



Province of Alberta

The 30th Legislature
Third Session

Alberta Hansard

Wednesday morning, May 4, 2022

Day 29

The Honourable Nathan M. Cooper, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta
The 30th Legislature
Third Session

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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

9 a.m.

Wednesday, May 4, 2022

[Mr. Milliken in the chair]

Prayers

The Acting Speaker: Lord, the God of righteousness and truth, grant to our Queen and her government, to Members of the Legislative Assembly, and to all in positions of responsibility the guidance of Your spirit. May they never lead the province wrongly through love of power, desire to please, or unworthy ideals but, laying aside all private interests and prejudices, keep in mind their responsibility to seek to improve the condition of all. Amen.

Please be seated.

Orders of the Day

Government Bills and Orders Second Reading

Bill 20

Justice Statutes Amendment Act, 2022

[Adjourned debate May 3: Member Ceci]

The Acting Speaker: Are there any members wishing to join debate on second reading? I see the hon. Member for Calgary-Bhullar-McCall has risen.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to speak to Bill 20, Justice Statutes Amendment Act, 2022. This bill seems to be making a few changes to justice acts. Some of them seem pretty straightforward, as the government claims. They are mostly housekeeping, and I will speak to those changes as well. But we have obviously more challenges in the justice system that this government has done nothing to address.

One thing that we do take issue with is that this bill is legislating the changes that government made to the victims of crime fund by taking supports away from the victims of crime, and these changes will certainly have a negative impact on the victims of crime. Instead of supporting victims of crime, the UCP is doing exactly the opposite. This was the opportunity for this government to realize how horrible their changes were and to fix some of those. But, no, they did not get this one right.

As I said, the bill amends five different pieces of legislation: the Corrections Act, the Justice of the Peace Act, the Missing Persons Act, the Youth Justice Act, and the Victims of Crime and Public Safety Act. I want to say that we do not take issue with the changes to the Corrections Act, the Youth Justice Act, the Justice of the Peace Act, or the Missing Persons Act, but we have serious concerns with respect to the victims of crime fund and public safety act changes.

The Corrections Act is making changes so that the compensation rate for Alberta Parole Board members can now be set by an order in council instead of regulation. In the tech briefing government shared that this brings this board in line with other Alberta boards, agencies, and commissions.

With respect to the Justice of the Peace Act, it gives the Chief Judge of the Provincial Court of Alberta the discretion to designate a justice of the peace as either part-time or full-time if there are certain conditions that are met. That's the same process for judges, and we take no issue with that.

With respect to the Missing Persons Act, it adds a definition of medical information and now allows for TV footage and other

video recordings to be used in missing person cases. Again, we do not take issue with the changes that are proposed in this legislation.

Lastly, the Youth Justice Act changes align the act with changes from the federal Criminal Code, and according to the government it's not a change in the policy.

But the changes that they make to the victims of crime fund and public safety act are significant ones, and these changes have implications for victims of crimes.

Earlier, a couple of years ago, the UCP brought forward Bill 16, and they made changes to the victims of crime fund so that the victims of crime fund can be used to backfill for the reckless cuts that this government has made to the justice system. Since then we have been hearing constantly in our constituencies – in Edmonton, in Calgary, across the province – that victims of crime have been denied benefits. They are only given 45 days to apply for the benefits. I think that's unfair. That doesn't give enough room, enough time for the victims to apply for these benefits. Victims should not be forced to apply for these benefits within a certain time. They should be allowed to heal on their own timeline.

The changes that are contained in this piece of legislation are making some of those changes, some of those horrible changes, permanent. One change that is contained in this piece of legislation is that it de-establishes the Criminal Injuries Review Board. That was, I guess, in part done by legislation previously, but this one formally de-establishes that. This board was an important, arm's-length board that was responsible for reviewing the benefits, hearing the complaints about those benefits. What this government is doing is that they are completely getting rid of this board so that victims will only have to apply through this government, and whatever government wants to do with that program, they will be able to do that on their own.

So far the changes that government has made to this program were not helpful. They were, rather, harmful to the victims of crime. Not one organization across this province – not one organization – supported the changes that government made. I do challenge the members of the government, members of the UCP caucus, this morning if they are aware of just one organization across this province that supported these changes. Not one, but the government won't listen.

That's the reason Albertans don't trust this UCP government. They think they know the best. They ignore Albertans. They just don't respond to their e-mails. I was personally copied on many e-mails relating to this fund. Our leader has received numerous e-mails about this, and we know that they are getting the same e-mails, but unless these e-mails are coming from lobbyists, they just don't respond. The result is that victims of crimes are paying the price.

These changes are fairly significant, and they will codify the changes government made to the victims of crime fund. No one, no victim supports these changes, no organizations supporting victims are in favour of these changes, and we will not be supporting these changes.

9:10

Government needs to go back to the drawing board. Government needs to consult with the victims of crime. Government needs to consult with organizations providing supports to victims of crimes and reverse their damaging policy of using the victims of crime fund to backfill their reckless cuts. Since the UCP took over, they have cut the Justice department budget by \$200 million in the last three budgets, and that impacts services throughout the Justice department. They have downloaded policing costs onto the municipalities. They are making Albertans pay for their recklessness.

When we talk to stakeholders, when we talk to the legal community, there are many issues that they will bring up, but that's not the focus for this government. For instance, since they became government, they've been telling Albertans that they will be hiring 50 prosecutors. And year after year, every time when we ask about the progress on that hiring, they will say that they are in the process of hiring those prosecutors.

We do know that because of the Jordan decision there are so many cases that are at risk of being thrown out because courts won't be able to prosecute them within Jordan timelines. There are so many cases, and Albertans who are victims of those crimes won't be able to have a day in court. They won't be able to get the justice they deserve. That situation has been made worse by the COVID-19 pandemic as well. There are tens of thousands of cases that are at a serious risk of being thrown out. Government should be focusing on those cases, on addressing those delays. That's something that Albertans expect this government to focus on.

Lastly, in Calgary in particular we have seen a wave of violence, drug related, gang related. So far there have been 11 murders already this year in Calgary – 11 murders – and one of them a couple of weeks ago was from my neighbourhood. The government needs to focus on addressing that wave of violence because that's, first and foremost, the government's responsibility, to make sure that people are safe in their homes, in their communities. That needs to be the focus of this government. Everyone is fearful for their safety. Those are the real issues that are facing Albertans. Instead, the government is solidifying their raid on the victims of crime fund so that they can backfill for their reckless cuts to the justice system. These changes are hurtful. These changes are damaging.

One, the government is not doing anything to address the rise in crimes. Two, the government is not doing anything to address the delays within the justice system. On top, the government is taking away the supports from those victims of crime. That is shameful, and that's something we will not support.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Next I believe I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs has risen.

Ms Goehring: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise this morning to speak to Bill 20, the Justice Statutes Amendment Act, 2022. While I am so appreciative of the Member for Calgary-Bhullar-McCall for highlighting some of the major concerns that this piece of legislation has, this legislation makes some changes to the justice act. Some seem positive. Some are housekeeping, as per what the government is saying.

We, however, think that more needs to be done. We see that they're legislating the victims of crime fund but not actually doing anything to fix the mess that they made. In previous pieces of legislation – I believe it was Bill 16 – this government created some considerable changes to the victims of crime fund, none of which actually support victims of crime.

I have a background where I was a volunteer with the Sexual Assault Centre of Edmonton and then did my first-year practicum as a social work student with the Lurana Shelter. I can tell you that had they talked to just simply those two agencies, they would have known that the changes that they were making were not only not helpful, but they were going to be so restrictive that victims couldn't actually access the fund. They put in an implementation of a 45-day time period where the victim must apply for the services for emergency assistance.

I can tell you that the majority of my calls and my interactions dealt with victims well past the 45-day limit. Most in that period –

in the initial weeks or months following a crime specifically related to domestic violence or sexual assault, there is no capacity to expect someone to go and fill out all this paperwork and do all of this work, especially because the majority of those individuals haven't even reported it yet. So many are still in that contemplation phase.

You know, unfortunately, there's a lot of stigmatization that happens around sexual assault and domestic violence. There's a lot of blaming of themselves. Unfortunately, there can be space where other people blame them as well. We've seen judges throughout the province make comments that are completely inappropriate, blame the victim, and those things make the news. So when someone is a victim of a serious crime, those are all of the images and messages that they have. To expect someone to apply within 45 days for funding is absolutely ridiculous.

I think about what the intention of this Bill 20 is. I mean, most of it is what we can support. There are, I believe, five different pieces of legislation, different acts, that are being impacted, but the one that sticks out the most is definitely the victims of crime fund and the horrible changes that this government did.

I know that since the implementation we've heard from many that work in the area of being supports to those that have been victims. You know, there were some significant concerns. The money wasn't rolled out on time. They highlighted the 45-day time period as being way too restrictive. It used to be two years, and even within that two-year time period there were still organizations advocating on behalf of victims, saying that it just wasn't enough time. To take it from two years to 45 days: I can't imagine that many victims are actually able to access this funding. So when this government opens up this legislation, I'm just so confused as to why they wouldn't have taken the feedback that they heard from Bill 16, both prior and post, and done some significant changes in here.

9:20

We know that, you know, I believe it's a \$1,000 limit for being able to access money for counselling. Well, Mr. Speaker, the average rate for a qualified therapist is around \$200 an hour, so saying that there's only \$1,000 to access supports – you're dealing with trauma. That simply is not enough. We hear from victims and their families who say they've spent tens of thousands of dollars on counselling. To have a trauma-informed practice isn't something that can just be wrapped up in only a handful of sessions. These are situations where, like I mentioned, we're talking about the stigmatization of what happens when someone has been assaulted, acknowledging that there's that impact, acknowledging the societal messages that this person perhaps could be to blame. You have to undo all of that trauma.

Oftentimes I've experienced where there are multiple incidents of trauma, and the one that they actually come forward and report wasn't the first time that this person has been victimized. So to think that \$1,000 for counselling is the solution: it's simply unacceptable to look at that. We have so much trauma that can happen as a result of a crime, and I think that this could have been a really great opportunity for them to fix the legislation that they broke with Bill 16.

We know the history and the statistics regarding domestic violence, and we know that it's very likely that those that have experienced domestic violence or intimate partner violence don't report within the first incident. When I was at Lurana Shelter, the statistic was that an assault happens, a woman is victimized, an average of 35 times before she tells one person. Thirty-five times. And that's just telling someone. What happens if that person comes forward and she's not believed or she's not supported or she can't access shelters because they're overflowing, there are no beds available, or she can't get in to see a therapist because the wait-lists are astronomical?

Forty-five days is just simply not a reasonable expectation for someone to be able to report the crime and then complete all the paperwork that's required. There are some significant barriers that individuals face when they're trying to access support services. I know that because of this, many individuals choose or are forced to stay in that relationship because there isn't anything available to help them escape safely.

We know statistically that when a person decides to leave the relationship and they have a plan, that's when they're most at risk, and when I say "at risk," Mr. Speaker, the worst case scenario is that they're killed. This isn't something that is a light topic. It is proven over and over that in intimate partner violence, domestic violence the highest risk to that individual is death. So when we're talking about things that could actually support victims, they need access to mental health supports. They need access to nonprofits, where some of those services no longer exist because they've had to close their doors.

I remember working at Lurana, and the amount of calls that we received in a day compared to the amount of beds that we had available was devastating. We were a shelter that was in Edmonton, and we accepted women from all over the province. We had a shelter that had four beds for single females, and then we had family beds as well. Those four single female beds were never open. There were continuously women that required those services, and to have to tell an individual that we don't have a bed – they've created the courage to come forward, they have a plan, they want to escape – is devastating.

So when you think about the decisions that victims that are fleeing domestic violence or intimate partner violence are facing, it is basic safety needs first. Do I have somewhere safe to go? Do my kids have somewhere safe to go? To complicate things more, throw in a family pet. Trying to find a safe shelter or space for a family pet that you know is at risk – because often statistics show that if human beings are being abused in the home, family pets are also being abused. That can be a factor, where someone chooses not to leave because of their family pet.

When we're talking about a 45-day time period, these individuals are simply trying to stay alive. They're not thinking about applying for the victims of crime fund. And I can tell you that's probably not at the top of mind for those that are providing the supports and services to those individuals. We want to make sure that their basic needs are being met. Is there a protection order in place? Do they have the means to be safe? Can they make sure that their kids are safe? These are people that are coming from all across the province. If you're in rural Alberta, I can tell you that it can be a huge culture shock to come into the city and be in a shelter in the city.

On top of an individual being abused an average of 35 times before they tell one person, the statistic from when I was at the shelter was that an individual would leave the situation an average of seven times before leaving the final time. There are so many factors that come into place when you're deciding what to do. What is the best thing to do for myself? For my kids? For my loved ones?

Those are statistics that aren't unknown. They're easily accessible. We have done so much studying when it comes to how best to support victims. I can tell you that Bill 16 and what the UCP introduced is not what is needed.

Bill 20 would have been a wonderful opportunity to be able to take the mistake of Bill 16 and do some real changes. There are other pieces of this legislation, under the other acts, that make sense, and they're clearly things that we can support. However, this should have been a place where the UCP fixed what they broke. We heard pleas when this piece of legislation was introduced, and we continue to hear from those that are providing services and from victims that there's been so much damage done for those that need

to access the victims of crime fund, that something should be done. Bill 20 would have been the perfect opportunity to make those changes.

I have a friend who accompanies police, RCMP specifically, when there is a serious incident, and her job is to help the families. She's a victim support worker, so she's on call, and she could get a call at any time of day within her area of work to respond. That's because the police have been called, so we know that there's been a crime. Even within that time period, where it's been reported, the police know that it's happened, we have a date of the incident, she tells me that this still isn't enough time.

9:30

The priority isn't trying to set up an application to get services. So many of these individuals are in shock. They have no idea of the trauma that can happen.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I will take my seat. Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other members looking to join debate on second reading? I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview has risen.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I rise to speak to Bill 20, the Justice Statutes Amendment Act, 2022. I want to thank my two colleagues who have spoken to this bill and shared their insights and experiences, which helps, I think, Albertans to understand the significance of this bill and the significance of the actions of this government.

Now, as pointed out by my colleagues, there are a number of – I would refer to them as housekeeping – amendments that are being made to, I believe, five pieces of legislation, which, as my colleagues have indicated – I mean, I'll go through them, but they're all reasonable changes. The focus of my comments this morning in second reading will be on the changes that the UCP government made to the victims of crime fund and how frustrated Albertans feel that a fund that is so critical to helping people, helping support people who have gone through unbelievably traumatic experiences, is being used to fund other programs that, quite frankly, the government should be funding, whether it's additional police officers, especially at a time right now.

Mr. Speaker, I mean, it should be pointed out that western Canadian select has been sitting around \$90 U.S. a barrel for some time now. You know, as many Albertans know, every dollar that western Canadian select is above what the government budgets is another \$200 million in royalties for the government. The government has the funds and the means to provide services to Albertans, but this government is choosing not to, and I'll relay some of my experiences working with some very vulnerable young people when I taught at Inner City High School for six years.

I guess I'll lead with some of the housekeeping changes for the benefit of Albertans who are paying attention to the debate this morning. We'll start with the Corrections Act. There's a change where compensation rates for Alberta Parole Board members can now be set by OIC, an order in council, which brings it in line with most other if not all other ABCs, agencies, boards, and commissions. That seems reasonable and very much a minor, minor change.

There are changes to the Justice of the Peace Act giving the Chief Judge of the Provincial Court of Alberta the ability to designate a justice of the peace as either part-time or full-time. This is similar to the process for judges, so this brings it in line, you know, with the rest of the justice system. I appreciate that previously governments were doing this in a process through regulations, which, of course, just expedites the process. In fact, this could have

been in the red tape bill. This is actually reducing red tape and speeding up the process. So instead of tying up cabinet to do this, it gives the authority to the Chief Judge of the Provincial Court of Alberta to make that decision. Quite frankly, they are probably much more qualified to make that decision. My guess is that the Minister of Justice would have been speaking to them regardless ahead of time. This expedites that process, so that change I can get behind, Mr. Speaker.

As well, there are changes to the Missing Persons Act. It adds a definition of medical information. Now, the act already had provisions which allowed access to health information, but now things like TV footage, other video recordings can be used in missing person cases, which is wonderful. My understanding of this is that that would also apply to any kind of video even done by cellphone. You know, my understanding is that this is really modernizing this act, but again it wouldn't hurt to have some clarification from the Minister of Justice that it's bringing the act up to speed for today's technology and the access to technology that most Albertans have.

It also adds a section that the justice of the peace can seal court records related to a missing person if that case interferes with an investigation or if it endangers people and changes the timeline for a review by a special committee of the Legislative Assembly. As well, Mr. Speaker, it adds regulation-making powers that give the government the ability to define any term not defined in the act. Again, I suppose that if there is a realization that there's a term that needs to be defined, instead of having to bring the whole act back through the Legislature, which, of course, is a much more lengthy process than doing it through regulations, this gives the cabinet the ability to define a term.

For the Victims of Crime and Public Safety Act – actually, I'll come back to that one. Let's jump to the Youth Justice Act. Changes here are changes that are going to align with changes from the federal Criminal Code, so that includes updates on forfeiture, changes that notification of parents can be given by any peace officer as opposed to solely the officer in charge. I mean, that again seems that it makes quite a bit of sense, Mr. Speaker, especially when you think about people and their shifts when they work, holidays, et cetera. It now gives peace officers much more flexibility. I also believe that this will expedite those conversations, again, that they can happen now much easier and much quicker.

I'll now spend the duration of my time talking about changes that this government made to the victims of crime fund and how this was an opportunity for the government to reverse changes that they've made. Again, you know, for the benefit of Albertans, there were a few changes made to the victims of crime fund, first and foremost being that all of the funds that were collected would be used to support victims of crime. Now, I have in my notes, if I can find it, the fact that there would have been a surplus in the fund. Here we go, Mr. Speaker. Before changes to this act were made, there was a \$74 million surplus in this fund, the victims of crime fund, that could have been used toward helping more victims. Instead, the money is now also going to be used to pay for more prosecutors and police officers.

9:40

Now, Mr. Speaker, I am supportive of the fact that we need more prosecutors and we need more peace officers and police officers, absolutely, but they should be paid out of government's revenues and not out of the victims of crime fund.

You know, as a number of people have spoken out and said – I was reading that one person had described this as robbing Peter to pay Paul. We've heard stories of the trauma that people have experienced and what's required, the supports that are needed to help victims.

You know, another change to this was that the two-year reporting period shrunk down to 45 days. I remember speaking in this Chamber against this idea, which is absolutely ridiculous, that the timeline requiring someone to report a crime has shrunk so significantly, especially when we're talking about assaults, sexual assaults, domestic violence. The number of victims that will be ineligible to access this fund is staggering. It's shameful, Mr. Speaker, that people who have gone through what I can only imagine as some of the most traumatic experiences that a person could ever have to go through now don't have access to supports if they do not report within 45 days.

I can tell you, Mr. Speaker, that when I worked at Inner City High School, I worked with a number of young people who had faced incredible challenges and had students disclose being victims, but I can tell you that it was not within a 45-day window. Some of them were well over a year if not even longer. To deny supports because a person is not ready to disclose or has to work through the trauma that they've lived through – like, I don't understand the rationale for it, but it looks a lot like the government is trying to prohibit or inhibit victims of crime from accessing supports. I'd love to hear the logic behind it. It's creating barriers, barriers that are completely unnecessary.

I can tell you, Mr. Speaker, that when I first looked at this, it made me think back to why I first ran to be an MLA. I was teaching at Inner City High School and saw the incredible barriers that the government then was putting forward for these young people who faced a myriad of challenges but were trying to go to school in order to change their circumstances. They wanted to improve their lives. They didn't want to live in poverty. They didn't want to be homeless.

The hoops that the government brought forward with additional barriers in accessing funding for them to be able to pay their rent, to go to school – many of the students were older, Mr. Speaker. They were unsuccessful in the traditional system. Some of them were born on the streets, born into poverty. Some faced addictions. For some, their parents or parent were in and out of incarceration their whole life. That's their number one role model.

So here they are trying to improve their lives. Mr. Speaker, if a student or someone who wants to go to school can't access funding to do so, then how are they supposed to pay for food and a roof over their head? A number of the students also had young children, so there are issues and barriers as far as child care and daycare. It was really frustrating to see. You know, I give kudos to the school, that provided incredible supports, working with our students, spending hours in front of a computer trying to navigate the system. Here we see again barriers that this government has created.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other members wishing to join? I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

Mr. Feehan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I certainly appreciate the opportunity to speak to this bill because it gives me the opportunity to speak to an overall trend that I see with this government. In fact, I'm beginning to think that we should not refer to this government as the UCP but, rather, as the "Are there no workhouses?" government.

Mr. Bilous: Charles Dickens.

Mr. Feehan: Exactly.

We see a consistent trend in this government to seek out people who are the most vulnerable in society and to take resources away from them and deprive them of the things that they need.

We saw in Bill 16 substantive amounts of money taken away from rape victims to be used for other useful – agreed – things in society, but you don't take money away from rape victims to do them. Why would you take it away from the most vulnerable? We've seen with this government the decision to deindex AISH and to move the payment date for AISH to a date that makes it most likely for people who are disabled to end up having to pay extra fees because of the lateness of their payments. Of course, the deindexing is actually taking money out of their pockets. So we see this government not only going after rape victims; we see them going after disabled people.

We see this government moving to reduce the age at which children in care are supported, and what have we seen in the children in care services? We've seen the most number of children in care or who have had a recent open file with Children's Services die in the history of this province. So if you're a rape victim, if you're disabled, if you're a child in care, if you're vulnerable, this government is not there for you. We see this government oppose race-based data collection, so for people who are oppressed, systematically victims of racism, the government is not there for you. I can tell that after over three years since the report on the missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls from the federal government has come out, this government has not even issued a single step forward in moving on that.

Consistently what we see is this government taking people who are vulnerable, pummelling them, beating them down, and then kicking them when they're down, taking their money away when they're in the most vulnerable place that they could possibly be: children in Children's Services, disabled people, racialized people, and now we see people who are rape victims. Specifically, people who've actually witnessed murders are no longer considered eligible for services. You know, this is something I just cannot stand for with this government, this constant decision to go after people who are most vulnerable, to take resources away from them, and to just make the decision that they don't care.

This is the whole attitude of Scrooge writ large here in this province, sending people who should be protected by a society into the worst possible circumstances and making the decision that they just have to survive on their own, and if they don't survive, too bad, even if they're murdered. We have no report from this government after three years on murdered and missing Indigenous women. Three years. How much time do you need when the reports are already written for you?

9:50

This is completely unacceptable. Here we are again finding this government taking money away from people who have been brutalized by watching murders, by being raped, and going through serious traumas that have resulted in the destruction of their lives, their families, and their sense of self. Does this government have no sense about how trauma affects human beings and the consequences of trauma in our society? Can they please go back to school and learn something about how trauma has the consequence of building more trauma in society? If you don't deal with trauma, you will end up with people acting out in ways that cause more trauma for others.

Repeatedly I see this government finding the vulnerable, beating them up, doing the worst possible thing they can to them, and now taking their resources away.

Mr. Nally: Point of order.

The Acting Speaker: A point of order has been called.

Point of Order Language Creating Disorder

Mr. Nally: Mr. Speaker, 23(h), (i), and (j), language that is going to cause disorder. I have been very patient listening to the ridiculous comments from the individual across, but to say that a government beats up on vulnerable – and, actually, not beats up on. Beats up, so it wasn't even figurative. It was literal. Quite offensive. Hopefully, the gentleman can class it up.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Bhullar-McCall.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I understand that that member somehow didn't like hearing about trauma, victims of rape, victims of crime who are stripped of support through this piece of legislation. We are at the second reading of this bill, where a member can talk about the principles of the bill, changes contained in it, how they impact the society, how they impact Albertans. It's not at all a point of order. I think the minister needs to read up in this House procedure book.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you very much.

At this stage I don't think that we have brought ourselves to a point where there's an actual point of order. The individual, though very passionately, was discussing about the government broadly speaking, not individuals. What I would say, though, is that it can get to a point where language chosen by an individual in here can ultimately begin to cause disorder. So what I would do is that I would just ask the hon. member to perhaps use some different phrases that may accomplish the same goals. If he could, please, continue.

Thank you.

Debate Continued

Mr. Feehan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Of course, when I'm using an expression, I'm speaking metaphorically, not literally, although it doesn't surprise me that the government has trouble with the difference between the two.

I do think it's interesting that they are not objecting to the facts that I've put forward, that this government indeed has attacked the disabled and has taken money out of their pockets, that they have reduced supports for children who have lived their lives in care, and that we have seen an increase in the number of children that have died subsequently, often from suicide, if you read the Ombudsman's report on this. They do not argue the fact that they denied race-based data collection, which was asked for by people who are oppressed. They do not deny that they have done nothing about murdered and missing Indigenous women in terms of putting out a report. They've had three years to do something. They had a committee work on it for over a year within that period of time and still have done nothing.

You notice they do not argue the facts, because the facts speak for themselves. The truth is that this government does not understand the nature of vulnerability and are more than happy to take resources away from people who are vulnerable. In this case they're specifically targeting people who have experienced trauma. They are specifically going after people who have been raped, people who have seen murders and taking resources away from them, just as they did with Bill 16. If they just did nothing, we would be better off. If they had just left AISH alone, we would be better off. If they had just left the children-in-care bill the way it was, we would be better off. In most of these cases doing nothing

would be a better moral choice than the choices that this government has made.

Now we see there are specific actions being taken here where they're putting in limits of 45 days from the time of the actual commission of the crime to apply for victims' services. This is so ridiculous, that they do not understand the nature of trauma and how people respond to trauma. If you look at jurisprudence across this country, you will see that governments and courts have said that you cannot put limits on victims because there is a process of dealing with trauma which often extends into the period of years.

There was a time that you couldn't report a rape if it was over a year old. Governments and courts have said: "That's ridiculous. People can't do that. You should be able to report a rape 30 years later." But in this government, in this province, if you do that, you get no resources because: oh, you didn't report it in 45 days. Can you imagine what it's like to go through a sexual assault? Can you imagine what it's like to witness somebody in your family get murdered? And you're supposed to go: I know I'm feeling all these bad feelings, but perhaps I should be reasonable and think about the paperwork I have to do. It is absolutely unconscionable that this government is acting in this way yet again, consistently. Their value system is to go after people who are most vulnerable and take the resources away from them.

The other thing that this government could do, besides take off this ridiculous limit of 45 days, which is just absolutely in the face of all science with regard to the treatment of trauma: they could actually provide resources, put the money back in that they took out in Bill 16, and say to people: "You know what? We're not going to limit your counselling to \$1,000 after you've been raped," which, as has been mentioned in this House, is maybe five sessions, "and why don't we actually provide counselling for you for a period of a year or two regardless of the costs?" That's what most trauma victims actually need.

Trauma is not readily resolved. I worked in this area for many, many years, as you know. I wish we had a better resolution. I wish people could come with me and work with me and within five sessions it's all gone, they're happy, and they're at least in a functional place where they can move on in society. But that is not what happens. What happens is that people go into a trauma state, and they struggle for months, sometimes years even to get into the place to begin to do the work, let alone actually work through the horribleness of these things and then actually resolve them and move on and find a place to thrive and be vibrant in society. Anybody who works in the area knows that's true.

I wish there was a better answer. I certainly would go take the training if something else was offered to be able to provide quick and effective services to resolve trauma, but we know that nobody in the world has designed that kind of treatment. What we do have is effective, solid, relationship-based treatment that takes time to build a relationship and to use that relationship effectively to move a person from a place of trauma to a place of health. And this government has just made the decision that they do not want to be part of that healing process, that they are going to put limits on families.

First of all, some won't even get it at all because: "Oh, they only witnessed their mother being murdered. They didn't actually get murdered themselves." And others who have been sexually assaulted or by other kinds of assault will be told: "Get over it. Get on with it quickly." This is absolutely not acceptable, and I'm insisting that this government remove this bill, that they do the work to get this right. They haven't even released the report that was done by the working group to examine the benefits of the fund for victims. They won't even give us the information, hiding reports,

as they typically do, and, when they are absolutely forced to, releasing them on Easter weekend. This is the consistent pattern with this government. There is an inherent dishonesty in that kind of behaviour.

If you want people to actually receive the information, you don't release it on Holy Thursday. You release it on Monday morning so that people can read it and respond to it. But I can see that they are just trying to hide yet again the facts that people would use to judge this government as they should be judged, as governments who are not there if you're disabled, not there for you if you're a child in care, not there for you if you're part of a racialized community, not there for you if you are a murdered or missing Indigenous woman, and now not there for you if you are a victim of trauma.

10:00

This government needs to remove that 45-day limit now before this bill moves forward. This government needs to increase the actual resources available to families and not limit it to \$1,000. This government must reinstate the financial benefits for all survivors of any kind of victimization, because you are not the judge of how people respond to a traumatic incident. For one person a traumatic incident may not be overwhelming, but for somebody who has had a previous traumatic incident, even a small crime can be triggering of the initial traumatic incident.

I worked with one person who was a bank teller, and someone came in to rob the bank. She wasn't even the one who had the gun pointed at her, but she came into therapy. She was deeply traumatized because she had experienced previous traumas of being victimized as a child, being sexually assaulted, and therefore came back to me, because I helped treat her when she was young, to say that she was struggling again. She's the kind of person that would not get any resources from this government because the gun wasn't pointed at her; she just happened to be in the bank at the time the robbery occurred. But for her it was real trauma because it was an echo of the trauma that she experienced as a child and made her feel vulnerable again, and she needed to come back into therapy in order to go back to that place where she found health and healing. And this government has made the decision that she is not worthy of services, she is not worthy of support.

This government needs to open up the money that is available in the victims of crime fund into new, exploratory ways of treating people and building community around people who have been victimized. There was supposed to be a surplus in this fund until the government raided it, and now the government is denying, put a moratorium on grant applications for new programs to come forward, and there's no reason to do that. You have the money.

As previously stated by one of my peers, oil is at the highest it's been for very many years. You have an abundance of dollars. Now, I know it can't be spent on everything, but you would think that people who are victimized and traumatized would be at least somewhere near the top of priorities. But no. You know what's at the near top of priorities? A war room, which doesn't report on anything and hasn't accomplished anything in many years and spends more money on a daily basis than this program gives to people who have been victimized. This is completely... [interjections] Yes.

Mr. Eggen: Thank you for that. I appreciate – you know, just further to that, let's not forget that the victims of crime fund is funded from resources that are seized from other criminal activities, too, right? So it's not as though it's, like, money that is from oil revenues. Rather, it is money that's accumulated from, let's say, the seizure of assets in a criminal situation.

The Acting Speaker: Hon. member, would you like to respond? You have only about 12 seconds at this stage.

Mr. Feehan: I think I've made my point. I think that the government needs to sit down and look at its decisions from a value-based perspective and to start treating people who are vulnerable with respect.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other members wishing to join in the debate? I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. Schmidt: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise and offer a few comments as well on Bill 20, the Justice Statutes Amendment Act, 2022. Let me first start off by thanking my friend from Edmonton-Rutherford for bringing so much passion to the debate. He has been a fierce advocate for victims of crime and for better treatment of the victims of crime from this government from the very day that he was elected, and I really appreciate the fact that he brings his significant experience as a social worker and a person who was engaged in therapy for people for many, many years. I appreciate that he brings that perspective to the House. It's one that I think is very much needed, and certainly the government would benefit from taking his advice into consideration.

I would also like to say that I appreciated the Member for Edmonton-Rutherford's references to Dickens. I, too, am a fan of Dickens but not Charles Dickens; I'm a fan of Little Jimmy Dickens, whose hit in the 1960s, *May the Bird of Paradise Fly Up Your Nose*, is certainly one of the most outstanding country music songs of all time.

I want to build on the point that my friend from Edmonton-Rutherford was making with respect to the government and how they're treating victims of crime. He did mention that the government has been sitting on the report on missing and murdered Indigenous women for at least three years, and I just want to update the House on the status of the government's response to that report. We had a meeting with the Indigenous Relations ministry at the Public Accounts Committee on Tuesday morning. We questioned officials from the Indigenous Relations ministry on the status of the government's response to that, and they said that they will be responding to that report in the very near future. So I certainly hope that that provides everybody with assurance that the government is taking this issue very seriously, because after three years of waiting for a response, to hear that the response is coming sometime in the near future is not exactly the assurance that people were looking for.

To turn to the issue around how the government has changed the use of the victims of crime fund with this legislation and previous legislation, you know, let me just first state that I think the government has done a good thing in announcing yesterday or maybe the day before – I can't remember exactly when it was announced – the fact that Crown prosecutors are going to get a pay bump so that they are competitive with other lawyers, people working in the field. I think that it's important that we pay Crown prosecutors the salary that they deserve and pay them enough to keep them working for the Crown instead of losing them to other areas of law.

We know that this government has had a serious problem with workforce morale in the Crown prosecutors' office, and I sincerely hope that by increasing the pay, the government will be able to better retain Crown prosecutors, better attract Crown prosecutors. This is a problem that has long existed, that the government has failed to address even though they committed to addressing it in their platform. You know, they promised to hire a whole host of

new Crown prosecutors, yet they have failed for three years to hire the number of Crown prosecutors that the Justice department says that it needs. I hope that by increasing the pay of the Crown prosecutors, this will advance the government's work to attract and retain more Crown prosecutors in the Justice department.

Mr. Speaker, the money that is to be paid to Crown prosecutors, to new Crown prosecutors, to raises for existing Crown prosecutors, should not come from the victims of crime fund, as this government has given itself the power to do. That money should come from general revenue. Victims of crime should be supported by money from the victims of crime fund. I think that it's unfair to take away important supports for victims of crime to pay Crown prosecutors.

The government has an obligation to carry out justice by having an adequate staff of Crown prosecutors and to look after the victims of crime by providing them benefits through the victims of crime fund, and they certainly have the financial wherewithal to achieve both of those objectives simultaneously. There is certainly no cost pressure that the government is facing right now that would prevent them from doing both of those things at the same time. They can keep the money in the victims of crime fund for use by victims of crime and also give a pay increase and hire more Crown prosecutors at the same time. It won't affect their bottom line. They'll still probably run a surplus this year if they did both of those things.

10:10

It's outrageous to me that they would try to achieve their objectives in one area of the Justice department by sacrificing the needs of victims of crime. That's incredibly unfair, especially at the same time as granting profitable corporations a \$4.7 billion tax cut. Why does somebody who has been a witness to murder or a victim of sexual assault have to go without important supports to deal with the trauma that they've suffered while shareholders of insurance companies get to increase their dividends? That's not fair. But this is the way the government continues to prioritize the people of Alberta. If you are an investor, you get every benefit, every support from the government. If you're a victim of crime, you have to fight tooth and nail to get the bare minimum of supports from the government. That's incredibly unfair.

You know, Mr. Speaker, we had a high-profile violent crime occur not too long ago in the constituency of Edmonton-Gold Bar. A young man by the name of Karanveer Sahota was murdered by allegedly seven children while waiting for a bus on his way home from school.

An Hon. Member: It's horrible.

Mr. Schmidt: It is horrible. My heart goes out to his family, who are suffering the pain of that loss.

But what's made it worse, Mr. Speaker, is that if they wanted to apply for support and benefits through the victims of crime fund, they only have 45 days to do it. I can tell you that just from observing how all of this has played out, 45 days is precious little time for a family to access victims of crime funding if they've been in this situation. The logistics of dealing with his hospitalization, the funeral, bringing the family together to mourn his loss: that all takes time and energy. They don't have additional time or the mental energy to worry about whether or not they should apply to the victims of crime fund within 45 days.

Moreover, Mr. Speaker, this crime has victimized hundreds of other students. This kid was murdered in full view of a school of about 900 students. How many of those other students need the support to deal with being a witness to that trauma? Hundreds of them, and there are no supports for them now through the victims of crime fund because they're not eligible. If you're a witness to a

homicide, you no longer qualify for benefits through the victims of crime fund.

Now, maybe people would say: “Well, surely the school must have support for them. Can’t they just talk to the counsellors at school?” The answer is no. On the very day that McNally high school brought in grief counsellors to help these hundreds of students deal with the trauma of witnessing one of their fellow classmates get murdered at a bus stop, that same grief counsellor was given his notice that he was no longer to be employed by the Edmonton public school board. They couldn’t afford to keep him on. How is that fair?

This government has failed that family twice over, failed that family and the students at McNally high school twice over. They’ve told everyone who has been victimized by that crime that they are no longer eligible for benefits, and they’ve taken away the important supports that should be there in the school for these kinds of cases.

And to add insult to injury, Mr. Speaker, when we bring this up in the Legislature, the lack of critical supports for students in Edmonton public schools, the minister denies it, tells us that we’re fearmongering, that what is actually happening and is plain for everybody to see with their own eyes is not happening. I would certainly like the minister to take the time to visit with the students of McNally high school – I’m sure they’d be happy to have her – explain to them the effect that this crime has had on their school community, and tell them the kinds of supports that they need to be able to heal from this, create safer schools, put measures in place to make sure that this doesn’t happen to another McNally high school student ever again. My hope is that by doing that, the minister’s heart would be opened, that she would let go of this story that she continues to tell, that the supports that Edmonton public school students are getting are sufficient, because they’re not, and that she’d reverse the decisions that she’s made to claw back funding from those students.

You know, it’s easy when you sit here in this House, and all you have are the budget documents in front of you, to think that what you’re doing is sufficient to meet the needs of the students, but if the minister were to actually visit McNally school right now, I’m sure that she would come back to this Legislature telling a different story because you can’t not be moved by listening to what the students and the staff have experienced as a result of this, and they need much more support than what they’re getting to get through this, and it’s not coming from anywhere. It’s not coming from the victims of crime fund. It’s not coming from the budget of the Ministry of Education. It’s not coming from anywhere else. Those family members and those students are left completely on their own to deal with this.

My fear, Mr. Speaker, is that if the family of that student and his classmates at McNally high school aren’t able to sufficiently deal with this trauma, that will have a negative outcome, that will lead to further violence and crime. I think we have an opportunity here to stop the cycle of violence, and I hope the government takes it.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other members wishing to join debate? I see the hon. Member for Calgary-East.

Mr. Singh: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I’m pleased to rise today to speak in favour of Bill 20, Justice Statutes Amendment Act, 2022. First, I want to thank the Minister of Justice for bringing this bill forward. Part of the responsibilities of this Legislature is to continuously update current legislation to align with current societal realities and changes in our province and country. This

responsibility is even more important for justice-related legislation, which is required to stay current and effective. This bill is a demonstration of the UCP government’s commitment to ensure that Albertans have access to justice.

10:20

Mr. Speaker, we have read from the bill. One major highlight of Bill 20 is the housekeeping amendments to the Corrections Act, the Justice of the Peace Act, the Missing Persons Act, the Victims of Crime and Public Safety Act, and the Youth Justice Act. I fully support the changes proposed in this bill, which will streamline the appointment process for justices of the peace and clarify the processes for police working cases on missing persons.

There are also changes that will bring provincial legislation in line with changes to Canada’s Criminal Code. Some of these changes include renaming “death benefit” in the Victims of Crime and Public Safety Act to “funeral expense reimbursement.”

We all know the trauma the families and friends of missing persons go through in finding their loved ones. This bill will make it possible for our officers to resolve missing persons cases in a timely manner. Some of this information includes inbound and outbound phone and text records of missing persons as well as a record of their browsing history to help police determine possible places to start looking. The bill also proposes access to signal records from wireless devices which will indicate the possible location of a missing person. This will go a long way to improve the efficiency, effectiveness of police searches for missing persons because they will have more tools at their disposal to work on the missing person’s case.

Administrative changes are also proposed in the Corrections Act amendments, which will ensure that compensation rates of Alberta Parole Board members are set by order in council rather than regulations. These changes will greatly improve the functions of the board and bring them into consistency with other government agencies, boards, and commissions in Alberta.

The bill also proposes to remove administrative bottlenecks in the Justice of the Peace Act to give powers to the Chief Judge to make full- or part-time appointments of justices of the peace. With these changes, the Chief Judge, in accordance with established laws and the approval of the Judicial Council, will have the flexibility in judges and masters in chambers for new assignments for the remainder of their appointments either on a full-time or a part-time basis.

With the passage of this bill there will be efficient and effective court administration. Mr. Speaker, it is important for us to examine our laws and justice system and look for ways to improve them by removing what slows down the justice system. This proposed legislation puts forward a number of changes that will modernize Alberta’s justice system by removing redundant clauses and correctly adjusting dated references in existing legislation. The new legislation will modernize the wording of this legislation and bring it up to speed with the current realities in Alberta’s justice system. The bill proposes changes to Alberta’s justice system, and it is pleasing to note the proposed bill will significantly align Alberta’s justice system with other jurisdictions in Canada. In my view, the administrative and housekeeping reforms included in this bill will help Alberta to update legislation that govern this justice system and bring relief to Albertans.

The job of government is fundamentally to respond to calls from the public for changes in different areas of society and to advance the well-being of its people. This UCP government is doing precisely that by introducing transformative adjustments to Alberta’s justice system that will make responsible stakeholders perform better. The administrative changes that are introduced,

although minor, are very important in order for justice-related legislation to continue to run smoothly for Albertans both now and into the future.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I will adjourn the debate. Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there – I see the hon. member for . . .

Some Hon. Members: He moved to adjourn debate.

The Acting Speaker: Oh, he moved to adjourn debate. Sorry.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Bill 22

Electricity Statutes (Modernizing Alberta's Electricity Grid) Amendment Act, 2022

[Adjourned debate May 3: Mr. Turton]

The Acting Speaker: Are there any members looking to join debate on this one? I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. Schmidt: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to offer a few comments on Bill 22, the justice – Justice Statutes Amendment Act, 2022: that was the last bill that we were talking about. This is something else entirely. I'm sure that the name is incredibly clever, reflecting – the Electricity Statutes Amendment Act, 2022, of course.

I think that the government is making some positive moves here in modernizing the electricity grid. Certainly, the legislative changes that are being allowed here to allow for energy storage to be incorporated into the grid and function on our energy market are positive and much-needed moves to modernizing the energy grid. As my friend from Lethbridge-West said in her comments on this bill a few days ago, any forward-looking government would recognize the need to decarbonize its electricity system, and by enhancing the capacity for energy storage on that electricity system, I think that we are moving in the right direction with regard to that.

We have a long way to go, though, Mr. Speaker, when it comes to decarbonizing our electricity grid. Even though our government accelerated the phase-out of coal-fired electricity, the bulk of that electricity generation was picked up by natural gas generation, which, to its credit, is certainly a cleaner fuel than coal, but it is still quite greenhouse gas intensive. Eventually we need to get to a net-zero electricity grid, and in fact our party has committed to achieving that objective by 2035 should we be elected to government.

10:30

You know, it's interesting, Mr. Speaker, that on the topic of coal-fired electricity phase-out, the associate minister of natural gas and a number of his colleagues on Executive Council have blamed the accelerated coal phase-out for the current electricity price spike, which makes absolutely no sense, especially when it's followed up by the minister's claim that had we only looked at the issue of so-called clean coal, we wouldn't be in the mess we are in today when it comes to electricity prices.

Well, Mr. Speaker, nothing could be further from the truth. The fact of the matter is that had any government pursued so-called clean coal technology, the price of electricity generation would have skyrocketed because the costs of capturing carbon emissions and storing them underground at a coal-fired electricity power plant are astronomical. There is no way that there would be any feasible way to capture those emissions and store them underground and provide electricity at a price that's lower than it is today had any government allowed coal-fired generation to pursue that option.

Moreover, there are a couple of examples where so-called clean coal technology has failed spectacularly. I think it was not too long ago that Mississippi closed down a so-called clean coal electricity generation plant because the technology that they tried to employ there did not work. So now the ratepayers in that state, in that jurisdiction, are on the hook for a massive technological failure of a huge bet that went bad.

So when the associate minister of electricity says that he wishes that the government would've pursued clean coal technology, what he's saying is that he wanted electricity prices to go up even more than they have already. It's completely outlandish. What I suspect that the government wishes they could've done is to allow coal-fired generation to continue apace without any significant greenhouse gas emissions mitigation measures in place. That's not even something that the Harper government in Ottawa supported, nor is it something that the planet could've survived.

I'm exceptionally proud of our government's record of phasing out coal-fired power. In fact, even though, when we embarked down that road, we were told by power generators that it was impossible, it could never be done, a couple of years later TransAlta and Capital Power . . .

Mr. Jean: We're paying for it.

Mr. Schmidt: We're not paying for it. We're not paying for it.

Mr. Jean: Yes, we are. You haven't checked your heating bill.

Mr. Schmidt: The Member for Fort . . .

The Acting Speaker: Hon. members, through the chair. The only person with the call right now is the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. Schmidt: It's interesting to me, Mr. Speaker, that an actual member of the Harper government is taking issue with a decision that his own government made, and what the member fails to recognize is what additional costs the people of Alberta would have paid if we hadn't made that decision. He's laughing because I think he suspects that climate change isn't real and it doesn't have actual costs to the people of Alberta, but it does. It will, and it will be borne by his constituents if we – those greenhouse gas emission reductions had to come from somewhere, and they came from the coal-fired power plant. The Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo – sorry. Not the Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo. That guy can't tell his left foot from his right foot most of the time.

Speaker's Ruling Insulting Language

The Acting Speaker: Hon. member, I think that that was a direct insulting attack on an individual member. I'd ask that you withdraw the comment.

Debate Continued

Mr. Schmidt: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Member for Fort McMurray-Lac La Biche needs to recognize that if those greenhouse gas emissions didn't come from the coal sector, they would've come directly from the oil sands sector, which is something that he's absolutely opposed to.

We need to recognize that climate change is a serious and imminent threat and that we need to do something. We need to take meaningful action, and our government did that. We shut down

coal-fired power in an attempt to do our part to reduce Canada's greenhouse gas emissions. I'm looking forward to hearing the Member for Fort McMurray-Lac La Biche's greenhouse gas mitigation plan. If he thinks that he could do it cheaper, without making the kinds of impacts that our government made, then he's welcome to present his plan. I eagerly await that.

The minister has also claimed that skyrocketing power prices have been the result of what he says are our government's overbuild of the transmission sector. I have two things to say about that. First of all, if the associate minister is so concerned about the overbuild of the electricity transmission sector, then he should maybe take that up with the Minister of Municipal Affairs. Ask him why that decision was made, because that's exactly who made it, Redford-era PCs. In fact, I – the rest of them are gone. You know, former member of this House Joe Anglin made an entire political career on the issue of the overbuild of the transmission sector, and the PCs laughed him off at the time. So they're the ones who hold responsibility for that.

Let me also say that having lived through the hottest summer on record and then one of the longest cold snaps on record, just in the last eight, 10 months here in Alberta, I am thankful that we had the capacity in the electricity sector to generate and transmit that much power. If we hadn't, there would've been people freezing to death in their homes this winter, and there would've been people who suffered, who died from the heat because they didn't have access to air conditioning. We know that people did die from heat. Hundreds of people in Calgary died from heat exposure because they didn't have access to appropriate air conditioning.

Mr. Schow: Are we going to buy them air conditioners like we're going to buy them roofs?

The Acting Speaker: Hon. members, the only member with the call right now is the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar. I would remind all members of the House, though, that if they do have comments that they would like to make, it would be through the chair, or perhaps I think that there's always the opportunity to do an intervention as well – right? – but if you also want to have conversations, perhaps you can take them to the lounge.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar with three minutes and 49 seconds remaining.

10:40

Mr. Schmidt: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Member for Cardston-Siksika asked me if I think the government should buy people air conditioning. I certainly do, at least in long-term care facilities. There are hundreds of people in long-term care facilities who had to withstand . . . [interjections]

The Acting Speaker: Hon. members, I think the next time I stand up, I'm going to call members out and say: perhaps you would like to go have a conversation in the lounge.

We have the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar. If you could please stick to the bill at hand, Bill 22, that would be very appreciated; three and 34 remaining.

Mr. Schmidt: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Of course, all of the comments that I've made have been directly applicable to the electricity system. We need air conditioning in our long-term care facilities because senior citizens will die if they continue to be exposed to the kinds of heat that we saw at the end of June and the beginning of July last year. That is a fact, and the government has a responsibility to look after those people, to make sure that they lead lives that are as good as can be. If the Member for Cardston-Siksika would like to visit some of the long-term care facilities in

Edmonton-Gold Bar and see the kind of conditions that people are living in currently, I am more than happy to give him a tour.

We have some serious issues to deal with in the electricity system. I think the government is making the right move in requiring distribution owners to provide long-term plans because upgrading our distribution system will be critical to electrifying the future. Speaking to people with experience in this area, the city of Edmonton is not equipped right now to handle the massive electrification of the transportation sector, for example. We just can't under the current plan, so I'm glad that the government is bringing forward a requirement for distribution owners to plan for that future because just in the transportation sector alone we are undergoing massive change.

The sale of electric vehicles is skyrocketing right now and would actually be even higher if we had a supply chain that didn't limit the production of those vehicles. But if people in Edmonton were to all suddenly shift to electric vehicles, the distribution system would not be able to handle it as it's currently constructed, so I'm glad that the government is requiring distribution owners to address those kinds of problems, and I look forward to everybody in Edmonton-Gold Bar being able to choose to purchase an electric vehicle and use that for transportation if they want.

An Hon. Member: What do you drive?

Mr. Schmidt: Right now – what do I drive? I drive a minivan. It's the sexiest vehicle on the road, thank you very much. I'm happy to take the member on a cruise through Edmonton-Gold Bar if he wants to enhance his cred there. I can tell you that you get a lot of attention driving down the streets of Edmonton-Gold Bar in a minivan.

Mr. Schow: Playing some polka music?

Mr. Schmidt: Yes, absolutely. The Member for Cardston-Siksika can choose the polka record of his choice to listen to as we make that cruise through the . . .

Mr. Bilous: It's an eight-track.

Mr. Schmidt: Yeah. I had to have my minivan modified to include an eight-track player so that I could listen to my old polka eight-tracks.

The point is, Mr. Speaker, that I think the government is moving ever so slowly in the right direction to decarbonize our electricity system and to upgrade, but I don't think they're going far enough, and they're not being honest about some of the cost pressures.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Next I see the hon. Member for Calgary-East has risen to debate.

Mr. Singh: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to express my support for this significant legislation that will modernize our electricity laws, Bill 22, the Electricity Statutes (Modernizing Alberta's Electricity Grid) Amendment Act, 2022. I would like to thank the Minister of Energy and the Associate Minister of Natural Gas and Electricity for taking this important initiative to ensure our system is able to meet the fast-emerging technological innovations and promote investor confidence through sustained focus on regulatory clarity and efficiency.

Alberta's energy-only market continues to attract new investment and competition. It is a good thing that we maintained this type of market through Bill 18 in 2019 after consulting with a cross-section of stakeholders. During that consultation process stakeholders

voiced strong support for the energy-only market, saying that it offers structural and administrative simplicity and has a proven track record for providing both affordable electricity and a reliable supply of electricity.

Investors expressed confidence and willingness to invest in an energy-only market, saying that it is established and understood, which offers greater certainty regarding its future performance. Technological and industrial developments continue to evolve rapidly, producing new challenges and opportunities as well.

We are seeing a transition from centralized to decentralized generation systems and a baseload to intermittent electricity generation. Alberta's electricity system, like many globally, is seeing the way that electricity producers and consumers interact with and use the electricity grid evolve as innovative technologies and changing consumer behaviours are increasingly asking a one-way-flow power system to operate in a bidirectional, or two-way, manner. This can also be seen from the significant rise in distributed energy resources, including distributed generation, generation like solar panels, small natural gas fuelled generators, energy storage, electric vehicles, and controllable loads.

With these emerging advancements occurring, Bill 22 will reinforce our energy-only market and maintain market competitiveness. It will ensure consumers have safe, reliable, and affordable electricity while promoting investor confidence through regulatory efficiency, policy clarity, and removal of needless barriers.

More and more consumers have expressed interest in a self-supply with export system. The Alberta Utilities Commission expressed that there are limited circumstances where the owner of a generating unit is allowed to consume electricity produced from that generating unit on their own property while also exporting the electricity produced by the generating unit for exchange through the Power Pool. Where no exemptions apply, the owner of a generating unit is prohibited from using that unit to supply on-site load and export electricity generated for exchange through the Power Pool.

The AUC recognizes that current legislation was enacted prior to the recent increase in distributed generation and the affordability of economic, small-scale generating units. Having said that, Mr. Speaker, in late 2019 consultation on the issue of power plant self-supply and export was made, and the majority of the 33 submissions received were in favour of the option of having unlimited self-supply and export, which requires a change to the statutory scheme and may require changes to existing transmission and distribution tariff structures.

10:50

A second round of consultation was made in 2020, which was focused on the market and tariff implications of unlimited self-supply and export. The AUC published a discussion paper which included a summary of the summations received from the said consultations. With thoughtful consideration of all the relevant matters, including the result of the consultations, and to ensure ongoing fairness relative to the transmission cost of uneconomic bypass, this bill will enable unlimited self-supply with export, which can assist industrial and commercial operators in managing electricity costs, promote the reliability of the integrated electricity system, and reduce emissions. It will clarify tariff treatment of self-supply with export projects in the spirit of fairness and ensure that these projects will align with an efficient, fair, competitive electricity market.

Currently, Mr. Speaker, Alberta's system is based on companies that generate electricity as their core business plus limited exceptions such as industrial system designations and small-scale generation. Commercial and industrial businesses who would like to generate electricity and export it to the grid are currently not

permitted to do so. By enabling self-supply with export, everyone who wants to generate their own electricity will be able to do so and export the excess electricity to the grid and will pay their fair share of the overall system costs from which they benefit, including transmission.

Increased self-supply with export is not expected to increase electricity costs for Albertans. Rather, the additional generation would help stabilize energy prices and encourage electricity market competition. With greater competition consumers will expect more options and different offers. Also, the system is designed to ensure that those participating pay their fair share of system costs, which, in turn, would keep the system costs stable for consumers.

In addition, Mr. Speaker, it will explicitly provide the definition for an energy storage resource, which is lacking in the current legislative framework, inadvertently limiting its application. It is aimed to provide clarity to regulators and ensure certainty to investors. It will also identify parameters of users, ownership, and cost recovery. Over the past several years there has been an increased interest in energy storage projects in Alberta, particularly in the last couple of years. The significant development of new large-scale renewable projects has resulted in substantial interest in new energy storage projects.

Canada's largest solar energy project is under way in Vulcan county, which attracts big investors like Amazon, apart from their announced investment in a solar energy project in Newell county, east of Calgary, which will produce over 195,000 megawatt hours, MWh, of renewable energy. That is enough to power more than 18,000 Alberta homes for a year. So as we promote diversification of our economy, we have to modernize our legislation and systems for us to address growing development.

Energy storage is an evolving technology with potential benefits for all aspects of Alberta's electric energy system. Energy storage has many different attributes and, depending on the application, may look like generation, load, transmission, or distribution. Energy storage technology is also scalable, resulting in deployment to the smaller residential scale or all the way to the larger commercial projects.

Bill 22 will also begin winding down the Balancing Pool by redistributing its remaining responsibilities and laying the groundwork for dissolution in the coming years. Established to support Alberta's fair, efficient, and openly competitive electricity market, the Balancing Pool's primary role of managing fixed-price deals with electricity producers ended in 2020. Actions taken by the previous government resulted in the Balancing Pool losing 1.34 billion of taxpayer dollars.

Another positive impact that the bill introduces, Mr. Speaker, is the establishment of a long-term planning framework to modernize Alberta's distribution system. Grid modernization is needed to support the evolving system, and should there be no context of long-term planning now, unexpected costs may result in the future. Proper consideration must be made respecting the needs of rural electrification associations or disconnected municipalities. Suitable development of road maps and consideration of storage, electric vehicle charging, energy efficiency, and distributed generation must also be made with minimal technical standards.

To ensure accomplishment of these needed modernizations of distribution policies, this bill will authorize the minister to guide planning frameworks through regulations. Alberta's current policy framework does not require distribution companies to proactively plan for adoption of distributed energy resources and does not require distribution facility owners to consider the system benefits which these resources could provide.

However, proactive planning of grid modernization could provide for better cost management and improve customer outcomes.

Legislative amendments are required to ensure the distribution system can enable the development of distributed energy resources in an orderly and efficient manner. It is expected that a transparent and co-ordinated long-term planning framework will support an orderly and cost-efficient transition to a modernized grid that will integrate more distributed energy resources.

With that in mind, Mr. Speaker, the government seeks to improve the lives of all Albertans. Alberta's recovery plan is set on an unprecedented path towards a new, innovative, and diversified energy future, recognizing that the development of sustainable forms of energy will become more of a driver of investment moving forward. It is the provincial government's ongoing, aggressive response to the impact of the pandemic and distribution in global energy markets.

As we strive to lead the country in economic growth, we are seeing new businesses and more investors coming to our province as we promote diversification. That is why the changes that this bill carries . . .

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any members wishing to join debate? I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview has risen.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise and speak to Bill 22, the Electricity Statutes (Modernizing Alberta's Electricity Grid) Amendment Act, 2022. I have a number of comments on the bill but also want to talk a little bit about Alberta's electricity system as a whole, going back to the mid-2000s. Really, that is where we need to go back to to truly understand why today Albertans are paying such a high price for electricity.

11:00

But I'll begin with some comments about the bill. I have a couple of questions, actually, for the minister. I know that the minister brought forward a bill similar to this. I believe it was last fall. I'm curious why it got pulled then to be reintroduced now. I appreciate that there are some changes between the two bills. I believe the first iteration of this bill didn't deal at all with the Balancing Pool and that this iteration does, but I'm just curious why that was, if the minister, through Committee of the Whole, could walk us through that process.

What this bill does I'm largely in support of, Mr. Speaker, as far as providing the ability for . . . [interjection] Oh, I don't even have to wait for Committee of the Whole. I'll give way to the minister.

Mr. Nally: Yeah. Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the hon. member for making way. That's a good question. We had this in another iteration. While it was in Committee of the Whole, we had some stakeholders that had some concerns that they had already made some investments based on the current climate of regulation in the industry. So if you go back to the bill, we put some amendments in there that allow and address those companies that had made investments so that they won't be unfairly punished with new regulation. It essentially gives them a path to industrial system designation. I don't know the exact number, because it's always fluid, but it's around 18 companies in that position. Then, as you know, we prorogued, so we had to start again, and Bill 86 has now become Bill 22.

There was a second question, and it escapes me. But it'll come to me, and I'll stand up on another intervention later on. Thanks, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Bilous: Okay. Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and through you to the minister, I do thank him for his comments and response. It's quite

nice to actually have an exchange where we're talking about policy, so that was quite enjoyable. I appreciate that and recognize that that's a very good reason to pull the bill back, recognizing that companies had made investments.

I know for a fact – I'm curious, and if the minister has an answer to this, I welcome him to stand up, and I'll take his interjection. I know Amazon's AWS has made an announcement to invest significant dollars in Alberta. It'll take a period of about 14 years to get the full investment, but I know they've already begun. In fact, I found it fascinating to learn that their three facilities are powered by solar, so they've invested significantly in a number of different solar farms. I'm curious if – I would imagine and hope that this bill in its current iteration has obviously recognized that investment to ensure that that will be accounted for.

I found it fascinating that Amazon – and I sat down with AWS. I found it fascinating that their plan to go – you know, using renewables to power all of their facilities by the mid-20s is incredibly ambitious, but kudos to them, Mr. Speaker, for doing that. Their three facilities that they are building are all going to be powered by renewables. I think that that's very good news, and I think that as much as we can as legislators encourage folks to generate is good to see. [interjection] I see the minister has risen. I will give way again.

[Mrs. Frey in the chair]

The Acting Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Nally: Thank you, Madam Speaker, and thank you for giving way. To answer the question – and I won't speak to specific company specifics – I'll say that the legislation was written so that if a company was doing self-supply with export on January 1, 2022, they are the ones that will have that path to ISD status, industrial system designation. If there were companies that started doing it after that, then they will not have that same path to ISD, but they certainly would be welcome to apply for it.

The good news with respect to the company that you mentioned – and again, well, I'll go back to not using company names. Any company, whether they're in business before or after January 1, 2022, will be able to produce electricity in theory for themselves cheaper than they could buy it on the open market. That's a competitive advantage for the province, why it's an investment attraction tool. They could sell the excess to the grid. They will in fact be able to do that. It's a great business model.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: I'll just remind the member that you have an extra two minutes because of the interventions, so you have 13 minutes left.

Mr. Bilous: Great. Thank you very much, Madam Speaker, and through you to the minister: thank you for that response. That is great news.

I do agree with the minister that this is an additional competitive advantage for Alberta as far as companies being able to generate their own supply and then sell excess to the system. I don't know how many jurisdictions have enabled that, but I would imagine that Alberta is one of the few that provides that ability to companies. So that's wonderful news.

As I said at the outset, I don't have really any opposition to this bill. Again, providing the ability for producers is fantastic. Now, I know that energy storage – one of the issues is that it was previously undefined. It's because up until recently energy storage was – well, it just wasn't possible, you know, to store significant amounts of energy to be used later on. Again, of course, with evolving technology

that's changed significantly. So it's good to see that our electricity statutes legislation is being amended.

I do want to talk a little bit about – I know, you know, Madam Speaker, that when we go back and forth, there are comments that are made as far as the current reasons for why the current price of electricity is so high. I just want to comment on that because it goes back to actually before my time in this Chamber. But also when I first was elected in this Chamber, there were a number of debates that occurred about the transmission lines being built. I'm even going to reference a couple of articles that were written a long time ago.

You know, Madam Speaker, back in – well, let's start in 2009 with Bill 50 under the PCs. That legislation was completely contentious. In fact, my colleague referenced Joe Anglin. Joe did make a political career out of fighting against the government's incredible overbuild in the electricity system. It started back in 2009, when the PC government brought in legislation that removed the obligation the government had for public hearings around new power lines.

Of course, when we're building power lines throughout Alberta, where are they being built? They're being built through rural Alberta, through people's yards and acreages and farms and ranches. So there were a lot of very angry Albertans. In fact, I remember the Member for Edmonton-North West telling me stories about going to town halls where Albertans were irate with the government about this bill, Bill 50. I encourage members to comb the media if they're interested to see just how upset Albertans were with the fact that the government removed this obligation to consult.

That was one of the first steps that the government did in the overbuild of the transmission lines. I'm going to give a shout-out to our former leader and my former colleague Brian Mason, who in 2011 was sounding the alarm bells that the transmission lines that the government claimed were necessary to prevent rolling brownouts, which was hogwash, Madam Speaker – it was not true. That was not the reason for the massive overbuild. The massive overbuild was, in fact, because the government was planning to sell electricity down in the States but didn't want to admit that.

11:10

You know, back in 2011 – and I believe my colleague the Member for Lethbridge-West has already tabled these articles, because I know she's referenced them – Brian Mason was warning Albertans that their power bills were going to double because of this massive overbuild in the electricity system, and it wasn't just Mr. Mason that was calling it. He looked to a study that was done by the Alberta Direct Connect Consumer Association, and the study indicated that power bills were set to jump 65 per cent. That was in I believe it was an April article. Then, again, in May another news article talked about how much power bills were going to jump. I can tell you, Madam Speaker, that I encourage government members to look back at *Hansard* because I'm also on the record in this Chamber talking about how that massive overbuild was not only costing Alberta taxpayers at the time but that it was going to cost them on their monthly bills.

Again, this started, you know, before my term in 2012, but this continued through 2012. As these commitments were already made, funding contracts were already signed – I know one of the members earlier had asked: why, when we formed government in 2015, didn't we cancel it? Well, the answer is quite simple. The contracts were already signed. The money was already out the door. To cancel them at that point would have cost Alberta taxpayers even more without the lines being completed. So it was a lose-lose situation that we were in. That's a bit of history that Albertans need to be reminded of, Madam Speaker.

The other part. When we talk about the coal phase-out and the transition off coal: that file I was heavily involved with when we were government. In fact, I toured the province and spoke to Albertans in town halls throughout the province. What I reminded Albertans about: yes, we were accelerating the phase-out of coal. Companies had a 12-year runway, from 2018 to 2030, to phase out coal, to transition to natural gas. Now, interestingly, companies have accelerated their phase-out, and in fact I believe Capital Power will have their final facility converted by next year. Now, I may have misspoke by a year, but they're going to be completed very soon. TransAlta is not far behind.

I had conversations with these companies about when people talk about clean coal and technology to bolt onto existing power facilities. The example, of course, that everyone likes to use is in Saskatchewan. The cost of that is prohibitive to the point that companies told me: it's less expensive, it makes more sense for us to transition to gas right now rather than invest in an expensive technology to try to clean the emissions as they're coming out.

The other thing that's interesting, Madam Speaker, is that Alberta had 18 – I'm trying to think of the term. But our regulations affected six out of the 18 because regulations under the Harper government in 2012 phased out 12 of the 18 facilities. The difference is that that government provided zero supports for workers, for communities, and for the companies to transition. Zero supports. Now, I'd love to hear from the members of this House who were part of the Harper government that brought forward those regulations. In fact, it was the Premier in his former role who was a member of cabinet, a part of the decision to phase out 12 of 18 coal-fired facilities. So when the government jumps up and screams at the NDP for phasing out six, their own leader, the Premier, and the newly elected member, who were part of the Harper caucus, phased out 12 of 18 coal-fired facilities with zero supports.

So when the members opposite yell at the opposition for phasing out the six, the runway we gave them was longer, and we had supports. We had millions of dollars set aside for retraining, for those that were close to retirement to be able to top up their pension so they wouldn't lose out on pension dollars, because the facilities, when they transitioned to gas, required fewer workers, about a third fewer, and supports for the companies to be able to transition. Now, the government shouldn't decry at all about supports for industry when they, too, have . . .

Ms Lovely: What about the people of Forestburg? What about all those people in Forestburg who lost their jobs?

Mr. Bilous: . . . when the supports that we provided . . .

The Acting Speaker: Hon. members, I hate to interrupt the Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview, but if we're going to have conversations, I would prefer that we take them to the lounge.

Member, you can continue.

Mr. Bilous: Yes. Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. The member that was asking about the facility in Forestburg: that facility was phased out under the Harper regulations, not under the Alberta NDP, so it's a great example of how the government uses misinformation to try to blame our government when the reality is that she should be asking that question to the Premier because it was his regulations.

Now, again, Madam Speaker, I'm encouraging Albertans and members of this Chamber to go visit *Hansard* for not just the Alberta Legislature. Go look at the federal *Hansard*, and members will see that it was the Harper government that phased out 12 of the 18 coal-fired facilities. That is a fact. That is not disputable. That's not an opinion of mine; that happened, factually. Yes, we brought

forward regulations to phase out the remaining six of 18 coal-fired facilities. That is also a fact. They had a long runway with supports to help them convert. So the difference between the Harper government and the two sitting MLAs that were part of that government and the NDP government is that we had supports for those communities. I sat down with the mayor of Forestburg, I sat down with councillors and reeves of all of the coal-affected communities, and we asked them: what supports do they need so that their communities can remain vibrant? Then we provided those supports.

So I won't be lectured by government members about how decisions that we made impacted their communities. I recognize that it impacted their communities, but that's why we were there to support them through their transition.

The Acting Speaker: Any other hon. members wishing to speak? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

Mr. Feehan: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I appreciate the opportunity to speak to Bill 22. I relish any opportunity to see the government correcting themselves, having initially entered into this process last term and now coming back to fix things up. I actually appreciated the comments from the associate minister of natural gas as to the reason why. It's always nice to be able to offer some support to the government when they make a decision that I think is good.

11:20

I was hoping that given the interim time, given the reason, that they had suggested, that they wanted to make a change, they might have done a little bit more, but I certainly like the direction that we're going here. I'm always wishing that the government would dig in a bit more and kind of get the work done, but I certainly want to commend them for kind of catching up with the rest of the world in terms of moving toward a better electricity grid, making sure that we are providing the infrastructure necessary for the future. We know that the future is certainly going to be a lot more about electricity and a lot less about coal.

[The Speaker in the chair]

As the previous speaker suggested, you know, the movement away from coal is something that is not actually a partisan idea. As was mentioned, it was actually initiated in Canada under the Harper Conservative government and continued with us. The major difference, of course, is that we actually did something to facilitate the movement forward in a positive way both for people who worked in the industry and for institutions that are involved in the transition whereas the Harper government simply didn't do that with the first 12 coal plants that they shut down.

Now, we know it's very difficult, and we know that it's easy for local MLAs to kind of blame the government when people go through difficult times, but I just want to, you know, reflect on the fact that the Conservatives often suggest that people just need to learn how to retrain themselves and catch a new job. In fact, I think we had an announcement out of the Finance minister's office recently that if you don't like the job you have now, you should just get a better one. We certainly know that the stance from the Conservative side of the House is that things change, economies change, and people just need to fend for themselves, yet here they are in the House often complaining, as we just heard from the Member for Camrose sort of chattering in the background with the last speaker, that individuals were hurt. It's funny that the government suddenly is concerned about that when they haven't been concerned about it with any of the other major transitions that have happened in society over the last number of years.

Moving beyond that, let's talk about the positives that I see moving forward here. I certainly like the move toward electrification being done in a way which is responsible and inclusive and forward thinking, future oriented. I know that it certainly was the direction that we had taken on this side of the House, both when we were in government and currently, in that we had had since we first came into government a very extensive climate leadership plan, that was ably brought forward by the then environment minister, which actually made some huge steps forward in our electrical grid and our joining the rest of the world in doing two very important things; that is, creating work and industry here in the province of Alberta and taking care of the environment simultaneously, which I think was quite effectively done under the climate leadership plan under the previous environment minister.

There were some real specific benefits that came from that kind of a plan. I was very happy to see the renewable energy program auction for provision of energy into the electrical grid, for renewable energies, and I can tell you that as someone who was watching that bid happening for the very first time and wondering what kind of a price we would get out of it, we were ecstatic to see the price that was being offered by international corporations to provide electricity in the province of Alberta at a rate that was actually better than many other facilities such as coal or even natural gas and all being done by wind, which had multiple benefits.

One, of course, is the intended benefit, and that is to make the shift toward renewable energies, because we certainly care for our children and our children's future and we love to see anything that's done to ensure that we can decarbonize the environment and provide for our children to have a good life, as we ourselves have been able to have. Unfortunately, we've kind of set them up a little bit with the climate, and we need to do something significant about that.

Not only was I thrilled with the movement forward because of the environmental benefits of it, but I also was thrilled because we really gave a boost to Alberta's renewable energy sector. The massive amount of investment that suddenly came into the province of Alberta because we were moving on these renewables and were providing long-term stable contracts in a competitive bid process is quite significant. The benefits for Albertans are that many jobs were created in the construction of these wind farms in southern Alberta, a place where jobs were quite needed. Of course, many people were able to begin businesses associated with the construction process and were able to enter into the economy in a really positive way that is both environmental and economically successful. We were thrilled to see that kind of movement forward.

Of course, what we've subsequently seen is continued investment, because we knew from our experience with the oil sands that if the government makes an initial investment, gets things going, it often stimulates the investment from the market. And exactly as Peter Lougheed did with the oil sands, we did with wind turbines in southern Alberta, and we were successful in very much the same way. I'm glad to see this is growing. I'm glad to see it's very successful.

Again, not only was I happy about the environment, not only was I happy about the jobs and the investment, but I was happy because in the second round of the renewable energy program bid process we made a requirement that you must involve First Nations communities in the bid process. We went through, you know, a very detailed conversation with the First Nations communities, saying: how much? If we made it too high, nobody would be able to bid in because they just simply wouldn't have the money or only those already wealthy nations would be able to bid in. If we made it too low, of course, you begin to wonder how much influence they'll

actually have. We certainly wanted them to be at the table properly as full partners in the process.

So we came to an agreement as to what that level would be, and we then sat back and wondered: now, will this change the bids that are coming in? Will it change the prices that we were able to obtain? Lo and behold, it did not. We had virtually the same price come in in the bids that required First Nations partnership. That was an excellent outcome, not only excellent because we were continuing the good work that was done from the original round of the REP program, but it expanded the work by making sure that First Nations were beneficiaries of the movement into the future in this province, were not left behind. They have all too often been left behind in the history of Alberta.

As a result, we actually kind of coincidentally, to be honest, had nations from all three of our treaty areas benefit from this program: the Blood Tribe in Treaty 7, the Paul band in Treaty 6, and the Sawridge band First Nation in Treaty 8. We saw the benefits spread throughout the province, not just in the southern part of the province, and we saw an opportunity for First Nations to build their equity, to build their role in the economy in this province, and to do good things for citizens in this province, as we should always be making sure that they have the opportunity to do.

It was really a successful process and one that I think, you know, would have been nice to have continued and moved forward on because we know that the world is moving in that direction. It's not a left-right issue. Some of the most well-known right-wing financial groups in the world, like BlackRock, for example, are very clear that they want to move in this direction. They see it as the future of the world, and they are actually making massive investment decisions based on exactly those principles of ensuring that as we move forward, we move forward into the new economy and not the economy of the 1970s, and that will benefit all of society not only here in Alberta but around the world.

11:30

Our people are already experiencing the horrible effects of climate change. I was extremely concerned about people living in India over the last few weeks, where temperatures were hitting well over 60 degrees Celsius at one point in some areas, and people literally were dying of heat because they were too exposed to it without having any ability to respond.

We're going to see more of that. All of the research indicates that that is the direction that we're heading, that we're going to see more climate disasters and that that's going to not only be horrendous for the people who experience it but is also going to be very, very concerning for economies around the world, who are going to have to adapt to it, so it is responsible for governments to make the choice to adapt to it now so that the big financial hit doesn't come at the last second, when too much work is required to move forward and we just simply do not have the resources to do the things we have to do. Doing it now is the right thing, so I certainly think that there are some great movements forward here.

I was also very proud of working with the Indigenous climate leadership program in my ministry, where we were able to see a massive investment in solar and connection to the grid. I have been down to Montana band to see their over one megawatt system. I've been down to Samson band to see their over one megawatt system. I haven't, unfortunately, been able to return to the Mikisew up in Fort Chip, but I know that their solar system is there and it's actually replacing some diesel, which is one of the worst forms of energy generation. Of course, I've been to many, many other bands, like Little Red and Tallcree, where other aspects like solar panels on the roofs of buildings and the building in Tallcree of their new school on environmental principles were all made possible through the

decisions of having a comprehensive climate leadership plan. I certainly wish this government would actually develop a comprehensive climate leadership plan, would actually plan for the future both economically and environmentally. They have not, so quite disappointing.

The one piece of this bill that I was kind of hopeful for seeing a little bit about was storage, because, of course, that is going to be a major part of the movement forward. I just wish that more had been done to actually provide resources or to establish mechanisms for the development of storage techniques and so on. There are very many varieties that are to be discussed.

I know the government has complained about the overbuild in the electrical system, but that has been well responded to by the Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview. I also want to remind the government that an overbuilt system actually is in itself a storage facility, and they themselves have put forward legislation to ensure that that is recognized, so it seems ironic that they complain yet actually have legislation that supports it.

Overall, I just want to say that I look forward to a future in which we build the economy of Alberta by recognizing where we are going. You know, the famous Gretzky statement "Go to where the puck is going and not to where it has been" is always a good message for governments. Too often this government is going back to an economy that was quite positive and significant in the 1970s but is not going to be the economy of the 2070s. We want to get ourselves in line. We want to move forward, and I certainly want to support this government in any of their legislation that does help move us forward.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Hon. members, are there others wishing to join in the debate? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs.

Ms Goehring: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise this morning to speak to Bill 22, Electricity Statutes (Modernizing Alberta's Electricity Grid) Amendment Act, 2022. I have to say that, you know, as a child I grew up in a home where we frequently spoke about electricity. My dad started to work with what was then Calgary Power in the '70s, then transitioned to TransAlta, and then after TransAlta transitioned to Fortis. So when I was a kid, electricity was something that my dad was very passionate about and something that we talked about quite frequently. I grew up in Whitecourt, and that's where he worked with TransAlta. Because we were a small community, many of my science teachers throughout the years asked my dad to come in to provide some sort of electricity education for me and my peers, and it was quite exciting for me as a kid because I got to really understand how electricity is distributed. My dad was a lineman, so we often got to go out and watch him climb poles and work on lines. So talking about electricity now as an adult is something that I feel kind of nostalgic about, I guess.

[Mrs. Frey in the chair]

When we're talking about being able to modernize the electricity grid, I have a general understanding of what the province looks like in terms of electricity and the distribution and the DFOs that are part of this province and, really, all of those Albertans that rely on those DFOs when they're looking at their energy. When I see that we're moving forward with, you know, modernizing our electricity, I think it's a huge step.

I know that this was previously introduced by this government, I believe, and it didn't go forward. It was abandoned in the last session, and now, you know, we're seeing it again today. I think that there's so much in this legislation that I can support. Anything

that looks at ways that we can modernize Alberta's electricity grid is a positive thing, and if implemented correctly, this could really have a positive impact on Albertans and the way that they are able to access electricity.

I know I'm really proud of the work that we did as government when it came to supporting a renewable energy sector. I saw many of my neighbours install the solar panels on their roofs. You know, it's something that we talk about in this province when it comes to alternative renewable energy, and I think that there's quite an appetite to look at ways to do that. Some of it is for perhaps cost benefit. Some of it is environmental impact. I think that there are lots of mitigating factors when it comes to ways to boost our renewable energy sector, and I think that Albertans are excited about that and they look forward to some of the alternatives that are out there.

I know a few of my friends have transitioned from different careers. They're now in the solar panel installation phase of energy, and it's something that they're excited about. Sitting down and talking with them can be a little confusing because I don't understand all the ins and outs of how their installation of it works and how they assess how many panels each roof should have and which way you're facing and all of those intricacies, but hearing the excitement and passion in what they do and being able to relay that to consumers in the province is really a good thing.

When I look at this Bill 22, I think that there are so many things that could have positive impacts long term. Unfortunately, what we have seen is this government that really has delayed the process and failed Albertans. When we look at the outrageous, skyrocketing costs for utilities, you know, we were pleading with this government to extend the ability for residents to not have to pay in the middle of winter, and that was rejected. There were some real things that could have happened to really help Albertans at the time. Even the fact that this legislation was introduced and then taken away and now, six months later, is reintroduced – six months ago this perhaps could have had a significant impact on so many Albertans that are struggling with high utility costs.

11:40

When I think about the trust that Albertans have in this government and their ability to modernize the electricity system, I know that there are some questions about what's going to happen. I know that many Albertans have told me that they simply just don't trust this government with their pocketbooks. They've watched utility costs skyrocket, insurance rates skyrocket, and we have a government that just talks about "Trust us," and it continues to be shown over and over that this government has failed.

So while I read the legislation – and I can see many points throughout this that are great areas. You know, being able to define the energy storage, talking about self-supply and export, requiring the DFOs, or the distribution facility owners, to prepare long-term distribution system plans: these are all really important things that we absolutely do need to look at and we need to take action on. I just think that there's a general mistrust for how that will roll out.

You know, this government talked about providing supports to Albertans when it comes to their skyrocketing utility rates. I get e-mails from constituents whose bills went from \$88 to \$475. That is something that is just simply a deal breaker for someone of fixed income.

When we look at the resources that have been cut back, they have cut those living on AISH, which is tough to make ends meet, and when you are experiencing these unexpected costs, it literally means food, utilities. So there's a general distrust when it comes to the capacity for this government to really have Albertans' best interests in mind.

I know, when it comes to working with stakeholders, that there are also some questions about their ability to consult. Because there are some major distribution facility owners, I hope that those organizations have been consulted, that they have talked with those in rural Alberta, because the way that they have grids and the way that they distribute power all across the province is different. The needs are different.

We look at, you know, some of the calls that I know my dad would go on in rural Alberta, and it's quite a bit different than the structure and the infrastructure that's provided in a city like Edmonton. So what is the capacity for this to roll out equally all across the province? Has that been considered? Have we looked at the different needs? Have we talked to the municipalities and the leadership within those communities to talk about what it looks like to roll out a plan?

I think that this is something that really should be taken into consideration, knowing how many decisions have been made without the key players being at the table. You know, we talk about the importance of being elected officials, and then we see the disregard for that when it comes to municipalities. I think municipalities have significant insight into what the needs of their communities are.

I would suggest that a community like Fort Saskatchewan, where I also lived when my dad worked for TransAlta, versus Whitecourt versus Boyle – all have very different needs and capacities. What does it mean for those that are doing the work? Have they been talked to? When they're talking about doing this rollout, is it with those that are doing the work? Has it been in consultation with the municipal leaders and how it will look in their communities? I think that something that we can all agree on is that adding more energy storage to the grid is a wonderful thing – we support that – but what does that look like for different areas in the province?

I think that, you know, something happened between the introduction of Bill 22 last fall, that ended up dying on the Order Paper, and then today with Bill 22. What happened in that time period? Was there information that, you know, was absolutely needed that came to be and now we're going to see it in here? Were there things that government thought, "Okay; no, we were completely on the wrong track"? We don't know what happens because of the secrecy that's going on, and it's just not clear, Madam Speaker, what this government is doing to get direct support out the door, what's happening with the decisions around this piece of legislation.

I know that it's concerning that there's this potential here for some great work to be done about modernizing our electricity grid, but based on the record of what we've seen over and over with this government, they simply can't be trusted. I hope to hear throughout this debate, you know, some of those questions addressed. What happened with the previous bill? Why was it allowed to just die on the Order Paper? What's the difference that they heard in that time? Was there something significantly wrong with that piece of legislation? Did industry come forward and express some glaring issues? What caused it to die on the Order Paper, and what's now happening that's different in this legislation?

I can say that Albertans are struggling, and when we look at utility costs and the outrageous costs that so many households are facing, something that is going to have an impact on that is welcome. One hundred per cent I would support anything that's going to have positive long-term impacts, but we just need more information about what that plan is in this. It's easy to support in the way that it's laid out, but I just have this hesitancy when I look at the track record and how many times this government continues to let down Alberta families, especially in a time where affordability is top of mind for so many.

We have other pieces of legislation before the House where we're talking about the high cost of insurance, where we're talking about just general affordability and the concerns that Albertans are facing. We're talking about them on this side of the House, yet we're not seeing legislation that's actually having any long-term effect. I just really hope that we're seeing a modernization of our grid to add energy storage and really reduce costs in the long term. That would be the ideal outcome of this legislation, and I look forward to getting some more information throughout the debate. I think that it's a wonderful opportunity to hear from all members about some of those details that are outstanding.

[Mr. Milliken in the chair]

When we talk about, you know, being transparent and being able to really have a good understanding, the electricity grid in the province perhaps might not be an area that most Albertans truly understand. It's quite complex. When we're hearing that this legislation is going to help, that's something where we truly want to be able to say, "It helps because" and being able to identify clearly what those actions are going to be, whether it's supporting infrastructure across the province, being able to look at transmission lines and what that potentially could be across the province. I know that there's some understanding about there being alternatives to nonwire. I think that as a kid I had a really clear understanding of what lines were across the province, because no matter where we went, my dad was able to identify: I worked on that line. I think that there are some great conversations happening. I just really hope that we're able to kind of break through that and get a good understanding.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Next up to speak I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-North West.

Mr. Eggen: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. I just want to make a couple of comments in regard to Bill 22. There are sort of three areas that I am particularly interested in categorically, and those are, of course, transmission lines and generation and storage.

11:50

I guess I'll start with the last one. I find it intriguing how this bill is sort of setting some frameworks for energy storage here in the province of Alberta, defining what energy storage could entail. I would be curious for the minister to give more information about initiatives that this government and different energy companies might be pursuing to move forward on energy storage. You know, it's just a very interesting way to make an electric grid more efficient and take advantage of generation of electricity during nonpeak hours, right?

Of course, electricity is transported around the province or to any given area, and the further that you transport that power, the more you lose through line loss and so forth. You know, to be able to build generation capacity in proximity to where most electricity is being used is one thing and then to build storage capacity in the same way – right? – so that you have some storage capacity that's in reasonable proximity to where the electricity is being generated.

You know, I've seen some very interesting different techniques in different parts of the world for how you can effectively store energy for off-peak hours and then bring it back when, let's say, you have rush hour or during the dinner hour or when people are using air conditioners more and stuff like that, right? Now that we have a defining framework for storage of electricity, I would like to

see how we might pursue that in a reasonably environmentally sustainable way.

I can remember seeing one particular facility set up where they were pumping water during the evening and the nighttime, when the electricity demand was down, up into an elevated storage facility, like a lake that was built at a high level, and then running that same water back down through turbines during the day so that you could have a cycle of power that was already generated and then recycle it as hydro power and put that back into the grid. There are lots of ways you can pursue this. Batteries as well are another one.

In regard to generation – right? – again, as we move away from coal, which is a logical and, I think, economic and moral imperative for us to continue to do, I think we saw power companies, in fact, accelerate their conversion of generation from coal to even exceed the expectations that were set by our provincial government and the federal government and to actually retool the generators, power plants even faster than what the timelines were originally. You could see that there was incentive and motivation to do so. There was good economic motivation and incentive to do so, and of course the expectation to decarbonize is paramount.

I find it a bit disturbing to see the associate minister and the Premier talking about coal again, talking about clean coal. I mean, this is obviously the opposite of the direction of the world right now and obviously the opposite direction of what is actually happening here in the province of Alberta. You know, I don't know what the logic is behind that, if they're just trying to plumb some depths of polling to try to secure votes based on false pretenses or something, because it certainly is a false pretense. You're not going to bring back coal generation. I mean, that would be insane, right? Any suggestion of that is dishonest, quite frankly, and I really think it should not be included in the debate around electricity, in any legitimate debate around electricity.

The other parts that I had mentioned were in regard to generation and diversifying our generation capacity. One thing that's always intrigued me for years – right? – is for people to be able to generate their own electricity, not burning coal, of course, but through solar panels or wind power and so forth, and being able to sell that power back onto the grid. The degree to which you can enhance or somehow get people to do this, have incentives to do so, I think really can help to diversify our electricity grid.

You know, it's not just in order to decarbonize and to localize electricity generation, but it's a good safety net. Quite frankly, if you have all of your generation eggs in one basket, so to speak, and then those systems fail – right? – you get brownouts and blackouts, rolling brownouts and blackouts. It really can cripple an economy and really send a bad message to investors if you can't keep your grid up and running and diversified.

Anyway, my point is, Mr. Speaker, if you can incentivize people to put, let's say, solar panels onto their home, not just by making it cheaper to buy panels and so forth, which is getting cheaper all the time, but also to give a differential price for that electricity that you're producing on the roof of your house not just to use for yourself, which is yours because you generated it – the sun gave it to you, and away you go – but also to be able to sell that onto the grid, right? If you can sell that electricity that is monitored to be coming from solar panels and sell it at a better price, an incentivized price, back onto the grid, then lots and lots of people will put on panels. I mean, lots of people are putting on panels anyway.

I mean, it's certainly my intention to do so. I kind of missed the city of Edmonton's special deal. I think it was all taken up in about a couple of hours, right? They had a subsidy for panels and so forth. I mean, it's just, really, a great thing to do. I think it's a responsible thing to do, and by having a differential price, in other words a

better price, for the electricity you're generating off the roof of your garage, you will make it look more attractive for people to consider doing that, you know. I think that there's a lot of future in that as well.

Another thing that we can do to help to maintain the safety and the integrity of our electricity generation system is to have more electricity generation capacity with smaller units closer to where it's being used, right? You see in Calgary, for example, the power company there really doing that, quite aggressively building smaller generating units around the city so that you're reducing line loss. You're not producing electricity somehow all the way over in Hanna or just south of Hanna and bringing it all the way to Calgary. If you have a smaller generating unit that's close to the city, then it's more efficient, and quite frankly it helps for the safety and the integrity of the system as well.

We have a lot of work to do for electricity generation and transmission and storage here in the province of Alberta. We know that at the much larger, higher level view this is the future of how we build a more sustainable energy future for our province and as you see electrification taking hold, right? I know that other members were talking about people building political careers based on opposing the massive transmission capacity that the PCs were embarked on back 10 or 15 years ago. I mean, I certainly was part

of that as well, but also now here we are in 2022, and we're looking to really upgrade our electricity transmission with people using electric cars and so forth and different other forms of electric transport, electric-driven industrial development. You know, the long game for it is really not bad, right? Mr. Speaker, you have increased generation capacity and transmission capacity. We need to bring that down to a neighbourhood level, more or less. I think that's the next step, right?

I was listening to the radio the other day, you know, talking about: well, you have one person on the block, say, who is plugging in their car in their garage – right? – but what happens when suddenly you have 30 people plugging in their car in the garage on one block? Then suddenly that level of electricity transmission needs to be upgraded. I think I'm the first person on my block plugging in my car in the garage, and I expect there will be a whole lot more people doing it in the next number of years, especially with the price of gasoline and other incentives as well. Plus, it's quite fun to drive. I have an electric hybrid . . .

The Acting Speaker: I hesitate to interrupt the hon. member. Under, I believe, Standing Order 4(2.1) we are adjourned until 1:30 this afternoon.

[The Assembly adjourned at 12 p.m.]

Table of Contents

Prayers.....	1097
Orders of the Day	1097
Government Bills and Orders	
Second Reading	
Bill 20 Justice Statutes Amendment Act, 2022	1097
Bill 22 Electricity Statutes (Modernizing Alberta’s Electricity Grid) Amendment Act, 2022	1105

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