



Province of Alberta

The 30th Legislature
Third Session

Alberta Hansard

Monday evening, April 25, 2022

Day 23

The Honourable Nathan M. Cooper, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta
The 30th Legislature
Third Session

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

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

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

Party standings:

United Conservative: 61

New Democrat: 23

Independent: 3

Officers and Officials of the Legislative Assembly

Shannon Dean, QC, Clerk
Teri Cherkewich, Law Clerk
Trafton Koenig, Senior Parliamentary
 Counsel
Philip Massolin, Clerk Assistant and
 Director of House Services

Nancy Robert, Clerk of *Journals* and
 Committees
Janet Schwegel, Director of Parliamentary
 Programs
Amanda LeBlanc, Deputy Editor of
 Alberta Hansard

Chris Caughell, Sergeant-at-Arms
Tom Bell, Deputy Sergeant-at-Arms
Paul Link, Deputy Sergeant-at-Arms
Terry Langley, Assistant Sergeant-at-Arms

Executive Council

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

Parliamentary Secretaries

Martin Long	Parliamentary Secretary for Small Business and Tourism
Jacqueline Lovely	Parliamentary Secretary to the Associate Minister of Status of Women
Nathan Neudorf	Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Environment and Parks for Water Stewardship
Jeremy Nixon	Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Community and Social Services for Civil Society
Searle Turton	Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Energy
Dan Williams	Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Culture and for la Francophonie

STANDING AND SPECIAL COMMITTEES OF THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ALBERTA

Standing Committee on the Alberta Heritage Savings Trust Fund

Chair: Mr. Rowswell
Deputy Chair: Mr. Jones

Allard
Eggen
Gray
Hunter
Phillips
Rehn
Singh

Standing Committee on Alberta's Economic Future

Chair: Mr. Neudorf
Deputy Chair: Ms Goehring

Armstrong-Homeniuk
Barnes
Bilous
Frey
Irwin
Rosin
Rowswell
Sweet
van Dijken
Walker

Select Special Committee to Examine Safe Supply

Chair: Mr. Jeremy Nixon
Deputy Chair: Mrs. Allard

Amery
Frey
Milliken
Rosin
Stephan
Yao
Vacant
Vacant
Vacant
Vacant

Standing Committee on Families and Communities

Chair: Ms Lovely
Deputy Chair: Ms Sigurdson

Amery
Carson
Dang
Frey
Gotfried
Hunter
Loewen
Reid
Sabir
Smith

Select Special Information and Privacy Commissioner Search Committee

Chair: Mr. Walker
Deputy Chair: Mr. Turton

Allard
Carson
Dreeshen
Ganley
Long
Sabir
Stephan

Standing Committee on Legislative Offices

Chair: Mr. Rutherford
Deputy Chair: Mr. Milliken

Allard
Ceci
Dach
Long
Loyola
Rosin
Shepherd
Smith
van Dijken

Special Standing Committee on Members' Services

Chair: Mr. Cooper
Deputy Chair: Mr. Schow

Allard
Deol
Goehring
Gray
Long
Neudorf
Sabir
Sigurdson, R.J.
Williams

Standing Committee on Private Bills and Private Members' Public Bills

Chair: Mr. Rutherford
Deputy Chair: Mr. Jeremy Nixon

Amery
Frey
Irwin
Long
Nielsen
Rehn
Rosin
Sigurdson, L.
Sweet

Standing Committee on Privileges and Elections, Standing Orders and Printing

Chair: Mr. Smith
Deputy Chair: Mr. Reid

Aheer
Armstrong-Homeniuk
Deol
Ganley
Gotfried
Loyola
Neudorf
Renaud
Stephan
Williams

Standing Committee on Public Accounts

Chair: Ms Phillips
Deputy Chair: Mr. Reid

Armstrong-Homeniuk
Lovely
Pancholi
Renaud
Rowswell
Schmidt
Singh
Toor
Turton
Walker

Select Special Committee on Real Property Rights

Chair: Mr. Sigurdson
Deputy Chair: Mr. Rutherford

Frey
Ganley
Hanson
Milliken
Nielsen
Rowswell
Schmidt
Sweet
van Dijken
Yao

Standing Committee on Resource Stewardship

Chair: Mr. Hanson
Deputy Chair: Member Ceci

Dach
Feehan
Ganley
Getson
Guthrie
Lovely
Rehn
Singh
Turton
Yao

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

7:30 p.m.

Monday, April 25, 2022

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

The Deputy Speaker: Good evening, hon. members. Please be seated.

Government Bills and Orders Second Reading

Bill 18 Utility Commodity Rebate Act

[Adjourned debate April 21: Ms Issik]

The Deputy Speaker: Are there members wishing to join the debate on Bill 18 in second reading?

Seeing none, I will call the question.

[The voice vote indicated that the motion for second reading carried]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 7:31 p.m.]

[Fifteen minutes having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

For the motion:

Aheer	Nally	Sabir
Copping	Nixon, Jeremy	Schow
Eggen	Orr	Schweitzer
Ellis	Panda	Sigurdson, R.J.
Feehan	Phillips	Smith
Ganley	Rehn	Sweet
Gotfried	Reid	Toews
Hanson	Rowswell	van Dijken
Long	Rutherford	

Totals: For – 26 Against – 0

[Motion carried unanimously; Bill 18 read a second time]

Bill 13 Financial Innovation Act

[Adjourned debate April 20: Mr. Nielsen]

The Deputy Speaker: Are there members to join the debate? The hon. Member for Edmonton-North West.

Mr. Eggen: Well, thank you, Madam Speaker. I appreciate the opportunity to, you know, just reiterate the importance of Bill 13. I think that it definitely is necessary, and it's some important ways by which we can change financial products and improve consumer protection. However, I also know that there are always the bills that we have before us and then the time as it progresses. I'm just looking at Bill 18 and the urgency of getting some movement and progress around Bill 18, so I would like to request to adjourn debate and move to Bill 18.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Bill 16 Insurance Amendment Act, 2022

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Minister of Finance and President of Treasury Board to move Bill 16 at second reading.

Mr. Toews: All right. Well, thank you, Madam Speaker. I, in fact, rise to move second reading of Bill 16, the Insurance Amendment Act, 2022.

Bill 16 proposes measures that would help ensure an efficient regulatory framework, support growth of Alberta's insurance industry, and advance our efforts to modernize Alberta's financial services sector. Alberta's recovery plan, our strategy for economic diversification, recognizes the tremendous potential for expanding the financial service sector in the province.

To this end, I recently introduced legislation to promote innovation in the financial services sector by allowing companies to test new products and services. This legislation is the first of its kind in Canada, one that will spur investment in innovative and new technologies and position Alberta's economy for growth in the financial services sector. Bill 16 takes us a step further in these efforts with amendments to insurance legislation for commercial entities. The proposed amendments in Bill 16 relate to two insurance statutes, the Insurance Act and the Captive Insurance Companies Act. I'll go over the amendments to each, starting with the Insurance Act.

7:50

Proposed amendments to the Insurance Act are intended to advance government's efforts to increase insurance capacity in the province by facilitating access to reinsurance. Madam Speaker, reinsurance is insurance for insurance companies. As a result of scarce supply of insurance and reinsurance globally Canadian and Alberta's insurers are finding it very difficult to meet the demands of their clients in both commercial and personal lines of business. Increasing reinsurance availability in the province should have a positive impact on the overall insurance supply in the provincial insurance market. This will help ease the shortage and high prices and better position traditional insurers in serving Albertans and Alberta businesses.

Specifically, the proposed amendments would add reinsurance provisions to the Insurance Act, allowing provincially licensed insurance companies to focus solely on reinsurance and to enter limited partnerships. If Bill 16 is passed, Alberta would be the first Canadian jurisdiction to allow provincial insurers to have a reinsurance-specific business model and pursue limited partnerships for capital formation.

It's worth noting that the reinsurance industry in Canada is very limited and composed mostly of foreign-based enterprises. The majority are operating through a subsidiary and conducting business in Canada through a branch. In some instances their business activities are performed directly from abroad. To do business in Canada, reinsurers may choose to be licensed, often referred to as admitted, or unlicensed. Admitted reinsurers are federally licensed and supervised by the federal office of the Superintendent of Financial Institutions. Much of the existing global reinsurance capacity is located in Europe, the United States, and Bermuda; therefore, it can be challenging to access reinsurance if you're a Canadian- or an Alberta-based insurer.

In addition, Madam Speaker, we're continuously seeing pressure to reduce Canadian insurance capacity through actions taken in Europe against insurers supporting fossil fuel projects such as Canadian pipelines. Add that to the current global hard insurance market, and I'm sure we all can appreciate the challenges for many commercial entities to meet their insurance needs. That's why it's imperative we do what we can to allow the insurance industry to attract capacity to Alberta and to help diversify our provincial insurance sector.

Diversifying Alberta's insurance sector has both short- and long-term benefits for the province's economy. Greater insurance

options will help commercial entities with immediate insurance needs. Greater activity in the insurance industry will help attract investment, strengthen Alberta's financial services sector, and support economic diversification. That's why in the fall of 2021 we passed the Captive Insurance Companies Act, which will come into force this summer and allow the formation of captive insurance companies right here in Alberta.

We're very excited to be only the second province in Canada, next to B.C., to come into the global insurance market as a captives domicile. The Captive Insurance Companies Act is expected to come into effect this summer once we finalize the accompanying regulations. Right now we're putting the finishing touches on the legislation itself, with an amendment being proposed in Bill 16. The amendment proposes new redomestication provisions for the Captive Insurance Companies Act to specifically address the relocation of foreign captives to the province. These new provisions in the legislation would help clarify how companies can bring their foreign captives to Alberta; that is, having their insurance companies together with the rest of their business geographically.

If passed, the amendment will ensure that forthcoming rules for setting up a captive in Alberta are straightforward. This will make it easier for Alberta businesses to evaluate decisions on bringing their foreign captives home and to do so without interruption to the operation of their captives. This is a very important consideration when making business decisions about relocating an existing captive to another jurisdiction.

I'm pleased we have an opportunity to refine our legislation before it comes into effect to ensure it's straightforward, on par with legislation of other captive jurisdictions, and, most importantly, built on feedback from experts and stakeholders. Alberta is well positioned to soon welcome captives.

In addition to new provisions on reinsurance and captive insurance, Bill 16 proposes several administrative amendments to the Insurance Act. This will help ensure a clear and efficient regulatory framework for the conduct of insurance business in the province and maintain adequate protection of consumers.

Overall, Bill 16 supports the positive momentum for creating opportunities in every sector of our rapidly growing economy. The proposed measures will help create a regulatory framework that will help generate more insurance activity right here in Alberta. This will lead to more opportunities for Albertans in sophisticated finance and insurance positions or careers and boost the investment potential of our entire financial services sector.

With that, Madam Speaker, I would like to adjourn debate.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Government Bills and Orders Committee of the Whole

[Mrs. Pitt in the chair]

The Chair: Hon. members, I'd like to call Committee of the Whole to order.

Bill 18 Utility Commodity Rebate Act

The Chair: Committee of the Whole has under consideration Bill 18, the Utility Commodity Rebate Act. This is its first time in Committee of the Whole. Any members wishing to join the debate? The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Ms Ganley: Yes, Madam Chair. Thank you very much. I am pleased to rise and speak to Bill 18. As I think we have discussed

in the House and as we have voted recently, the Official Opposition in general is in favour of this bill; however, we believe that it can be made better in some ways.

With that in mind, I plan to move a series of amendments, beginning with this one. I'll wait for that to reach the table.

The Chair: Hon. member, please proceed to read it into the record.

Ms Ganley: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. I move that Bill 18, the Utility Commodity Rebate Act, be amended in section 3 by adding the following immediately after subsection (3):

(4) A rebate required to be provided under this Act in relation to the use of a utility commodity between November 1, 2021 and April 30, 2022 must be provided no later than May 31, 2022.

The purpose, Madam Chair, of this amendment is to put a timeline into place. You know, we've seen, with respect to natural gas rebates, a promise that it would be coming in the budget, and then in the budget it was sort of deferred until fall.

With respect to electricity rebates, we've seen six weeks and some portion of a week go by at this point since it was promised. My understanding, at least from the associate minister's comments in the media, is that we are not expecting that rebate until June or July. The purpose of this amendment, Madam Chair, is to bring that date back, because I think the issue that we have is that this situation is urgent. It is significantly urgent for Albertans, and you know another few months is likely to be far too much for those Albertans.

You know, we have certainly heard – and we've been getting volumes of correspondence, a lot of correspondence, on this issue – from people who are basically writing to us to say that they're making the decision between keeping the heat and lights on and buying groceries. That is a dire situation for many Albertans. It is a situation that is of immediate concern to them. The purpose here of this amendment is to ensure that this moves forward in a timely manner.

You know, this act, which is before us today, is an act which essentially mirrors a natural gas act from 2001 and just adds electricity into that act. It's very straightforward. It's a very easy drafting job. I would imagine it could have been done in one day, to be perfectly honest, yet we waited five weeks to see it come before the House.

The concern I have is that I'm not sure that the government feels the sense of urgency that Albertans feel on this file. What we are trying to do is to amend the act to ensure that that sense of urgency is through.

8:00

I know the government is going to say, you know, that we didn't pass the act in one day; therefore, we don't actually really want it to go through. Madam Chair, I think it's worth just taking a moment to outline why that is completely absurd as an argument. To begin with, like I say, this act itself is essentially a copy and paste from a previous act, just kind of adding in electricity. It could have been introduced the day after the rebate was promised. It was not. Instead, we waited five weeks, and apparently we're still going to be waiting another two months, till the end of June or beginning of July, before Albertans see relief. I don't know. It's clear to me that this could have moved faster than it did, and it hasn't.

So rather than simply opposing, rather than simply complaining, we have come forward to try and help make this legislation better, to try and do something that is important to all Albertans, to try and ensure not some sort of, like, fake, you know, "They didn't vote for the bill the same day it was introduced" but a real timeline – a real

timeline – that puts real money in the hands of Albertans in a real and timely manner.

I think, Madam Chair, that every member of this House owes it to their constituents to give real consideration to this. I imagine that the members opposite are getting the same e-mails we are from people who are not partisans. They are just desperate and under stress, and they need assistance now. Even though we believe that the amount of the rebate proposed by the government is insufficient – and it seems that at least some members of the UCP’s own caucus agree with that – we do think that sooner is better, and a more timely rebate is definitely better.

You know, there are people who are behind right now who face disconnection because this government was unwilling to support an extension on that ban, and I think that those individuals need the money. I would hope that many members of this Chamber understand what that’s like, when you have a sudden and unexpected increase in your costs. Albertans have seen a lot of sudden and unexpected increases in their costs. They’ve seen utilities going through the roof. They’ve seen car insurance going through the roof after the cap was removed on that by this government. They’ve seen tuition hikes. They’ve seen interest on student loan payments go up. All of these factors are coming together to combine to make sort of the perfect storm. These aren’t people who are being frivolous or wanting a new iPhone or something like that. They are people who are doing their best to pay their basic costs and get by, and they are genuinely struggling to do that.

I think we owe them that help. I think we owe them that help in a timely manner. So even though I continue to oppose the proposed amount of the rebate and I believe that it ought to be higher, I do think that we should move forward as quickly as possible. With that, I would urge all members of this House to vote in favour of this amendment because I think it will help constituents throughout the province.

The Chair: Hon. members, I forgot to note that this is amendment A1. Are there any members that wish to speak to amendment A1?

Seeing none, I will call the question.

[The voice vote indicated that the motion on amendment A1 lost]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 8:04 p.m.]

[Fifteen minutes having elapsed, the committee divided]

[Mrs. Pitt in the chair]

For the motion:

Carson	Ganley	Sabir
Eggen	Loyola	Sweet
Feehan	Phillips	

8:20

Against the motion:

Aheer	Nixon, Jeremy	Schow
Allard	Orr	Schweitzer
Copping	Panda	Sigurdson, R.J.
Ellis	Rehn	Smith
Gotfried	Reid	Toews
Hanson	Rowswell	van Dijken
Long	Rutherford	Williams
Nally		

Totals: For – 8 Against – 22

[Motion on amendment A1 lost]

The Chair: Back on the main bill, Bill 18, in Committee of the Whole, the hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Ms Ganley: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. That was disappointing to see, but fortunately I am prepared with another one. I’ll just wait for that to reach the table.

The Chair: Hon. members, this will be known as amendment A2. Hon. member, please proceed.

Ms Ganley: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. I move that Bill 18, Utility Commodity Rebate Act, be amended as follows: (a) by adding the following immediately after section 4(3).

(4) Despite any provision to the contrary in any other enactment, a distributor may not disconnect an eligible consumer from a utility commodity for non-payment of the cost of that utility commodity from the time a rebate is authorized under this Act until the rebate has been provided to the distributor’s eligible consumers.

(b) by adding the following immediately after 5(3):

(4) Despite any provision to the contrary in any other enactment, a direct provider may not disconnect an eligible consumer from a utility commodity for non-payment of the cost of that utility commodity from the time a rebate is authorized under this Act until the rebate has been provided to the direct provider’s eligible consumers.

(c) by renumbering section 6 as 6(1) and adding the following immediately after subsection (1):

(2) Despite any provision to the contrary in any other enactment, a contractor may not disconnect an eligible consumer from a utility commodity for non-payment of the cost of that utility commodity from the time a rebate is authorized under this Act until the rebate has been provided to the contractor’s eligible consumers.

That was a bit of a mouthful. What it means is that between the time a rebate is authorized and the time a rebate reaches the consumer, they may not be disconnected from their utilities.

Madam Chair, as you may recall, the Official Opposition drafted an act to extend the disconnection ban. Between October and April 15 of any year people cannot be cut off from their utilities for nonpayment. There are very good reasons for that: we are Albertans, we care about one another, and we don’t like anyone to freeze. Now, we offered a piece of legislation to the government, and we offered to work with them to get it through in order to extend that ban. It ran through the summer and would continue to sort of run into the ban for next year, so they’d have another year.

The reason for that, Madam Chair, is that these are extraordinary times. These are times when Albertans are under an extraordinary amount of pressure. We have seen, you know, high unemployment, jobs returning very slowly, a lot of people giving up looking at all. We have seen very little wage growth, especially for those earning less. We have seen a government who has used inflation to take more money out of the pockets of Albertans, seniors whose benefits were deindexed by the UCP who have less in their pockets, and many other people in a similar situation. People have less coming in at the same time we’re seeing unprecedented growth in costs.

When the UCP took the cap off insurance, we saw some people’s rates go up 20 or even 30 per cent. That was a big hit for a lot of people. We have seen utilities skyrocket since the UCP took the cap off electricity. Again, as I’ve mentioned, we’ve seen, I mean, some tuition going up triple-digit percentages, like more than 100 per cent. We have seen the UCP government essentially start charging people additional interest on their student loans. That’s driving costs through the roof for folks.

You know, this is a perfect storm of factors because of the policies of this government that have left people in a position where

they are not able to cover their basic costs with the income they are earning, and that has been extremely problematic. It has been stressful and challenging. Despite the fact that we don't hear them standing up and talking about it, I have no doubt that the members opposite have been hearing from their constituents, just as I have been hearing from mine, about these concerns.

My last amendment was to get the money out the door faster, to ensure that Albertans had the money in their pockets by the end of May, because, again, this government has been promising these rebates for months, and they haven't gone out. We know, according to the associate minister, that it will be at least two more months before people see electricity relief, and even then, \$150, something one of their own members called paltry, and it may be months more before they see relief on natural gas. That's problematic, and the people who have been writing in to us are hundreds or even thousands of dollars behind on their utility bills.

With the government having refused our amendment to get the money out the door faster, with the government having refused to work with us to ensure that Albertans are not cut off from their utilities while they are getting their feet back under them, we now have one more attempt, and that is an attempt to say that once the government authorizes a rebate, during the time that it takes them to process – and, I mean, with this government that seems to be a pretty long time – those rebates, people can't be cut off. So if people are sitting there expecting relief, having relied on the word of the government that relief was coming, they can't be cut off while they're waiting for that help to get there.

This is an incredibly small thing – an incredibly small thing – that this government could do, having done next to nothing to help people, having told them that it was the market working and that they should feel sorry for these poor insurance companies who are generating record profits. This is a very, very small thing that they could do to help Albertans, many of whom desperately, desperately need that help.

You know, I'd like to remind the members opposite that we were sent here to represent those Albertans. That is who elected us. Each and every one of us won an election. Each and every one of us had people come forward and put their faith in us that we would put their interests first, that we would be there for them and take their concerns seriously and bring those concerns to this place, this place where we collectively come together and make the rules that govern us all. I would remind the members opposite that it is those people that they work for. It is not corporations.

Madam Chair, with that, I will simply say that this is a very small thing. It's not asking the government to do anything additional. It's just asking them to give people the tiniest amount of relief and to allow them not to be disconnected in that period between when the government promises them something and delivers, which with this government could be a while, that period of time during which the money is travelling to our constituents who are waiting for that money, that they not be disconnected, that they not be left with no heat or sitting in the dark, that they can happily go out and spend that money on their groceries so that they can have both groceries and heat and power at the same time. That is not, I think, a tremendous ask, but I do think that it would be a tremendous help to those people who sent us to this place.

The Chair: Are there members wishing to join the debate on amendment A2? My apologies. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie caught my eye first, but if you want to give – there we go.

8:30

Member Loyola: Thank you, Madam Chair. As you can see, we're all chomping at the bit here to respond to this particular amendment.

Like many other members on my side of the House, I am absolutely one hundred per cent sure that they also have constituents that they've heard from, like myself. I remember – it's probably about four weeks ago now – that I had a constituent that was contacting my office because her electricity was being cut off. This is something that, of course, is unfathomable to me because we're going through a really tough time. We're going through a considerably tough time. We don't need to let people know that COVID was very hard on families. I can't tell you the number of people who I've spoken to who tell me that they're just one paycheque away from not being able to make ends meet at the end of the month, and some people are, like, \$200 away, we've heard.

I think that amending this bill to include this particular amendment, that has been proposed by the Member for Calgary-Mountain View, is a no-brainer. I just can't understand why the members on the other side wouldn't want – well, first of all, I was completely surprised when they didn't want to accept the proposal that we had put forward to actually extend the opportunity for people not to have their electricity or their utilities cut off. The only way that I can understand what the members on the other side of the House are thinking is that they're so blinded by their ideology that government should just stay out of these things.

Of course, you've heard me say before that when it comes to supply and demand, there are going to be people who are priced out of the market, and there are people who are struggling because of COVID. COVID exacerbated the economic crisis that we're going through. I understand, you know, that members on the other side are all about making things voluntary. For the most part corporations, yeah, do their part but not always. It's a very difficult situation. I want to remind members of this House that for people who are going through potential cut-off of their utilities, it's so incredibly stressful. It's so incredibly stressful to have to go through that process. Even though you end up calling a 1-800 number and you work out some kind of an arrangement, the whole process is stressful for the person going through it.

I just don't know how else to state to the members on the other side of the House that this could be easily rectified by accepting this amendment into the proposed piece of legislation that you have brought before us. It would calm so many people who are actually going through quite a miserable time right now. To not do this would add insult to injury.

I highly suspect that members on the other side of the House are going to vote this amendment down, and it's heartbreaking, to be quite honest. I know for a fact that if I'm hearing from constituents that are having a hard time making ends meet, members on the other side of the House must be hearing also from constituents in their ridings that are also having a tough time making ends meet. It can't just be my riding.

I would highly encourage the members to, you know, give some sober second thought to this amendment – it's a no-brainer; it would help so many people – so that we can actually pass this amendment and make this piece of legislation that you've brought before us a little bit better.

With that, I'll take my chair, Madam Chair.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-West.

Ms Phillips: Thank you, Madam Chair. Albertans want to live in a province where we can keep the lights on, and Albertans expect a government that will protect them as consumers – not to do everything but to do that which is in their power and to take common-sense approaches to protecting consumers – but we have a government who are in cahoots with companies who are making

every choice they can to increase costs for us and raise profits by now five times what they were last year.

Albertans have asked us for action. That is why we are debating this legislation now. This appeared nowhere in the government's budget documents. It was only after the outcry from Albertans. Albertans deserve the credit for the minimal amount of action that this government has already taken, but it is only on this side of the House, Madam Chair, where we have a group of people who are willing to actually make it real.

Now, this government was not interested in a legislated timeline to get money into people's hands. What they could do, at the very least, is protect people from utility cut-offs while they are waiting for the government to get its act together to send them the money to protect them as consumers. People need us to be there for them right now, while they're waiting for those rebates. We know that people need us to be there for them because they have asked us for this action.

We all as Albertans want a level playing field, where the government policy is targeted and reasonable and keeps us financially and physically secure. That's what keeping the lights on does for all of us and for small businesses and for farmers, but we have a government who are focused on tilting that playing field, Madam Chair. They are focused on tilting that playing field towards record profits that cost ordinary people more. Ordinary people pay for those profits, that have now gone up by five times.

This is a common-sense, very simple thing that the government could do, a very simple amendment to help people while they're waiting for those rebates. This is what Albertans can support and want to support, a targeted, common-sense, low-cost solution to protecting them as consumers. It is prudent. This measure protects the right people, not the obscene profits of the utility companies right now but ordinary people just trying to get by when the cost of everything else is going up. That is why this House must support this amendment.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Chair: The hon. Associate Minister of Natural Gas and Electricity.

Mr. Nally: Thank you, Madam Chair. I thought one of my colleagues was going to have to hold me up. I would like to thank the member for the comments. I would like to invite them to leave the house of revisionist history and come back here under the dome, under the realm of reality, and we can be a little more accurate about the actual current events. The reason I say that is that we have an opposition like no other opposition in the country and certainly like no opposition this country has seen, quite frankly.

We'll start it off with the Member for Calgary-Mountain View, who in March was in front of a business telling everybody that electricity in this province was 15 cents. Well, in effect, that wasn't true. Electricity wasn't 15 cents. Electricity was 7.5 cents if you had a contract. If you had the regulated rate option, it was 10 and a half cents.

An Hon. Member: That's awkward.

Mr. Nally: Embarrassing, right?

So, depending on which price you looked at, the member was off between 50 to 100 per cent.

Mr. Sabir: Point of order.

Mr. Nally: Well, Madam Chair, I would suggest . . .

The Chair: Point of order.

Point of Order

Allegations against a Member

Mr. Sabir: I rise under 23(h), (i), and (j). The minister is making allegations and references to things that are not part of this House's record. I think the minister should stay on the amendment and speak to whether he will support it or not.

Thank you.

8:40

The Chair: The hon. deputy government whip.

Mr. Rutherford: Thank you, Madam Chair. This is clearly a matter of debate. I think the amendment, covering off quite a bit of things around electricity, cutting people off, the price of electricity – this entire conversation is very relevant to what the minister is talking about. The facts that he is pulling from, I believe, came right from media sources within the *Calgary Herald*, so he's accurate in what he is saying. If the members opposite don't like what he is saying, then I suggest that they just join into the debate and add what they would like to add. But it is certainly not a point of order.

The Chair: I would tend to agree with the deputy government whip on this matter. However, I think it's probably important to caution all members on the language that they use in this House and how it may incite others to not be very happy.

However, my caution has been given, and I'll ask the hon. minister to carry on with his remarks.

Debate Continued

Mr. Nally: Thank you, Madam Chair. I certainly don't want to be responsible for them getting all ginned up and excited tonight, so I will not reference the newspaper article where the member was quoted as saying that it was 15 cents.

The point that I'm trying to make is that Albertans deserve an Energy critic that actually knows the price of energy. The regulated rate is 10.8, by the way, in case the member was interested.

Also, you know, what we've heard from the opposition – I think that we need to change the name of this amendment. This is amendment A2. We just heard from A1. Let's change the name to the CYA amendment, because that's really what these amendments are about. They are a CYA amendment, and the reason I say that is because the NDP made a strategic error last week. You see, I came into this House, and in front of the members of the opposition I asked for them to work with us in a bipartisan fashion. I asked to have unanimous consent to proceed to second reading, and they refused. They voted to continue with the legislative process. They voted to get the rebates out longer rather than speeding them up.

Then the next day I pointed out to the members, again in a bipartisan fashion, that the Chief Justice was going to be in the House at 3 o'clock providing royal assent, and I invited the members to work with us to push this legislation through, to get the rebates into Albertans' pockets as . . . [interjections] You know, Madam Chair, it's hard to speak when they're lighting their hair on fire like that. We were certainly very patient to listen to them, and I would ask them to extend the same courtesy to us.

See, they made the strategic error because when they voted down the motion that would have sped up the legislative process, that was about six and a half hours after the Member for Calgary-Mountain View did a press conference telling all the media that the rebates were taking too long. That's right. They went in front of the media

and said: these rebates are taking too long. Then that member came into this Chamber and voted down a motion to speed up the process. Then they threw their hands up in the air. I mean, Madam Chair, talk about gaslighting Albertans.

I think that the members opposite are discovering that Albertans are on to them, and I think that the members opposite are discovering that Albertans are a little more astute than they thought. Albertans are not happy. They're not happy that these rebates are going to take longer because the NDP refused to work in a bipartisan fashion. We invited them to speed up the legislative process to help us push this through, and what did they say? They said no. Then they come in here and they gaslight Albertans. They come up with amendments that say: you know, we want to have this out by a certain deadline. Madam Chair, we could easily have made that deadline if we had had royal assent on Thursday at 3 o'clock, like we had suggested. Shame on the NDP.

Now, let's go back and talk about some more gaslighting. You know, the NDP talked about how the support that we're providing is not enough. Well, Madam Chair, the total amount of this support to Albertans is \$280 million. That's how much we're trying to rush out the door to support Albertans, \$280 million. Now, they will throw up their hands and say: oh, what about the rate cap? We're providing \$280 million over three months. The NDP's rate cap didn't apply to half of Albertans. If you were on a fixed rate, you didn't benefit from the rate cap, so they got nothing from the NDP. The other folks, that were on the regulated rate option, received \$108 million over two years. You know, I would suggest that the support that the NDP provided pales in comparison to the support that we are providing Albertans.

Now, in addition, we've also said that we're going to provide a rebate for natural gas, and again they gaslight Albertans or scare them. I'm not sure what they're doing. It's hard to keep track. But they tell Albertans that this is a fake rebate. Remember that, the NDP standing up and saying, "This is a fake rebate" and that it was a fake rebate because the trigger price of \$6.50 was too high? Well, in fact, I know that the Member for Calgary-Mountain View wouldn't know the price of natural gas, Madam Chair, but it's actually trading for \$6.75 today. Had this legislation been in effect, then the trigger price would have been released. Again, does that stop them from calling it a fake rebate? I believe I heard it as recently as today in this Chamber, so they continue to gaslight Albertans.

That's not the only support because – I bring this up only because the members talked about the cost of living in general. In addition to those two items that I just mentioned, Madam Chair, we also decided to pause the gas tax, 13 cents a litre on gas tax. That is providing, you know, \$8, \$9 every time an Albertan fills up the trunk, so it's real support that Albertans feel in the pocketbook every time. But in terms of the total support, actually \$1.3 billion is the cost of that support if it goes on for the full year. The total support package that we're providing is \$2 billion, yet the NDP would have us believe that the supports we're providing are not enough. Again, they continue to gaslight Albertans and frighten them.

But that's not even the real problem, Madam Chair. The real problem here is that the NDP lacks vision. Now, the reason I say that is that I'm not sure if they read the legislation. Well, in fact, they either didn't read the legislation or they didn't understand it. I'm not sure which. The reason I say that is that this is actually enabling legislation. See, we're putting this legislation in to enable us to be able to do this now and at any time in the future. But if we were to accept the amendments of the NDP as written, it would no longer be enabling legislation. It would be so prescriptive as to be

useless down the road, so if we were to find ourselves in this situation three years from now – and heaven forbid, Madam Chair; I hope that we don't – we would have to go through this process all over again. We have the vision that they lack, and we are putting this forward as enabling legislation so it'll be there to support Albertans whenever it's needed.

You know, this is a pattern. They routinely make decisions without understanding the consequences of their actions. It's not the first time they've done this. I remember Bill 6, and I only mention Bill 6 as an example of when they don't think things through. Bill 6 was the farm legislation, and we continue to hear from members there that claim to be driving through rural Alberta, but they can't be stopping in any of these small towns, Madam Chair, because they would be laughed out of some of these towns, because these farmers were upset when they demonstrated such poor understanding and lack of respect for the family farm. Had we actually accepted the initial iterations of Bill 6, there would have been porta-potties in farmers' fields, porta-potties in families' fields. We have a three-generation family farm. It's 2,400 acres in southern Saskatchewan, and my stepdad still goes out there on a regular basis to check the soil and the moisture, but I've got to tell you that he would laugh if I told him that he had to put a porta-potty in his field. But this is what the NDP do.

Now, let's come to something more damaging. Let's talk about the coal-to-gas conversions because this is another example of the NDP lacking the vision to see the consequences of their actions. They sped up the coal-to-gas conversions, Madam Chair, and they ran the victory lap with all of their environmental extremist friends, all of their progressive politicians, their leave-it-in-the-ground extremists. When they were done running the victory lap, they forgot to tell Albertans that, by the way, they just sentenced Albertans to higher electricity prices, and we're seeing it today. In fact, the NDP keeps mentioning the U of C study, which was not peer reviewed by the way, and that study references the coal-to-gas conversions as one of the reasons for the higher prices that we're seeing.

8:50

But that's not all. The NDP also spent \$7.5 billion on infrastructure when they were in government, Madam Chair. Now, they'll throw up their hands, and they'll gaslight Albertans, and they'll say: oh, we didn't approve that. Well, you know, I will be the first one to be fair to the NDP, and I will say that they did not start the overbuild on the transmission system. What the NDP is guilty of is not stopping it, and I am proud to say that this government stopped the overbuild. If you're wondering, in 2020 we spent \$100 million on infrastructure, and in 2021 we spent zero dollars on infrastructure. Compare that to the \$7.5 billion that was spent under the NDP.

The AESO recently released their forecast, and they indicated that they have deferred a billion dollars' worth of unnecessary transmission. Again, that was something that the NDP could have looked at. They could have deferred the transmission buildup, but they did not. In addition, the AESO forecasted that we will average \$150 million to \$200 million a year in infrastructure, again, versus the \$2 billion a year that was spent previously. Madam Chair, that's the problem with that caucus; they don't see the consequences of their actions because they lack vision.

Now, in case that wasn't example enough, you know, the Balancing Pool comes to mind. I released an audit last week that was the absolute smoking gun, Madam Chair. This audit, done by Deloitte, confirms that they spent \$1.34 billion in losses on the Balancing Pool.

An Hon. Member: What?

Mr. Nally: Yup: \$1.34 billion. Then they turn around, and they hang that on Albertans as a ratepayer. You may remember that there was a time when we had a Balancing Pool rate rider that actually paid money back to Albertans. The Balancing Pool has given back over \$4 billion to ratepayers.

Mr. Sabir: Point of order.

Point of Order Repetition

Mr. Sabir: Standing Order 23(c). The member is just persisting in completely needless, useless, repetition of things and not speaking to the amendment at hand, which requests the minister to consider putting it in legislation so that Albertans who get a rebate: their connections are not shut off. They're able to get the electricity, get the utilities they need. That's what the amendment is about, and I have not heard a single word about this amendment in the last however minutes.

Thank you.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont.

Mr. Rutherford: Thank you, Madam Chair. This is not a point of order. I don't think listing out the steps the NDP took to raise the cost of electricity is needless repetition. If they're tired of hearing it, they shouldn't have done it. The minister has the ability to lay this out simply because this amendment talks about stopping people from being cut off from their utilities because they can't afford to pay it. They can't afford to pay it because the NDP raised the costs too much for them, and that's what the minister is discussing. It's completely relevant.

The Chair: Oh, the speeches I've heard in terms of repetition. Hon. members, I think this is a good time to get back on track and, most certainly, specifically speak to amendment A2, which has lots of words. I'm certain that the minister's remarks will be a little bit more specifically about those as opposed to other things or more so relatable moving forward.

The hon. minister.

Debate Continued

Mr. Nally: Thank you, Madam Chair. You're absolutely right. I mean, Albertans are struggling with the high cost of electricity. Why? Well, because of the path that the NDP took us down. I won't belabour the point on the Balancing Pool. I think the point was made that \$1.34 billion was hung on the ratepayer, and that is not being paid back on a rate rider that we'll be paying till 2030. Yeah, electricity is expensive because of the NDP.

Again, this goes back to the gaslighting. The NDP come here, and they want us to do this and to do that. But we put a motion forward in this House to ask the NDP to work across the aisle in a bipartisan fashion to send a motion to Ottawa basically saying: do not increase the carbon tax on April 1. They actually voted against that motion, Madam Chair.

Mr. Sabir: Point of order.

Mr. Nally: So on one hand they come in here . . .

The Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-Bhullar-McCall.

Point of Order Repetition

Mr. Sabir: Again 23(c), persists in needless repetition or raises matters that have been decided during the current session. That matter was decided during the current session. Unless he wants to bring it back for debate or rescind that vote, I don't think it's in order for the member to discuss that. He should stick to the amendment at hand.

The Chair: The . . .

Mr. Nally: Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Chair: Are you to speak to the point of order?

Mr. Nally: Yes.

The Chair: Okay. The hon. minister.

Mr. Nally: Thank you, Madam Chair. This is absolutely not a point of order. There is certainly no repetition in this. In fact, I'm bringing up the carbon tax for the first time. The carbon tax is one of the things that has increased the price of electricity, which is causing Albertans to suffer from utility insecurity. Some, unfortunately, are having conversations about disconnection because of some things like the carbon tax. The NDP had an opportunity to vote against that, and they voted to support the carbon tax by the feds. For that reason, I say that this is a matter of debate.

The Chair: I would agree. It's a matter of debate. Where this would come into an issue is if that specific topic were to come up over and over and over again, which has previously been the theme with some other things that have been said. So I would caution you again, realizing that this is a different matter, and encourage you to speak to amendment A2 or not at all, and we can vote on it and move on to the next thing.

The hon. minister.

Debate Continued

Mr. Nally: Thank you, Madam Chair, but I'm trying my darndest to convince the members opposite of the folly of these amendments. Make no mistake, there is folly – there is folly – in these amendments. Yeah, the carbon tax is absolutely one more example, and the point that I was trying to make was that if they truly cared about the cost of daily living, they would have voted with this government to send a strong message to Ottawa to not increase the carbon tax, but they voted against this government and in support of the carbon tax. I don't know how they can come in here on one hand and complain about the high cost of electricity and then on another hand, you know, vote against that motion.

Madam Chair, I think I've clearly articulated, as clearly as I could today, about why we have to vote down this CYA amendment, so I'm asking all my colleagues to give careful consideration and to vote no towards this amendment.

The Chair: Any other members? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning.

Ms Sweet: Oh, thank you, Madam Chair. I'm going to be short and sweet, I think, with this. Honestly, the minister just stood up and waxed on for quite a long period of time and actually didn't speak to the amendment, which is specifically speaking to the fact of how we can support Albertans who are at a vulnerable situation where potentially their utilities will be shut off. The minister clearly

doesn't want to speak about that because for some reason the government does not want to actually make sure that they're being held to account in this piece of legislation and make sure that they accept this amendment, where we can then ensure that Albertans will not have their utilities cut off if a rebate is to be paid out to Albertans. It's sad, and what is even worse is the fact that we just saw a minister, not only a week ago, standing in this very place talking about this piece of legislation, being asked questions about how it would work, and the response that we heard was: we don't know yet; it has to be put in regulation.

The government wants to rush. They want this bill put through. We're giving suggestions about how to make it better to make sure that the money – the whole intention of this is to support Albertans to deal with their utility bills at a time when they can't afford them. This amendment does that. It gets the money in the pockets of the people that need it and secures the fact that their utilities are going to continue to be available to them. It's pretty simple, yet the minister just stood up and spent 15 minutes talking about all the reasons why utilities are expensive. You're right. They're expensive. So accept this amendment, support Albertans, make sure their utilities are not cut off so that when they get the rebate, they can pay their bills. It's black and white. It's pretty simple. Just accept it, vote for it, and get it done. That's what's going to help Albertans.

9:00

The Chair: Any other members wishing to join the debate on amendment A2? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

Mr. Feehan: Thank you, Madam Chair. I am happy to take a moment to speak to this amendment, and I want to come at it from a very different angle because I think my colleagues have articulated extremely well the reasons why this government should be onboard here. But one thing that I think should be added to this debate is something about the serious consequences of taking away people's utilities, with a little bit more depth from my experience.

I was very disappointed, of course, when the government failed to agree to the previous amendment, because it brought timeliness into the bill. Of course, I believe that justice delayed is justice denied, and in this case I think the government has chosen to deny justice. But what's more concerning, for me, in this second amendment is the people who will suffer the consequences of having their utilities cut off.

Now, many in the House know that I was in social work for many years before I became elected. One of the things I did in my time as an instructor in the Faculty of Social Work, prior to coming in, is that I was a coauthor on the Canadian Incidence Study of Reported Child Abuse and Neglect for the last two rounds of the study, that were done in 2008 and 2013. In that study one of the things that we found quite clearly in the analysis of the child welfare system in the province of Alberta is that the vast majority of the cases where children come into care or come to the attention of Children's Services, the child welfare system, is because of neglect, not because of abuse.

In fact, there has been some good analysis showing that lately the amount of child sexual abuse, for example, which is an area of my particular focus of practice for many years, has actually been going down through this study, so we're very grateful and happy to see that. That kind of abuse is no longer as horrendously high as it once was, but what we are seeing is that the cause of children coming into contact with the system is neglect. One of the significant aspects of neglect that contributes to contact with child welfare is people being unable to provide adequate home and shelters, including utilities.

I am concerned about this particular bill because I know that this government spends a significant amount of money in the child welfare system in trying to address problems that occur in family homes. We know that those problems are primarily neglect. We know that absence of appropriate shelter is one of the significant reasons why neglect is identified in a family. In this particular situation what we're asking is for the government to ensure that families do not get into the position of having their utilities cut off, because that would bring them to the place of potentially being identified by child welfare as unable to care for their children, which brings their children into care. From a straight sort of selfish point of view, the government could seek to attempt to try to save some money in the child welfare system by preventing families from being in this kind of crisis.

Now, the situation in this case is such that if you get your utilities cut off, it is because you have found yourself in a position where you're unable to pay your bills. The issue is just simply an issue of poverty. So if we cut them off because they are poor, then, essentially, we are making poverty; we are in a manner kind of criminalizing poverty. That's really not an appropriate thing for us to be doing. If people get their utility bills cut off, there is a double cost here because not only do they have the problem of trying to pay the bill, which they're unable to pay, but once you've had your utilities cut off, you actually have to pay a second reconnection fee to have your utilities turned back on again. So whatever deep, you know, well of poverty that you've been in is exacerbated by having the bill not only remain standing but being added to by having a reconnection fee associated with it.

I'm very concerned that this is a very simple way the government can try to help families from getting to that very horrendous, desperate place where families who cannot at this point already pay their bills are subsequently finding themselves further down the well in terms of being unable to pay their bills and therefore being subject to potential child welfare intervention because of the lack of appropriate shelter, including the utilities.

I think, you know, I certainly agree with the comments made by my colleagues prior about this bill, and I'd just like to add that it just doesn't make sense for us to be working with families to try to enhance their well-being on one hand and then creating circumstances where their ability to provide appropriately for their children is being taxed to the degree it is when their utilities are cut off. I'd like the government just to help us to avoid some of those circumstances and to help us decrease the demands on the child welfare system, which, of course, is being highly stressed right now because so many families have experienced dramatic increases in utility bills, and this government has done nothing for them.

You know, this government has certainly had months and months of time to look at this. The government took some actual, specific, direct action in removing the utilities cap, and therefore the government is actually complicit in this problem. Had they just left well enough alone, we probably wouldn't be here today, but they have taken action. That action has consequences. The government is responsible for those consequences, and ultimately the government will pay financially, but more importantly, families will pay in terms of the stress and potentially even the loss of their children through child welfare investigations.

I think it would cost the government nothing to just pass this amendment here, to just go ahead and say: "Sure. Why don't we just do that one thing. It won't really matter that much to us as a government. It won't hurt us in any way as a government." It just simply is a way of recognizing that some people find themselves in desperate straits and could use a helping hand, and the government by just simply passing one amendment can help some families with that stress.

Thank you.

The Chair: Are there others to speak to the bill? The hon. Member for Calgary-Bhullar-McCall.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Madam Chair. I rise to speak briefly to this bill. I was listening to the minister, and the minister said it's an enabling legislation. What we are trying to do with these amendments is that we want to put some certainty in this piece of legislation, that it's not just: trust us; we will get it right.

The reason that we don't trust the UCP, the reason that Albertans don't trust the UCP is that they are the least trusted government across Canada and across North America, if I could say that. Nobody trusts this government. They said and signed a public health guarantee. That was out the door as soon as they became government. They said many things during the campaign, but they never followed through on that, so we cannot trust this government on this legislation. There needs to be some certainty.

They already refused to at least guarantee that in five weeks' time Albertans will see a rebate. The government already delayed taking action on this file by almost six months. Utility costs have been going up for months now, and wherever we go in our constituencies, at different events, when we talk to stakeholders, they are concerned about the rising costs of utilities.

9:10

Well, somebody mentioned a study from the University of Calgary School of Public Policy where the number one reason for rising utility costs is that utility companies' profits have gone up by five times. The associate minister of natural gas rejected that study right away, that it's not peer reviewed, and then he went on to talk about many other things, none of them reviewed by anyone at all and not helpful either. This amendment at least will give assurance to Albertans that their utilities will not be cut off during the time they are getting this rebate. No one, no Albertan, should have to choose between their utilities and putting food on the table, and that's where people are at.

I was in Banff and door-knocking outside. We went to a house where one person told us that, basically, she has not paid the rent because at least she had some assurance that she won't be kicked out right away, but she paid the utilities so that after April 15 her utilities are not cut off. Albertans are struggling.

A few months ago the same minister stood in this House. When asked what he would do about the rising cost of utilities, the minister said, and I pretty much quote, that: news for the NDP, we won't do anything; the market will fix it. Clearly, the market didn't fix it, and now the minister is putting forward this legislation that enables him to intervene in the market. We need in it that there is some certainty, there is some date that Albertans can hope to get their rebates by, and there is some assurance that while they're waiting for the UCP's infighting to end so they can provide the rebate, their connection won't be cut off. That's what this amendment is about.

I urge all members of this House: think about your constituents. Think about those who are struggling to make ends meet. Think about those who are on minimum wage and fixed incomes. This amendment is about those people; it will help everyone in those circumstances. So please vote for this amendment.

Thank you.

The Chair: Are there others that wish to speak to amendment A2? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. It's my pleasure to rise and speak to this amendment. I appreciate the robust debate that is going on tonight. Obviously, I'm rising to speak in favour of this amendment. I'm not sure why the government is so opposed to

an amendment that would ensure that utilities aren't cut off until the government's rebate program comes into effect or provides assistance to them. There are only a couple of reasons I can think of as to why the government would be opposed to this.

Madam Chair, if the government stands behind their rebate program and has refused previous amendments that would put a timeline and a collar around those rebates, so ensuring that Albertans will get that assistance – you know, I'm not trying to relitigate a previous amendment that was voted down in this Chamber, but I really don't understand why the government would refuse an amendment that ensures the money gets out the door unless they're planning to drag their feet. Otherwise, there's no coherent explanation for why they wouldn't agree to an amendment to get money out the door efficiently.

In this case, Madam Chair, facing utility cut-offs is a very real challenge for many Albertans. Members of the opposition, during question period and other times in this Chamber, repeatedly demonstrate correspondence we've been receiving from Albertans with ridiculously high utility rates. You know, I appreciate that the bulk of winter may be behind us, but even if that's the case, again, I can't think of a logical reason of why the government is refusing to ensure that folks don't get their utilities disconnected.

As my colleague the Member for Edmonton-Rutherford pointed out, the majority of Albertans that are facing utility shut-offs are those who are struggling the most to make ends meet. We've heard a number of stories of families and parents that have to choose between utilities and food. Madam Chair, I can't even imagine being in that predicament. I mean, I will acknowledge that I am extremely privileged, that I have never had to make that decision, but I can tell you that being a parent, I can only imagine the struggle that parents are going through.

The opposition once again is trying to bring forward reasonable amendments to strengthen the bill. This is where – and earlier today, you know, the Assembly voted down a previous bill. The challenge that I have is when party lines and partisanship can blind members of this Chamber from the real reason they were elected. Now, unless I've missed the boat in my 10 years of being an MLA, our job is to represent our constituents first and foremost. I appreciate that we are all here representing different political parties, but I would challenge any member for putting the priorities of their constituents second or third or fourth. If we are all here in the spirit of bringing forward the best possible legislation to support Albertans, then I'm really at a loss, Madam Chair, when government won't accept reasonable amendments.

I'm speaking from a place where when we were government, I remember on bills that I brought forward as minister of economic development and trade acknowledging and accepting amendments from the opposition because good ideas come from all sides of this Chamber. Any member that thinks that only they have the best ideas or their staff have the best ideas or their party has the best ideas, quite frankly, I think, has missed the boat, and if anything, their perspective is quite dangerous. I mean, again, our parliamentary system exists for a reason.

9:20

In this example we've got an amendment that would provide an extra layer of protection for the most vulnerable. I know that members on both sides of this Chamber have spoken about and advocated for protecting Alberta's most vulnerable citizens, so it's disappointing, from the sounds of things, that the government is not willing to accept this amendment and is resorting to bipartisan, hyperpartisan attacks. We're in a position where collectively as members of the Assembly we can ensure that before this legislation passes, it's in the best form and shape that it's in.

I find it amusing, Madam Chair, when members or ministers will either play semantics or talk about, you know, that previously the government asked for unanimous consent to speed this bill through. Where is the government's recognition that the opposition has been calling for these supports since last fall? For Albertans who pay attention to the Assembly and debate in this Chamber, they're thinking that it's absolutely ridiculous that the minister of natural gas stands up and tries to accuse the NDP of dragging its feet on this bill when we've been calling for this bill for months.

We're in a position, Madam Chair, where an amendment like the one that's before the Chamber right now can improve it, so I know that Albertans are getting less and less patient with the theatrics and the hyperpartisanship that is being displayed in this Chamber and looking for solutions, real solutions, to help them with their current affordability crisis. My hope is that members of this Chamber will acknowledge that good ideas come from all sides of the House. No party has a monopoly, and in fact governments that think they have a monopoly on the best ideas: friends, we have examples of governments around the world that are not democratically elected who think they have a monopoly on good ideas.

So in the spirit of co-operation, I ask all members to consider supporting this amendment.

The Chair: Are there others that wish to speak to amendment A2?

[The voice vote indicated that the motion on amendment A2 lost]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 9:23 p.m.]

[One minute having elapsed, the committee divided]

[Mrs. Pitt in the chair]

For the motion:

Bilous	Feehan	Phillips
Carson	Ganley	Sabir
Eggen	Loyola	Sweet

Against the motion:

Aheer	Luan	Rutherford
Allard	Nally	Schow
Copping	Neudorf	Schweitzer
Ellis	Nixon, Jeremy	Shandro
Frey	Orr	Sigurdson, R.J.
Gotfried	Panda	Smith
Hanson	Rehn	Toews
Issik	Reid	van Dijken
LaGrange	Rowswell	Williams
Long		

Totals:	For – 9	Against – 28
---------	---------	--------------

[Motion on amendment A2 lost]

The Chair: We're back on the main in Committee of the Whole. Any members wishing to speak? The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Ms Ganley: Me again, Madam Chair. I rise to propose another amendment. I will let it get to the table.

The Chair: Hon. members, this will be known as amendment A3. Hon. member, please proceed to read it.

Ms Ganley: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. I move that Bill 18, Utility Commodity Rebate Act, be amended in section 8 by adding the following immediately after subsection (2): “(3) A

rebate under this Act must be provided within 30 days of the rebate being authorized under this Act.”

Madam Chair, what this one does is that it means that in subsequent instances, because, as the minister noted, the legislation is enabling and it can be used in subsequent instances, if a rebate is announced, it goes to Albertans within 30 days. This doesn't seem like an extraordinary request to me. I am sure that we are about to hear from the associate minister at great lengths about how it would be absolutely impossible to get a rebate out the door in 30 days, that he could never manage to do that, and a whole series of other bizarre allegations about things that never happened. But I think, Madam Chair, that it would be perfectly possible to get a rebate out within 30 days.

9:30

In fact, I think Albertans expect their government to be able to move at this kind of a speed. I believe someone used to say: moving at the speed of business. I think that's all we're asking the government to do. We're not even really asking them to move at the speed of business. We're just asking them to move at – I don't know – something resembling a reasonable speed, that if they promise Albertans a rebate, within 30 days Albertans will have that rebate in their hands. I don't think that's a particularly extraordinary request. I don't think that Albertans will think that's a particularly extraordinary request.

Now, the government having, of course, thus far voted down our attempt to ensure that the current rebate gets out the door by the 31st of March – “rather ironically,” I suppose, is the right word for this – while complaining that the opposition didn't pass their bill in six hours, they can't possibly get the rebate out the door by the 31st of March, which is more than a month away. But it's the fault of the opposition because when they requested unanimous consent to pass the bill – what? – roughly six hours after it was introduced, we didn't comply. I mean, I don't actually think I have to go on at length about that, Madam Chair. I think it's pretty transparent to anyone who happens to be listening that that's absurd and absurd on a special series of levels. This amendment would, I mean, simply force the government to keep their word to Albertans within a reasonable length of time.

The UCP came rushing forward with this bill, a bill which they have admitted is enabling legislation. It doesn't require them to do anything. It simply enables a rebate. They have refused to provide any sort of timeline on that rebate. We're now asking them to do exactly that. Why? Because this issue was raised with them months ago. It was raised by us; it was raised by Albertans. Many people raised the issue. The government did nothing about it. The associate minister rose in this place and said that he planned to do nothing. Then the government promised a rebate on natural gas, a rebate which – I mean, the associate minister literally just rose in this place and said: well, you know, if this had been passed, then people would already be getting a rebate on their natural gas. Except the Premier has said that the rebate isn't going to be until the fall, and then he said that, no, it might be earlier. Then the associate minister said that it won't be until the fall . . .

Mr. Nally: Electricity.

Ms Ganley: . . . so the natural gas rebate is all confused. I'll just remind the associate minister that this bill actually deals with both electricity and natural gas, so I'm well within my rights to speak on both.

The electricity rebate then was again also raised. It was also deferred for a lengthy period of time. It was promised; nothing happened. We called on the government to do the thing that they

promised to do, and then finally we see an act come before this House. Well, that's good, but the act, again, is enabling. It doesn't require anything. So we're asking for a time frame, and I think – you know what? – that's really reasonable because people out there, real people out there living their lives, are trying to pay their bills. They're trying to make the decision between their electricity bills, their natural gas bills, and their groceries. That is what people are doing out there, that is what they are writing to us about, and that is what this government does not seem to understand.

All we are saying is that when this government promises those people relief, they ought to provide it within a reasonable period of time. It's not an extraordinary request. Obviously, the members opposite think that it is an extraordinary request, but I don't think Albertans are going to see it that way, and I think that we owe them that. I think that we owe Albertans legislation that guarantees that when this government makes a promise, they have to follow through within some period of time, because demonstrably the government will not do it on their own.

Madam Chair, I am sure that we are about to be delighted by another series of bizarre allegations and a long attempt to describe how a government that has had this problem for months and done nothing about it and has admitted after the introduction of this act – has admitted – that they don't think they can get this money into the hands of people before June or July, makes some sort of attempt to blame the opposition for not passing the bill in six hours – well, again, it's absurd.

Just for the record, for members who maybe haven't sat in cabinet or maybe aren't familiar with this, there is absolutely no prohibition on drafting regulations while an act is still before the House. So I will call the government's bluff, and I will say that I would be delighted to see the regulations turn up the very day after we pass this act, but, Madam Chair, I don't think that's going to happen. I think that this has been one hundred per cent bluster. You know what? Even if the regulations do turn up the day after, I don't think we're going to see the rebate the day after. I mean, the government just voted down an amendment to get the rebate out the door by the end of May, so they clearly don't have any particular confidence that they can manage that.

Again, I think, to be clear, we have been calling for the government to do this. They ought to do this, providing Albertans with some sort of certainty as to the time frame in which they're going to see this money and in a situation where they are generally struggling. You know, seeing the money several months from now is not sufficient to them. They want to see it soon, and that, Madam Chair, is why we have brought these amendments. It is why we have attempted to ask the government to get the money out the door in a timely manner. This will be the second attempt at that. It's why we have asked the government to prohibit Albertans from being disconnected from their utilities while the government is dithering and unable to get the rebate out the door. They voted that down, too.

But, Madam Chair, I suppose I will simply say that hope springs eternal, and perhaps some of the MLAs on the government side will take this opportunity to stand up for their constituents.

The Chair: The hon. Associate Minister of Natural Gas and Electricity.

Mr. Nally: Thank you, Madam Chair. It was just shared with me that the fastest way to get these rebates into Albertans' pockets was to not have lost \$1.34 billion on the Balancing Pool. That would have been the preferred approach, but I digress. Here we are.

Apparently, the Member for Calgary-Mountain View is embarrassed, and the hon. member is embarrassed because I've

called her out for not knowing the price of electricity. In addition, that is the same member that went in front of the media and demanded that we get these rebates out quicker, and that same member voted in this House against getting the rebates out any quicker than we could have. The gaslighting that happens on that side of the House is unbelievable.

You know, I think that we need to change the name of this amendment, too. We're going to call this amendment the Failure to Consult amendment. You see, had the members opposite actually consulted with industry, then they would know that these utilities actually have different enterprise resource planning software, ERP. Now, these enterprise resource planning softwares aren't something where you can just go in and change a billing cycle in five or 10 minutes. It actually is much more complicated than that. I can remember when I was in industry and we had enterprise resource planning software – it was SAP, a great program – you actually had to have SAP consultants come in here to change anything that was SAP related. Madam Chair, the NDP would know this had they done the slightest amount of consultation with anyone from industry, but they did not. Just like everything else the NDP has done, it is littered with unintended consequences.

Again, my ask of everyone on this side of the House is to urge you to vote against this amendment. This would be just one more example of charging forward without knowing the consequences. Such has been the history of the NDP, so I ask the hon. members to politely turn down this amendment.

Thank you.

9:40

The Chair: Are there others? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you, Madam Chair. That was a great example of where this place has gone to, where the minister gets up and resorts to personal attacks, a level of arrogance I haven't seen since the Redford government, as opposed to talking about the amendment. The fact of the matter is that this amendment is putting a time frame on the rebates. Now, I appreciate that the government needs to work with industry, but asking for a time frame on this I don't think is unreasonable. In fact, when we look at the UCP promise of the electricity rebate, we're now moving into week 10 of the announcement of a rebate without the action of a rebate. [interjections] I know that the minister is yelling right now, and, you know, I'd be happy to go for a coffee with him and explain the ins and outs of how the government could move faster on a number of these programs, so . . . [interjections]

The Chair: Order.

Mr. Bilous: Again, we're talking about an amendment to improve this bill. We're at a place – I believe this is the bill that's replacing the previous failed no-rebate rebate bill. Thirty days, according to the minister, is unreasonable. I would love for the minister to propose, then, a more reasonable timeline.

I'm just nostalgically thinking of a time, not that long ago, in this place where spirited debate could exist in a way that was trying to get to a better outcome. Sadly, the state of our current Legislature – there's a reason that Albertans are disappointed in politicians, because we've somehow forgotten how to have a constructive conversation. Disagree with the ideas a hundred per cent, but by all means, please then present an alternative as opposed to just personal attacks.

If 30 days is unreasonable, fair enough. Then, Minister – through you, Madam Chair, I would ask the minister then to propose a counter. What is a reasonable time frame? Is it 60 days? Is it 90

days? I appreciate that the minister likely has more frequent conversations with industry than the opposition does. That's not for lack of trying; that comes with the position. If we pull out the partisan conversations, it's a reality. And I know this because I was a minister, but that's irrelevant.

The point is: how do we strengthen this piece of legislation? How do we ensure that rebates are going to get out in a timely fashion and that Albertans are going to get them in their pockets? Here we have example after example where my colleague is proposing amendments, and as opposed to the government standing up and speaking about why they are not necessary or how they won't in fact do what we believe they will do, we have a bunch of political staffers behind closed doors writing hyperpartisan comments and speaking points that result in a debate that goes into the mud and is all about character assassination as opposed to the spirit of policy debate.

I look back at exchanges between former Premier Peter Lougheed and Grant Notley, who was a two-member caucus, and the two of them would have extremely spirited debates about policy but were completely respectful with one another and respected each other. In fact, it was Premier Lougheed who ensured that there was a state funeral for Grant Notley when he died. He didn't have to do that, and if they were mortal enemies, he probably wouldn't do that. But I look at where that debate was in our history in Alberta and I look at where it is today, and quite frankly, Madam Chair, it's no wonder that Albertans are disappointed.

Again, whether we're talking about natural gas rebates, whether we're talking about electricity rebates, whether we're talking about how to diversify the economy, Albertans want to see the best policies put forward. They don't care who it comes from, and I think we often get lost in our own Twitterverse, for lack of a better frame, that just reinforces our own point of view as opposed to expanding our point of view, which is the point of the Westminster system, why we have multiple political parties represented in the Chamber. If we don't want to hear any other point of view, then what's the point of having democratically elected representatives from multiple parties?

Mr. Eggen: Democracy.

Mr. Bilous: What's the point of having democracy?

Madam Chair, the point is that what's disappointing for Albertans is that we have lost the ability to have a respectful debate about policy. So I'm hoping the minister will rise and speak to why this amendment is not necessary or if the 30-day time frame is unreasonable and if there is a more reasonable time frame for an amendment like this. How can we ensure that the rebate gets out the door in a timely fashion without a response of, "Trust us; we're going to do this"?

I appreciate how legislation and then regulations work. I also appreciate the fact that to get something on a cabinet committee agenda takes months, and anybody who stands up and argues differently: their nose is going to grow, because it takes time. It doesn't happen overnight. If this bill was passed in all three stages right now, the regulations would not be dealt with tomorrow. They would likely not even be dealt with at the next cabinet meeting.

But the point is, for the purpose of this amendment, Madam Chair, that if 30 days is not the right answer, then I hope the minister can provide the House with, in his opinion, a more reasonable amendment and then possibly comment on if he would entertain such an amendment, and if not, please share with Albertans why not.

The Chair: Any other members to the amendment? The hon. Member for Edmonton-West Henday.

Mr. Carson: Well, thank you, Madam Chair. It's an honour and a privilege to rise this evening to speak to this very important amendment, and I thank my colleague from Calgary-Mountain View for bringing it forward. So far all of the amendments, obviously, as you can see from the voting record, I've had the opportunity to put forward my support for, because they've all been extremely important to Albertans.

We've heard again and again this evening and over several months now that Albertans are looking for support, and they're reaching out to our offices. This is one opportunity, with the amendment before us, to ensure that this is strengthened in a time where the government continues to say that they are ready to move forward with these rebates as soon as possible and, you know, casting aspersions that it's the opposition holding up this legislation.

9:50

But I would repeat that the fact is that if they have these regulations ready, as they claim to, and that it is indeed this debate that is holding it up, then they really should have no issues with moving forward with this amendment that has been proposed by the Member for Calgary-Mountain View, and I would say the exact same thing for the past amendments that we saw in terms of ensuring that the rebate is put in place by the end of May, that there's a moratorium on utility shut-offs for Albertans until a time where the associate minister and the government are prepared to move forward with that rebate. I think those have all been very reasonable amendments, just like the one before us, and I am deeply troubled, as the previous member pointed out, that we have come to a place this evening and several evenings before it, Madam Chair, where we spend more time attacking each other than debating the substance of the amendments before us.

At the end of the day, Madam Chair, I was sent here and all members of this House were sent here to represent their constituents but also be there to say and show that they support those members of the public when the time comes, and that time of need is here right now. Of course, the time was several months ago to take action on this legislation, but here we are several months later with a piece of legislation before us which, in principle, very willing to support and do our best to move it through the Legislature. But, unfortunately, there are no timelines in this legislation for when Albertans are going to see utility rebates. There is no dollar amount attached to how much Albertans are going to see rebated to them. All we can do in the opposition is try to improve this legislation in good faith to show Albertans that this government is really willing to take action.

Up to this point, through the decisions that this government has made to vote down amendment after amendment, it seems quite clear that this legislation was nothing more than a photo opportunity for this government to roll out the red carpet for themselves over and over again while not actually providing any real support to Alberta families. It's incredibly disappointing, again, when we have such a reasonable amendment before us. Albertans are expecting us to work together in this Legislature to create the best legislation, to create meaningful change across this province, and right now what Albertans need is support through utility rebates, and in the absence of that, they need support through a moratorium on utility shut-offs.

We have come way too far through this pandemic and through the lack of support from this government, and it's truly unfortunate that we aren't seeing a government willing to put forward the rebates that they so claim to want to put forward in the legislation itself. So here we are again in the opposition giving them an opportunity to show Albertans that they want to take real, meaningful action and that the policy decisions around rebates are

important to them, more important than the grassroots guarantee that the Premier committed to himself and to his caucus members, which has all but eroded to this date, Madam Chair.

With that, I would again urge all members to support this amendment. I feel that it's very valuable, and I look forward to supporting it myself. Thank you.

The Chair: Any other members to amendment A3?

Seeing none, I will call the question.

[The voice vote indicated that the motion on amendment A3 lost]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 9:54 p.m.]

[One minute having elapsed, the committee divided]

[Mrs. Pitt in the chair]

For the motion:

Bilous	Feehan	Phillips
Carson	Ganley	Sabir
Eggen	Loyola	Sweet

Against the motion:

Aheer	Luan	Rutherford
Allard	Nally	Schow
Copping	Neudorf	Schweitzer
Ellis	Nixon, Jeremy	Shandro
Frey	Orr	Sigurdson, R.J.
Gotfried	Panda	Smith
Hanson	Rehn	Toews
Issik	Reid	van Dijken
LaGrange	Rowswell	Williams
Long		

Totals:	For – 9	Against – 28
---------	---------	--------------

[Motion on amendment A3 lost]

The Chair: We are back on the main bill, Bill 18, in Committee of the Whole. The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Ms Ganley: If at first you don't succeed, Madam Chair, try, try again. Okay. I have another amendment. Sorry. I'm just making sure I've got the original here. There you go. I'll wait for that to reach the table.

The Chair: It's of medium size. This will be amendment A4.

Hon. member, please proceed.

Ms Ganley: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. I move that Bill 18, Utility Commodity Rebate Act, be amended by adding the following immediately after section 8:

Report

- 8.1 If a rebate is authorized under this Act, the Minister must
- prepare a report setting out how the conditions set out in section 2(1) were met in respect of the rebate, including any causes of an increase in the price of that utility commodity,
 - lay a copy of the report referred to in clause (a) before the Legislative Assembly within 60 days of the rebate being authorized under this Act, and
 - within 10 days of laying a copy of the report before the Legislative Assembly in accordance with clause (b), provide a copy of the report to the Market Surveillance Administrator to consider whether an investigation is warranted under section 42(1)(a) of the Alberta Utilities Commission Act.

Once again, Madam Chair, a rather – well, I guess, as you said, a medium-sized amendment. So what this does is that it requires in instances when a rebate is provided that the minister provide a report setting out a number of things, but I would say most importantly, including the causes of the increase in the price.

Madam Chair, had anyone been listening through the debate today . . .

10:00

Mr. Eggen: They are.

Ms Ganley: They may have been, okay?

For the many people out there listening through the debate today, they may have been rather confused because both sides appear to be operating from entirely different sets of facts, and that is confusing. As has often been said, every person is entitled to his or her own opinion but not to their own set of facts.

What this is meant to do is clarify for Albertans what's going on. We have a report out of the University of Calgary which indicates that a large portion of the upswing here has to do with profits, profits that have, according to that report, quintupled. Quintupled is kind of a fun word to say five times. Five times as high as they once were is – I don't know – I would say, a significant increase. That seems pretty significant to me. I think that's relevant to Albertans.

But then we have the associate minister standing up over and over, first of all referring to some legislation that was passed by previous Conservative governments, which sort of overrode the system and allowed the construction of very large lines that are costly. At the time the Official Opposition railed against it. Oh, we weren't the Official Opposition; I apologize. At the time the NDP opposition railed against that. There are some quotes in there. You can go back in *Hansard*. Both the Member for Edmonton-Strathcona and the leader of the NDP at the time, who was the Member for Edmonton-Highlands – the previous one, obviously, not the current one – were quite clear. In fact, I believe the previous Member for Edmonton-Highlands referred to it as, you know, that you're going to see a rider on your bill that's PC arrogance, or some words to that effect.

The point of this report is to clarify the facts, Madam Chair, and the reason I want the facts clarified is because I believe they show what I have been alluding to all along. I think this is worth while. I think Albertans deserve to know. I think that when prices go up like this, Albertans deserve to know the reason for that.

Now, the thing I think Albertans deserve more than that is a substantive rebate, a rebate within a reasonable time frame, not to be disconnected from their utilities while they await such a rebate, but all of those are things which the government has already rejected this evening. So I am left with this, which is to say an amendment to make sure that Albertans at least understand the facts that are before them so that we can have a rational conversation, and I think that that is what, Madam Chair, democracy is meant to be at its best, a rational conversation, where, you know, we all operate from the same set of facts.

I think, Madam Chair, the thing I would say in closing is this. The set of facts before us is as follows: we are presented with a bill, a bill which enables but does not require rebates; in that bill are no numbers on how much the rebates will be; in that bill is no requirement to provide those rebates within any sort of reasonable time frame. That's problematic. I think it's problematic because Albertans are struggling now, and I think anyone who denies the fact that these Albertans need these rebates, that they need them in a timely fashion is just not paying attention.

The associate minister says that it would be impossible to provide these rebates in a reasonable timeline. He said that we haven't done any consultation. Well, Madam Chair, I can assure you that we have done plenty of consultation. We have consulted with the people who are most important to us as elected representatives, and that is the people who sent us here to this Chamber, the people of Alberta, the people who have written in to us, telling us that they are hundreds or thousands of dollars behind, telling us that they cannot afford life under this UCP government, telling us that their insurance has gone up and their utilities have gone up and their tuition has gone up and the cost of their interest payments has gone up, all due to actions of this government.

So I would say, Madam Chair, that the people who have failed to consult are the members opposite. The people who have failed to consult are the government members who haven't spoken to Albertans, who don't seem to understand the urgency of this situation, who think that they can wait months and months to do anything about this problem and then convince Albertans that it must be the fault of the Official Opposition because they didn't pass the bill in six hours. I say it again: it's absurd. We have done our consultation. We have talked to the people who sent us to this place, to the people who we all serve, to the people to whom we ought to be accountable, the people of Alberta.

With that, I will say that this is one last attempt to ask the government to do something. If they refuse a timeline, if they refuse a rebate that would actually make a difference to Albertans, if they refuse to prevent Albertans from being cut off from their utilities, at minimum they can present them with the facts. At minimum they can tell them why it is that the cost of electricity has gone up. I don't think that that's a terribly difficult request. I am hopeful that maybe just this one small thing the government can do for the people of Alberta.

With that, I would urge all members to vote in favour of this amendment.

The Chair: Are there others? The hon. Associate Minister of Natural Gas and Electricity.

Mr. Nally: Thank you, Madam Chair. This evening has been a master class in gaslighting. In fact, it's been the very definition of gaslighting. You know, I can't believe that the NDP will complain about the speed at which rebates are getting out to Albertans, and then they vote against getting them out any quicker. That is the very definition of gaslighting, and this is all we've seen this evening.

The really frustrating part is that when you come up with four amendments like this, I mean, this really – four amendments: that means one thing to me. That means filibuster, Madam Chair. It means do everything that you can to distract from the real issue, which is that they made a strategic error last week and they're embarrassed and they're trying to distract from what they did last week.

In the time, the two and a half hours, that we have spent doing this, we could have gotten through third reading of this legislation, and that would have meant that I was then going to be the Minister of Justice's problem, because then I would have went to him at the end of the night and said: when can we get royal assent on these items? But I won't be doing that because we're not ready for royal assent because we're still in Committee of the Whole debating the fourth amendment.

You know, the lead headlines in the *Sun* and the *Journal*, Madam Chair, are actually about paralysis by analysis. That is exactly what the NDP is doing. They are burying us under paralysis by analysis with four amendments. I don't know if there are more coming. I certainly hope not.

Madam Chair, I'm going to ask again. We've time allocated. We've had no choice but to do that. My ask of the NDP is to stop the gaslighting, stop the paralysis by analysis. Help us pass this legislation and get rebates to Albertans because that's what matters right now more than anything.

The Chair: Any other members to amendment A4? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Mr. Bilous: Yeah. Madam Chair, the minister who just spoke should be embarrassed from his comments. First of all, debate for two hours in this Chamber is not filibustering; what it is is ensuring that there is proper, adequate, democratic oversight on a piece of legislation. All of us were elected to this Chamber to do our job, and if the minister has an issue with that, well, he's welcome to go to other countries around the globe that don't have democratic debate and have a one-party state where you only hear one side and things are expedient.

10:10

I'm quite happy to live in a country that has multiple parties elected to hear multiple points of view. In fact, regardless of the number of votes the UCP received in the last election, there are 24 members who were elected representing a significant number of Albertans, and one would argue that no single member in this Chamber – no single member – received 100 per cent of the votes in their riding, which means that Albertans have diverse political views. So I will not be lectured or accused of gaslighting for doing my job, which is to provide thoughtful amendments to legislation. It's the actions and words of the previous speaker that showcase why Albertans are so frustrated with their elected representatives. I did not hear one single reason of why this amendment before the Chamber is unnecessary.

The amendment here, Madam Chair, is talking about the minister preparing a report as to why a rebate would be warranted. Honestly, I think that's just good policy. If we get to a point that a rebate is triggered because the price gets to a point that is untenable for many Albertans or unaffordable, then the government is going to investigate as to why that happened. We're talking about a legitimate investigation.

I mean, the challenge with this place is that it seems like every day in question period history is being rewritten. The overbuild of the electricity transmission lines was first commissioned under Ralph Klein, and then it was actioned by former Premier Stelmach's government. I know this, Madam Chair, because I was involved in politics at that point. Now, I'm happy for other members, if they were also actively engaged in 2006, to get up and speak about the then policy of the former PCs. Then that continued under Alison Redford's government. To my recollection, there are five MLAs in this place that were here at that time.

My colleague the Member for Lethbridge-West cited a number of different news articles in which the former leader of the Alberta NDP, Brian Mason, in between 2004 and 2008, talked about the overbuild and how much it was costing Albertans and even made a comment about how on Albertans' electricity bill there should be a line that talks about the PC overbuild of the transmission lines. That's accessible. Just google it. It's an article that existed pre-2008.

Then in 2012 I, the Member for Edmonton-North West, the Member for Edmonton-Strathcona, and the former leader continued to talk to Albertans about the fact that the PC government committed billions, and we learned the real reason for the transmission overbuild. Even though it was being billed and sold to Albertans as "This is necessary," nobody believed that. It was to

export electricity to the United States. Pull up a map of Alberta and look at the transmission line, where it goes. It goes from north to south.

So when members of the UCP get up and talk about, “This was the NDP overbuilding the transmission lines,” that’s patently false. It was a decision that we fought against, in total, for probably about six years, maybe a little longer than that. I encourage all members of the public to go on *Hansard*, because we are all on *Hansard* speaking against this. It’s ridiculous for government members today to make the claim that these current high prices are because of an NDP policy. It’s patently false.

I will circle back, Madam Chair, to this amendment. The point of this amendment is only to direct the minister, for lack of a better term, to investigate: when rebates are triggered, what was the trigger? Let’s dig into that. Now, despite what the minister says, entities like the AER and the AESO were commissioned to provide oversight, but keep in mind that these are Crown corporations who report to government. The buck stops with the elected officials, period.

To blame a Crown corporation or, you know, to blame a previous government that had nothing to do with the transmission overbuild and, in fact, at countless moments in the Legislature and outside of the Legislature – in fact, the Member for Edmonton-North West and I were talking about the number of rallies that we spoke at opposed to the overbuild. It’s countless. [interjections] I can hear members of the government chirping, because they don’t like to hear the truth. They don’t like to hear the fact that this government is falsely accusing the opposition.

I love when members talk about: what did you do for oil and gas? Well, we committed 50,000 barrels per day to Keystone XL. What have you done for Keystone? Nothing. We moved Canadians; 4 in 7 Canadians were in favour of the Trans Mountain pipeline. We moved the needle to 7 in 10 Canadians. What have you done? The revision of history is ridiculous.

I believe and I know that both parties support our energy sector. Both parties support our oil and gas workers. We know that our oil and gas sector is the lifeblood of this province. We know that we have incredible potential in a number of other sectors, including hemp and opportunities that were realized by the previous government to support the development on the full value chain of areas like hemp, value-added ag, forestry, life sciences, biotech.

I apologize, Madam Chair. I’ve really digressed from this amendment, so I will circle back to this. I appreciate the latitude members have given me in this speech. Thank you.

10:20

This amendment is here to provide oversight and to ensure that there is an adequate – “investigation” is not the right word, Madam Chair – exploration as to why the rebates are triggered and then to share that with Albertans. I think that’s a reasonable request. I think that if the government is truly interested in transparency and accountability and showing Albertans why a rebate was triggered, then I see no reason as to why members of the government would vote against this. So I encourage all members to support this amendment.

The Chair: Any hon. members wishing to speak to amendment A4? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

Mr. Feehan: Thank you, Madam Chair. I just will take a few moments here. I noticed that the minister of natural gas has been presenting himself as an expert on gaslighting. He uses the word quite frequently when he speaks, and I am willing to accept he is an expert on gaslighting, at least the actual doing of it.

I think that the simple explanation for all of this is that the minister has been complaining that because we did not agree to his planned subversion of democracy by changing the rules of the House and debate and passing this bill on the day that he presented it – in fact, he already had said that we were filibustering before even a single person had spoken to it. In fact, the reality is that the government side has said that when this bill is passed, it will be July at the earliest before anybody sees any of this money. It’s also true that if we debate this bill now, as we are supposed to under the democratic process, and continue to debate this bill in the usual manner in which it’s done and pass it in the usual manner in which it is done, the rebates will arrive in people’s homes in July of this year. So regardless of whether we’ve had these debates or not or whether or not we gave consent to the government to subvert democracy, which, thank goodness, we did not, the rebates were going to arrive in people’s homes at exactly the same time as per the government’s scheduling.

All of the statements that the minister made are clearly gaslighting, are clearly not about what it is that the minister is saying they’re about, because the outcome, regardless of the minister’s ridiculous statements, is exactly the same. So it’s quite clear that it wasn’t about getting the money out earlier that the minister was interested in. The minister was simply interested in stopping the democratic process in this House from occurring because of the minister’s embarrassment and not actually wanting to do what it is that this bill is doing.

Now, we know that because when the minister was asked to do something about it a year ago and the members on this side went, “Well, what will you do about this problem?” the minister proudly stood up and said, “Nothing.” Then he eventually got forced into making some move forward and suggested that he wanted to do this as quickly as possible but then has done everything to make sure that we cannot do this as quickly as possible, has stopped every one of the amendments that might have moved this forward. Actually, it was the government side that adjourned the initial debate on this, which we could have had more of on the day that it was introduced so that we could have gotten it through faster.

In fact, this government is not wanting to do what this bill is doing, and I suspect that they’re hoping that if the circumstances are right, they will never have to do it at all. You know, I accept the suggestion of the minister of natural gas that he knows a lot about gaslighting, because he certainly demonstrated a lot of it in this House. Nothing that the government has done demonstrates anything other than the fact that they intend to engage in a process that gives the minimal amount to the fewest number of people at the last possible date.

Now, I think we’ve heard that from this government before with regard to protecting our children from COVID, for example, and many other kinds of acts in this House, so we are not surprised. But what we see is them pretending to do otherwise and accusing the opposition of not going along with their pretense. What the minister, when he gets into one of his rants, is really ranting about is being caught, being caught out saying one thing and actually doing another. I think that kind of behaviour is fairly classic for this government and is really unacceptable.

If this government wanted this money to be in the hands of Albertans today, it would be in the hands of Albertans today. They could simply have had all of the stages of this bill proceed in the timeliest of manners, but they chose not to. They adjourned the debate initially. They could have agreed to any of the motions put forward, the amendments put forward, to ensure that the legislation included timeliness and that the government was forthright in the decisions that they made, but they have refused to do that.

So when the government pretends that somehow they would have acted sooner if it weren't for the opposition, we know they are indeed, as the minister says, gaslighting. He is right. He just simply needs to point that finger at himself, because the answer is that regardless of this process, this money was going to come out on the same day. All of the excuses that he provides are clearly without justification and are an attempt to treat Albertans as fools, something that I think is completely unacceptable and should have this government feeling shame, but they apparently are incapable of that.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Chair: Any other hon. members to join the debate on amendment A4?

Seeing none, I will call the question.

[The voice vote indicated that the motion on amendment A4 lost]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 10:27 p.m.]

[One minute having elapsed, the committee divided]

[Mrs. Pitt in the chair]

For the motion:

Bilous	Feehan	Sabir
Carson	Ganley	Sweet
Eggen	Loyola	

10:30

Against the motion:

Aheer	Luan	Rutherford
Allard	Nally	Schow
Copping	Neudorf	Schweitzer
Ellis	Nixon, Jeremy	Shandro
Gotfried	Orr	Sigurdson, R.J.
Hanson	Panda	Smith
Issik	Rehn	Toews
LaGrange	Reid	van Dijken
Long	Rowswell	Williams
Totals:	For – 8	Against – 27

[Motion on amendment A4 lost]

The Chair: We are back in Committee of the Whole, no amendments on Bill 18. Any members to join debate?

If not, I will call the question.

[The remaining clauses of Bill 18 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

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

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Chair: Any opposed? Carried.

The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Schow: Thank you, Madam Chair. I move that we rise and report Bill 18.

[Motion carried]

[The Speaker in the chair]

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Airdrie-East and the Chair of Committees.

Mrs. Pitt: Mr. Speaker, the Committee of the Whole has had under consideration certain bills. The committee reports the following bill: Bill 18. I wish to table copies of all amendments considered by Committee of the Whole on this date for the official records of the Assembly.

The Speaker: Hon. members, does the Assembly agree in the report? If so, please say aye.

Hon. Members: Aye.

The Speaker: Any opposed, please say no. In my opinion, the ayes have it. That motion is carried and so ordered.

The Deputy Government House Leader is rising.

Mr. Schow: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We had a lot of great progress this evening debating Bill 18. I think it's a really important bill, and I'm grateful for everyone's participation. With that, I actually rise to ask for unanimous consent to waive Standing Order 77(1) and any other necessary standing orders in order to proceed immediately to third reading of Bill 18.

[Unanimous consent granted]

Government Bills and Orders

Third Reading

Bill 18

Utility Commodity Rebate Act

The Speaker: The hon. Associate Minister of Natural Gas and Electricity.

Mr. Nally: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I'd like to thank the members opposite for allowing us to go immediately to third reading.

This is an important piece of legislation at a time when Albertans are struggling. We know that there's some great news out there. We know that a lot of the things that we have put in place are working. We are seeing a balanced budget. We're seeing some 130,000 jobs that have been created. We're seeing an economy that, quite frankly, is on fire, so there's lots of great news, but we also are seeing some inflation, and we are seeing the cost of living is now on people's minds because everything is getting more expensive. Of course, there are a lot of reasons for that, and we can look to the coal-gas conversions that have made electricity very expensive. You know, we could also look to the carbon tax.

We have been saying this from day one, Mr. Speaker, that you should not be taxing Albertans for heating their homes in the winter. It's just fundamentally wrong to do so. But, you know, progressive politicians across this country have this childlike enthusiasm for continuing to raise carbon taxes and making everything more expensive for Albertans, and it's wrong. But this is where we are.

We also have a situation where we have an overbuilt transmission system. I have tried to be fair to the NDP, Mr. Speaker. I have been the first to admit that the NDP did not start the overbuild, but they didn't stop it either. We did stop the overbuild, and I've given many examples.

In 2021 we spent zero dollars on transmission, and it's because we have brought fiscal responsibility to the electricity grid. Unfortunately, we still have to pay back the \$7.5 billion, and this is what's causing everything to be more expensive. Utilities are going up, and layer on top of that, Mr. Speaker, the geopolitical situation in Ukraine right now, and that is continuing to increase prices. We have an energy crisis in Europe, and make no mistake: it is on our

doorstep and it is coming our way and it's causing everything to go more expensive, particularly in the utilities.

For that reason, we have put forward this rebate legislation so that we would have enabling legislation that would allow us to provide immediate relief to Albertans. This would be short-term relief while we do the longer term work involved in lowering prices. Mr. Speaker, I would encourage all of my colleagues, I would encourage the members opposite to support Bill 18 so that we can get these electricity rebates out to Albertans as fast as possible. I encourage everyone to support Bill 18.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Hon. members, third reading of Bill 18, Utility Commodity Rebate Act. Are there others? The hon. Member for Calgary-Bhullar-McCall.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to speak to third reading, and the associate minister has asked quite nicely for support of this bill. I wish there was a timeline, some certainty, when Albertans will get the rebate. The government has been dithering on it for the last six months. I wish there was a ban on shut-offs so that Albertans

have some assurance that their utilities won't be cut off for nonpayment, but it's not there. Let's hope that the government realizes that it's a serious issue and moves at the speed of business and does something that benefits all Albertans.

Thank you. With that, we will be supporting this piece of legislation.

The Speaker: Hon. members, are there others?

Seeing none, I am prepared to call on the associate minister to close debate if there are none. The hon. the associate minister to close debate? That is waived.

[Motion carried; Bill 18 read a third time]

The Speaker: The Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Schow: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. More progress, which is just wonderful to see in this Chamber. But I think that it's time to call it a night, so I do move that the Chamber adjourn until tomorrow at 10 a.m.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 10:39 p.m.]

Table of Contents

Government Bills and Orders

Second Reading

Bill 18	Utility Commodity Rebate Act.....	807
	Division	807
Bill 13	Financial Innovation Act.....	807
Bill 16	Insurance Amendment Act, 2022	807

Committee of the Whole

Bill 18	Utility Commodity Rebate Act.....	808
	Division	809, 816, 819, 822

Third Reading

Bill 18	Utility Commodity Rebate Act.....	822
---------	-----------------------------------	-----

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

For inquiries contact:

Editor

Alberta Hansard

3rd Floor, 9820 – 107 St

EDMONTON, AB T5K 1E7

Telephone: 780.427.1875

E-mail: AlbertaHansard@assembly.ab.ca