



Province of Alberta

The 30th Legislature  
Third Session

# Alberta Hansard

Tuesday afternoon, May 10, 2022

Day 32

The Honourable Nathan M. Cooper, Speaker

**Legislative Assembly of Alberta**  
**The 30th Legislature**  
Third Session

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## Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Tuesday, May 10, 2022

[The Speaker in the chair]

**The Speaker:** Hon. members, please be seated.

### Introduction of Visitors

**The Speaker:** Hon. members, I do have a number of very special guests joining us today, and I beg your indulgence for a little bit of extra time this afternoon as well. Members, this morning I had the privilege of meeting with a very special guest who is joining us in the Speaker's gallery. Please welcome the ambassador of the Kingdom of Belgium, His Excellency Patrick Van Gheel, accompanied by Mr. Arnaud Gaspart, deputy head of mission at the Belgian embassy, and Ms Lori Schmidt, honorary consul designate for Belgium in Alberta. Please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

Also joining us in the Speaker's gallery is a delegation from the Central Alberta Economic Partnership. It is Economic Development Week. I ask that you please welcome Chief Leonard Standing on the road of the Montana First Nation at Maskwacis and vice-chair of CAEP; James Carpenter, chair of CAEP; and Kimberley Worthington, executive director of CAEP. Please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

Last, hon. members, certainly not least, it's my great honour and pleasure to introduce to you a former member, Mr. Neville Roper, who sits in the Speaker's gallery today. Neville joined the air force in 1941 just shy of his 19th birthday and served until his discharge in the fall of 1945, when he returned home to Rimbey, Alberta. He has been a member of the Royal Canadian Legion Branch branch 36 for over 76 years. Always an active member of his community, Neville was a member of the Rimbey firefighting brigade, a town councillor, and was also the mayor for 11 years. From 1967 to 1971 Neville Roper served as the Member of the Legislative Assembly representing the constituency of Ponoka.

He and his wife, Edith, travelled extensively until her passing in 1999. Neville continued to explore the world, celebrating his 78th birthday building houses in Fiji with Habitat for Humanity and his 82nd birthday while on a bus tour in the Dominican Republic. Members, Neville Sydney Roper celebrated his 100th birthday on March 5 and is here to participate in a project we're working on in association with former Members of the Legislative Assembly to capture the stories behind the service of former MLAs. He is joined by his daughter Lisa Madsen and his 92-year-old sister Doris Moonie. I would invite you all to rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly. [Standing ovation]

Mr. Roper reported many, many stories to me today, including that of stealing former member Tom Copithorne's boots and having the pages scurry them out. I'm glad that the members are equally as well behaved today as they were when you were a member.

### Introduction of Guests

**The Speaker:** Hon. members, joining us in the gallery are two guests of the hon. Member for Livingstone-Macleod. Please welcome Liz Charyna and Deborah Storlien-Cundy.

Also joining us is Karen Gosbee, a guest of the Member for Chestermere-Strathmore.

Also in the gallery are Burton Bailey and Emma Kunaka, Red Deer-North constituency office, and Vesna Sertic, constituency manager for Calgary-Peigan. I invite you to all rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

## Ministerial Statements

**The Speaker:** The hon. Minister of Environment and Parks.

### Federal Impact Assessment Act

**Mr. Jason Nixon:** Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker, for an opportunity to rise on a ministerial statement today on a very important issue. In August 2019 the Trudeau government brought into force a new set of regulations for federal environmental impact assessments, also known as Bill C-69 or better known here in Alberta as the no-more-pipelines bill.

Mr. Speaker, this law weaponized environmental law to attack industries and provinces that do not agree with the environmental zealots in Ottawa. Alberta's government very quickly responded and launched a constitutional challenge to the act on the grounds that the no-more-pipelines bill was a federal intrusion on provincial jurisdiction.

In February 2021 the Alberta Court of Appeal heard the case. Now, Mr. Speaker, I think it's important to note that Alberta was supported by many key partners who intervened in support of our province in this case, including the Attorney General of Ontario, the Attorney General of Saskatchewan, the Woodland Cree First Nation, the Indian Resource Council, the Canadian Taxpayers Federation, the Canadian Association of Petroleum Producers, the Explorers and Producers Association of Canada, the Canadian Energy Pipeline Association, the Independent Contractors and Businesses Association, and Alberta Enterprise Group. We would like to take a moment and thank all of those intervenors for their critical support in defending against the Trudeau Liberals' intrusion on provincial rights.

Now, Mr. Speaker, I am happy to report to the House that today in the Alberta Court of Appeal there was a decision made on this case. In a historical ruling, ruling in favour, the court clearly ruled in favour of our province's argument. This ruling represents one of the most significant rulings on environmental law in the history of our country. This is very good news. As of today Bill C-69, the no-more-pipelines law, can no longer handcuff Alberta and our job creators coming to invest in this great province.

Now, I'd like to take this opportunity to read some of the key points from this historical decision. I would draw your attention to paragraph 421 of the decision, where it says, "the [Impact Assessment Act] constitutes a profound invasion into provincial legislative jurisdiction and provincial proprietary rights." Strong words, Mr. Speaker.

From paragraph 423 it says:

The unavoidable effect of the [Impact Assessment Act] would be the centralization of the governance of Canada to the point this country would no longer be recognized as a real federation. This is not what the framers of our Constitution intended. And it is certainly not what provincial governments agreed to either on patriation of the Constitution.

Mr. Speaker, I want to emphasize this. The Court of Appeal today clearly stated that this type of legislation and constitutional infringement would make our country unrecognizable. I will point out that the job of the federal government is to keep our nation united, but sadly Trudeau and his Liberal government are insisting on using laws to break our very country apart.

I will go further into this ruling, Mr. Speaker, and draw your attention to paragraph 424 in its entirety. It says:

Where natural resources are involved, it is each province that is concerned with the sustainable development of its natural resources, not the federal government. It is the province that owns these natural resources, not the federal government. And it is the province and its people who lose if those natural resources cannot be developed, not the federal government. The federal government does not have the constitutional right to veto an intra-

provincial designated project based on its view of the public interest. Nor does the federal government have the constitutional right to appropriate the birthright and economic future of the citizens of a province.

Mr. Speaker, for those reasons the Alberta Court of Appeal found the Federal Impact Assessment, Bill C-69, or the no-more-pipelines bill, ultra vires Parliament. That means that with the no-more-pipelines bill the federal government has completely – and I want to stress this; completely – overstepped their powers and disrespected the concept of the Canadian Confederation.

Now, Mr. Speaker, I would also like to take a moment to recognize the critical role of Indigenous communities and what they played in this case. Alberta's government has heard loud and clear from Indigenous communities that they can and that they want to participate in and benefit from responsible natural resource development in Alberta, which is why the Minister of Indigenous Relations created the Indigenous litigation fund to make sure the voices of Indigenous people could be heard in legal actions that were attempting to hinder responsible resource development in our country and make sure that Indigenous peoples could be heard in those moments and make their desires for increased market access for natural resources or pipeline development be known and ultimately make sure that they can share in the economic benefit of these projects.

**1:40**

Mr. Speaker, this fund helped the Woodland Cree First Nation to intervene in Alberta's constitutional challenge of the federal Impact Assessment Act in late February 2021. I'd also like to note that the litigation fund is also currently being used to support Fort McKay Métis Nation and Willow Lake Métis Nation's challenge to the federal Oil Tanker Moratorium Act. I know that the Minister of Energy looks forward to updating this Chamber on this important litigation in the future.

Mr. Speaker, our government is proud to back Indigenous communities to take legal actions that support their decisions to own, manage, and participate in natural resource development projects. We are working with Indigenous peoples to build a prosperous future that benefits all the people of Alberta. The court found in paragraph 315 that this legislative scheme . . .

referring to Bill C-69,

. . . permits the federal executive to stop intra-provincial designated projects authorized by a province or provincial authority even where agreements have been made by an Indigenous entity with either or both the provincial government and project proponent and with provincial approval again constitutes federal overreach. It also underscores that the true purpose of this legislative scheme is to empower the federal executive to veto intra-provincial designated projects based on its view of the public interest, not what is in the interests of the Indigenous entity involved, never mind the interests of the province in question and its citizens.

Additionally, the court also noted that

all three appellate courts that heard the Greenhouse Gas References concluded that the federal government did not have the constitutional jurisdiction to regulate GHG emissions in a province.

The court found that the federal government

does not have the right under the national concern doctrine to regulate GHG emissions generally within a province including from intra-provincial designated projects approved by that province, much less stop such projects from proceeding.

Mr. Speaker, Alberta's government followed through on our commitment to stand up for Albertans against the unjustified intrusion into provincial jurisdiction by the Trudeau government, better known as the Liberal-NDP alliance, which, it is important to

make clear, is supported by the provincial NDP, who continue to support Ottawa's efforts to attack our largest industry. Alberta agrees with the Court of Appeal that the impact assessment goes against what the framers of our Constitution intended and is certainly not what provincial governments agreed to when they agreed to the patriation of our Constitution. This decision means that the impact assessment cannot be used by Canada in Alberta. The act is unconstitutional, and, in the opinion of the court, the federal government has overstepped its powers.

The Court of Appeal agreed, Mr. Speaker, that the federal government is needlessly overhauling a regulatory and environmental review process that is already one of the world's best, putting jobs and investment at risk. Alberta wants to see investment grow, not driven away by unbalanced, unpredictable new rules for large-scale infrastructure projects. Alberta stands by the principle that provinces are best situated to make policy decisions for our own unique economies and for our own citizens. The Ottawa-knows-best attitude of the federal government disrupts the constitutional balance of our federation, and it undermines our rights to manage our own affairs, and the Alberta Court of Appeal's decision is a major step in correcting this trend.

Mr. Speaker, in closing, the decision of the court is clear.

Where natural resources are involved, it is each province that is concerned with the . . . development of its natural resources, not the federal government. It is the province that owns those natural resources, not the federal government. And it is the province and its people who lose if those natural resources cannot be developed, not the federal government. The federal government does not have the constitutional right to veto and intra-provincial designated project based on its view of the public interest. Nor does the federal government have the constitutional right to appropriate the birthright and economic future of the citizens of a province.

Mr. Speaker, it is clear that this country cannot be a federation at all if this type of legislation is allowed to stand. The Liberal-NDP alliance must stand down now its weaponization of environmental law against our largest industries and respect the rights of provinces all across this country. Alberta will continue to vigorously defend our constitutional rights and the people of the great province of Alberta.

**The Speaker:** Hon. members, a member of the opposition has up to three minutes to respond to the ministerial statement. I see the hon. Member for Lethbridge-West.

**Ms Phillips:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Thank you for the opportunity to reply. Now, as is customary in the Chamber, the Official Opposition did not receive any notice that there was going to be a ministerial statement, so my reply will be necessarily brief and necessarily unscripted.

However, I thank the government for bringing forward their analysis of the just-released decision. I thank them for providing the House with some of their commentary and some of their analysis. Of course, as intervenors they would have been provided some heads-up that the decision was coming. However, we as the Official Opposition did not benefit from that, so we are still reviewing the ABCA decision and how that decision lines up with the concerns that we brought through to the Senate of Canada through various means through our intergovernmental relations work through 2018 and '19, and we can provide further comment about that to this House at the appropriate time, Mr. Speaker.

There is no question that there were serious concerns both with the legislation and with the regulations that were ultimately gazetted in the summer of 2019, Mr. Speaker. That analysis was done, and we found many points of agreement with the current government in that

analysis through the development of this legislation. There is no question that as we review the ABCA decision, we will do so through the lens of finding full value for our resources, getting our oil and gas products to market, and building an economy with good-paying jobs for Alberta's future, and that remains our focus.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for the opportunity to provide this reply to the ministerial statement.

## Members' Statements

### Unemployment, Wages, and Cost of Living

**Mr. Deol:** Mr. Speaker, the UCP likes to talk a lot about booms and swagger, but the reality is that Albertans are feeling the pinch. Despite the April job numbers showing an uptick, there are several concerning facts the UCP continues to ignore.

Alberta's unemployment rate is still higher than the national average, Calgary has the highest unemployment rate of any city in the country, and Alberta has the highest long-term unemployment rate in the country. Roughly 1 in 3 unemployed workers have been unemployed for six months or longer. At the same time, wages are failing to keep pace with inflation. In fact, Alberta has had the slowest wage growth in the country since the start of the pandemic, and investment and GDP are still below prepandemic levels.

Meanwhile the UCP piles on additional costs as half of Albertans are just \$200 away from not meeting their financial obligations at the end of the month. Income taxes, property taxes, tuition, utilities, and auto insurance have all gone up because of this government. They are literally pushing Albertans to the brink. Rather than recognize these challenges, the UCP tells Albertans that everything is fine or that someone else is to blame, and rather than focusing on the needs of Albertans, the UCP is focused on themselves.

It is time for a government that puts Albertans first, one that puts more money in Albertans' pockets, creates good jobs, and helps hard-working Albertans get ahead. It is time for an NDP government.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

1:50

### Oral Question Period

**The Speaker:** The Leader of Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition has question 1.

### Calgary Office Revitalization and Expansion Working Group Report

**Ms Notley:** Mr. Speaker, last month our party released a fully costed plan for revitalizing Calgary's downtown, a serious, quantified investment in tower conversion, small-business grants, and support for cultural events along with a world-class innovation district. So I was flabbergasted to read the government's report today, the one that's eight months late, to discover that the UCP is so far behind. No commitments. No funding. To the Premier: why is this report more about identifying an already-known problem than funding the solution, or, put another way, where's the money?

**Mr. Schweitzer:** Mr. Speaker, can you feel that, what's in the air right now? Can you feel it? NDP hypocrisy. Not only did they chase away investment by the billions; right now in this province the unemployment rate: 5.9 per cent. The last time it was that low in Alberta, we had another Conservative government. We're cleaning up the mess that they left behind. We have a plan for the downtown of Calgary endorsed by the chamber of commerce. We have eminent people from across Alberta on that panel. We're reviewing it. Thank god the NDP are not in office anymore.

**Ms Notley:** There's a lot of hot air there, Mr. Speaker. What's not there is money.

In fact, the biggest number in this report is the number of task forces it recommends. This report was due in September, and after spinning in circles for a year, Albertans now have to wait for five more task forces. Mr. Speaker, this is a master class in dithering. They've kicked the can so far down the road, it's landed somewhere in Saskatchewan. Why is the UCP plan so short on action? Why do they care so little about the future of downtown Calgary?

**Mr. Schweitzer:** Mr. Speaker, it is amazing that the NDP have such little regard for all the people that dedicated their time to put together that report as well as the Calgary Chamber of commerce, who resoundingly endorsed the report that came out, but let's talk about some more of these economic highlights. Albertans can look forward to the fact that they do not have an NDP government that is simply chasing away investment. Under that government, when it comes to diversification, they thought a good year for venture capital was \$37 million. We had over \$200 million in just the first quarter alone.

**Ms Notley:** Our downtown plan, \$160 million; theirs, \$5 million.

Now, another part of this report talks about a very important issue, the need to reinvest in social supports for the most vulnerable. At least they talk about it. News flash: if this UCP government, that's frozen benefits, slashed affordable housing, cut income support, and reduced rental supplements – to date the UCP have actively increased poverty, full stop. Rather than sending this report off to gather dust, as the minister promised today, will the Premier stand in the House today and reverse his cuts and increase funding to vulnerable Albertans?

**Mr. Schweitzer:** Mr. Speaker, we're proud of the work that our Associate Minister of Mental Health and Addictions as well as our Minister of Justice are doing to ensure safety across this province. The committee report that came through emphasized the fact that community safety in our downtown core is important long term.

This is the one thing I have to tell Albertans across this province. There's one thing as well. I mentioned earlier on. There's this thing in the air, Mr. Speaker – you can feel it – economic momentum in Alberta. We're forecasted to lead the country in growth. You can rest assured we will not let the NDP come back to destroy Alberta's economy.

**The Speaker:** The hon. the Leader of the Opposition. Second set of questions.

**Ms Notley:** Let's turn down the panic meter just a little bit there, Mr. Speaker.

### Child Care Affordability

**Ms Notley:** More and more Alberta families are struggling, and they need a government to act. A good start would be to aggressively cut child care fees in half using the new federal dollars. Now, the UCP claimed that the 50 per cent reduction would have happened already. However, according to a report today by the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives Alberta families won't see a full 50 per cent cut any time in 2022 or perhaps ever. Can the Premier explain how his UCP government found a way to miss the mark again when it comes to child care?

**The Speaker:** The hon. the Minister of Children's Services.

**Ms Schulz:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. What we're doing in terms of child care is exactly the opposite of what the members opposite did. We are not picking winners and losers. We are not telling parents where they can and cannot access support to accessible, high-quality early learning and child care. We have in fact met the parameters of our first year in this agreement with the federal government. We have seen child care fees reduced by, on average, 50 per cent in every single licensed space across this province in the centre of parents' choice.

**Ms Notley:** Well, in fact, according to the report this minister has not met her targets. She has, however, picked losers. This report indicates that the lowest income families are paying around \$400 more. That's compared to the zero dollars they paid under our government. To the Premier: how on earth could you get \$3.8 billion from Ottawa and still find a way to make the most vulnerable Alberta families pay more?

**Ms Schulz:** Mr. Speaker, I will take the facts any day over the stories and spin being shared by a union-funded, left-wing think tank. Let me tell you what Alberta parents already know. Child care fees, on average, have been reduced by half, and right across this province, in the setting of parents' choice, parents are paying between \$10 and \$25 a day. And you know what? The most supports are being targeted to the parents who need it the most.

**Ms Notley:** Well, even if she was right, on average does not include Calgary. According to the report Calgary continues to have among the highest fees in Canada across all age groups under this Premier and this minister. Nearly every province and territory signing on to this plan has found a way to make the plan work. Instead of leading the pack in lowering costs, this minister ensures that Albertans continue to pay more, and this will hurt our economy. Why doesn't the Premier understand that his indifference to the child care issue has a real economic cost to the future of this province?

**Ms Schulz:** You know who's not listening to the NDP spin, Mr. Speaker? More than 90,000 parents right across this province who are benefiting from reduced child care fees in the centre and space of their choice. More than 90,000. This is a good plan. Why is it a good plan? Because it is not based on NDP ideology or spin. It is based on the feedback and the concerns that we heard from Alberta parents, child care operators, and educators right across this province; 90,000-plus parents think that this is a great deal for Alberta families. I wish the NDP thought it was as great as Alberta parents do.

**The Speaker:** The hon. the Leader of the Opposition for her third set of questions.

### Government Policies and Cost of Living

**Ms Notley:** Mr. Speaker, over the weekend, if the Premier had picked up a copy of the *Herald*, he would have seen a column from economist Trevor Tombe. He wrote that we need a sensible solution to inflation. A very reasonable position, I think. In fact, he acknowledged the value of the gas tax deferral, but he also listed some other things the Premier could do right now to help take the pressure off struggling families, starting with reindexing the tax code to give back almost half a billion dollars to Albertans this year. Will the Premier take his advice – yes or no? – and why not if not yes?

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

**Mr. Toews:** Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to answer that question, but first I would like to ask the members of this House and the Leader of the Opposition: why is the opposition not celebrating and asking questions around our victory around Bill C-69? This is a great day for Alberta. This is a great day for Canada. This is a great day for wealth creation and prosperity for future generations.

**Ms Notley:** Wow. Well, you know, Mr. Speaker, some Albertans are under an exceptional amount of stress and don't have time to read the Court of Appeal because they can't pay for their groceries, and that's what they're focused on.

Now, Tombe recommends boosting the child and family benefit to get another \$1,000 into the hands of families. He also notes that the government could reverse decisions to freeze benefits, which has seriously hurt the ability to buy food for vulnerable Albertans across this province. Why doesn't the Premier take some good, nonpartisan advice and help most vulnerable Albertans?

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

**Mr. Toews:** Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. We are taking action on affordability. We have come forward with the suspension of the fuel tax. We have an electricity rebate in process, in motion . . . [interjections]

**The Speaker:** Order. Order. We heard the question. Let's hear the answer.

**Mr. Toews:** . . . and we have a consumer protection mechanism for natural gas. But it's more than that. We inherited a fiscal train wreck from the members opposite. We inherited a fiscal situation that would have meant our programs would have been unsustainable. Future generations would not have benefited. We've taken action to make these programs more sustainable.

**Ms Notley:** For the moment, Mr. Speaker, these guys are still in power, so they have responsibility for their decisions. Now, Tombe notes two current government policies that have more to do with inflation than the carbon tax ever would: one, their decision to drive up tuition at colleges and universities; and two, the rising vehicle insurance premiums that this government is allowing big, profitable insurance companies to charge Alberta families. Those are this government's policies. Not mine, not Ottawa's; this government's. Why won't they stand up for Albertans and act to reduce their inflation?

2:00

**Mr. Toews:** We are taking action, Mr. Speaker. In fact, the members opposite brought in a carbon tax, pushing up costs on every Albertan, on every Alberta family. We're taking action. Bill 41, the bill we implemented about a year and a half ago to deal with the systemic issues driving up insurance costs, has flattened insurance . . . [interjections]

**The Speaker:** Order. Order. The Leader of the Opposition had the opportunity to ask the question. If she'd like another one, I invite her to do so when it's her turn.

**Mr. Toews:** Mr. Speaker, in the last year and a half, after implementing Bill 41, insurance premiums have declined by almost 1 per cent. When the NDP were in office, automobile insurance premiums didn't go down; they went up by 14 per cent.



### Health Care System

**Mr. Shepherd:** Mr. Speaker, one of the most telling examples of this government's skewed priorities on health care was their decision to fire Dr. Verna Yiu. This was a body blow to front-line workers who trusted and respected her leadership. The plan of the UCP was apparently to downplay what that would mean for the system, with the Minister of Health trying to claim that it was expected that Dr. Yiu would be leaving early when all the front-line health care workers I've spoken with were shocked by the decision. Did the Premier really believe that Albertans would buy their spin that firing Dr. Yiu with a year left in her contract was no big deal and that it wouldn't lead to further chaos in our public health care system?

**The Speaker:** The hon. the Minister of Education is rising.

**Member LaGrange:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To respond to the hon. member's question, of course, Dr. Yiu was a valued member of our health care system. But what I really believe is happening here is that they're trying to distract from their very, very poor record on health care. When we look back over the four years that they were in government, the wait times for a hip replacement under the NDP went from 204 days to 265 days. The wait for a knee replacement went from 238 days to 298 days.

**Mr. Shepherd:** Mr. Speaker, our record? This government's record is that in everything in health care they simply break the system and leave it to others to deal with the consequences. This week alone we're seeing lines of sick children waiting over an hour to be triaged at the emergency room, longer wait times for surgical procedures, ER doctors warning that people might lose their lives as a result of this situation that the government has allowed to develop on their watch. The Premier calls this par for the course; Albertans call it a crisis. When will this Premier actually take responsibility for the devastation his government has created in our health care system instead of attacking front-line workers, trying to discredit claims from Albertans who need critical health care? Why doesn't . . .

**The Speaker:** The hon. Minister of Education.

**Member LaGrange:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The hon. Minister of Health is trying to deal with all the situations that were left from the members opposite. As I was saying, the wait time for cataract surgery went up from 202 days to 320 days. The wait time for open-heart surgery went from 60 days to 98 days. They left us a mess that we're dealing with, and we are going to fix it.

**Mr. Shepherd:** Mr. Speaker, these excuses are pathetic, just like the Minister of Health and the Premier, who knew that their decision to fire Dr. Yiu after six years of exemplary service would cause further chaos in our system. They were given specific lines on how to respond to the question of the chaos it would create. Their solution: pretend that firing her with a year left in her contract was expected and make the laughable claim that hiring her created more chaos than firing her did. Can the Premier or this minister list the number of times that sick kids were forced to wait hours in the cold outside to get in an emergency room in '15, '16, 2017, '18? That's when we were in government; this is their record.

**The Speaker:** The hon. the Minister of Education.

**Member LaGrange:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again, I want to reiterate that we valued Dr. Yiu for the work that she did, particularly through the pandemic. That being said, we have committed to

Albertans that we are going to fix the health care system. We know that we have some of the lowest capacity in all of the country, and that needs to be dealt with. The NDP had four years. They didn't deal with it; we will. As I said earlier, the NDP record speaks for itself; 204 days for a hip replacement under the NDP went to 265. I could go on and on.

### Alberta at Work Initiative and Veterinarian Supply

**Mr. Hunter:** Mr. Speaker, the Alberta at work initiative is directly investing in programs to help get more Albertans back to work while also addressing the province's structural unemployment problem. Some of these labour shortages greatly affect rural Alberta and our agricultural sector. One of these critical labour shortages is the shortage of large-animal veterinarians in rural Alberta, which could threaten the sustainability of our agricultural sector. To the Minister of Labour and Immigration: what is Alberta's government doing to address the current shortages of large-animal veterinarians for future projected shortages?

**The Speaker:** The hon. the Minister of Labour and Immigration.

**Mr. Madu:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the hon. member for that very important question. Alberta's government is investing \$8.4 million to support the enrolment expansion of the University of Calgary Faculty of Veterinary Medicine. We are making a capital investment of \$59 million to support the construction of new infrastructure to expand the veterinarian medicine program at the University of Calgary. This funding is part of the Alberta at work initiative, and it will double the amount of vets trained right here in Alberta, in return providing more opportunities for young Albertans who enter veterinary professions to support the workforce needs of businesses and communities.

**The Speaker:** The Member for Taber-Warner.

**Mr. Hunter:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the minister for his answer. Given that in 2017 Alberta decided not to renew its funding agreement with the Western College of Veterinary Medicine in Saskatchewan and given that these investments are aimed to ensure Albertans can learn the skills and knowledge they need to meet the labour demands of tomorrow while addressing critical labour shortages, can the minister elaborate on the value of having access to training close to home with the help of these targeted investments?

**Mr. Madu:** Mr. Speaker, the Alberta at work initiative is here to get Albertans back to work while also addressing Alberta's structural unemployment problem. To retain our skilled workers, we need to be able to provide them the skills, the training, and knowledge right here in our province. The expansion of the vet med school at the U of C does just that. Through this program we will be able to double the amount of veterinarians trained here in Alberta. By providing this training close to home, these graduates can find fulfilling careers right here in our province as we address this critical labour shortage.

**The Speaker:** The hon. member.

**Mr. Hunter:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and again thank you to the minister for his answer. Given that we now know how the Alberta at work initiative will help address specific labour shortages such as the shortage of large-animal veterinarians and given that Alberta's government invested \$600 million towards the Alberta at work initiative, can the minister expand on the other sectors Alberta's government is investing in and how this funding will help get Albertans back to work?

**Mr. Madu:** Mr. Speaker, again I thank the hon. member for that very important question. We are investing a record \$255 million through Advanced Education towards various supports for students. Through my own ministry Alberta's government is proud to invest \$64 million over the next three years to support Alberta's workers to develop new skills and talents in our province. We believe every Albertan deserves the opportunity to participate in their communities and in the workplace, which is why we are investing \$20 million to provide support for these Albertans.

### Child and Youth Deaths during COVID-19 Pandemic

**Mr. Deol:** Mr. Speaker, Alberta saw a spike in excess deaths during the pandemic, and the rates for youth were high. A study recently published said that youth make up a large portion of non COVID-19 related deaths, including from the drug poisoning crisis. This data is important to shape public policy on how people are cared for. Following this sobering information, what will the UCP announce today so that we do not see tragic deaths of youth in this quantity again?

**The Speaker:** The hon. the Minister of Education.

**Member LaGrange:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Any death of a young person is tragic, and our hearts go out to them, their families, all of the people that knew them. Reported COVID and overdose deaths account for the vast majority of the increases in deaths in the pandemic in Alberta, but there have likely been other deaths beyond the normal for a range of reasons. The AHS's paper gives rough estimates based on our assumptions about what would be normal in that period compared to other prior years. There is a wide range of methodologies to calculate excess deaths in the pandemic based on different assumptions and giving different results.

2:10

**Mr. Deol:** Given that the children's hospitals in Calgary and Edmonton are full and that young Albertans are struggling to get the care they need and given that there have been tragically high numbers of children dying in care and given that the drug poisoning crisis has taken the lives of young people at rates higher than ever, when will enough be enough for this UCP government? When will they stop the chaos in health care and guarantee that children will be able to access the care they need?

**The Speaker:** The hon. the Minister of Children's Services has risen.

**Ms Schulz:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. As I've said before, the death of any child but especially a child who has been in the child intervention system is not only a tragedy, but it is, in fact, a call to action. My ministry: I did ask them to look into what we are seeing in this past year. Unfortunately, we have seen an increase of opioid- and addictions-related deaths. That is why we are working so closely with the Associate Minister of Mental Health and Addictions to direct additional supports to help young people who need it. That work will continue. It's also going to take community partners working alongside us. That work is under way.

**Mr. Deol:** Given that more must be done to decrease the number of excess deaths in Alberta, especially young people, and given that the study does not have race-based information and that we know that racialized communities have more difficulties accessing government services in the health system, making this data essential, why is this government failing Albertans by refusing to collect race-based data?

**The Speaker:** The hon. the Associate Minister of Immigration and Multiculturalism.

**Mr. Yaseen:** Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for the question. First of all, the assumption in the question is totally baseless. We plan to address and we have addressed already a number of issues, and we plan to address the challenges of racism, including the collection of race-based data, through more efficient and collaborative methods and in a way that is considered in harmony with Albertans' privacy.

### Utility Load Limiters

**Ms Phillips:** Mr. Speaker, I cannot believe I have to stand in this Legislature and ask about people having their heat and electricity turned off at a time when utility bills have skyrocketed and the UCP has failed to deliver the meagre relief in the form of rebates that they promised. Now we're reading about Calgary families whose electricity and heat are being rationed, and families are going without. Can the minister explain why he believes people should go without heat and electricity because he can't do his job and people are waiting until next year for a meagre rebate?

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

**Mr. Nally:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for the question. We recognize that the higher cost of utilities is having a burden on Albertans. That's why we put forward the electricity rebate that we did. Unfortunately, the caucus opposite actually voted against speeding up the legislative process. I mean, you can't make this stuff up. In addition to that, that's the same caucus that complains about the price of electricity. They don't even know the price of electricity. We have Albertans' backs. We've demonstrated that, and we'll continue to support them.

**Ms Phillips:** Mr. Speaker, given that families in Calgary are being put on what's called load limiters, which means they're being rationed, power is being withheld from families, and given that the nonprofit Harvest Hills Cares Calgary told the media that they have heard from hundreds of families who have had their utilities rationed and given that the media reported one family whose kids couldn't do school work on their laptops because it kept tripping this so-called load limiter, does the minister really think we should be denying kids an education because their parents can't cover utility bills in excess of 700 bucks a month? What is the explanation for this?

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

**Mr. Nally:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's unfortunate that there are some Albertans that are struggling from utility insecurity. The good news is that in that same article that member is referring to there are actually fewer people year over year experiencing utility insecurity. I can tell you this: since the member is aware of the utility insecurity, why didn't they speed up the passage of Bill 18, that would get electricity rebates into the pockets of Albertans that need them the most? Why don't they look at those cameras and tell Albertans why they're making them wait?

**Ms Phillips:** Now, Mr. Speaker, given that Harvest Hills Cares Calgary also heard from a senior dealing with a load limiter – that's rationing – who was unable to use their breathing machine and their microwave at the same time, seriously, and given that this senior

was unable to use the machine they need to breathe and heat up food simultaneously, does the minister seriously believe that seniors facing UCP inflation and cost-of-living crises should have to choose whether they suffocate or starve? How is this allowed? Whose side is the minister on?

**The Speaker:** The hon. the associate minister.

**Mr. Nally:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I came into this House, and I asked everyone in this Chamber to give us unanimous consent so that we could speed up the passage of the rebate legislation, and on this side of the House . . . [interjections]

**The Speaker:** The minister.

**Mr. Nally:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On this side of the House you know how we voted. We voted to speed up the passage of that legislation. But that's not how they voted on that side of the House. They voted to slow down the legislative process and make Albertans wait, so I think they owe Albertans an answer. Why did they make them wait longer for the rebates? [interjections]

**The Speaker:** Order.

**Mr. Hunter:** Point of order.

**The Speaker:** A point of order is noted at 2:16. The hon. Member for Taber-Warner raised it.

#### Executive Council Political Staff Communications

**Mr. Loewen:** Thanks to the hard work of investigative journalists, the public learned of serious allegations of a centrally co-ordinated effort by this Premier to circumvent the FOIP Act. In response to these allegations I have personally written to the Information and Privacy Commissioner to request an investigation. The allegations include direct instructions to delete e-mails, encouraging staff to use their personal cellphones for government business, and encouraging staff to use unsecured Internet messaging apps. All this begs the question: what exactly is this scandal-plagued Premier and his administration hiding from Albertans?

**The Speaker:** The hon. Government House Leader.

**Mr. Jason Nixon:** Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yet again what you see from the hon. member is similar to things that you see from his colleagues in the NDP opposition, who continued to put forward false allegations. In fact, I've lost count of how many false allegations . . .

**Mr. Loewen:** Point of order.

**Mr. Jason Nixon:** . . . that you get from the opposition, none of which, Mr. Speaker, after three years have ever been found to be true by the Chief Electoral Officer, by the Ethics Commissioner, on and on. This government takes FOIP very, very seriously. Our staff are trained to follow FOIP, and they are expected to follow FOIP.

**Mr. Loewen:** Given that our Legislative Assembly allocates significant taxpayer-funded resources to providing safe and secure communications and given that the reason we do so is to protect against the threat of information being intercepted, which prevents cabinet confidences from being breached by nefarious domestic or foreign interests, and given that we don't want the detailed itineraries of senior officials to be leaked as markets rise and fall on leaked and stolen information, can the Premier tell us why he would encourage his staff, just like Hillary Clinton did, to use private communications equipment?

**Mr. Jason Nixon:** Again, Mr. Speaker, the government and the Premier have made clear to all staff from day one of the government that they must comply with FOIP. That's the top priority of the government. All staff have received training on how to comply with FOIP, and the government takes it very, very seriously. [interjection] I hear the deputy leader of the NDP, who once in this Chamber famously said that she told all her staff to go to voice mode, so I don't think that she should be heckling inside this Chamber. Again, staff are expected to follow the FOIP law. They're trained to do so, and we expect them to do so.

**Mr. Loewen:** Given that that's not what the report said and given that FOIP is an essential part of ensuring transparency yet only 1 in 10 general requests were satisfied while 23 per cent of general requests can't be fulfilled due to a lack of records – go figure – and given that these latest allegations further betray the paranoid bunker mentality within this Premier's government and given damaging allegations that offices were given 24 hours' notice, providing an opportunity to delete e-mails, showing a complete disregard for transparency and ethics, please tell us why Albertans should trust a Premier that is once again setting the bar at a new low.

**Mr. Jason Nixon:** Again, Mr. Speaker, that was categorically false. Departments and ministerial offices are not given 24-hour notice about a FOIP. Staff are trained to do FOIPs underneath the law. They're expected to follow the law. That's been made clear by the government, and again anonymous Twitter trolls are not real allegations. This is the approach that you see from the NDP. That member and his NDP colleagues, who continue just . . .

**Mr. Loewen:** Point of order.

**Mr. Jason Nixon:** . . . to make things up, Mr. Speaker: it's very, very disappointing.

**The Speaker:** A point of order is noted at both 2:19 as well as 2:17.

#### 2:20 Diabetes Management Coverage

**Member Irwin:** Conor is six years old. He has type 1 diabetes; he relies on an insulin pump. Walker just turned eight. He has type 1 diabetes; he relies on an insulin pump. For both of these little boys and thousands of Albertans, access to an insulin pump is absolutely life saving, but in an unconscionable, indefensible decision this UCP government has cancelled the insulin pump therapy program. To the Premier: how, in any universe, can you stand up and brag about the economy when you're cutting critical life-saving supports for kids like Conor and Walker?

**The Speaker:** The hon. the Minister of Education.

**Member LaGrange:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the hon. member for the question. You're absolutely right. We need to be concerned about our young people, and that's why we want to provide them with the newest technology. In phase 2 of this new program, the insulin pump therapy program, we have expanded coverage to provide continuous glucose monitors to children under 18 under supplementary health benefits. We estimate that more than 1,500 children will benefit from this expanded coverage, saving parents about \$4,200 annually. Of course we care about our young people.

**Member Irwin:** Unbelievable.

Given that yesterday 25 Albertans came to speak out against the UCP's cruel cuts to the insulin pump program, just a small handful of the thousands of Albertans across our province who are going to

be impacted by this despicable decision – they’re angry. They’re scared because they don’t know if they can continue with this life-saving treatment, yet those Albertans waiting in the gallery wanted an answer from the Premier. Nope. The environment minister laughed. To that minister: what exactly is so funny about Albertans losing their coverage for life-saving insulin pumps?

**Mr. Jason Nixon:** Well, Mr. Speaker, again, this is ridiculous behaviour from the Official Opposition to refer to any member, saying . . . [interjections]

**The Speaker:** Order. Order.

The hon. members of the opposition asked a question. The least they can do is to listen to the answer.

The Government House Leader.

**Mr. Jason Nixon:** Correct, Mr. Speaker. I certainly did not laugh at people that were in that situation. Assuming what conversations may or may not be taking place between me and colleagues on this side of the House is ridiculous, but that’s what you see from the Official Opposition.

The Premier was very, very clear yesterday, Mr. Speaker, about a significant process that is being undertaken to be able to help people that have found themselves in this situation. I want to thank the Premier and the hon. Minister of Health for taking that action and, through you, condemn the Official Opposition for continuing to play politics.

**Member Irwin:** Wow.

Given that it’s been a week since this government cruelly cancelled the insulin pump therapy program – and we’re all still waiting for any details. They have not released any information. This government is saying: just trust us. Albertans do not trust this government with health care. Children’s hospitals are at the brink of collapse. There are long lines of ambulances outside hospitals. Doctors are fleeing the province. Health care is in a crisis. Do the right thing for once. Please commit right now to restoring the insulin pump therapy program.

**The Speaker:** The hon. the Minister of Education.

**Member LaGrange:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The members opposite need to know that these changes came after years of consultation and communication with diabetic Albertans and will deliver equitable coverage that includes non pump users. Numerous Albertans have written over the past years about the need for more options on insulin pumps and supplies, including newer technologies and advanced moderating devices like continuous glucose monitors. We’ve also heard from those who want equity in benefits coverage, including non pump users. Alberta Health engaged extensively with the insulin pump program’s clinical advisory committee before making decisions.

### **Calgary Office Revitalization and Expansion Working Group Report**

**Member Ceci:** The UCP has finally released a report on revitalizing downtown Calgary. This comes after the Finance minister said that it wasn’t his job to help downtown Calgary and eight months after the report was supposed to be released. Upon reading it, many of the recommendations look a lot like the ones we put forward in our plan. However, the UCP has ridiculed many of these proposals, including the ones found in their own report. They’re opposed to supporting office conversion, they’ve cut affordable housing, and they’ve put barriers up to accessing mental health and addiction support. Does this mean that the UCP disagrees with their own plan?

**Mr. Schweitzer:** Mr. Speaker, it must be difficult for the members opposite to stand up and ask questions on this topic, and you want to know why? Because when that member was Finance minister, the unemployment rate in Alberta skyrocketed. Right now in our province it is lower than at any point when that member was Finance minister. We have a report from the committee. It was well received by the chamber. We’re studying the report across government, with lots of opportunities for us to collaborate with all levels of government to make sure we have a vibrant, thriving downtown in Calgary. Albertans can rest assured that we’re not going to let the NDP chase away business again.

**Member Ceci:** Given that that member forgets there was a recession in Alberta and Canada and given that the UCP’s report on downtown Calgary is eight months late and still doesn’t have any funding attached to it except \$5 million, that the CEO of the Calgary Chamber called a drop in the bucket and absolutely inadequate, and given that several of the recommendations appear to be directly lifted from our plan and given that our plan is costed, if the government is going to copy our work, can’t they at least properly cite Alberta’s NDP?

**Mr. Schweitzer:** When it comes to the economy, we’re not going to take advice from the no development party, the NDP. When you look at what’s happening across this province, Alberta has economic momentum. Those are words that were never – never – spoken ever in Alberta when the NDP were in office. That’s right, Mr. Speaker. Alberta has economic momentum. Alberta can rest assured that the NDP will not get back into office. We have their back. Jobs are being created right now in Alberta.

**Member Ceci:** Given that Alberta led GDP for two years under our watch and given that several of the recommendations from the UCP’s working group are to create more task forces to study parts of this issue even further – in other words, it’s a plan to make several plans – and given that this just means more delays and given that Calgary desperately needs support as the city continues to face the highest unemployment rate in the country and the office vacancy rate still sits around 30 per cent, why the constant delays? Or is the minister too busy getting his leadership campaign ready to help the city of Calgary, that he’s a member of?

**Mr. Schweitzer:** Oh, Mr. Speaker, it’s that time again. It’s time to resurrect the NDP legacy tour bus for Alberta. It is that time. When they were government, their Energy minister told Albertans: if you want a good job, you know what you should do? This is NDP advice: leave the province. Right now we’re seeing waves and waves of Canadians come to Alberta for opportunities. That is a fresh opportunity, stuff that we never heard ever when the NDP were in office. [interjections]

**The Speaker:** Order.

The hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake-St. Paul.

### **Diabetes Management Coverage (continued)**

**Mr. Hanson:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Many Albertans are affected by diabetes, and this disease takes a ton of time and effort to manage, which is why, back in 2013, the Alberta government implemented the insulin pump benefits program to specifically support those with type 1 diabetes. The insulin pump automatically gives a small amount of insulin throughout the day and night to help control your blood sugar, without needing to give yourself several shots of insulin multiple times a day. To the

Minister of Health: why was this program created in the first place, and has it been successful?

**The Speaker:** The hon. the Minister of Education is rising.

**Member LaGrange:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I cannot agree more than with the hon. member, because insulin pumps have been a game changer for so many Albertans with blood sugar control as they are easy and efficient. I want to assure the member, his constituents, and all Albertans that we are continuing to support diabetic Albertans. That's not only for right now but to ensure our programs are sustainable and can continue to provide devices for Albertans into the future, with the new technologies like the continuous glucose monitors and advanced insulin pumps, which so many have asked for. We're delivering.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake-St. Paul.

**Mr. Hanson:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that I've heard many stories of individuals whose lives have been drastically changed for the better once the insulin pump became available – the insulin pump provides flexibility for type 1 diabetics; before, they had to plan their entire schedule and meals around insulin, and now the insulin is delivered at the exact right moments without much thought – and given that some of my constituents are worried about the recent announcement that on August 1 the insulin pump program will be taken away, to the minister: why are we changing the benefit program, and who have we consulted on these changes? [interjections]

**The Speaker:** Order. Order.

The hon. minister is the only one with the call.

**Member LaGrange:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. These changes come after years of consultation and communication with Albertans. We engaged extensively with the insulin pump program . . . [interjections]

**The Speaker:** No.

The hon. minister is the only one with the call.

**Member LaGrange:** We exchanged extensively with the insulin pump program's clinical advisory committee, all of whose members worked to make sure Alberta's diabetics get the care they need. Transferring from the insulin pump therapy program to government-sponsored health benefit plans like Blue Cross nongroup coverage means that we can now cover a new generation of insulin pumps in the third part of our three-phase plan, building on our expansion of coverage for diabetes test strips . . .

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake-St. Paul.

**Mr. Hanson:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The insulin pump works fantastic because with this pump people can plan insulin around their lives rather than planning their lives around insulin. Given that just last week the Alberta government announced that this program will be discontinued come August 1 and given that the replacement for this program will be the government-sponsored health benefit plan but many of my constituents are worried about the lack of details about what this plan will cover, to the Minister of Health: can you provide details on what will be covered, what the cost to diabetic Albertans will be on a monthly and yearly basis?

2:30

**The Speaker:** The hon. Minister of Education.

**Member LaGrange:** Thank you again, Mr. Speaker. We expect that the vast majority of the 4,000 Albertans in the program will continue to receive coverage through existing government and private plans. About 60 per cent already have private coverage, and about 30 per cent are already enrolled in Blue Cross. About 500 low-income Albertans will continue to receive coverage under Alberta adult health benefits at no cost to themselves. No cost. None of this happens before August 1. Premiums for Blue Cross nongroup coverage are \$63.50 per month for a single Albertan.

#### Edmonton Remand Centre Emergency Services

**Mr. Sabir:** Paramedics at Edmonton Remand Centre, Canada's largest prison, will no longer be on-site as of June 1. Paramedics are qualified to handle crisis situations, trauma response, and overdose from drug poisoning, which is tragically becoming more common. Other medical staff at the Remand Centre believe this is a dangerous decision because paramedics are better equipped to respond and are a key part of the medical team. Why is the UCP removing paramedics from the Remand Centre, where they serve a critical, life-saving role?

**The Speaker:** The hon. Minister of Education.

**Mr. Ellis:** Oh, sorry.

**Member LaGrange:** No. Go ahead.

**The Speaker:** The hon. the Associate Minister of Mental Health and Addictions.

**Mr. Ellis:** Mr. Speaker, thank you. I apologize if I did not quite understand the member's question here, but the pandemic and related public health restrictions, of course, have caused increased harms from the illness of addiction in jurisdictions throughout North America, including Alberta, and it's no exception. You know, we're focused on addressing the cause of fatalities in opioids related to EMS calls, the illness of addiction, and we want to make sure that – and that's why we created the 8,000 new spaces for people with addiction and mental health concerns. We've removed all user fees, and we've expanded the virtual opioid dependency program.

**Mr. Sabir:** Given that EMS is over capacity as is and Albertans from every corner of the province wonder if they can receive an ambulance when they need one and given that emergency room wait times are increasing as well and Red Deer had 14 ambulances lined up outside the ER two weeks ago, the need for preventative and immediate measures to avoid more ambulance trips is clear. Why is the Minister of Health putting more demand on ambulances by removing on-site paramedics from the Remand Centre? I hope the question is clear this time.

**The Speaker:** The hon. the Minister of Education.

**Member LaGrange:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I just want to inform the members opposite that they are incorrect in their assumptions because there will be no reduction in services or staff at the Edmonton Remand Centre. Alberta Health Services is aligning its correctional health services at the Edmonton Remand Centre with the rest of the province to ensure patients have access to the most appropriate care. In fact, they will have registered nurses instead of paramedics in those roles. They will have enhanced care because those registered nurses actually have a broader range of spectrum of care that they are able to provide for those individuals.

**Mr. Sabir:** Given that many nurses do not understand why paramedics are being removed from the prison and given that the United Nurses of Alberta are in the process of filing concerns over this decision, it is clear that the UCP did not consult with them. Removing paramedics from the Remand Centre is opposed by the paramedics and nurses and could put more strain on the health care system and result in the deaths of people at the Remand Centre, so who did the UCP work with to create this plan? Why are you ignoring paramedics and nurses?

**Member LaGrange:** Mr. Speaker, again, registered nurses have a broader scope of practice than paramedics and will help enhance patient education, support for patients following release, and the ability to connect patients to additional treatment such as opioid dependency treatment and other recovery-based treatments and services for patients at the Edmonton Remand Centre. Impacted paramedic employees are going to be offered other positions with AHS emergency medical services under their collective agreement. Again, there is no impact to the level of care.

### **Disability Worker Wages AISH and Income Support Payments**

**Ms Renaud:** This pandemic showed us many everyday heroes who went above and beyond to do their jobs and serve Albertans during difficult times. One group that doesn't get enough credit for their work is disability workers, whose work with disabled Albertans deserves the gratitude of us all. Instead, what they're getting is a crisis. The Alberta Disability Workers Association has warned that they're facing a staffing crisis because too many are unable to make ends meet with their salaries, forcing them to take on other jobs or even leave the sector. To the minister: how long is the minister prepared to let this crisis develop before acting?

**The Speaker:** The hon. the Minister of Children's Services is rising.

**Ms Schulz:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. First of all, I do want to thank disability workers right across this province. We know the last two years throughout the pandemic were extremely challenging, and we're grateful for the important work that they do. You know, our government is committed to providing a work environment where all employees are safe and treated with respect and dignity, and that includes our disability workers. I know that that's something that this government is committed to with the Minister of Community and Social Services as well.

**Ms Renaud:** Given that it's not just the workers who are struggling but the individuals that they work with – they're also feeling the real consequences of this government's inaction and lack of support – and given that we've heard reports from families who are concerned about the absence of supports, long wait times, and changing contracts that are leaving families behind and given that the Alberta Disability Workers Association is calling on this government to increase wages so that they can retain and attract staff that disabled Albertans rely on to live, can the minister explain why he or she has failed to listen to the concerns of disability workers?

**The Speaker:** The hon. the Minister of Children's Services is rising.

**Ms Schulz:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The Minister of Community and Social Services is working with the disability services sector and partner ministries to improve recruitment and retention strategies for the disability services sector. We did provide

a grant to the Alberta Council of Disability Services to collect and analyze data. In addition, we continue to provide funding to service providers to enable them to put together solid compensation packages for their front-line and very important staff.

**Ms Renaud:** Given that there has been no wage adjustment – disability workers are leaving the sector; they can't afford to feed their families with what they're being paid – and what we're getting is a plan to consult to consult and given that all the minister can do is compare Alberta supports to other provinces, which does nothing to resolve the disability worker crisis, and given that the minister of social services failed to stand up for disabled Albertans in the budget by not reindexing basics, that would have been the basic thing to do, will he commit to ending the cuts to AISH and income supports and delivering a wage increase to disability workers before the session is out? People are hurting right now.

**The Speaker:** The hon. the Minister of Children's Services.

**Ms Schulz:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The members opposite know full well that the AISH budget increased by \$12 million. They know that the Community and Social Services budget increased by \$36 million this year. They know that the disability services budget is \$1.4 billion, which is an increase of \$61 million. We're providing an additional \$34 million to enhance career and employment services to support Albertans looking for jobs, to help people get back on their feet, and our partnerships with FCSS programs help people adopt healthy lifestyles right across this province. We will continue to support those most in need.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

### **Kinship Care**

**Mr. Neudorf:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We know that it is important to keep children connected to their families, communities, and culture wherever possible. For Indigenous children in particular it is important that children are with people familiar with the child's own cultural practices and traditions. I know a number of families that give of their lives to serve in this way. To the Minister of Children's Services: what is kinship care, and why is it a focus of your ministry?

**The Speaker:** The hon. the Minister of Children's Services.

**Ms Schulz:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. When a child comes into the child intervention system, our first priority is keeping families together whenever safely possible. Kinship care is a good alternative for kids that cannot safely remain with their immediate family, which, of course, would be our first option. However, these children are placed with caregivers that have a family relationship or connection to the child. For Indigenous children kinship care protects the child's connection to their family, their community, their culture. By investing in kinship care, more Indigenous children in our care will be taken care of according to traditional practices.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

**Mr. Neudorf:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the minister. Given that we know the importance of keeping families together, especially in the case of young siblings, and given the need for children to develop pride in their personal identity alongside familial and community belonging and further given this key role that kinship caregivers can play in Indigenous families and communities, to the same minister: how are you improving care and supporting kinship care providers?

**The Speaker:** The hon. minister.

2:40

**Ms Schulz:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Now, this move to kinship care was one of the recommendations from the all-party panel on child intervention. As part of our investment to providing care that keeps children connected with their families, cultures, and communities, we know we're going to continually need to review and improve these supports. For example, we're providing \$900 to kinship caregivers for initial and ongoing costs, welcoming a child into their home, recognizing that these are often stressful and emergency situations. We want to make sure that those families are ready, willing, and able to support children in need. We're improving how staff are trained so they understand how to successfully work with kinship caregivers, and we're adopting a timelier and more culturally appropriate home assessment practice.

**The Speaker:** The hon. member.

**Mr. Neudorf:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you again to the minister. Given that children do better when connected to their extended families, communities, and culture and that having these important aspects provides foundational relationships for their best futures and given that when a child comes into care, the ministry's primary focus is to find the best placement to meet the child's needs, to the Minister of Children's Services: how many children are receiving kinship care compared to other forms of placement?

**The Speaker:** The hon. minister.

**Ms Schulz:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Children do better when they are connected to their culture, their extended family, and their communities. Our continued commitment to kinship care has resulted in a greater number of children placed in kinship homes compared to foster homes. As of December in 2021 the number of kinship care homes has gone up to 2,422. This has surpassed the number of foster homes, at 1,674. This number continues to increase, which is important because we know, again, the importance of keeping kids connected to their families, their culture, and their community.

**The Speaker:** Hon. members, this concludes the time allotted for Oral Question Period. In 30 seconds or less we will return to the remainder of Members' Statements.

The Deputy Government House Leader.

**Mr. Schow:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I wish to advise the Assembly that pursuant to Standing Order 7(8) the daily Routine may continue beyond 3 p.m.

## Members' Statements

*(continued)*

### Federal Impact Assessment Act

**Mr. Sigurdson:** Mr. Speaker, I'm happy to speak about Alberta's historic victory today over the federal government's no-more-pipelines law, Bill C-69. This morning the Alberta Court of Appeal released their decision on Alberta's constitutional challenge of C-69, blasting the federal government in a 4-1 decision for their overreach into provincial jurisdiction and their attack on Alberta resource industries.

Mr. Speaker, I want to put on record a few of the court's statements. They said that C-69 "constitutes a profound invasion into provincial legislative jurisdiction and provincial proprietary

rights," a clear statement that this Legislature, not Ottawa, has the right to regulate our resources. The court went on to say that for Ottawa to have implemented C-69, it would have represented "the centralization of the governance of Canada to the point this country would no longer be recognized as a real federation." It cannot be overstated how significant this is. In addition, the highest court in Alberta has sent a message to Ottawa that the federal government does not have the "right to appropriate the birthright and economic future of the citizens of a province."

Mr. Speaker, when Canada repatriated our Constitution, in 1982, Premier Lougheed made sure that he included the promise of Alberta's right to control our own resources. This government has defended that promise. Ottawa will surely try to appeal, and Alberta will again defend our rights with the support of Alberta's highest court. I am confident that we will win again.

Mr. Speaker, when the NDP were in office, Alberta's constitutional rights were bulldozed by Justin Trudeau, and the NDP stood by and did nothing. Under this United Conservative government that will never happen again. The attack on Alberta's resource industries from the NDP-Liberal coalition stops here. It stops today. That message is what we send to Ottawa.

### Housing Prices and Affordability

**Mr. Gotfried:** Mr. Speaker, we have come to know and embrace the Alberta advantage as fundamental to Alberta's success. Recognized in different ways by each of us, for most it is about the advantages we possess in attracting people and investment while creating a sense of the spirit of inclusive opportunity we offer to Canadians and new immigrants alike. We have so much to be proud of in our province, from the beauty of our lakes, mountains, forests, foothills, and prairies to the blessings we enjoy from a bounty of natural resources and the drive, work ethic, entrepreneurial and community spirit of long-time residents and newcomers alike.

But, Mr. Speaker, we all need a roof over our heads and appropriate, affordable, and well-located housing in which to live, thrive, and grow. We are currently witnessing the challenges faced by individuals and families in other parts of our great country, and the pressure is right here in our own backyard. Housing affordability has and must continue to be seen by us as government and legislators and indeed all Albertans as a vital pillar of the Alberta advantage, now and into the future. We all have a part to play in ensuring housing affordability wherever Albertans may be on the housing continuum.

As our government remains focused on building upon our encouraging economic recovery, we must continue our commitment to health and social programs, diversification, innovation, and competitiveness, all well supported by housing choice and affordability. To attract businesses and investment, we must attract talented and ambitious people and their families by offering an enviable lifestyle and the opportunity to make a good living while building a good life. Mr. Speaker, let's keep our collective eye on the pressures we may face as we move back to a robust economy and strong net migration and ensure we work together on land and housing supply and tax and levy burdens as we recognize that, at the end of the day, it is owners and renters that not only drive our economy but prove that we can do so while ensuring the Alberta advantage is more about people than GDP.

Thank you.

### Calgary Downtown Revitalization

**Member Ceci:** In January of last year our leader spoke to the Calgary Chamber of commerce and promised to come back with a plan to

revitalize the city's downtown, and we delivered. Last month we released our plan to revitalize the downtown core, that has reached office vacancy rates not seen since the Great Depression. Our strategy, titled *Bringing New Energy to Downtown Calgary*, focuses on economic diversification, the creation of an innovation district, the direct funding to support the city of Calgary's greater downtown plan. Our strategy also proposes support for small businesses, events and festivals, public realm improvements, transit, more child care spaces and affordable housing units downtown, and support for mental health and addictions.

The UCP has repeatedly ridiculed our plan while offering no solutions of their own except for providing a paltry \$5 million in their latest budget. Instead, all they've done is delay. After the Finance minister said that there'd be no help for downtown Calgary, the government reversed course and promised to release a plan by September of last year. Month after month went by and nothing. It took them another eight months to finally release their report, only to find out that many of the recommendations are eerily similar to ours. But the government still has to review and decide which ones to implement, if any, and there still isn't any funding attached to these proposals.

Meanwhile the office vacancy rate continues to hover around 30 per cent, and Calgary has the highest unemployment rate out of any city in the country. Calgarians can't afford any more delays. In fact, they can't afford this government. Too much is at stake. If they are looking for a plan to revitalize downtown Calgary, we have one ready and waiting to be implemented. Go to our website.

Thank you.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Chestermere-Strathmore.

#### Domestic Violence Survivors

**Mrs. Aheer:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Can we please talk about coercive control and abuse and needed support for women to leave and to hold perpetrators accountable when they abuse? My dear friend Karen Gosbee, who is in the gallery today, is a survivor of 23 years of coercive control and domestic violence and courageously shared her story and advocacy for victims when she wrote *A Perfect Nightmare: My Glittering Marriage and How It Almost Cost Me My Life*. Quote: "There was a nonfatal strangulation attempt with guns in the house. Karen called 911 to protect herself and the children. That resulted in George freaking out even more and raving about how he would never be given the Order of Canada now despite the countless awards he had received over the years, including the Queen Elizabeth II silver jubilee medal from Premier Redford and many others. But the Order of Canada: that's the one that he coveted. And being found out as a domestic abuser would have ruined his chances. That's what was most important and what he was concerned about."

Strangulation is a predictor for future lethal violence. Victims are 750 per cent more likely to die at the hands of their abusers, and 80 per cent of women never even come forward. Mr. Speaker, it is individuals like Karen Gosbee that have the biggest impact on change, and she has contributed her advocacy to fellow survivors of coercive control and abuse. Quote: "Before I came forward, I," Karen, "was told by influential male leaders not to reveal I was a domestic abuse survivor because my advocacy would be discredited." End quote.

2:50

We are the elected leaders with the power to make decisions to make change. Maintaining one's power and control, whether that's physical or coercive control, is abuse when one's rights are sacrificed to uphold their own. When we come forward, Mr. Speaker, why do we lose power? When we speak the truth, they will

try to shut us up through intimidation and bullying. We need to listen and provide opportunity and resources for women to have the courage to come forward and make real change.

Thank you.

#### Justice System Funding and Access

**Mr. Sabir:** Mr. Speaker, we are all elected to this Chamber to serve Albertans, and the most fundamental way that we do this is by creating and supporting a justice system that is accessible, fair, and, most importantly, just. Albertans deserve a justice system that treats all Albertans equally and with respect and dignity, but over the last three years the UCP has shown that this is not the priority for them.

The UCP, since taking office, has slashed the Justice budget by over \$200 million, and it doesn't stop there. During their time in office the UCP has made it harder to access the justice system. They have imposed deep cuts to wraparound supports needed for a functional and effective justice system. They have cut victims of crime supports. They are making changes to Alberta's legal aid system that are opposed by the legal community and will further make it difficult to access justice for many Albertans. They ignore the calls of municipalities to drop their costly provincial police force idea. They are silent on the rising gun crimes and gun violence in Calgary.

Albertans are losing trust in this government, but this is what we can expect from a Premier and government that thinks they are above the law. They fired the Election Commissioner who was investigating them. Their Justice minister attempted to interfere in the administration of justice, and rather than sanction this behaviour, the Premier chose to reward it with a new cabinet post. They work overtime to try and silence the voices of the opposition and Albertans who oppose their agenda.

This is a government that claims to be tough on crime, but that's a talking point only since they are doing absolutely nothing to address crime and its root causes. Albertans deserve a government that addresses crime and its root causes and understands the rule of law and lives every day to uphold it, and the Alberta NDP is prepared to be that government.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Livingstone-Macleod.

#### Hemochromatosis Awareness Month

**Mr. Reid:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my privilege to rise in this House today to acknowledge and welcome Liz and Deborah from the Canadian Hemochromatosis Society. The month of May is Hemochromatosis Awareness Month, and this year marks the 40th anniversary of this society. At the beginning of the month Liz launched her cross-Canada awareness tour, starting in Victoria, with Elsie the Bus. Liz is travelling across Canada, with Alberta stops here in Edmonton and in Calgary.

Hemochromatosis, or iron overload, is Canada's most common genetic disorder. As a result, so many people may not know that they could have it, and that's why awareness is so important. Early detection of this disorder could prevent so many Canadians from having serious life complications.

That's why people like Liz Charyna and Deborah Storlien-Cundy, both in attendance here today from the society, will be spending time over the next four months stopping in many towns and cities to help raise awareness of this disorder. They are here today in our beautiful Legislature, and I encourage all members to take time to say hello and thank them for their hard work. Their dedication, time, and effort to raise awareness for this disorder is amazing. The tour started earlier this month in Victoria and will be heading to St. John's, Newfoundland, and back.



Liz told me that they are celebrating a wide variety of things as they stop to speak to Canadians: celebrating early diagnosis, celebrating the people learning to live with hemochromatosis and knowing that they are not alone, celebrating the physicians and other health care providers who recognize the symptoms of hemochromatosis in their patients and provide treatment, and celebrating all the friends, members, and volunteers of chapters of the Canadian Hemochromatosis Society across Canada.

With the month of May being important for so many other disorders and diseases, it's important that some like hemochromatosis aren't lost in the shuffle. Thank you again to Liz and Deborah for taking the time to stop in and visit our Legislature today. The work you do is so amazing, and without you so many Canadians might not know they have a disorder like this one.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont.

### Economic Recovery and Job Creation

**Mr. Rutherford:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As I had mentioned in this House before, unemployment is a scary thought for anyone and, sadly, a reality for some. Our government cares about Albertans, and we are doing what we can to ensure that Albertans have a chance and opportunity to work and provide for themselves and their families. Despite a world-wide pandemic unemployment in Alberta is lower today than it was under the NDP.

While job creation throughout the rest of the country has come to a halt, this has not been the case for Alberta; in fact, it's been quite the opposite. Our province had created 16,000 jobs just in April alone. This marks six consecutive months of job gains in Alberta. Since the UCP took government, we have seen Alberta's unemployment rate drop, and just last week it dropped once again to 5.9 per cent. This is the lowest unemployment rate our province has had since 2015. Alberta's recovery plan is continuing to prove its success.

Our province is building momentum, diversifying, and gaining strength, all while leading the country in overall employment rate. The only thing that's holding us back is our labour shortage, which we are addressing through the Alberta at work program. Mr. Speaker, this program is taking action to help Albertans not only find jobs but to build skills and advance their careers as well. This program strengthens our province's K to 12 education system, supports access to training and career development opportunities, helps out-of-work Albertans get back into the workforce, with many other steps to benefit Alberta's workforce and point our province towards economic growth.

Mr. Speaker, we know how important economic growth is in our province, but does the opposition understand its importance? While the NDP mock red tape reduction, campaign on higher taxes for Albertans, and support long, full lockdowns in this province, our government's approach has been quite different and points Alberta towards a brighter and more secure future. Our government aims to cut red tape, has lowered the corporate tax rate, is creating jobs, and is making Alberta the most competitive economy to invest in. This plan puts Alberta in line for both short- and long-term economic growth. Our recovery plan is working. Alberta is back.

Thank you.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Lac Ste. Anne-Parkland.

### Lac Ste. Anne-Parkland Constituency Priorities

**Mr. Getson:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I still consider myself an interloper and a newbie when it comes to politics. I don't feel that this is a detriment, however, to my constituents because, in fact,

because of that, I ask more questions. One of the simple questions I ask the most often is: what matters to you? That typically gets the ball rolling.

I host interactive town halls in person and online. School board chairs, town mayors, county reeves, councillors, chambers of commerce are in attendance, and these folks get to sit up front with me in the hot seat so people in the audience can see that we work, we ask, and we interact in the province. There's no script. It's wide open, open mic when you come to a "what matters to you?" town hall. Folks get to hear about some of the great things that the government has done and that we're working on. They also get to hear about what their MLA has been up to on keeping our commitments and getting some status updates on the projects.

Corporate media doesn't cover the good news very well. Fear and conflict seems to sell more clicks. I faithfully write articles in a local newspaper to discuss the issues at our town halls, and the response has been extremely positive. Here's what I'm hearing from a lot of Albertans.

The economy. They like the economic corridors. They like the corridor authority concept. They like the balanced budget, low taxes, economic diversification. They need lower costs of input. Inflation is killing us.

Mental health supports for our youth. There's a bright future ahead for the youth, and we don't hear that very often. They need us to help deliver that message of the good things that are happening out there.

COVID response. The REP program tore the communities apart, and it's up to us to ensure that that never happens again.

Real health care reforms. Not window dressing, not more of the same, not the rhetoric of American-style health care scare tactics. Don't throw more money at it; actually get to the root of the problem and make it cost-effective, delivering quality service.

And they don't want any more socialist governments, quite frankly. They had enough of that.

They sure as heck have seen what the bromance down in Ottawa is doing, and they're done with it. They want more autonomy for the province, and Bill C-69 being turned down today by our courts is showing that.

We've got a year left, so let's make it happen.

### Tabling Returns and Reports

**The Speaker:** Are there tablings? The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

**Mr. Neudorf:** Thank you. I have the requisite number of copies of an article I quoted in my private member's motion yesterday, Alberta Municipal Gov't Labour Costs Out of Touch with Reality, by Franco Terrazzano.

**The Speaker:** Are there others? The hon. Member for Central Peace-Notley is rising for a tabling.

**Mr. Loewen:** Yes, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to rise and table the story Inside the Kenney Government's System of Secrecy, that I referred to in my questions today, about the attempt to obstruct the FOIP Act.

**The Speaker:** Of course, the hon. Member for Central Peace-Notley would never use the proper name even if he was quoting a newspaper article.

Does he have other tablings, or is that all?

**Mr. Loewen:** Yes. One more. I'll table the letter I sent the Information and Privacy Commissioner in regard to that information.

3:00

**The Speaker:** Are there others? The hon. Member for Lac Ste. Anne-Parkland.

**Mr. Getson:** Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I've shared with the public here recently my own personal story, my health history of the vaccine injury. With that, it seemed to have popped a bit of a bubble. I have tablings here with the requisite copies of a number of individuals. Ken Hiller is one of them who had more issues with that. He's lost mobility in his arm. He had a bunch of other health issues. I have that for Mr. Ken Hiller.

I have another one here for Ms Char Barnier. Again, similar type items: having health care issues, has lost control of her arm, has had issues with heart complications, has lost time at work as well and also with a daughter who's lost employment as a nurse.

I have another tabling here of Michelle Merrett. Again, similar type of items. She works in a stressful organization, her normal work. She is now suffering from brain fog, suffering from tons of pains, aches, uncontrolled items that are still yet to be fully recognized and speaks to the process of having the federal government recognition of vaccine injuries.

I have another tabling from Lorna Kennedy. This one is talking about lymphatic issues that were brought on by it, talking about some of the other pains and aches in the legs and hands. Again, similar items with the brain fog. Her husband then had heart conditions and heart issues since that.

I'll have some more tablings for tomorrow, sir.

**The Speaker:** Hon. members, we are at points of order. At 2:16 the Member for Taber-Warner rose on a point of order, and the Deputy Government House Leader will be arguing on his behalf.

### Point of Order Remarks off the Record

**Mr. Schow:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We were doing so well leading up to this day with no points of order this week. However, at 2:15 the Member for Taber-Warner called a point of order. At the time the Associate Minister of Natural Gas and Electricity was answering a question from the opposition. It was quite a raucous moment in the Chamber. The comment was overheard: you're a clown. The point of order was called on the Member for Edmonton-Decore, but the reality is that I cannot confirm whether that was, in fact, the case. I did hear the comment.

I do believe this is a point of order under 23(h), (i), and (j). If whoever said that comment did in fact say it, which I believe they did, hopefully, they'd recognize how inappropriate it is and apologize, but I'll leave the rest in your hands, Mr. Speaker.

**The Speaker:** The Deputy Opposition House Leader.

**Mr. Sabir:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I certainly didn't hear it and the Deputy Government House Leader didn't hear it, but I can agree that if any member has called the minister of natural gas a clown, at least in this Legislature, that would be offside the House rules, but I didn't hear it.

**The Speaker:** Hon. members, as you know, remarks that do not appear on the public record do not invite an intervention by the Speaker, *House of Commons Procedure and Practice*, 624. However, I do concur with both the Deputy Opposition House Leader and the Deputy Government House Leader that if anyone did call the minister a clown, the honourable thing would be to apologize and withdraw. I consider the matter dealt with and concluded.

At approximately 2:17 the hon. Member for Central Peace-Notley rose on a point of order and then again at 2:19. I'm not sure if they are two separate incidents or if they can be combined, but I'll call upon him now.

### Point of Order Allegations against a Member

**Mr. Loewen:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Yes. I called a point of order on 23(h), (i), and (j), "makes allegations against another Member; imputes false or unavowed motives to another Member; [and] uses abusive or insulting language of a nature likely to create disorder." Now, I don't have the benefit of the Blues, but the nearest I can figure what the Government House Leader said was: "continued to put forward false allegations . . . I've lost count of how many false allegations" we get from opposition, "none of which, Mr. Speaker, after three years have ever been found to be true."

The Government House Leader knows full well that the allegations regarding the unethical FOIP actions of the Premier have been made by staff in the government, some current staff and some previous staff. Now, I'm hoping that he's not calling these staff liars in this case, but he also did say that this was coming from "anonymous Twitter trolls." Now, I'm going to suggest that he's not calling government staff anonymous Twitter trolls or calling Charles Rusnell or Jennie Russell, those investigative journalists that come up with this information, Twitter trolls also.

As far as "none . . . have ever been found true" in his comments, I wanted to mention just a couple of instances. There was the sky palace party, where the Premier clearly denied anything went wrong there for multiple days and then finally admitted guilt. In fact, I think what he said at the time was that he actually had staff go back and measure the distance between the chairs, and they were actually less than two metres, which obviously made it that it was actually a fact that it was an issue and he was guilty there.

I also want to point to the kamikaze campaign, where the Premier said he knew nothing about the financing. Of course, then there are stories come out where the Premier did know about the financing. Of course, there was a couple hundred thousand dollars . . .

**The Speaker:** I am certain that the hon. Member for Central Peace-Notley is aware that points of order are not to be used to prolong debate. I assume the point of order is with respect to the language around false allegations. I don't think we have time this afternoon to defend, argue, debate all sorts of things that may or may not have happened in the past. If the member has any other specific allegations or concerns around the point of order with respect to that language, I'm happy to hear them. If not, we'll be moving on to the government.

**Mr. Loewen:** Yes, Mr. Speaker. Obviously, the accusation that they were false allegations is not true. The suggestion that there has never been in three years any allegations to be found true is also incorrect. I ask that the member apologize and withdraw.

**Mr. Schow:** Mr. Speaker, this is, of course, a matter of debate. There's a lot to unpack from the statements made from the hon. Member for Central Peace-Notley, none of which rise to the threshold of a point of order. He said himself in his remarks that none of this has been substantiated. These are all allegations made by members of the public, none of which have been proven true. While the Member for Central Peace-Notley may not like the comments from the Government House Leader, I certainly don't believe they rise to the level of a point of order.

**The Speaker:** I would agree. This is a matter of debate and not a point of order. I consider the matter dealt with and concluded.

At 2:19 the hon. Member for Central Peace-Notley rose on an additional point of order. I'm happy to hear that now should he choose to do so.

### Point of Order Parliamentary Language

**Mr. Loewen:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I rise on a point of order, 23(h), (i), and (j) again. On the quote from the House leader – again I don't have the benefit of the Blues, but as near as I can recall it was, "That member and his NDP colleagues, who continue just . . . to make things up." Now, of course, this isn't true. There's no relationship with myself and the NDP. In fact, I brought this up before when I was tabling documents on March 31, to which the Government House Leader became very agitated. I guess he doesn't like to be called out when he lacks truth in his statements and comments, but he did have to apologize and withdraw twice over that incident on March 31. I was just going to suggest the best way for the Government House Leader to avoid situations where facts are laid out that prove he is incorrect is to start telling the truth. It's easy.

Thank you very much.

**Mr. Schow:** Well, Mr. Speaker, before I begin arguing this point of order – rather, against it – I would say that points of order should not be used as an opportunity to call the House leader a liar in however creative a way that may be. Suggesting that he "lacks truth in his statements" would indirectly be saying that, but we'll move on from that.

Mr. Speaker, in this Chamber we are all colleagues. Whether we're on the same party, same benches, or opposite sides, we are, in fact, colleagues working on behalf of the people of Alberta. To suggest that there is a problem, that saying "the Member for Central Peace-Notley and his NDP colleagues" is offensive – I can't speak for the hon. Government House Leader, but to say "the Member for Central Peace-Notley and his colleagues" is not a point of order. However, if that member is concerned about the perception of siding with the NDP, then I would suggest that he would stop playing petty politics and stop siding with them on important issues regarding this province. Siding with members who are closely seated to him would not be in his best interest if he doesn't want to be associated with such a caucus.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I do believe that this is a matter of debate and is certainly not something that should be a point of order.

3:10

**The Speaker:** I thank you for both of your interjections.

I do have the benefit of the Blues.

That's been made clear by the government, and . . . anonymous Twitter trolls are not real allegations. This is the approach that you see from the NDP. That member and his NDP colleagues, who continue just . . . to make things up, Mr. Speaker: it's very, very disappointing.

I will say that the hon. Member for Central Peace-Notley ought to know that trying to find the most creative way possible, whether it's in point of order debate or regular debate, to call another member of the Assembly a liar is unparliamentary, just as it is and I have made many comments about making allegations that certain members, specific members, are making things up.

I would encourage both members to consider the caution appropriately. This is not a point of order. I consider this matter dealt with and concluded.

Ordres du jour.

## Orders of the Day Government Bills and Orders Committee of the Whole

[Mrs. Pitt in the chair]

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

### Bill 17 Labour Statutes Amendment Act, 2022

**The Chair:** This is the bill's first time in Committee of the Whole. I see the hon. Minister of Labour and Immigration standing to speak.

**Mr. Madu:** Thank you so much, Madam Chair. I am very pleased to rise and speak to Bill 17 in Committee of the Whole. As I have shared with members previously, Bill 17 introduces changes that would improve Albertans' access to bereavement and reservist leaves and maintain the status quo at postsecondary institutions. Job-protected leaves like bereavement leave and reservist leave allow employees to take time away from work to attend to personal matters without fear of losing their job. To show compassion to parents grieving the loss of an unborn child, bereavement leave will be expanded to include employees who experience a miscarriage or stillbirth as the bill is currently drafted.

Madam Chair, there has been a lot of discussion with stakeholders and in this House on bereavement leave and the proposed changes to it. I thank the various stakeholders and members of this House for their thoughtful contributions to this debate so far.

Madam Chair, I do want to thank my colleague the hon. Member for Sherwood Park for his private member's bill that inspired Bill 17. The hon. Member for Sherwood Park consulted with stakeholders and partners who have invested a lifetime in pregnancy loss supports across our province. I would also like to thank them for sharing their experiences with us.

Madam Chair, I also want to offer my sincere thanks and recognize Ms Aditi Loveridge, founder and chief executive officer of the Pregnancy and Infant Loss Support Centre, for the work she and her organization do on a daily basis and her critical advocacy on this issue to see that this is a really good bill.

In response to debate in this Assembly as well as feedback from these stakeholders and as I committed in this Assembly, I would like to introduce an amendment to the sections of the bill that address bereavement leave, and I do have the requisite copies here, Madam Chair.

**The Chair:** I'll just wait for a copy, and then I'll have you read it into the record.

Hon. members, this will be known as amendment A1.

Hon. minister, please proceed to debate.

**Mr. Madu:** Thank you, Madam Chair. I move that Bill 17, the Labour Statutes Amendment Act, 2022, be amended as follows: section 1(5) is amended in the proposed section 53.983(2) by striking out clauses (b) to (d) and substituting the following:

- (b) the pregnancy of the employee ends other than as a result of a live birth;
- (c) the pregnancy of the employee's spouse or common-law partner ends other than as a result of a live birth;
- (d) the pregnancy of another person ends other than as a result of a live birth and the employee would have been a parent of a child born as a result of the pregnancy.

With this amendment the legislation would provide the broadest approach possible to address any situation where pregnancy ends other than in a live birth regardless of the reason or timing for the end of the pregnancy.

To be clear, Madam Chair, miscarriage and stillbirth are still covered, and employees experiencing miscarriage or stillbirth will be eligible for bereavement leave. Instead of naming miscarriage or stillbirth specifically, if this amendment is accepted, the legislation would use more general terminology to make it clear that any employee experiencing pregnancy loss is eligible for bereavement leave.

Madam Chair, pregnancy loss is a very difficult and highly personal circumstance. Employees experiencing any kind of pregnancy loss should be able to access bereavement leave without having to share the details of their circumstance with their employers. Once again, I would like to also thank members in this Assembly and others who have spoken out on the importance of making bereavement leave available to any employee who experiences any kind of pregnancy loss.

With that, Madam Chair, I hope that all members of this Assembly present would vote in favour of this amendment. Thank you.

**The Chair:** Are there others to join the debate on amendment A1 on Bill 17? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

**Member Irwin:** Thank you, Madam Chair, for calling on me. I have many, many, many comments to make, but it is committee, so I may just make a few right now and then return once I've had a bit more time to digest.

Now, I want to start my remarks, actually, quite similarly to the minister. Gosh, I have to just talk about and highlight the incredible advocates who, as the minister said, have worked with this government. In fact, prior, when the Member for Sherwood Park worked on this in its previous iteration as a private member's bill, it was during that debate that, you know, we had the opportunity, all of us, to very much ask questions about the specificity of that proposed legislation. It was in that discussion, too, that we shared our shared support of folks like Aditi Loveridge, who is the head of the pregnancy and infant loss centre in Calgary. In fact, they work all over the province, and they're expanding to other areas as well.

3:20

It's never been more on my radar and on the radar of so many Albertans and Canadians, the issue of a person's right to choose and the issues around abortion. We need to look no further than the United States and the proposed overturning of Roe versus Wade, which, as everybody in this Chamber knows, has sent serious chills down the spines of many. You know, this government, when asked to debate abortion access and to talk about the real threats facing women and gender-diverse folks in this province, refused to. The associate minister responsible for Status of Women dismissed our concerns and minimized them as something that happens south of the border.

You know, it was incredibly frustrating for us and for so many who were watching at home to hear that dismissive attitude because we've seen, yeah, countless examples where threats to human rights, threats to reproductive rights are ever present. By dismissing them and by minimizing them, it puts all the freedoms that so many of us – many, many folks – have fought for. I think just prior in the Assembly to the veteran who's celebrating his 100th birthday – apologies that I forgot his name; I will find that and correct the record because that's my error for talking off the cuff – as an example of somebody who fought for our freedoms. We were so honoured to celebrate him today.

All that to say, you know, that I see this amendment in front of me from the minister, which seeks to strike out some of the clauses that we in the Official Opposition as well as stakeholders, those on the front lines, had concerns with. We really wanted to make sure that – I expressed this, and so did my colleagues in the Chamber. We don't always have a great number of opportunities to work together on pieces of legislation and really get them right, so I appreciate that we've had an opportunity to go back and forth. I appreciate that the minister was willing to listen as well to folks with lived experience, folks on the front lines.

I guess, because it is committee, again, I like – and I think I say this probably at least once a week in the Chamber. I am not a lawyer, and my key legal adviser . . . [interjection] I know; I know, to the Member for West Yellowhead, that you're shocked by this. My key – oh. I was going to say something that might be a point of order. I'm unable to consult with my key legal adviser at the moment, but I do want to get some clarity from the minister because, again, I sometimes need a little bit of guidance on language in amendments.

I see in the amendment – again, for those watching at home, we've just gotten this:

- (b) the pregnancy of the employee ends other than as a result of a live birth;
- (c) the pregnancy of the employee's spouse or common-law partner ends other than as a result of a live birth;
- (d) the pregnancy of another person ends other than as a result of a live birth and the employee would have been a parent of a child born as a result of the pregnancy.

Particularly in clauses (b) and (c) I want to get some confirmation from the minister if this amendment specifically includes termination for medical reasons and abortion. I want to get that clarity because one of the big concerns that stakeholders raised is that – listen, somebody who is experiencing pregnancy loss – and many of my colleagues have shared their own experiences, were quite vulnerable in doing so, and I respect that so much.

One of the things that they've shared and others with lived experience have shared is just, you know, that it's one of the toughest times that somebody will have to go through, and we're concerned that if there's a lack of clarity and a lack of inclusivity in the language, that's going to put a lot on the person to try to navigate understanding what exactly is written in the legislation. We can't have any room for interpretation on this bill. We can't force an employee at one of the toughest, most traumatic times of their life to have to justify why they need that leave and have to explain to their employer. You know, like I said, it's committee. I appreciate that we'll have lots of back and forth, and I know I've got colleagues who want to ask a few more questions as well, but I would like to, hopefully, get that clarity on the record from the minister.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

**The Chair:** Are there others to join the debate on amendment A1? The hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Devon.

**Mr. Smith:** Thank you, Madam Chair. I'm pleased to be able to rise today and to speak to this amendment on Bill 17, the Labour Statutes Amendment Act, 2022. The changes that have been made by this amendment, in my mind, broaden it and change some of the language. It talks about pregnancy of the employee ending other than as a result of a live birth.

I believe that when I rose the other day to speak in second reading to Bill 17 I focused my remarks on the fact that this bill was dealing, amongst other things, with unpaid bereavement leave. This amendment focuses in on that part of this bill. The leave recognizes that a pregnancy lost to miscarriage or to stillbirth – in second reading we talked about the fact that a miscarriage or a stillbirth

should be recognized, that the grief over the loss of a young child in the womb due to miscarriage and to a stillbirth has value and that we should recognize that with three days' leave for the employee or for a spouse or for any of the other situations that are mentioned within the bill.

In second reading I rose to speak in support of Bill 17 because it recognizes that all Albertans – what I believe all Albertans intuitively know, that they instinctively know, that the grief that they have is not bounded by whether that life is inside or whether it's outside of the womb. As I listened to the debate in this House, in this Legislature, the debate to that point had been gratifying to hear, that MLAs on both sides of the House understood this, that the life that we grieve has value.

Every life, Madam Chair, I believe, has value, regardless of its age or its colour or its religion or its nationality or any other precondition that you would want to put on it. Value is not placed on life as a result of its status or its income or its mental acuity or any perceived value that a society or an individual could place on it. Life has value from conception until death, not for any other reason than because it is a human life. It is a person and, in my eyes, a life that is made in the image of God. All life is worthy of life. And any loss of a valuable life is worthy of our grief and of a period of mourning.

Madam Chair, the amendment before us today I believe broadens Bill 17 in that it now refers to a pregnancy ending other than the result of a live birth. I will be supporting this amendment for two reasons. Firstly, I believe that it recognizes that in many, many cases, even in the case of an abortion, there can be and often is great and at times even debilitating grief. I believe that this amendment also recognizes that there are many circumstances under which life in utero may be lost, and in all of those circumstances it is a life that has value and has the capacity and should have the capacity to be mourned.

3:30

Madam Chair, I know there will be some people that perhaps are pro life that will question how the amendment can be supported when an unborn life in the womb that is taken not as a result of an unfortunate life circumstance but has occurred as a result of a deliberate choice could be supported by someone like me, that is pro life. While this is true, I would bring to everyone's attention the need in all of our lives for mercy, for compassion, for grace, and for love. I've met and I have listened to women of all ages who have grieved and had immense emotional pain over their abortions. They have regretted that decision, and they have mourned over the loss of the life of their child, in many cases for years and years. This amendment recognizes what many women, what many fathers, what many grandparents, what many siblings have recognized, that the life lost in the womb had value, that their grief is real, and that the time to mourn is necessary, even and maybe especially when the loss of the pregnancy is the result of an abortion.

Secondly, Madam Chair, I support this amendment because there are many circumstances in life under which life in the uterus, in utero, may be lost. Therefore, the grief will be as unique as the circumstances and the individuals involved and so must be recognized by this bill. This amendment, by broadening the language, recognizes this and is therefore, I believe, worthy of support.

Madam Chair, we've heard from both sides of this Legislature that we understand that all life, including life in the womb, has value and is worthy of the grief that we have at its loss. It is therefore reasonable to this MLA that the amendment should receive the support of this House, and I would encourage all MLAs to do so.

Thank you.

**The Chair:** Are there others to join the debate on amendment A1? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

**Ms Hoffman:** Thank you very much, Madam Chair. I'm going to start by saying that hearing from two government members who have never had to make a decision for themselves about whether or not they'll need an abortion, who come here and talk to us about abortion and use phrases like "life in utero" repeatedly in this place when they know how loaded those terms are, I think is disrespectful to all women who are engaged in this consideration this afternoon. I appreciate that they have an opinion and that they have every right to share it. I think that women's voices need to be heard loud and clear. Women's voices, obviously, from our caucus have been amplified, but I think women within all political parties owe it to be engaged in this debate and to be very clear about where they stand on women's rights to choose or any Albertan's right to choose.

I've definitely heard from many Albertans who don't identify as women who didn't think they'd ever be in the horrific decision of having to decide whether or not to proceed with a pregnancy because they didn't plan on having a man make them get pregnant. That was not part of what they anticipated was going to be a part of their life plan.

To any Albertan who has been in a position where they need to make a choice about their own body and their own health when it comes to reproduction, I want to say that the members of this caucus support Albertans in making those choices for themselves. To apply lots of cloaked language about whether or not somebody has a right to have time off when they've undergone a medical procedure that often causes a variety of physical responses, I think – I've heard what you've had to say, and I want to acknowledge that.

I know that many people really wanted clear language from the government in their amendment to actually spell out abortion and termination of pregnancy for medical reasons. That was a very clear ask from people who are going to be required to interpret this down the road, and I'm sure that the minister who brought forward the amendment thinks that this goes far enough in the language that he's choosing. I'm sure that he very deliberately – he very deliberately – chose language like "other than as a result of a live birth," thinking that that was probably inclusive enough. I know that people who are going to be tasked with interpreting this have asked us specifically to have the law spell out abortion and termination for medical reasons.

I want to talk for a moment about why people who are in that position deserve the opportunity to have the same protection in law, to have protected time away from work to be able to heal and to be sick, very frankly. I think that most people who – and it's interesting, too. You'll often hear men say: it's a decision that should only be between a woman and her doctor. I actually don't think it should be up to the doctor. I think it should be up to the person who's pregnant to make the determination whether or not they proceed with their pregnancy, and I really wish that the government would acknowledge that through clear language in this amendment.

If they won't put it in this amendment – and for anyone who doesn't know the details around legislative process, once a section has been amended, you can't reamend that same section. So by the government putting this language in and the government having a majority, if they so choose to pass it, it means that other people in this House can't bring forward amendments to the same section that would actually give that clarity. The government stood up – maybe they stood up – and the government was recognized immediately for standing first in the Assembly and having the attention of the person facilitating the debate. Fair enough. And the government has chosen to use this language other than the language that was very explicitly asked for from many folks for whom this issue is a very deep, personal issue.

Is this language better than where we were at before the amendment was brought forward for consideration? Probably. Is this our best work? I don't think so. I think that we could do a very good service to the people of Alberta by actually spelling out the types of pregnancy loss, including abortion and termination for medical reasons.

I also want to take a moment to say very explicitly that I know women who have had to make this difficult decision. They knew full well that if they went full term and if it resulted in a live birth, the fetus that they were carrying would not survive past the point of birth for more than a few minutes or hours based on all of the medical analysis on the status of the fetus. To say to that expectant mother, that pregnant person, "If you go full term, then you can have the guaranteed protection; if you don't, you may not have the protection of a job-protected sick leave while you're dealing with the impacts of your pregnancy termination or pregnancy loss," I think that that, again, puts this chilling effect over women and their bodies.

**Member Irwin:** And gender-diverse folks.

**Ms Hoffman:** And gender-diverse folks. Yeah. Thank you for that.

I didn't think that we'd be in a position where this would be such an area of focus for our consideration in this Legislature a few months ago. Actually, as soon as the Premier was elected, I thought that there will be things that are done covertly to roll back women's protection. Certainly, he doesn't have a track record of wanting to talk about women's reproductive health in this place.

In fact, he got up and ordered every member of his caucus – or maybe he didn't order it. But somebody directed every member of their caucus to get up and walk out of this Chamber 13 times – 13 times – almost four years ago to the day when we brought in protection to stop people from being harassed as they entered or were in the vicinity of a health facility that provided these types of services, so bubble-zone protection.

3:40

**An Hon. Member:** Thirteen times?

**Ms Hoffman:** Thirteen times, not once or twice. The first couple of times it was definitely something we'd never seen before in this place: an entire caucus get up and walk out of the Chamber, neglecting to engage in debate, engage in their jobs, actually, their jobs as it relates to making decisions in this place for Albertans, get up and walk out of this Chamber 13 times. I believe one person did speak at one stage, but nobody voted. How disrespectful that is to, obviously, the people directly impacted by the legislation but also to the people who sent them here to come and do their jobs, so frustrating and so disrespectful.

I have to say that I really wish the government had been more definitive in the actual language in the amendment. Since they haven't and since I know that there are times where laws need to be interpreted and that one of the main things that those who are interpreting do is that they go back to see what the debate was around those sections as they were being considered to become law, it would be really great if the government could just definitively state that this includes abortion and termination for medical reasons, at least on *Hansard* if they're not going to put it in the amendment. It would be much better in the amendment, but if they can at least put it on the record so that if we do get to the point where people are arguing over their rights as it relates to the law and the labour statutes amendment that we are considering today, I think that that would be far more appropriate than continuing to throw around coded language. I think that Albertans deserve that clarity, and anyone who needs to access this type of job-protected sick leave needs to have that clarity on the record.

It isn't just because of the 13 times every member of the UCP got up and walked out of the Chamber. It's because there are many members within the government caucus that have a long, documented history of actually fighting against women's rights to choose and all people's rights to choose, the right to choice and to bodily autonomy as it relates to pregnancy status. There is such a well-documented history, and we've all seen the images where underneath the now Premier it says, "Anti-Abortion Activist." Like, Albertans deserve to have this clarity in law. It should have been in the amendment. It needs to be in *Hansard*. Continuing to try to skirt around the edges of what is such a fundamental question about our rights is more than disrespectful. I think it is a dereliction of responsibility to all people of this province, who expect government to make decisions.

I'm sure my colleagues of various political persuasions have opportunities to speak to children about the role of government. One of the questions kids often ask is: "What's the toughest part?" And I say, "Sometimes you've got to make really tough decisions, and at the end of the day you have a choice to vote yes or no." I have to say that today is yet another one of those days where the government is trying to muddy up the question, not make it as clear as it should be, and that, I think, is disrespectful to everyone who is waiting for the government to definitively stand up for choice and access to abortions throughout this province.

It really came to a head, of course, last Monday, just over a week ago. On Monday night, when that draft decision of the Supreme Court in the United States became publicly available, so many of us, I think, sat on our phones or whatever devices watching the news, seeing what was happening, and felt angry, frustrated, disrespected. And I don't live south of the border; I live here. But because an attack on *Roe versus Wade*, which has been held up as a beacon of human rights for many of us around the world, is about to be considered for a significant retraction on those rights, because that is happening in what was once seen as such a great democracy, it sends a chilling effect over other democracies around the world and women and other folks who might need to access abortions around the world.

So when I look at what's happening with some women and other folks who are fleeing Ukraine right now and ending up in Poland, some who are pregnant and, if they were still in Ukraine, would be able to access abortion services, and reporting that they're not able to access them now that they're in Poland – and some of them have said that they got pregnant because of sexual assault by people who were invading their country on them. I don't think that anyone wants to say: well, that's another country's legal authority, and they have a right to make a decision about, you know, how they're going to determine that.

I think we should all stand in unity and say: "You know, what's happening right now, an attack against *Roe versus Wade*, has ripple effects around the world. It's wrong, and we stand with women and other people who might need to access abortion services. We stand with them, and we oppose what's happening and this attack on human rights." I wish the current government had the moral conviction to stand up and say that. For those who are looking to the current government for an assurance that they absolutely will not waver, I wish we saw the clarity in language in this place that Albertans and all people deserve to hear from other democratic governments around the world. It seems clear that the current Premier and members of his cabinet and, potentially, caucus continue to evade the question and continue to try to create any opportunity to distract, and I think that that is incredibly disrespectful to all of the people who are calling on their government to show some leadership.

Is this amendment better than the bill was before the amendment? Maybe. Is this amendment our best work? I don't think so. I don't think this is our best work. I don't think it's answering the question that many have asked us to engage in. It is better in that it doesn't

say “miscarriage” or “stillbirth” explicitly now. The bill is amended by striking clauses (b) through (d). That’s where it specifically said “miscarriage” and “stillbirth.” Thank you to my colleague from Calgary-Buffalo for pointing that out. Replacing “miscarriage” and “stillbirth” with this language that says, “Ends other than as a result of a live birth” I guess is a possible positive step forward, but it certainly isn’t definitive clarity that so many have been asking for.

They want the government to say the words. They want the government to put the words in law, and this government fails to do that time and time again, which is one of the reasons why, when people like the Associate Minister of Status of Women say, “We haven’t made any changes; the law is the same today as it was yesterday” – well, when you refuse to actually put in law words like “abortion,” it implies that that might not actually be a choice down the road because it could result in something other than a live birth, right? It doesn’t speak to the issue of the day, the issue that’s been raised, which is that people want the words “abortion” and “termination for medical reasons” to be incorporated in this.

By skirting around it and failing to actually address the question that has been asked, the question that my colleague the Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood asked in this Chamber – and the minister responsible for this amendment was directed by the Premier. I sat here. I saw it play out. The Premier said: just say yes to the amendment. Well, the amendment was to include abortion and termination for medical reasons. That’s what we were asking about. That’s what the Premier directed the minister to respond with, and that is absolutely not what is being put here definitively in black and white for us to consider.

So I have to say that it probably is better than just saying “stillbirth” or “miscarriage,” but it doesn’t answer the question that was asked, that the Premier directed the minister to bring forward an amendment to address, and I think that that is disrespectful to this place. It’s disrespectful to the member’s question when it was asked, and it’s disrespectful to women and anybody who is worried about their own bodily autonomy when it comes to reproductive health and a choice that they may have to make at some point in their lives.

3:50

While I appreciate that many men in this place have opinions on this issue and I especially appreciate the solidarity that’s felt in our caucus, I think the fact that people who haven’t had to make these decisions and will never have to make these decisions for themselves have been the only voices on the record from the government when it comes to the amendment that has been asked for from women’s rights organizations and others representing gender-diverse folks is incredibly disrespectful.

I think I will leave my remarks there for the time being and see where the conversation continues to, but this is absolutely a call to action for every single one of us in this place and particularly for women in this place because this bill is so close to the rights that we should all have protected.

Thank you.

**The Chair:** Are there others to join the debate on amendment A1? The hon. Member for St. Albert.

**Ms Renaud:** Thank you, Madam Chair. It’s my pleasure to rise and speak to the amendment to Bill 17, amendment A1. First, let me say that I think Bill 17 is an important piece of legislation. I was also in the Chamber when I saw the Premier sort of communicate with the minister and just say yes about an amendment. I was encouraged that that would happen, and I think we’ve all been waiting to see what this amendment from the government would look like. I’m

hoping that it’s just an oversight – and, hopefully, the minister will come back and clarify or perhaps amend the amendment and make some changes – but I don’t think it goes far enough.

Of course, I was happy to see the leave supported. I think it’s important to understand why these leaves, not just stillbirth and not just miscarriage – but there are other things where leaves are very important, and those things include abortion and termination for medical reasons. I don’t understand, Madam Chair – well, I guess I do understand why people are afraid to actually say those words. It’s almost like we work with code. You know, we’re not going to say it. We’ll say certain things that are careful – it’s a decision between someone and their doctor – but we won’t come out and say it.

But I think that we all need to step up and reaffirm that abortion is a human right. It’s a human right, and I think that it’s a critical piece of advancing the story of women’s advancement. I think it’s really important for us to recognize that for a woman or any person to have complete control over their body is important. It’s essential to advance human rights.

And it shouldn’t matter why. All too often I think that we’re qualifying things. You know, like my colleagues, actually, probably over the last year or so I watched with horror what is happening to the south, in the United States. We saw a lot of disturbing things happening in Texas. We saw the Governor of Texas I think it was in 2021, where they made abortion after six weeks’ gestation illegal. We saw some lawsuits or a threat of lawsuits to any practitioners that would offer these services to people. We saw them opening up the ability for lawsuits against them. Again, people were measuring their ability to do that, and all of this is methodically designed to reduce access to abortion.

When we saw the leaked decision for *Roe v. Wade*, I think – I’m not going to speak for my colleagues. You know, I was horrified by it, not entirely surprised but horrified by it. It was my hope – it became even more important that we in this place be crystal clear about what it is that we want to do, and what we want to do or what at least I hope the government wants to do is to amend their legislation to ensure that any person who has an abortion or a termination for medical reasons is covered for leave and that it shouldn’t matter what that reason is. It shouldn’t matter because they have been sexually assaulted. It shouldn’t matter that there is incest involved. It shouldn’t matter that it was contraception that didn’t work. It shouldn’t matter that it was a financial hardship or a dysfunctional, abusive relationship. It shouldn’t matter if it was a health issue like an ectopic pregnancy. None of that should matter because it is a person’s right to access an abortion.

Now, I could spend a lot of time talking about what this particular government has done wrong in terms of supporting and increasing and, at the very least, maintaining access to these services because that is dismal in this province. It was my hope that at least this amendment would clarify that any person that had a procedure like this, like the ones I described, would be eligible for a leave, but again we get this coded language that isn’t quite – you know, it’s not crystal clear. Maybe that wasn’t the intent of the government, and that’s okay, but I would love for the minister to come back and to maybe explain why the language is the way it is in this amendment.

You know, not all employers are the same. Not all employers are the same, so to have a person that wants to access this leave – let’s say that they don’t have access to anything else or any other time and they’re required to request this leave. Not all employers are informed and inclusive and accessible, and they will probe, if the language is not crystal clear, about what is covered and what is not. Then all too often people that are looking to access this leave are going to have to divulge information that they should never have to divulge. It’s personal. It’s nobody’s business other than the person

who chose what they did. But without clarity in this amendment, that is not going to happen.

I think back to in my own life, my own experience – you know, I have a uterus, so, yeah, I have some experience to add to this conversation. But I'm not going to really talk about that. I'm going to talk about my friend. I was really quite fortunate. I got to be a birth coach twice in my life, which has been awesome, once for my sister and then once for my friend, and it was really interesting. My friend, at around 40, decided that being in a relationship wasn't going to happen for her at that age. She really wanted to be a mother, so she did a lot of research, and what she decided to do was to do IVF with donor sperm. That's what she did, a lot of research.

You probably didn't know that there are sperm donor catalogues. You can actually go through and select the donor based on a number of factors, a lot of which are health related, but you can actually make those decisions, and that's what she did. It was a huge financial investment for her, but this is something where she couldn't wait any longer. She knew that she wanted to be a mom and have her own child, so that's what she decided to do. It was a lot of work, but that was her right, to do it. It was her body, and it was her choice.

The first time that she had IVF, actually, we were super hopeful that things were going along quite well, and then she miscarried. For her to request a leave for her – I mean, her employer did know what was happening, so she didn't have to explain that, but imagine, if she worked in a place where the employer was not as informed, how she would have to explain all of this, knowing that she's perhaps not in a relationship. She would have to divulge a lot of personal information. Anyway, that would be covered under a miscarriage. But that was one experience. Now, her healing journey was quite a bit different than, say, someone who chose to get an abortion for whatever reason, because it actually doesn't matter why they did get an abortion. But that healing process is quite different. I'll just fast-forward and tell you that her son is actually awesome. He's playing hockey right now, and he's about eight years old, and he's fabulous.

But on the other flip side is that when I was in my early 30s, I had two children already and actually ended up getting pregnant again. I don't have to say why, but there were some complicated reasons, and I decided to have an abortion. I did that, and I can tell you that it's a really difficult decision to make, but I'm not alone. I think there are so many women. Once I came out and said what I did, so many women said to me, "Yeah, so did I; actually, I did twice," or they would tell me their own experience.

4:00

The worst part of it is that people are terrified to say it. They're terrified of the judgment. They're terrified of people just thinking things about them that are not necessarily true. They're afraid and terrified of having to explain why. And they don't have to explain why. They absolutely don't. But people are fearful because they have just not had that right to be able to control everything about their own bodies.

So I think that if we're going to do this legislation properly and if we're going to say, "You know what? This is a good thing that we want to ensure that women for whatever reason, whether it is a miscarriage or a stillbirth or a termination for a medical reason or an abortion, whatever it is – it doesn't matter why; whatever it is – have access to this leave because they are important and they are valued and they deserve the time to be well and they deserve the time to heal," then let's be crystal, crystal clear about the language that we use. Let's not mess around. Let's not be afraid to say what it is.

I can tell you we're all, you know, really into it right now, and we're focused on this legislation, but years from now, when an employer looks at, "Do I have to support this or not?" they're going to look back and they're going to see ambiguity. They might find a loophole, and they might say: "Well, I don't have to do that. It doesn't really say. I mean, it's not really crystal clear, and then I looked at *Hansard* and I looked at the debate, and that wasn't crystal clear." I'm hoping that my comments are crystal clear. Let's use the language. Let's not be afraid to use the words. Let's normalize it.

As I said, abortion is a human right. To control your own body and to make decisions for your life and your future is a human right. It's frustrating to me. It's incredibly frustrating to me that in 2022 we're still dancing around words because we're afraid to use them. I hope that's not the case. I truly, genuinely hope that's not the case and that this is just an oversight in this amendment. I truly hope that is the case and that the minister will stand up and reassure this House: "You know what? Let's be clear. Let's define exactly what this is so that any person that requests a leave in the future will get it because we've been crystal clear, we've done due diligence, and we've identified exactly what needs to happen."

It's called inclusive language. It's so important that we use inclusive language. My colleague is so right to point out that it's not just women. It's gender-diverse folks that really need to be included in this conversation. I make mistakes all the time with the language that I use, whether it's about referring to someone with a disability or as a disabled person. You know, I'm sometimes not sure what language to use. Or gender diverse: I'm sometimes not sure what language to use. I welcome it when my colleagues correct me and tell me what the correct language is because we're learning and we're changing. So it is my sincere hope that the minister will take these comments as: this language isn't clear enough. Let's do our best to be crystal clear about what this leave is for and who it is for and what it's meant to do. We shouldn't be afraid of language.

I think, you know, given the state of politics in our country, in North America, given the state of – we see things going backwards in so many ways that I know that I'm fearful. I know that I have fought for women's rights, for equal rights, for years, for decades. I can remember going to a march when my son was, like, seven years old. There was actually a picture of him in the *Journal* holding a sign. It was my expectation that by this time my daughter wouldn't have to be worried about language or using the word "abortion" or having equal access to a leave. It was my hope that we would be well past that, but I see what's happening all around us, and I see that that is not the case.

You know, I saw a really funny sign, well, a funny-sad sign, at one of the rallies that said, "*The Handmaid's Tale* should not be a manual," something like that. It's sad. It's sad that we're at this place that we're talking about words, and we have a government that is – I don't know. I hope they're willing to correct this. I really want to give this government the benefit of the doubt here. I truly do.

Anyway, with that, I'm going to take my seat.

**The Chair:** Are there others to join the debate on amendment A1? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

**Member Irwin:** Thank you, Madam Chair. You know, it is committee, and I appreciate the opportunity to be able to speak multiple times to this bill or to this amendment, I should say. I just have to again thank my colleagues for sharing their perspectives and particularly my colleague from St. Albert, who shared her own personal story. She's exactly right. It's a lot. I don't have my own personal story. I do have a uterus, though, like my colleagues from Edmonton-Glenora and St. Albert pointed out. I guess I was hopeful that I would hear from more



government members, particularly those who would be most impacted. It's troubling to me that we've not heard back and we've not heard clarity from the minister.

We were going back and forth there, and in the spirit of collegiality I was hopeful that we would get some clarity, so I'll ask again for that clarity in the amendment. We see language around "result of a live birth." I need the minister responsible for Labour and Immigration to be unequivocal in the clarity needed around this bill, so I'll say it directly: will this bill include abortion and termination for medical reasons?

I'm incredibly frustrated when I hear – you know, we've only heard from one member opposite, and that is a member who just stated that he was pro life, or perhaps more aptly described as antichoice, and that's his prerogative, absolutely. But it's certainly concerning that I'm not hearing from members opposite that I believe would say that they may not hold the same views as that member. When that member shares stories about women regretting their abortions, I want that member to perhaps think about some of the stories that myself and my colleagues have heard.

In fact, I was communicating with somebody. She's given me her permission to talk about the work that she does, and her name is Autumn Reinhardt-Simpson. She is an abortion doula. You know, that might seem – and I'm quoting an article which I will table. It says:

That phrase might seem like an oxymoron – although she does sometimes support those who end up choosing to go through with a pregnancy,

as doulas often do. Our conception of a doula might seem a little bit contradictory, but her job is all about protecting clients' well-being. She says:

I'm here to support the choice that's best for you and your family, not the choice that's going to support my ideological preference or some sort of religious goal. I try not to impose . . . my own views, I just ask a lot of questions.

I'm there to support them, she says.

But unfortunately the stigma in regards to abortion care is such that people have to turn to a complete stranger like me and trust that they can help them and get them through this.

She offered me – she said, you know: I've got countless stories of folks in Alberta struggling to access abortion.

**4:10**

When that government's minister responsible for Status of Women dismisses the lived experiences of folks trying to access abortion, when I hear from members opposite that there are no issues in abortion access, when I hear the very Premier of this province, who's not even willing to utter the words "abortion," "reproductive rights," "women," for that matter – in fact, I can consult *Hansard*, but I believe his direct words were: "that procedure." Unwilling to even talk about the issue – and as has been stated already today, this is a person well known for his antiabortion sentiment. We've not had him clear the air in this Chamber as to where he stands today on that very issue, so until he does, we'll have to assume that he's unwilling to act on the very challenges that folks face across this province in accessing abortions.

Back to Autumn, the abortion doula that I mentioned earlier. She's doing incredible work. I know, at least the last time I chatted with her, about her studies. She was doing a PhD. She's got a lot going on, so she's really doing this on the side, and she's paying a lot out of pocket just to support folks. She gave me the example today of, you know, a woman last month, who she connected with, who had to go to 10 pharmacies before she could fill her prescription for Mifegymiso because none of the pharmacists would do it despite the law. That's one story of many she can offer us, and I will ask her to share more stories

like that. It's not fiction; this is the lived reality of many women and gender-diverse folks right now in the province of Alberta.

As my colleague from St. Albert talked about, in addition to the real barriers in access, you know, being turned down by doctors, obviously, trying to get a procedure, we know that there are very few sites in this province where folks can access an abortion. But people are being turned down for even getting the drug . . .

I look at my Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

**Ms Hoffman:** Mifegymiso.

**Member Irwin:** . . . which, you know, I was so proud to see that our government funded and supported.

They focused on expanding abortion access and focused on things like bubble zones around abortion clinics. It wasn't that long ago – gosh, when was it when I joined some counterprotesters who were there to support women and folks accessing the clinic? They were just trying to show their love and support because protesting is still happening outside the clinic in that same Member for Edmonton-Glenora's riding. It's still happening. It's the shame and, gosh, the verbal abuse that these folks have to experience, photography – right? – being outed to their families and their loved ones. It's unbelievable.

[Mrs. Frey in the chair]

So you can imagine that when I hear stories from Autumn and when I hear stories from, you know, folks who are on the front lines – I talked about folks working with the pregnancy and infant loss centre. I mean, there's still so much stigma that exists out there, and this is why we're incredibly alarmed when we see what's happening with the potential overturning of Roe versus Wade, which is why it should be incumbent on all of us in this Legislature, no matter your religious or ideological views, to ensure that women and gender-diverse folks are healthy and safe in our province.

No doubt – no doubt – we're skeptical of this government's support for reproductive health, when this is the same government that continues to attack health care in this province. What's most top of mind for me at this exact minute? Oh, I think about the cutting of the insulin pump program. Wow. You know what somebody said so aptly on Twitter this morning, yesterday? I'm not sure when. "You know, the UCP really did just wake up and say, 'You know who has it too good in this province right now? Type 1 diabetics. You know what? They're doing too well with their insulin pumps. So you know what? Let's cut that program.'" Let's give them additional barriers and red tape that they'll now have to try to manage, leaving many families across this province uncertain about the future of their insulin pump and getting no answers. Gosh, I almost feel sorry for the Education minister having to defend these decisions today, right?

**Ms Hoffman:** Almost.

**Member Irwin:** Almost. The same Education minister who talks about kids and putting children first and cuts insulin pumps for those very same kids like Conor, who is six, or Walker, who just turned eight. Unbelievable. Unbelievable.

**Mr. Getson:** What bill is this?

[Mrs. Pitt in the chair]

**Member Irwin:** I hope – you know, he's been doing this a lot today, the Member for Lac Ste. Anne-Parkland. I mean, not that I really want to get his perspective on abortion, but he's welcome to join debate. He's welcome to stand up and join debate instead of heckling consistently, as he does. It seems like he must be silenced because he hasn't spoken much today, but he sure has heckled a lot.

I don't think he's spoken at all, in fact. Anyways, I await his remarks. [interjection] Absolutely. I'd like to hear his views. That's right. The Member for Calgary-Bhullar-McCall is correct.

Again, I can point to significant barriers that women and gender-diverse folks are experiencing right now in the province of Alberta in 2022. The fact that I'm not hearing from government MLAs, other than the one so far, about their position on this speaks volumes. This is not just an urban issue, right? This is not something that just, you know, members like me and Edmonton-Glenora and Edmonton-City Centre in core areas of the city are hearing about. Members in rural Alberta are hearing about this as well, and some of the biggest barriers to access are in rural Alberta. I see a whole heck of a lot of MLAs in this Chamber who represent rural Alberta not speaking up about this or about the ongoing cuts to health care in their communities. I'm hopeful that I'll hear from them.

Again, I've certainly got more to say, but I once again want to ask for the clarity on this legislation because we haven't heard it yet. I want to again reiterate that none of us in this Chamber would want to put someone who has just experienced pregnancy loss through having to navigate understanding of this legislation, having to go back through *Hansard* and figure out: okay; does this bill apply to me? At a time when we should be supporting, we should make it as easy as possible for those who've experienced pregnancy loss to access leave like this, we're adding additional barriers, and we're lacking that clarity. With that, I will conclude my remarks for the moment.

**The Chair:** Are there others to join the debate on amendment A1? Seeing the hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

**Ms Hoffman:** Yeah. In committee I'm excited to rise and speak again and again and again until we actually get some answers from the government about what they actually mean about this amendment, because I think that this amendment is an attempt to be vague and cloaked about what the actual language means. In committee you can rise and speak as many times as you want. Certainly, would love to get some answers from the government. Maybe they haven't had a chance to hear the question again, so let me be very clear. The language in this amendment doesn't state abortion or termination for medical reasons. It might imply it, but it does not state it.

So will any member of the government stand in this House and definitively state that this includes termination for abortion or termination for medical reasons? Anyone in the government. That is the main question that we're asking here, and we will keep asking it over and over and over again, as is our right in committee, until we get some kind of an answer from the government, because it is embarrassing that we have to ask this many times and that the government keeps trying to play games. They may be in the room, but I can tell you it sure feels like they all got up and walked out emotionally, metaphorically, and in terms of their response to this fundamental question that has been raised by a number of people in Alberta, primarily by women and other folks who think that they might need to one day access an abortion or terminate a pregnancy for medical reasons. They want the government to give clarity, so we will keep asking the question. I know the government doesn't want to answer it, but Albertans deserve answers.

4:20

You might hear from me a lot more this afternoon if the government continues to refuse to actually address the root cause, the root question, the question that was asked by my colleague the Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood, the critic for LGBTQ2S-plus issues as well as Status of Women, the question that was asked in this House last

week in question period, following the draft decision that has been made public about overturning *Roe versus Wade* in the United States, the question that was asked specifically in this House that we have a chance to say that we are not attacking women's rights, that we are going to respect them and their bodily autonomy.

We have a chance in this bill that we are considering today, Bill 17, which is titled *Labour Statutes Amendment Act, 2022*, but it speaks specifically in its current iteration to miscarriage or stillbirth. We have a chance to actually clarify that we want that to include other forms of pregnancy loss, including termination for an abortion or termination for medical reasons.

The people of Alberta deserve clarity from the government instead of more vague amendments and a refusal to actually even engage on their own debate. This is a government bill, a government amendment. We're asking very clear, simple questions that have been asked of us. I would like to be able to support this amendment. I really would. I do think the language is probably a little bit better than the language that's in the current iteration of the bill.

We actually had amendments prepared and ready to go that would give that clarity, but the government decided to jump up and be recognized first and then bring in this veiled language. If this passes, members of this Assembly well know that once a section of an act is amended and that amendment passes, you can't amend that same section again.

The government has decided to bring in this veiled language because they don't want us to actually put very clear, plain language that everyone can understand into this bill and to have to actually make a vote on something that has the word "abortion" in it, clearly.

The behaviour of four years ago, four years ago probably to this day because the debate lasted for a few weeks – the then Official Opposition, the United Conservative Party caucus, got up and walked out of this Chamber 13 times, and they may be sitting here today, but it sure feels like they got up and walked out of the building.

It sure feels, Madam Chair, like they are refusing to actually engage in the debate that they brought into this place. They brought forward this bill. They brought forward this amendment. We are asking very clear questions about what the amendment means, and we want it to be on the record. We do not want lawyers to be tied up for many, many billable hours trying to interpret the government's vague language through this bill, their veiled language.

People deserve clarity. They deserve to know if the government is indeed including abortion and termination to do with medical reasons in this bill, full stop. We will keep asking the question over and over again in committee, but we deserve answers. The people of Alberta deserve answers. [interjection] Excellent. I look forward to hearing a response from a member. I did wait for a quite a while before I stood up to ask the question yet again. I see a signal from a colleague in the UCP caucus that they are going to answer this question, and I certainly look forward to hearing the answer. Hopefully, it will bring me to a position where I can feel more inclined to support this amendment.

Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

**The Chair:** The hon. Member for Brooks-Medicine Hat.

**Mrs. Frey:** Thank you, Madam Chair. I wouldn't of course want to rush my colleague from Edmonton-Glenora, but I do think it's worth pointing this out for the record. I've been listening to much of this debate albeit I did recently – I guess I can't say that. I haven't been in the Chamber for all that long, but I did hear lots of the debate. I know that intention is usually sussed out from the debate that we have in this place, so for the record, to make it perfectly clear to all Albertans, this amendment does include for abortion or medical termination as well.

This is, in my opinion, Madam Chair, an inclusive amendment. It is an amendment that's needed. I do actually want to thank the members opposite for bringing this forward as well. I know that we had heard this as well. Yes. This amendment does include termination for medical reasons and also abortion. I'll say that again for the record, now twice.

Madam Chair, I've been not quietly known as a pro-life individual. I am a woman. I am a rural Albertan. And I am very committed to my own personal beliefs. I also supported conscience rights legislation. I have supported pregnancy care centres in my riding. I have supported women in all difficult decisions, and I will continue to do that by recognizing that there is need to grieve the loss of a human life. I think that this amendment does that. I also think that the amendment that was to be brought forward by the opposition did that. Honestly, I could have probably voted for either amendment if we're being totally honest. But this language, I think, does that, and the intention certainly is to cover abortion and termination for medical reasons.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

**The Chair:** Are there others to join the debate on amendment A1 on Bill 17? The hon. Member for St. Albert.

**Ms Renaud:** Thank you, Madam Chair. I appreciate the comments from the member opposite. I appreciate that you were able to say the word a couple of times. That's great. That's a good thing.

**Member Irwin:** That would be a first, actually. We didn't hear that from the Premier.

**Ms Renaud:** No, we did not hear that from the Premier at all.

But I guess my question again is: if, actually, the point of this amendment is to be crystal, crystal, crystal clear that this leave is covered for people who experience stillbirth, miscarriage, abortion, and termination for medical reasons, then why not say it? The member is comfortable enough using the word "abortion" twice in her short speech; why not put it in the amendment? As I said in my earlier comments, I was super hopeful that the minister would come back and work with us and say: "You know what? Maybe we didn't get it quite right. We're not afraid of saying the words. We want clarity from now until whenever this bill is changed again. We want someone to have access to the discussion. We don't want it to be open for interpretation. A year, two years, five years from now we want to be crystal clear that if you choose to have an abortion or terminate for a medical reason, you have access to this leave, period. End of story."

I'm concerned that there seems to be a silence from the government about why they're unwilling to change the language and be clear in this language. Now, we've seen a pattern, and I was hopeful, as were my colleagues, that maybe we're wrong. Maybe we're assigning some things that don't need to be assigned to the government members because we've seen them leave this Chamber 13 different times when we were debating a bubble-zone bill. I'll tell you, that piece of legislation was so important.

If any of you have ever driven by an abortion clinic, it is gross, the people that are standing there with their gross, misleading signs and pictures, harassing people looking to get basic health care, health care that is a human right. They're assaulted with these disgusting images, that are misleading and false, and are subjected to this taunting when, really, they're just trying to access health care, as is their human right. We saw members opposite leave 13 different times. I don't really know why, but they did, Madam Chair. I'm sure you'll recall that incident. Actually, I think there was only one member of the opposition at the time who spoke to that piece of legislation; everybody else ran away.

I think we've seen time and again different members that are supported by groups that finance candidates that are meant to work

against increasing equity and equality around abortion. They're called pro-life groups, which – don't even get me started about why that's a ridiculous term – finance and fund these candidates, and we know that there are lots of them in the government benches. We know that. We know that the Premier – I think we all saw his picture on CNN as an antiabortion activist. That was the little thing at the bottom. That's what it read, that he went to university in San Francisco and decided that was going to be his calling. Doesn't have a uterus but wanted to stop people with uteruses from talking about it on campus. So you can imagine that there's alarm.

We see what's happening in the United States. We see what's happening in some of the southern states, where they may not have a full on ban, but they're making it increasingly difficult for women to access reproductive health care. They're making it increasingly difficult for practitioners to offer those services. It's frightening.

4:30

You know, I think back to the time when I had that procedure that I talked about a little bit earlier. I had to go to a hospital, actually, for it, and there was no signage. It was the weirdest thing that they had to give me directions: "Okay. Go down this hall. Then you'll see this picture. Then turn left here. Then knock on the door and wait." There was a bulletproof partition, glass.

I was so hopeful. When I was all done with that, I was certainly hopeful that things were going to change and women – not just women; gender-diverse folks and women would have access to health care where they didn't have to be afraid that some person with some kind of weird agenda, holding a sign, spending the day yelling at people trying to access health care. I would really hope that that would be different.

That is not the case, and that's why as legislators we have to do everything that we can to support changes that will ensure equity and ensure equality. What we're asking for is just clarity. If you're not afraid to use the word "abortion" – we heard the member opposite use it twice. Big steps. Baby steps. I'm not sure. It's good. Used the word twice. Why not be crystal clear in this amendment that if you want to access this leave that is in Bill 17, that I'm ready to support – then let's be clear. If you get an abortion for whatever reason – it does not matter; that is irrelevant – you have access to this leave. If you choose to terminate for a medical reason – does not matter why – you get access to this leave, in addition to stillbirth and miscarriage.

These are all things that require time to heal and not just physically. I'll tell you that it does require time to heal physically because it is really difficult, and it is difficult emotionally and mentally for whatever reason. That reason is irrelevant. Let's be clear that every single person going forward has access to this leave and there's no question that any person will have to go to their employer and explain why they should have access to this leave. Nobody should have to go through that. Nobody.

We can make that so here as legislators. We can be crystal clear about what this leave is meant to cover. It just takes a few words. It takes a little bit of courage. If indeed you want to promote equality and equity for all people in reproductive health and in leaves as described in Bill 17, let's fix this amendment so that it's crystal clear – crystal clear – about what it is meant to do.

Now, I think we'd probably be this passionate even if things weren't the way they are in our neighbouring country in the United States, even if we didn't see almost daily on the news the different assaults that are happening in terms of women's rights, if we didn't see women's rights being just dragged backwards. It feels like we're going back to the '50s sometimes.

I think we're reminded just how precious and fragile our rights are. It is incredibly important that we take our role as legislators

very seriously, and when we're saying – you know, I think the three people that have stood up, again and again, here with uteruses are saying: let's be crystal clear. Let's use the word so that abortion is covered, so that termination for medical reasons is covered in addition to stillbirth and miscarriage. Let's leave nothing to be questioned. Let's not make any person have to go to their employer and divulge information that no person should ever have to divulge to someone that they choose not to. That's awful. We can fix that. Maybe the government just made a mistake.

Now, they don't tend to admit when they make mistakes, and it usually takes a whole lot of public pressure for them to admit that there's a mistake. Usually they throw a few people under the bus, then say, "Well, yeah, it was a mistake." But maybe it was a mistake. They can fix it. Just change the words and make it crystal clear. That's all we're asking for. Make it clear so that this bill, which can be a good bill, and this leave, which can be a great thing – let's do it properly so that in the future there is no question what it covers.

With that, I'm going to take my seat and let someone else speak to this.

**The Chair:** Are there others to join the debate on amendment A1? The hon. Member for Lac Ste. Anne-Parkland.

**Mr. Getson:** Yes. Thank you, Madam Chair. I really appreciate the insight and the debate. A lot of the members opposite kept goading me to get up and speak. Quite frankly, I am not a woman. I believe that some of the matters being discussed here are best left to our fairer sex and our colleagues along those lines. Where I do have some challenges and issues is with some of the diatribe that was coming from the member for McCall, so I will respond to some of those items here, quite frankly.

The bill that we're talking about – and I really appreciate the minister bringing this forward, and I also really appreciate, originally, the Member for Sherwood Park bringing this forward. It was done with the absolute best intent to understand that folks out there that have losses – whether it's through clinical measures, whether it's through stillbirths, whether it's through miscarriages – need to be respected and acknowledged and given a time of bereavement. That was Bill 17.

The amendment that was brought forward – here is something that I'll throw back to my colleague that actually is a lawyer and should understand full well the complexities of law in contracts, as an example. Sometimes the best thing is to keep it simple, the old KISS principle, when it comes to law. When you get too prescriptive, you can also tip the scale and the balance the other way and cause issues or concerns or court challenges later.

What I want to read into the record here again is the actual amendment that we're talking about. It is on the Labour Statutes Amendment Act, 2022. It's that section 1(5) is amended in the proposed section 53.983(2) by striking out clauses (b) to (d) and substituting the following:

- (b) the pregnancy of the employee ends other than as a result of a live birth.

Anything other than a live birth: that's pretty wide breadth. So anything that could be underneath there other than live. Unless we want to get into a debate on what's alive and what's dead, it's pretty straightforward. Again, to the barrister there who should understand that full well but seems to be reminded from a contracts guy on this side of the table.

- (c) The pregnancy of the employee's spouse or common-law partner ends other than as a result of a live birth.

Again talking about live birth, everything under the sun other than that pretext. So, again, you're asking for specific items to be added? Be careful of what you're asking for because you might inadvertently cause different consequences as well. [interjection] They're heckling

again because it's all fair game. They like to do this. They like to pander and talk about something that really strikes near and dear to people's hearts without knowing their circumstances and discounting anybody else's beliefs and discounting anyone else's backgrounds . . .

**An Hon. Member:** Unbelievable. This is why we need clarity.

**Mr. Getson:** . . . experiences because they want to use this, again . . .

**An Hon. Member:** I was respectful.

**Mr. Getson:** . . . as a political football rather than understanding . . .

**An Hon. Member:** No. Because we want rights. We want our rights.

**Mr. Getson:** . . . the intent that it's being brought forward with and the absolute humanity of why this is being forwarded: to help people going through these circumstances. They'll diminish that, and they'll keep heckling me because, again, I don't fit their narrative. It's very sad, and, to me, it's actually morally reprehensible that you won't give me a chance to speak on this because you don't even know my circumstance.

**An Hon. Member:** You heckled us.

**Mr. Getson:** They're heckling again because it doesn't work for their political narrative.

The third part of this is:

- (d) the pregnancy of another person ends other than as a result of a live birth and the employee would have been a parent of a child born as a result of the pregnancy.

Now, they want to ask my positions on certain matters. It's none of their concern. They want to know about circumstances and that potentially, being a father of four, maybe I could have been a father of more, or that my wife and I had some other circumstances, or that I had friends that have lost other ones, too. We've had family circumstances. How many people I've worked with over the years on different projects where you have those awkward conversations when the lady comes in and has had something like that happen to them: they want to discount all that. The intent that was brought forward, if they look at it and just get off their political high horse for a moment and see how genuine and honest and pure this is: if anything, what we should be doing in here is agreeing to it.

Now, I didn't really want to speak too much to the amendment because I wanted to vote on it. I wanted to get this going forward, Madam Chair, through you to the heckle squad over there. To the heckle squad: let's get back to business. Let's make sure that we pass this, and let's make sure that we give those bereavements to the folks that are well deserving of it regardless of their beliefs, circumstances, or otherwise. Let's do something good as legislators in here and knock off the school ground antics.

**Mr. Shepherd:** If I may, Madam Chair, I think I will leave the majority of this debate to the women of our caucus, who I think have handled it quite ably. I just want to note that members of this government have no moral high ground to talk about political footballs and division. This is a government that's more than happy to grandstand on any issue that they feel they might get political gain, issues of populism. This is an issue of incredible importance to many women in the province of Alberta.

**4:40**

If this government wants to grandstand on things like firearms, a nonexistent truck tax, they're certainly welcome to do so, but I respect my colleagues who are reflecting the very real voices of Alberta

women, who I believe have legitimate concerns seeing what has happened in the U.S. and based on the actions and words we have seen of many here in Canada and here in Alberta. I respect and appreciate the debate they've brought forward, and I certainly look forward to that continuing.

**The Chair:** Any other members to join the debate on amendment A1? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

**Member Irwin:** Thank you, Madam Chair. Oh, goodness. Yeah. There was certainly a lot there. You know, I think this is my third time speaking in the last little bit. I'm very, very appreciative of my colleagues from Edmonton-Glenora and St. Albert. I'm posting a little bit about this on social media as we go along, and it's shocking to hear this government, government MLAs continue to say that we are making a political football out of this when we're talking about the rights of people like me and St. Albert and Edmonton-Glenora, people who have uteruses. I'm seeing a whole lot of people on social media chiming in and saying: no uterus, no opinion.

**The Chair:** Hon. member, I think this is a great time to remind all members that while there isn't a specific standing order against the use of social media while you are in the Chamber, it's significantly discouraged to be distracted from the debate in the Chamber. I would recommend that perhaps the tweeting or the social media use can be done by someone other than you or outside of this Chamber but not during the debate.

I will ask that you proceed with your remarks when you are ready.

**Member Irwin:** Well, regardless, anybody who's been following the debate, following what's happened with the looming overturning of Roe versus Wade knows that this is very much a real and emotional issue for many of us. You know, abortion is health care, full stop.

When I hear members opposite, as I was starting to say prior to being interrupted – I was starting to say, you know, that we are not making this a political football; we are amplifying and sharing the voices of people who've reached out to us. I can point these members to countless stories of women and folks across this province who are experiencing delayed care when it comes to reproductive rights.

I talked already, but I'll say it again. We've got a few more folks in the Chamber now who need to hear it as well. Access in rural Alberta is just incredibly challenging right now. It's not just access to a physical abortion procedure; it's access to Mifegymiso, the drug. Reports, as I shared not long ago, from people on the front lines like Autumn Reinhardt-Simpson, who is an abortion doula, saying that people are being turned down getting that prescription in rural Alberta. Ten times, she heard from a woman who went around to physicians to try to get access to that pill, a potentially life-saving pill, right?

It's completely fair for us as members of the Official Opposition, particularly us members who have uteruses and rightly have an opinion on this amendment, to ask those questions. So I again want the – we did get some clarity from the Member for Brooks-Medicine Hat, and I appreciate her standing up. I truly do. I appreciate her uttering the word "abortion," I believe twice, which is more than we've ever heard this Premier say it. I appreciate that. I'm not being dismissive. I truly do. She shared her own perspective, that she is – I don't have the benefit of the Blues, but I believe I wrote down that she noted that she is, in fact, pro life, and she's helped out with pregnancy care centres and so forth. She stated her views unequivocally on the record that she wants abortion to be included in this amendment. My apologies if I didn't get her words correct.

**Mr. Dach:** She said that that's the intention.

**Member Irwin:** The intention. Thank you to the Member for Edmonton-McClung.

If I didn't get her words correct, I'm happy for her to clarify, because there's obviously a lot going on, not that I was distracted by social media, just trying to capture the debate.

But I would like to hear from the drafter of the amendment and the mover of the bill, and that's the Minister of Labour and Immigration. I just want that clarity on the record here in committee. This is what we do in committee. We go back and forth, and we ask questions, and we seek clarity. We're not seeking clarity just so that I and my colleagues can feel good; we're seeking clarity for the folks who are on the front lines, the folks with lived experiences out there, the countless folks who've reached out to us to explain how important it is that the language is clear and inclusive, right?

You know, I think back to just the other day – oh, time is confusing; I forget which day it was – when we stood on the steps of the Alberta Legislature, and myself along with our leader, the Member for Edmonton-Strathcona, called on this government to be absolutely clear. We were asked about inclusivity and language. One of the members of the media asked about that and said: "You know, you talk about women. Are you also going to be talking about gender-diverse folks?" and I said, "Absolutely." I make the mistake all the time of talking about a woman's right to choose and women's rights, and I'm the critic for 2SLGBTQ-plus issues, so I admit that I still have things to learn. I hope that folks in this Chamber are willing to learn as well and to be more inclusive in our language and to be more inclusive in this bill.

The folks like Aditi from the pregnancy and infancy loss centre – I believe I got the name wrong there; I'll correct it in a second – have said that – you know what? – they make it a priority to be incredibly inclusive in their language, even things like using the word "parent," right? Not all who may experience pregnancy loss were planning to be a parent, as an example. There are a lot of ways that we can be a lot more clear and we can be open to learning. As it stands right now, without that clarity in the bill, this could potentially put a lot of folks who could benefit from this leave in a position where they're having to navigate the legislation and where they're having to seek clarity at a time when they should be supported. We don't want those folks, yeah, to have to explain and elaborate after having experienced something so traumatic.

Aditi Loveridge said it well when she spoke to this just the other day as well. She said: we want grieving individuals to feel empowered, to be able to define their experience as their own. She talked about miscarriage, stillbirth, abortion, termination for medical reasons, infertility, failed adoptions. All of those experiences deserve to be included, and they each can be defined under the loss of pregnancy.

She gave a really good, a really pertinent example. She said: when an employee tells their employer that they have cancer, they will not, or at least they certainly should not, be asked: "Well, what kind? You got lung cancer? Were you a smoker?" Like, absolutely not. And if that's happening, I mean, that's incredibly troubling to hear. But generally most employers know to be sensitive, and employees, folks who've experienced loss of pregnancy should be empowered, should have the choice if they choose to share details. We know that some folks are much more willing and open to share about their experiences than others, and that's completely fair, but no one should be put in that position where they're having to explain.

4:50

We're concerned that as it's written, discrimination could potentially still occur. Again, no one – no one, full stop – should have to justify the cause of their pregnancy loss. Again, we want to work together. I've been clear from the very moment I stood up on this bill. We've been

clear that we want to work together. We shared that feeling of collegiality back when this was a private member's bill. I was on that committee. I commended the Member for Sherwood Park for the work that he'd done, for the stakeholder engagement that he'd done, for the consultation, for listening. Absolutely. But we want to get it right. We have an opportunity to get the language right.

Okay. With that, I will end my remarks for the moment.

**The Chair:** I see the hon. Minister of Labour and Immigration.

**Mr. Madu:** Thank you, Madam Chair. I once again want to speak to the amendment that I put forward and the debate that has ensued as a consequence. I wanted to be in this Assembly, but I had an important meeting that I needed to attend.

**The Chair:** Hon. minister, I hesitate to interrupt, but the absence or presence of a member, including your own, is . . .

**Mr. Madu:** Yes. Withdrawn, Madam Chair.

I really was hoping that the members opposite would not delve into some of the stuff that they would like to talk about. The bill that we have before us is very specific, Madam Chair. We have worked hard with the stakeholders that want to make sure that this bill is as broad as it can be, but I see once again that the members opposite want to embark on their usual politics, just like they have done with every issue on matters that should not be a partisan issue.

It is disappointing that on an amendment that is the broadest possible of any bill on this particular issue, the bill that they – and I have had the benefit to see some of the amendments that they would like to introduce. That amendment is far more restrictive than the amendment that we have before the floor of this Assembly. Madam Chair, it speaks to “other than as a result of a live birth.” That phrase is the most inclusive language – the most inclusive language – that we can use to make sure that anyone out there who needs this bereavement leave, something that all of us agreed on, will not have to be denied or face any difficulty or have to explain anything to any employer. That is the goal here.

I had the chance to speak with Ms Aditi Loveridge on the day that the original bill was announced. I spoke with her. Since then my office has had to reach out to her and the stakeholders to make sure that there isn't going to be any argument on this particular issue, because this is not one of those issues that should be a subject of confusion or unnecessary debate. But here we are again with the NDP, Madam Chair. “Other than as a result of a live birth” is the most inclusive of all situations resulting in the loss of pregnancy, including miscarriage, stillbirth, and, yes, abortion, to the members opposite. I think that's what they are looking for. Yes: abortion, termination for medical reasons, and a number of other reasons. There are much more circumstances under which women can need these procedures, so we want to make sure that they are not limited whatsoever.

Madam Chair, I speak to you as someone – I think I've often told my story, the seventh of 11 children. I have four older sisters who are way ahead of me. In 2002 I watched my sister pass away in the hospital – in the hospital – from pregnancy. Luckily, we have the benefit of my twin nephews. This is a matter that is personal, and I don't think anyone here wants to play politics with this particular issue. What we are looking for is an assurance that the amendment before us is the broadest that we can have without having to name abortion, stillbirth, miscarriage, and all of those things, because there will be no end. There are circumstances that are much more than all of these things that you want us to name. That is the reason behind the amendment in the first place.

Here you have the NDP on an amendment that is the broadest that there can be ever, but they are hung up on the word “abortion.”

Are we surprised? No, we're not surprised. This is what they do best: politics, identity politics, politics of division, and stuff like that. Please. This is the broadest approach which addresses any situation with a pregnancy regardless of the reason or timing for the end of that pregnancy. For those at home watching and listening, let me say that again. The amendment before us is the broadest approach which addresses any situation where a pregnancy ends regardless of the reason or the timing for the end of the pregnancy. Yes, members opposite, that also includes abortion.

Madam Chair, I am a lawyer. I have also had the opportunity to consult with . . . [interjection] I see the Member for Calgary-Buffalo heckling. I am here now to address your concerns. We've also had the opportunity to discuss this matter with the legal services within my department and at Justice, and we are all in agreement that this is the broadest language ever. This also aligns with language used in the Employment Standards Code, precisely section 46(1.1) – you can check it out – with respect to maternity leave: “A pregnant employee whose pregnancy ends other than as a result of a live birth within 16 weeks of the estimated due date is entitled to maternity leave under this Division.”

Madam Chair, as I said before, after hearing from various stakeholders, this amendment is the broadest way that we can capture a number of experiences and circumstances without any limitations. Contrary, once again, to what the members opposite wanted to believe, this is a good amendment that will ensure people are able to access this type of bereavement leave for a variety of reasons. I should also note and would like to remind the members opposite that employees are not required to provide any proof of entitlement or reason for this leave.

Madam Chair, it is disappointing for me, listening to the totality of the submissions and arguments by the members opposite, hung up on one word and one word alone, abortion. This bill . . .

**Ms Hoffman:** And termination for medical reasons.

**Mr. Madu:** Yeah. And termination for other reasons. Yes. To the Member for Edmonton-Glenora: yes.

5:00

But if you sit here listening to them, if you read – and to members at home watching, I want to read into the record once again the amendment that we have put forward so that you know. I leave it to your judgment as to what it is that the members opposite are trying to achieve with their argument on this particular issue. The bill is amended as follows. In part A section 1(5) is amended in the proposed section 53.983(2) by striking out clauses (b) to (d) and substituting the following:

(b) the pregnancy of the employee ends other than as a result of a live birth;

Abortion is a pregnancy that ends other than as a result of a live birth. Are we clear on that?

(c) the pregnancy of the employee's spouse or common-law partner ends other than as a result of a live birth;

A pregnancy that ends as a result of any medical reason is a pregnancy that ends other than as a result of a live birth. Are we clear on that?

(d) the pregnancy of another person ends other than as a result of a live birth and the employee would have been a parent of a child born as a result of the pregnancy.

Any loss of pregnancy for whatever reason there is is absolutely covered and protected in the amendment that we've put forward. Are we clear on that?

Again, like every other issue, rather than focus on the substance of the bill before them – sometimes I wonder whether or not they actually take the time to read the bill. I don't think the Member for Edmonton-Glenora read the bill. I don't think so. I don't think so.

Even when you read it, you are not interested in the actual sections in the bill and what they say. You are much more interested in the things that you just want to pursue.

**The Chair:** Hon. minister, I hesitate to interrupt. Please direct your comments through the chair.

**Mr. Madu:** Very well, Madam Chair. It can be disappointing that I was hoping that all of us, members opposite – and I was carefully listening to their arguments and contributions since Bill 17 was originally tabled. We have taken into consideration the real concerns that they raised as well as those of other stakeholders in making sure that no woman, no person out there, no woman out there, gets to be denied the opportunity of this bereavement leave because of the lack of clarity in Bill 17 with respect to bereavement leave. That inspired this amendment today.

It is one of those instances in which I would hope that the members opposite would, for once, focus on the problem. You know, Madam Chair, when there is a problem, to solve that problem, we've got to focus on the problem rather than introduce a string of circumstances because of their ideological, philosophical pursuit. For the folks out there, Albertans who are looking to benefit from this bill, that's what they care about. That's what they want. [interjection] No. I am not interested in taking an intervention from the Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

**Ms Hoffman:** Well, you can't. It's committee.

**Mr. Madu:** I still have the floor.

Madam Chair, it is disappointing, extremely disappointing, that we have listened to stakeholders, listened to the members opposite, and taken into consideration all of their concerns and put forward an amendment that addresses all of those concerns, yet – yet – they are not interested in the substance of the amendment. They would rather want to, you know, make this bill, that should not be a subject of partisan conversation, a partisan issue. It doesn't help anyone on the floor of this Assembly. It doesn't help the very people out there in our communities, the ones who benefit from this particular bill.

Therefore, I would encourage and urge all members of this Assembly to vote in support of this amendment.

With that, Madam Chair, I move to adjourn debate.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

## Bill 22

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

**The Chair:** There are no amendments currently on the floor. We are on the main bill.

**Mr. Sabir:** Madam Chair, you just mentioned that there are no amendments on the floor, but I have one ready to go.

**The Chair:** I would expect nothing less.

**Mr. Sabir:** I will distribute this, and we will speak about this amendment.

**The Chair:** Hon. members, this will be known as amendment A1. Hon. member, please proceed.

**Mr. Sabir:** I move that Bill 22, Electricity Statutes (Modernizing Alberta's Electricity Grid) Amendment Act, 2022, be amended in section 1 (a) in subsection (6) as follows: (i) in the proposed section 70.1(4) by striking out “or any other person over whom the Commission has jurisdiction or any person to whom the Commission

provides services”; (ii) in the proposed section 70.1(5) (A) by striking out “or person” wherever it occurs, and (B) by striking out “subsection (2)(b)” and substituting “subsection (2)”; (iii) by striking out the proposed section 70.1(6); (iv) in the proposed section 70.1(7) by striking out “or person” wherever it occurs; and (b) in subsection (8) in the proposed section 72(1.1), by striking out “A person or owner” and substituting “An owner”.

Madam Chair, the legal interpretation of this amendment is that this amendment will stop the UCP government from piling more fees onto Albertans. It's that simple. It will disallow the administrative fee to finance the Alberta utility advocate to be charged to anyone but utilities; that is, the regular consumers, Albertans, cannot be charged the fee.

The new administrative fee results from the dissolution of the Balancing Pool. I don't think that it is fair for Albertans to be charged with additional fees. Albertans are already being hammered by the UCP increasing the cost of living on them. Madam Chair, there are utility costs, insurance costs, tuition costs, postsecondary costs, the Banff-Kananaskis park pass cost. This government has piled onto Albertans in every way possible. There is bracket creep. There are so many things. Albertans are struggling to make ends meet and cover these increased costs of living piled onto them by this UCP government and its policies.

5:10

While I do understand that fees to finance the utility advocate might not be as high, I don't think Albertans can afford any more because this government already has piled enough onto them. Since the UCP removed the cap from electricity prices, we have seen the utility bills doubled, in some cases tripled. It's been three or four months if not more that this government has been promising Albertans a rebate, a fake rebate, and Albertans are still waiting for that. Now somehow, in an otherwise good piece of legislation, they still manage to find something that they can slap onto Albertans to increase the cost of living for them. We all have constituents who are struggling with these rising costs of utilities, and I think we should all make sure that they're not slapped with extra costs.

I urge the members of this Legislature, all members of this Legislature, to think about your constituents and their rising bills and vote in favour of this amendment. Again, simply put, this amendment will disallow any fees to be piled onto everyday Albertans. It's that simple an amendment, and I hope that all members of this House support this amendment and vote in favour of this amendment to make sure that the government doesn't slap Albertans with any more costs.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

**The Chair:** Are there others wishing to speak to amendment A1 on Bill 22? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore.

**Mr. Nielsen:** Thank you, Madam Chair. Sorry. I had to lean a little bit there just to catch your eye, because I know I'm kind of off to the side here a little bit. But I appreciate the chance to rise and add some comments here to Bill 22 and, of course, amendment A1, that my colleague from Calgary-Bhullar-McCall brought forward.

You know, one of the things that he mentioned, of course, was about the rising costs that Albertans are facing. We've gone over this time and time again in the House about rising insurance costs. We hear this comment around how they've been dropping. The funny thing is that none of my constituents seem to see that reflected in those bills. On top of rising property taxes, because the government is shortchanging municipalities in terms of what they need to be able to provide services – of course, those things are going up. I seem to remember past members talking about how the NDP government was waging a war on fun. I could almost say that

the UCP government is doing that with their little fee just to go camping.

All of these things are starting to add up, so when you look at Bill 22 and we talk about the language – it's funny because in the previous debate we got really stuck on language, but as I've always said, it always comes down to that. When I hear comments about, "Well, we're taking a broad approach" or "We don't want it to be too prescriptive": the amount of arguments and grievances that I know I filed because language wasn't prescriptive enough and somebody was coming up with some kind of a wild interpretation of it. Hopefully, with amendment A1 we don't see that perhaps maybe we're proposing language that's too prescriptive, because right now Albertans are having a hard time, for instance, finding money to pay for their prescriptions. Maybe we should try to help that by not creating any extra costs, like my friend from Calgary-Bhullar-McCall had said.

Amendment A1 will take away that ability to just dump yet more expenses onto Albertans. They just simply can't afford it. There are already too many things going on. Their personal income taxes have been deindexed, as was mentioned. You know, their energy costs are going up. Somebody had mentioned to me in a messenger how: well, it didn't take long for us to lose ground at the gas pump; prices are almost right back up to where they were. So let's give Albertans some kind of help. They're still waiting for these rebates. They're still waiting for that help.

Of course, we heard earlier about how the NDP was supposedly blocking all of that and slowing things down. Well, it's done. It's settled. You should have had that money ready to go and out the door. Why is the minister having such a hard time getting 150 bucks out the door? Because that's really all it comes down to, 150 bucks against – you know, some of my constituents have shown me bills that are \$500 for electricity costs for one month, let alone over the past three months. If that stayed consistent, it would be \$1,500, yet we've offered them 150 bucks. We've offered them because they're still waiting for it to show up. We're no longer in the way. What's in the way of the government? What's holding them up? Why can't they get this money out the door, let alone, of course, any gas rebates? We still don't know what's going to be happening with that. We know at the very least that nothing is happening until at least darn near next winter, so that's not much help.

With Bill 22 and with amendment A1 we can at least offer them some hope that nothing else will get piled on. The amendment proposed by my friend from Calgary-Bhullar-McCall does just that. It's saying: you don't have to worry; there won't be any extra costs being levied against you because of this. You know, maybe we can finally stand up and say to people: look – okay? – we're not actually going to try to make your lives any more difficult. But the problem is that currently the language in Bill 22 will allow for that. So to say that maybe it's going to be too prescriptive or something like that? Come on. Be clear with Albertans what you're going to say to them.

If you're just going to outright charge them, then say it. Just say it: we're going to charge you because of this. Yeah, I can't guarantee they'll like it, but at least they'll know. Rather than dancing around like we've seen with the rebates, "Yeah, we've got help coming; any day now, it's coming; well, hopefully, maybe next week," and then after a month it's like, "Well, we're still working on it," we have an opportunity here. Let's do a little bit better with regard to Bill 22 in terms of this discussion versus the last one, when we couldn't seem to get some simple clarifying language added in.

5:20

It's funny because, you know, as my friend from Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood always says, I'm not a lawyer either, but it would seem to me that lawyers, above all, should appreciate how

clear, concise language is the better approach rather than soft, watered-down language that's left open to interpretation. That's always what happens. I've seen it way too many times where somebody will read that and go, "Well, it doesn't actually say that, so that means I don't have to do it," or "Well, I'm not actually being told I have to do that, so perhaps I can just skirt around it."

I think we can do better with this amendment. I'm certainly looking forward to some of the other comments around amendment A1 and how this can be of benefit to their constituents. I'm pretty certain that it's not just the constituents of Edmonton-Decore that are seeing ridiculously rising prices and expenses like their insurance, like their utility bills, like their property taxes, like their grocery bills, like their school fees, like their camping fees, and I can go on and on and on about this.

Hopefully, my colleagues might have something extra to say about that that I haven't covered, but it's certainly a good opportunity for us to go back and forth and talk about how we actually can make a bit of a difference for Albertans and not lump anything else onto it.

With that, I'll take my seat for the moment.

**The Chair:** Are there members to join the debate on amendment A1? The hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung.

**Mr. Dach:** Thank you, Madam Chair. I'm pleased to speak to the amendment brought forward by the MLA for Calgary-Bhullar-McCall that seeks to actually make it a little easier for Albertans to get through each week from paycheque to paycheque as they try to squeak by. Whether they're working at a low-wage job or even a middle-income job, things are pretty tough out there. It doesn't take more than a couple of trips down one or two grocery aisles to know how difficult it would be for families of even median incomes to be buying groceries the way they used to because their choices are limited. Their incomes are being stretched in many, many ways.

This amendment seeks to limit one extra cost that is being added to Albertans' increasing difficulty in paying their bills. By implementing a charge, a fee, on their utility bill to pay for the cost of the utilities advocate, it's kind of a callous disregard for the Albertan consumer to see fit at a time when inflation and costs are going up everywhere because of geopolitical events, because of climatic events. This decision by the government to have the utilities advocate paid for by a fee that's additional to what's being charged already in terms of rate riders and additional fees on utility bills was a fairly contemptuous oversight, totally unnecessary, and really pretty thoughtless. This amendment, Madam Chair, seeks to rectify that oversight.

Certainly, wherever it occurs, we're going to do our very best to make sure that Alberta consumers and, in fact, all Albertans, including the youngest amongst us, our children, and those who are least able to afford it, those on government-funded livelihoods like AISH, who already have been hit with a reduction of their income on an annual basis by the deindexing of their income by this government – we will do our best to try to protect Albertans from additional costs whenever we see the opportunity, and this is one opportunity that we weren't going to let go by, Madam Chair; that is, to make sure that already high utility bills don't get made higher by the addition of an administrative fee to fund the utilities advocate added onto the utility bill. It's already large enough as it is.

You'll see the different rate riders, some of them which are actually going to pay for the Progressive Conservative government's overconstruction, overbuild of the electricity grid in this province, something that the UCP government has been trying to pin on the NDP. In fact, that overbuild took place before we were ever in power, so a rather disingenuous attempt at off-loading responsibility, but



indeed that's what they're trying to do in other cases, too, Madam Chair.

They're off-loading costs or downloading costs onto municipalities at an extensive rate to the point that municipalities now are looking at, including in the city of Edmonton, huge tax increases possibly being contemplated to meet the service requirements that they now have been forced to endure. It's going to be a trade-off. Because of the off-loading or downloading of responsibilities to municipalities, cities are going to be looking at having to increase their taxes or lower their services. Because of the high cost that Albertans are already facing, this is going to be an extra burden. Wherever possible I think it's incumbent, Madam Chair, upon government to not add to that burden by doing such things as they've done in Bill 22, adding an extra fee onto the utility bill to cover the cost of an individual who is going to be the utilities advocate.

I know that in any circumstance where you're looking at either a limited income or a smaller income – the major thing that we hear on the doorsteps when we go to talk to our constituents, which I do twice a week pretty religiously, Madam Chair, is the cost of everything. People are really struggling, and that comes forward very voluntarily on the doors: the cost of utilities, the cost of gasoline, the cost of groceries, and the increased use of food banks. There are at least three or four sort of pseudo-food banks, smaller operations operating out of churches and synagogues and mosques, in my constituency which are seeing increased traffic as a result of the difficulty families are facing.

I know that at the Our Saviour Lutheran church in my community there's a Sunday food bank that's being offered – I know they don't like to call it a food bank, but it's a means of distributing food – that I've actually helped to collect using my own truck, and on a Sunday afternoon it's distributed. They had – and this would be a little bit of old data – a couple of years ago at least 64 families show up to the one location, Madam Chair. The volume, I would dare say, has increased a lot. I know that in speaking with members of the executive at Edmonton's Food Bank at the chamber of commerce banquet lately, they've received awards for their stellar performance in trying to increase the volume of food and support they provide to the huge load of people that are now seeking assistance from the food bank.

That indeed is a testament to why the government should not be placing additional burdens on individual Albertans and families by very callously putting in an extra cost on top of their utility bill to cover the cost of an individual who will be acting as the utilities advocate. A fairly thoughtless thing, and this amendment, Madam Chair, catches that out and rectifies it. It's one of the things that we can do as an opposition party and one of the things that we will do should we be re-elected as government once again. We will always look at cushioning the pocketbook of Alberta consumers and making sure that particularly those most vulnerable amongst us are not harmed. I mean, we did attempt to do many things like that, in fact, did many things like that: reduced child poverty, cut it in half, and, of course, looked to raise the AISH payments. We indexed them to inflation, and of course – guess what – when the UCP took power, they rolled those things back.

5:30

They were given to sending billions of dollars to profitable corporations: \$4.7 billion in a tax break which, of course, never ended up in reinvestment and creating jobs – those dollars were shown to be clearly invested offshore or went to pay dividends to shareholders – and \$1.3 billion or so invested in a bet to get the Keystone XL pipeline built. That never happened. So this is big money. That's \$6 billion right there, Madam Chair, when the government is betting on sort of trickle-down economics and wing-and-a-prayer policies wherein they

forget that the effect of measures that they take on a daily basis in bringing forward legislation such as we see in Bill 22 is harmful to everyday Albertans, in particular those of lower or median income, who are really, really struggling.

I've watched folks particularly at the meat counter. If you watch people looking at the meat counter, they're almost timid to get the grocery cart close to it. They peek at the prices, and most people are kind of embarrassed that they can't even go near the steak section. They're hardly able to afford the hamburger these days, Madam Chair, and it's a telling story when you see that the prime cuts are going untouched and that it's the cheaper cuts that are the ones that most people can afford these days.

I urge everybody to support this amendment. It's a small gesture among many things that we as the opposition hope the government would adopt to make life more affordable for Albertans. I know that the government is not trusted well by the population right now because they really don't see them as being in their corner, and this is an example of that, Madam Chair, a small example where, if indeed the government was concerned about diligently watching out for Albertans who are least able to afford any additional cost right now, this little measure inside Bill 22 would never have passed muster. Somebody should have caught it and said: look, this is going to be an extra cost added onto everybody's bill. The public is absolutely beside themselves about the cost of utilities and gas and looking after their family budget, and it never should have seen the light of day, and that tells me that this government is preoccupied with things other than looking after the best interests of Alberta.

What it's preoccupied with is something, I think, that most Albertans are aware of, and in the back of their mind they are wondering what the options might be after May 18. When the Premier's election leadership review results are revealed, maybe we'll see a shift or a turn by this government. There are so many different balls in the air. It could end up being just another RCMP investigation. Who knows? But indeed what we end up having is a government that is very much distracted by its internal dislocations, let's say, and a leadership review which has caused the party to be in disarray. In fact, the seating arrangement has changed to reflect that in the Legislature by showing those who are least loyal along certain rows and those who are more favoured taking other positions.

There are all kinds of theatrics going on in this Legislature and with this government and – dare I say? – in caucus and in cabinet right now, Madam Chair, that are distracting the government from actually making and taking proper scrutiny of legislation they bring forward, which would have certainly caught something like this, which is going to add an additional cost on the Albertan utility bill by having the utilities advocate paid for by a special fee on the utility bill.

I'm not sure if other examples can be found where an advocate or – you know, the seniors advocate that we wanted to bring forward is certainly not going to be an extra charge brought forward on your tax bill to pay for that. I don't know if there's a special line, a health care charge, that you'd have to pay. No. It's kind of an unheard-of thing.

It's something that maybe we shouldn't be surprised by, but unfortunately it is maybe a trial balloon by the UCP government to put another cost onto something that isn't called a tax. The government, of course, likes to say: we haven't raised taxes. Well, in fact, that's an argument that is pretty easy to destroy because, in fact, bracket creep, brought in by the current Premier, is something that will cost Albertans a billion dollars. Though the Premier attempts valiantly to tell us and all Albertans that it's not a tax increase – guess what – it's going to generate a billion dollars more in taxes. And guess what. Whose pocket is it coming out of? The same Albertans who are being hurt by this Bill 22, which will add

an extra cost onto their utility bill by forcing Albertans to pay a special fee for the benefit of having a utilities advocate on their behalf.

I don't know. If we have somebody who does represent consumers and other areas of utility provision, will the government contemplate putting another rate rider onto that? Maybe we should be prepared for that battle, Madam Chair, and wonder how many particular riders this government can think of so that they can pay for oversight in consumer legislation and positions that would otherwise be public servant payroll and come out of the tax base. Maybe they see this as a way of off-loading that is a convenient way of hiding the cost of providing, in this case, a utilities advocate.

The thinking behind it is something that really should have been carefully considered by the government, especially when we are at a point in time when the affordability issue is uppermost in Albertans' minds. On the doorsteps, in our media, in the newspapers – it doesn't matter where you go – it is absolutely what people are talking about because people are having great difficulty in absolutely just surviving, in buying groceries and paying the rent and mortgage payments.

Interest rates are creeping up as well, Madam Chair. It is a very difficult storm out there, and Albertans and Canadians and globally as well are being caught in the pinch. The responsibility of government is to be very careful to scrutinize their legislation that they bring through to not add to that burden. This is what they've neglected to do or forgotten to do or maybe just callously decided to go ahead with anyways even though there was an extra cost to Albertans for adding this rate rider onto the utility bills so that the utilities advocate could be paid for.

I know that there are lots of major issues going on that maybe seem more important, but this one, Madam Chair, is important to every Albertan who has a utility bill to pay and is looking at how they're going to stretch their dollar to actually get the grocery bill paid for. If the government sees fit and gets away with adding this extra little cost onto the utility bill, what's next? I mean, is it going to be another charge on your natural gas bill? Will it be some other excise tax or some other element to pay for some oversight on your home-heating bill or your natural gas or your car? Hard to say.

5:40

You know, there's one issue that has to do with the electrical grid that really hasn't received a lot of attention either in this bill or in legislative discussions or that I've heard the government talk about, and that is one of grid security and cybersecurity. Now, it's a huge issue that is not even contemplated, as far as I can tell, in Bill 22 and that will need a lot of oversight. Maybe the government is going to consider having us pay for a watchdog to look at grid security, maybe a whole panel of people to look at grid security to protect us from cyberattacks, and that will be a separate charge on the electricity bill on top of the utilities advocate.

That's something that is fair for Albertans to ask. It's a question that comes to mind. When you have something that is sort of a leading pilot project and nobody hollers about it – it's a small charge here – but, say, there's a larger issue that the government wishes to have oversight on such as cybersecurity on our electrical grid, which is a huge issue, Madam Chair, globally, I think it begs the question: would they go ahead and decide, "Well, let's pay for it by adding another fee onto the utility bill"?

I'm not sure if indeed others wish to speak, but I think that some may. I will take my seat and let some others add their comments to the debate, and I'll be happy to hear them.

Thank you.

**The Chair:** Are there others to join the debate on amendment A1 on Bill 22? I'm seeing the hon. Member for Edmonton-City Centre.

**Mr. Shepherd:** Thank you, Madam Chair. I appreciate the opportunity to rise and speak to Bill 22, the Electricity Statutes (Modernizing Alberta's Electricity Grid) Amendment Act, 2022, and particularly the amendment we have in front of us. We're going to strike out the section that says, "or any other person over whom the Commission has jurisdiction or any person to whom the Commission provides services" as well as some other changes in here.

Again, Madam Chair, this is about protecting consumers, this is about protecting Albertans, and we know that there have been a number of challenges for Albertans over the last year, in particular when it comes to utilities in the province of Alberta, indeed particularly in terms of electricity. I think we've spoken about that at some length, and I guess we're going to speak about it some more because this is a real issue that has been raised with us by many Albertans, the concerns about the rising costs they are seeing under this government.

I think we've all heard from our constituents about the soaring price of electricity. Indeed, we have heard the stories, and we have seen, each of us, I think, the e-mails from individuals who are seeing power bills of hundreds of dollars at a time when they are facing many other rising costs: certainly, the rising cost of natural gas, the rising cost of groceries and other things under inflation, soaring insurance rates. This is indeed a difficult time for many Albertans.

Again, the reason that we are bringing forward this amendment and, in particular, when it comes to electricity, Madam Chair, I know the government has a low opinion of the rate cap which we had had put in place on electricity in the province of Alberta. Certainly, it would have been protecting Albertans right now in a way that this government absolutely is not. Indeed, what we have seen from this government was a promise some weeks ago, months ago, really, that they were going to take action to provide a rebate to Albertans on electricity. That was around about the time of the budget, and then nothing. Weeks went by, and then we had the announcement that, oh, they are going to provide a rebate of \$50 per month for three months but no information about when that might actually come forward. Meanwhile Albertans continued to pay soaring electricity rates, soaring natural gas rates. Of course, we found out that the natural gas rebate that the government has promised was not actually going to do anything for Albertans until potentially, maybe next fall. I think Albertans had some real questions then about: well, what was going to happen with this electricity rebate?

We eventually, finally, saw the legislation brought into this House, and the legislation made absolutely no commitments whatsoever. It was a hollow shell of a bill. We attempted, Madam Chair, to bring forward some actual guarantees for Albertans because we were concerned, the government bringing this forward, that it could be months before Albertans would actually see this rebate that they had been promised and which this government had patted itself so firmly on the back for for suddenly deciding it was going to bring it forward well after they had already written the budget, which clearly showed that they had had no original intent of actually trying to take action to help Albertans on this.

The government rejected those amendments and said: "No, no. We're good. We'll get this in the regulations." Indeed, what do we find when those regulations come out, Madam Chair? That according to those regulations the rebates of \$150, \$50 a month for three months, could be paid out as late as October, November, December of this year. That's what this government thinks helping

Albertans looks like. That's what this government apparently thinks providing relief to Albertan consumers looks like.

Frankly, Madam Chair, I don't think that's what it should look like. That's why we had brought forward amendments to help this government get it out by the end of May. This is a government which talks about its ability to move at the speed of business, yet it could not find a way to give Albertans any more assurance than: yeah, we'll make sure that's there by the end of the year. It's shameful. It truly is. Again, that is why we're continuing to act in our role as the Official Opposition to step up and offer amendments to try to make this legislation better, to try to provide real protection for Albertans at a time when they are struggling in so many ways, unfortunately, due to the decisions of this government.

Certainly, we've had some discussion today about some of the other concerns that are coming up in the electricity market, and it really again raises that question of trust with this government, which is again why we are bringing this particular amendment forward that we are talking about and debating here now. As we begin here, you know, we've heard this government sort of say: "No. It's fine. You know, nobody is actually getting cut off from electricity. It's all good." But then we find out that, well, they may not be getting cut off, but they're being put on limiters. As we heard during question period today, some families, then, have kids that cannot use their laptop to do their homework for school because that is too much on that limiter. The government can dismiss and say: well, no; our lack of action isn't actually stopping anyone from having electricity. Well, it is still having very real and serious impacts for families in the province of Alberta, Madam Chair.

Unfortunately, what we have seen with this government is that their priorities so often are not the everyday people of Alberta. Certainly, they have a strong interest in their corporate friends. They have a strong interest in their own political ends, but the interests of Albertans? Often just left by the wayside, ignored. Again that question of trust, Madam Chair: whether this government can truly be trusted to have the interests of Albertans first, whether this government can truly be trusted to speak honestly about the impacts of its decisions on Albertans, whether this government can be trusted to take actual, tangible action to help those Albertans, to do so in a timely way, in a way that prioritizes the needs of those Albertans, getting that help to them when they need it, not when it's convenient for them, which, again, is why we're choosing to bring this amendment forward to Bill 22 at this time.

5:50

Now, certainly, as I've spoken to before, there are aspects of Bill 22 which I would absolutely support. In general I think there is – the majority of this bill are things we can support. Increasing the opportunity for energy storage: we talked about that at length. Certainly, there are a number of Alberta companies which are doing great work in this field, developing technology and innovation which could contribute quite a bit in terms of building energy independence and in terms of building the opportunity for us to generate electricity and make use of electricity with far lower generation of greenhouse gases. Certainly, there are elements of this bill that will support that through providing definitions of energy storage, by clarifying and opening some of the rules around self-supply and export. There are certainly a number of things we can agree with here, but there are indeed things that I think we can also make better. There are things that can be improved. Indeed, that is why we're bringing this particular amendment forward, to see if we can help make better perhaps just one section of this bill.

But at this time, I think that's about as much as I have to offer on this particular amendment, Madam Chair. I'll perhaps give the opportunity for one of my colleagues to offer their thoughts.

**The Chair:** Are there others to join the debate? The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

**Member Ceci:** Thank you very much, Madam Chair. My pleasure to briefly speak to some of the things that are problematic with this bill, and I agree with my colleague from Edmonton-City Centre. There are parts of this bill that I absolutely can support – the part that has been brought forward under the notice of amendment by my colleague from Calgary-Bhullar-McCall deals with the whole area under the Alberta utility advocate, and I am totally in agreement that where we can find opportunities to reduce the costs levied on Albertans, ratepayers who are hooked up to the grid, it's a positive thing.

Now, Albertans are already being hammered by this UCP and the increasing costs of living. We know that things like insurance have gone up exponentially under this government. Tuition in postsecondary has gone up significantly, making it unaffordable for many students to go for their higher education. We know there's been a reduction in student grants and the increase to student loan interest. There's no help on the horizon, it would seem, for natural gas cost increases, no help on the horizon for electricity power increases. Though there is lots of talk, there's no real meat coming forward for Albertans.

The income tax bracket creep is real and alive under this government, and the lack of indexation of important income support programs makes it really difficult for vulnerable Albertans to keep pace with the cost of living. There's also failed help with child care costs across Alberta and not being able to deliver what was agreed to with the federal government. We have seen delays to these programs that were supposed to help Albertans out and have not helped Albertans out.

We know that this amendment will deal with a small piece of that, Madam Chair, and should be supported so that the companies like TransAlta, ATCO, and Capital Power can pay for the costs of the Alberta utility advocate instead of socializing that to all Albertans. We believe that that's in the best interests of Albertans at this time because of the significant increase to costs that is hammering Albertans. You know, the fee, while it may not be significant, still will be on the bill. Probably all of us have heard many, many times from Albertans who say that they're seeing all these costs on their bill, and they would like them to be addressed.

I'll just sit down now and let you move to adjourn.

**Ms Hoffman:** You move to adjourn.

**Member Ceci:** I move to adjourn for you.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

**The Chair:** The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

**Mr. Schow:** Thank you, Madam Chair. I move that the committee rise and report progress on Bill 17 and progress on Bill 22.

[Motion carried]

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

**The Deputy Speaker:** The hon. Member for Spruce Grove-Stony Plain.

**Mr. Turton:** Thank you, Madam Speaker. The Committee of the Whole has had under consideration certain bills and would like to report progress on the following bills: Bill 17 and Bill 22.

**The Deputy Speaker:** Does the Assembly concur in the report? All those in favour, please say aye.

**Hon. Members:** Aye.

**The Deputy Speaker:** Any opposed, please say no. That is carried.  
The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

**Mr. Schow:** Thank you, Madam Speaker. I move that the Assembly be adjourned until 7:30 this evening.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 5:57 p.m.]





## Table of Contents

Introduction of Visitors .....	1257
Introduction of Guests .....	1257
Ministerial Statements	
Federal Impact Assessment Act.....	1257
Members' Statements	
Unemployment, Wages, and Cost of Living.....	1259
Federal Impact Assessment Act.....	1267
Housing Prices and Affordability .....	1267
Calgary Downtown Revitalization .....	1267
Domestic Violence Survivors .....	1268
Justice System Funding and Access .....	1268
Hemochromatosis Awareness Month .....	1268
Economic Recovery and Job Creation.....	1269
Lac Ste. Anne-Parkland Constituency Priorities.....	1269
Oral Question Period	
Calgary Office Revitalization and Expansion Working Group Report.....	1259, 1264
Child Care Affordability.....	1259
Government Policies and Cost of Living.....	1260
Health Care System .....	1261
Alberta at Work Initiative and Veterinarian Supply .....	1261
Child and Youth Deaths during COVID-19 Pandemic.....	1262
Utility Load Limiters .....	1262
Executive Council Political Staff Communications.....	1263
Diabetes Management Coverage .....	1263, 1264
Edmonton Remand Centre Emergency Services .....	1265
Disability Worker Wages AISH and Income Support Payments.....	1266
Kinship Care.....	1266
Tabling Returns and Reports .....	1269
Orders of the Day .....	1271
Government Bills and Orders	
Committee of the Whole	
Bill 17 Labour Statutes Amendment Act, 2022.....	1271
Bill 22 Electricity Statutes (Modernizing Alberta's Electricity Grid) Amendment Act, 2022 .....	1283

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