ouellette said he wouldn't vote against his own party's legislation but was concerned enough that he would likely be absent for the vote.

For his part, Danyluk said every MLA has the right to voice their opinion on the bill. "This is an open government," he said.

Danyluk also met with bar owners on Tuesday morning about their concerns, and by the end of the meeting their positions seemed to have softened.

Mike Scott, president of Ceili's Irish Pub and Restaurant — with two locations in Calgary and two in British Columbia — wishes the government had consulted with the hospitality industry sooner.

But he said he was encouraged by the meeting with Danyluk.

The government is firm in its intentions to move ahead with the bill but it recognized the concerns of bars and restaurants and wants to work with the industry in the public awareness campaign around the legislation and its impacts, said Scott, who informally represented a number of Calgary establishments in the meeting.

"They are adamant that it won't be rolled out like (B.C.) was, which is with the heavy hand," he said in an interview.

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