



Province of Alberta

The 30th Legislature
Third Session

Alberta Hansard

Thursday morning, May 12, 2022

Day 34

The Honourable Nathan M. Cooper, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta
The 30th Legislature
Third Session

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New Democrat: 23

Independent: 3

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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

9 a.m.

Thursday, May 12, 2022

[The Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

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

Please be seated.

Ordres du jour.

Orders of the Day

Private Bills Second Reading

Bill Pr. 1

Calgary Young Men's Christian Association Amendment Act, 2022

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-South East.

Mr. Jones: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to move second reading of Bill Pr. 1, Calgary Young Men's Christian Association Amendment Act, 2022. Thank you.

The Speaker: Hon. members, the hon. Member for Calgary-South East has moved Bill Pr. 1, Calgary Young Men's Christian Association Amendment Act, 2022. Are there any others wishing to add comment? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

Member Irwin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is, as always, an honour to rise in this Chamber, and I won't speak too long on this private bill. I do have the honour of serving on the private members' bills committee along with a few of my esteemed colleagues, so we did get the chance to hear from the YMCA and the stellar leader of the YMCA, the president and CEO, Shannon Doram, who does incredible work.

Fun fact: I grew up in Barrhead, Alberta, and when I was about – that's not the fun fact, Mr. Speaker; just wait. That's old news, but it is a fact.

Ms Hoffman: Let us decide if it's fun.

Member Irwin: Okay. Good point.

The fun fact is that when I was around eight or nine years old – wait for it – a family had moved to the area, and that was the Dorams. Shannon Doram was my best friend for about one or two years, and then she and her family – her dad worked at the Distance Learning Centre in Barrhead – moved to Calgary, where she lives now. So, you know, I haven't gotten to see her in many, many years, and then not long ago I saw that she had that role, and I was able to connect with her again. She is an incredible leader of the YMCA.

We are quite proud to support the Member for Calgary-South East's private bill. Basically, what the YMCA wants to do through this private bill is to just sort of modernize their objectives and their operations. You know, I know that many folks in this Chamber – especially in Calgary, there are huge recreational centres, and child

care is one aspect that the YMCA does. They do a lot of really important work in the community, and from what we heard from the committee meeting, this legislation will bring the Calgary YMCA incorporating legislation in line with other areas of the province. For example, the Edmonton area branches have had the ability to own land anywhere in the province for approximately seven years. If you know anything about the YMCA in the Edmonton area, it's the YMCA of northern Alberta, right? They've had a little bit of a different model, so the Calgary YMCA is hoping to do the same.

Like I said, I didn't want to speak too long. I just really wanted to get on the record our support of the great work that the YMCA does.

Ms Hoffman: And the fun fact.

Member Irwin: And the fun fact, which might not have been all that fun in retrospect, but I wanted to share it.

I hope that all members will support the Member for Calgary-South East's bill and support YMCA in modernizing their operations.

Mr. Jones: I'm coming over there.

Member Irwin: We'll handshake it out.

With that, Mr. Speaker, thank you for the time this morning.

The Speaker: My sense is that it would have been much more fun if you had told us just how long, long, long ago it was, or if we were to be led by the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo in the singing of YMCA.

Are there other members?

Seeing none, I am prepared to call on the Member for Calgary-South East to close debate should he choose to do so.

Mr. Jones: Thank you for supporting this important bill, and I encourage everybody in the Chamber to also vote in favour. I close debate.

[Motion carried; Bill Pr. 1 read a second time]

Government Bills and Orders Third Reading

Bill 20

Justice Statutes Amendment Act, 2022

[Adjourned debate May 11: Mr. Ellis]

The Speaker: The hon. the Associate Minister of Mental Health and Addictions has some time remaining should he choose to use it.

Are there others wishing to join in the debate for third reading of Bill 20, Justice Statutes Amendment Act, 2022? Seeing the hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung.

Mr. Dach: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise this morning and hopefully not be asked to sing. I wouldn't be up to that challenge this morning, and I don't think it would be a rewarding experience for anybody in the House.

I know that Bill 20, Justice Statutes Amendment Act, 2022, that we are considering this morning, proposes to be just making a few small changes to the justice act. There seem to be some larger issues that could have been affected or could have been attempted to be resolved by the government with this legislation. We're seeing lots of challenges in the justice system, Mr. Speaker, that are not addressed by this legislation; for example, legislating on the victims of crime fund. It's not fixing the messes that have been made by the

UCP government on the victims of crime fund, and it had many negative effects on the victims.

I know that if indeed one has been involved in the criminal justice system as a worker or somehow involved as a lawyer or in the process of supplying services to the criminal justice system, it's been self-evident for some time now that it always seems as though the criminal justice system is the last one on the totem pole to get funding. It's probably a result of who, in fact, the criminal justice system serves, and that is those who are most vulnerable, those with the smallest voice, those who are least heard in our society, and more so when, of course, they become convicted in our criminal justice system, their voice is even more muted, Mr. Speaker.

That's a tragedy because indeed anybody who ends up in the criminal justice system is a failure of our society to provide the proper means. There is certainly responsibility on the individual's part, but I think that if we roll back the clock, roll back the movie of the person's life who's involved in the criminal justice system, one will find a litany of repeated stories such as the scourge of mental illness coupled with drug addiction and a cyclical nature of intergenerational abuse. It's also coupled, in many instances, with a pattern of Indigenous suffering, which has been thrust upon that population by things such as the '60s scoop and, of course, the residential schools.

The Justice Statutes Amendment Act certainly has a lot of scope, but it really didn't go all that far. Instead of supporting the victims, the UCP did the opposite thing, and that's not right. We really would love to see the reversal of the changes to the victims of crime fund that are hurting victims and hindering their healing, and that didn't happen. Albertans can't trust the UCP to look after the most vulnerable, and this is another example of that.

9:10

Now, the bill amends a total of five acts, of course: the Corrections Act, the Justice of the Peace Act, the Missing Persons Act, the Victims of Crime and Public Safety Act, and the Youth Justice Act. Now, on the Corrections Act the compensation rates for the Alberta Parole Board members can now be set by order in council instead of regulation, and it does bring it in line with other ABCs. So that's not a bone of contention, but I know that many other things that could have been done would have been welcomed by this side of the House.

Now, the Criminal Injuries Review Board was winding down since 2016, and the Victims of Crime (Strengthening Public Safety) Amendment Act cut injury and witness-to-homicide benefits, which the board was responsible for. There was a class-action lawsuit, and it was concluded on January 13, 2022. Previously the UCP reduced victims of crime benefits such as injury benefits, so it would be ideal, Mr. Speaker, if indeed the victims of crime fund was used exclusively to benefit the victims of crime. But that's not what the fund is being used for, and the UCP has been, let's say, a little creative with how that fund actually gets used.

In every case, Mr. Speaker, you want to hope that the criminal justice system is one that seeks to minimize recidivism not by necessarily seeing punishment as the priority but by seeing the historical evidence that is so often repeated when a prosecutor or a defence lawyer is talking about the presentence report. I've had the opportunity to be privy to listening to many of those presentence reports as a volunteer intake worker for the provincial Solicitor General's office, and in that capacity, as I mentioned earlier, there was a constant repetition of similar stories that were heard.

Unfortunately, when these stories were being told, they were really rapid-fire tales told by the prosecutor or the defence counsel in arguing for one sentence or another. They were so rapid because the lawyers and the benches are so absolutely smacked with a heavy

load of cases, so the files that the lawyers would be reading from were very cursorily looked over briefly before the case would be heard in courtrooms 65 and 68 and momentarily briefed in front of the judge. The judge would be making a significant decision in a person's life, as far as sentencing, based on probably a lot of research that had gone into the report but very little that actually was able to be transmitted to the judge.

That speaks to the underfunding of the criminal justice system, Mr. Speaker, and that's one of the things that I think we need to pay attention to in this Legislature going forward and starting right now. It's well known by those who are involved in the system, maybe not as much by the public, that the system is chronically underfunded, and this results in poor representation of the accused and a difficulty in having cases heard in a timely manner. That's something that has been ongoing for a long time. I mean, it was in the 1980s that I worked as a volunteer court intake worker for the Solicitor General's department. The same difficulties are being evidenced here today, and there is an attempt by the government to alter the justice system by using Bill 20, the Justice Statutes Amendment Act, to make some changes.

However, there's so much more to do. I hope that the government has under consideration a lot of the reasons for the difficulty in the criminal justice system and is seriously looking at properly listening to those who are bending under the crushing weight of the caseloads they carry and looking to fund more properly and more aggressively particularly the prosecutors' offices as well as taking into mind the environment which those who are facing the system who have not yet been convicted who are particularly in remand in this province are having to face.

I know there's extra time credit given to inmates who are subsequently convicted for time spent in remand, but that is a calculation based on the extra suffering that people in this province are deemed to undergo by simply being in remand. That really speaks to the question of inadequacy in the remand system.

Now, we did finally replace the remand centre in Edmonton and built the centre that's north of the Yellowhead. It is still fraught with difficulties, Mr. Speaker. This morning on the news there was an indication that there are problems with drugs getting into that facility. A judge actually, very uncharacteristically, suggested that the staff there should be checked periodically for drugs. That was a serious condemnation of the environment that we have our particularly young offenders but all those on remand awaiting their trials – the environment that they face.

There are simple explanations and there are complex explanations for that. The underlying problem is that we don't give it the priority as a government or as a society that it deserves. It's a pretty devastating thing to be incarcerated, Mr. Speaker. I've had the opportunity to visit some of the institutions in Alberta. That was offered to me as a matter of my volunteer work. In fact, I remember going to the old Fort Saskatchewan jail, which is no longer functioning.

There were, of course, solitary confinement quarters there, and it was a devastating thing to see. Individuals were two or three stories below ground with a single light bulb overhead, maybe 12 feet high, on a bunk with no mattress, wearing something that resembled a barbecue mitt, and they had a paperback novel to read. That was it. That was life for those who were in solitary.

I'll never forget that day of visitation knowing that the inmates there when they first arrived were double bunked and perhaps terrified for their life because they didn't know who else they were going to be bunked with, and there were, I'm told by the individuals who worked there, nothing but screams and yelling all night long in those situations where people are first incarcerated.

There are lots and lots of improvements that can be made to our criminal justice system, and this act really nibbles around the edges at it and doesn't go to the heart of the matter. I know that indeed, you know, crime is a big issue all over. Nobody likes to become a victim of crime, but we have to look at the root causes of that and the social causes and the social determinants of a healthy society.

9:20

Part of that becomes evident when we look at the number of folks who are increasingly living homeless or houseless in our cities and, not only that, in rural areas as well. The rural areas are not seen, historically, to be sources of homeless people, but you'll find in places like Edson, I believe it was, it was looking at using small modular accommodations to house those who were homeless. They were local people. The funding ran out for that. I mean, that should cause people to really think and wonder what as a society we are prioritizing when more and more people are left on the street. What's the alternative? Having them jailed for petty crimes? I don't think that's a solution that most Albertans think is acceptable, and I certainly don't.

The solution, of course, is embedded in some of the comments made recently by the mayor of Edmonton, who called upon the province to step up and bear its responsibility when it comes to funding housing to prevent the homelessness and the encampments that are about to occur in this city. An increasing number of people will end up in jail with the criminal justice system being their only source.

The Speaker: Are there others? The hon. Member for St. Albert.

Ms Renaud: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise and speak for the second time on Bill 20, Justice Statutes Amendment Act, 2022. Of course, let me preface my comments by saying that, you know, some of the changes in this legislation do seem positive. As the government has claimed repeatedly that they are just housekeeping – and that's fine. However, there are some very large challenges in the justice system, and I would like to address some of those.

Yesterday I talked a little bit about, touched on a couple of the acts that are amended in this piece of legislation, one of those being the Justice of the Peace Act. The other one I spoke to was the Missing Persons Act. I'd like to touch on again today the Victims of Crime and Public Safety Act. As I said yesterday, one of the things that I was very concerned about were the changes around the cuts to witnesses of crime.

I spoke yesterday about – I'm sure that people in this Chamber will remember – the tragedy that happened in 2015 in St. Albert. At three o'clock in the morning there were two RCMP officers: Constable Wynn and then an auxiliary RCMP officer, Constable Derek Walter Bond. They were investigating the possibility of a stolen vehicle in the parking lot of the Apex Casino. You know, I'm not entirely sure what happened, but they went into the casino. The end result was, tragically, that Constable Wynn was killed, was murdered, and the other auxiliary RCMP officer was injured. There was a fatality inquiry, and that fatality inquiry really sort of paints a picture of what it must have been like for the people that were there at three o'clock in the morning at the Apex Casino witnessing that horrific tragedy, that horrific crime.

The reason that I bring this up is that I did have an opportunity to meet a couple that were witnesses to that crime. They were there at three o'clock in the morning at a casino and described what they saw, and their lives were forever changed. Now, I don't presume to know sort of what the diagnosis was, but I imagine that there was some trauma in their lives after witnessing something so horrific. In

any event, I did meet them a couple of years after the crime in MP Cooper's office. He's the Member of Parliament for St. Albert-Edmonton.

They had actually gone to their federal representative to see if there was anything that they could access in terms of financial supports so they could get the counselling that they needed and the financial support that they were – I believe that the husband was no longer able to work. I'm sure you can imagine what that must have been like. Their lives were forever changed. Anyway, there was a lot of difficulty accessing beyond just minimal counselling. Counselling is very expensive, and they needed quite a bit more than just five sessions. They did end up getting a little bit of support but certainly not what they needed.

The reason I'm telling this story is that just a few weeks ago, when I was at a trade show in St. Albert, I actually met this couple again. They came to where I was, and they introduced themselves and said, you know: we met this many years ago after this crime. They told me what life had been like between that time. Sadly, things had gotten much worse. Neither one of them were working. The husband, I believe, was able to finally access AISH benefits as he had a disability – well, actually, a terminal illness as it were. But they talked about how life had just been so tough for them. A lot of things had happened.

Why I bring this up again today is that not only victims of crime but witnesses of crime need our support. So while we're opening up this piece of legislation, I'm incredibly disappointed to see that some of the changes to the legislation previously introduced by the UCP have not been fixed. We've not addressed some of the serious holes that we've identified, that not just victims of crime but witnesses of crime also need support. It is in our best interest as legislators and as – you know, we're concerned about the finances of the province, that we know that this is a long-term investment.

When we invest in the mental health and the health of people, it is a long-term investment. Imagine that we're able to support victims or witnesses as they go through a really traumatic period of their lives. They will not need long-term support from government if we allow them to get the support that they need to heal, to get back their lives or some semblance of their lives or a new direction. Why I'm bringing this up is that it's incredibly disappointing that this piece of legislation that opens up, you know, quite a few pieces of other legislation doesn't deal with some gaping holes. That is one example of the problems.

I want to go back to 2020 a little bit and talk about when we were first debating Bill 16. I was hoping that this government would address some of the problems that we brought up, but instead this legislation is really sort of making those errors – I think they're errors – permanent. I would like to remind this House of some of the comments from Alberta Municipalities at the time that the legislation was proposed. I think that they were right on. They had their finger on the pulse of what needed to happen. Unfortunately, this government didn't listen. They were very organized. I'm sure many offices received the e-mails that were part of that campaign that I know I received. They were very specific about what their concerns were and what they wanted to see. So I'd like to remind members what those were.

They were very clear about wanting the UCP government to reverse the changes to the victims of crime fund and provide ongoing, sustainable funding to victims' services programs. Now, in this legislation I don't see that enshrined, that victims' services programs will be funded permanently and securely. Now, I think that the victims of crime programs, or some of them are victims' services units, are the only ones, I believe, in Canada that are not permanently funded. So they receive grants. They receive annual

grants. Some of them may receive, you know, a couple of years at a time, but that's enormous pressure.

For those of you that haven't worked in the nonprofit sector or have relied on government grants, it's incredibly stressful, and it's very draining in terms of human resources to constantly have to be applying for grants, to have to create sort of new metrics to measure success instead of just focusing on the ongoing work and building on your success year to year. It's incredibly stressful, and I think it's actually a waste of human resources.

Alberta Municipalities also wanted to shine a light on the fact that these victims' service units or programs really do rely on fundraising. Actually, some of them in the province – and I'm sorry; I don't have the statistics of which jurisdictions – actually have to fund raise up to 50 per cent of their annual budget. Now, for those of you that haven't worked in the nonprofit sector, fundraising takes an enormous toll in terms of human resources. It detracts from the work that the nonprofit sets out to do.

Imagine you're a victims' service program or a victims' service unit and part of your time is spent just trying to think of: "How are we going to fund raise? How are we going to fund raise hundreds of thousands of dollars? Well, maybe we'll do a golf tournament. Maybe we'll do a lottery. Maybe we'll do a bingo, or maybe we'll sell something." It takes a lot of time and a lot of effort to fund raise, and every time we force organizations to do that, we're detracting from the very important work that they are there to do.

That's our loss. That's a loss of time, a loss of human resources, and I think it's a sad use of – once again, it's just an investment in our future, and I think that, sadly, this government has demonstrated time and again that they don't think long term and long-term investment. Instead, they're thinking in terms of election cycles and what looks good, the bottom line, what it looks like, what looks good on a campaign slogan instead of what is best for the province of Alberta and what is best for Albertans.

9:30

Mr. Speaker, again, this is not my point of view. This is from Alberta municipalities. I will remind you that this is from their campaign from 2020. They talked about, highlighted the fact that there was an increase in the surcharge and that, you know, the pot of money grew substantially. That would have given, I think, the government, you know, the ability to get creative in terms of investing in victims, witnesses of victims, and organizations that support victims, but unfortunately that was not the case.

We all know how that worked out. Bill 16 was pushed through, and as a result I think there was an enormous loss. What they did point out and what I'd like to point out again for this House is that this Bill 16 actually took from a fund that was otherwise protected since its inception 30 years ago. What a legacy for this UCP government, that they raided a victims of crime fund that had been stable and doing its job for 30 years. Why they think they know best, Mr. Speaker, I really don't know when communities – Alberta municipalities, certainly – were saying very clearly that they were opposed to this change. Sadly, this government did not use their opportunity with Bill 20 to correct that error and make things better. They did not do that.

Victims' service programs, victims' service units, or however they are called, are incredibly important. As I mentioned, as Alberta municipalities pointed out, they don't have stable funding. As a result, they're forced to do fundraising. They're forced to have the stress of reapplying for grants or, you know, hoping that things go well with the government and that they get another grant. But they do incredibly vital work that otherwise would cost the government, I think, quite a bit more than victims' service programs.

As you know, Mr. Speaker, the vast majority of them are heavily reliant on volunteer hours, and these volunteers are very well trained and provide an incredible service to Albertans. I know that I've said this before: many years ago – probably, like, over 20 years ago; I don't even recall – I did volunteer in Edmonton for victims' services. I went through their training, which is extensive. You know, you have to commit to a certain number of hours every week to work in their program, and I did that for some time. But I actually could not do it because of the stress of that work. It was not something that I was cut out to do, and as a result I stopped doing that.

The service that they provide is absolutely incredible. One of the things they do is court preparation and accompaniment. That was pretty straightforward. It's understanding the court process and sort of demystifying that for people that are going through that, preparing them, you know, telling them it really doesn't look like it does on television: here is the role of defence; here is the role of the judge, you know, all of those things; here is the door you're going to go in; here is where you're going to sit. All of that is incredibly helpful, particularly if it's young people, just being there with them. You know, sometimes it was giving them a new stuffie, it was holding their hand, and those things are pretty straightforward.

Helping people with victim impact statements: if anyone has ever had to assist someone or write a victim impact statement, that can be pretty traumatic for people. To provide some support for them as they do that and as they have to relive some of that trauma and talk about how that impacts their lives, that's tough, and it's a lot of work. So there is that and helping them with financial benefits, accessing, knowing where to go, also accessing forms around restitution, understanding what that's about.

But what I found the most difficult was responding to incidents, if there was an accident or after the police had left. Let's say that there was a robbery at a 7-Eleven. You'd go in after, when everybody is gone, to support people that were perhaps witnesses or were victims of a crime and using all of the skills that you've learned through the training as a volunteer to support people through that and then explain what that process is.

That's a lot of work, and it's a lot of work for volunteers. Why I'm spending the time I am today explaining all of the services from victims' service programs and units is that these are volunteers. Investing in these programs, the small investment the government makes, provides an incredible service and is an incredible cost saving to the government. But this government's failure to see that and failure to invest long term is just a missed opportunity and just another example of the short-sightedness that we have seen time and again in this place. It's unfortunate. It's a missed opportunity, and I think Albertans are the ones that will suffer as a result.

You know, there is a thing called – I don't know that everybody knows it; I actually didn't realize it until quite recently and had a chance to look at it – the Canadian Victim Bill of Rights Act. I think that this needs to be top of mind when we make decisions around the justice system, to look at it from the point of view of the victim, to ensure that when we are amending legislation or when we are introducing legislation, everything that we do supports victims' rights.

I hope that most of us in this place have not been a victim of crime – that's my sincere hope, that we never are if we've not been – but if we are, to know that our government supports us through every single stage: through the investigation stage, through the trial stage, through the sentencing stage, and then through, obviously, dealing with corrections and conditional release and all of those things.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker and to my colleagues from Edmonton-McClung and St. Albert for their remarks prior to me speaking this morning. I was speaking to this in committee previously and ran out of time. In the middle of my remarks, what appeared to be the end of my remarks, I was revisiting a recent experience where I was with family members who were absolutely the victims of a crime because their son had been horrifically murdered. I was with the Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods. The Member for Edmonton-Meadows definitely knows the family very closely, and then also the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar was present at the funeral.

What really touched me – I hadn't been to many Sikh funerals before, to be very honest. Most funerals that I've attended in my life, although it seems like I know more and more young people who are dying these days, have been for people at the end of their life – I guess everyone is at the end of their life – after a long life, rather, people who have generally been at least over the age of 60, for the vast majority.

But this was a very young man who was a high school student. The way that the female members of the community vocalized the grief that I think everyone in the room was feeling: they were the ones powerful and vulnerable enough to, I think, really bring about sound through their sharing of emotion, through their weeping, through their vocalization of their grief when the young man left the funeral home. It was incredibly powerful, Mr. Speaker.

Part of why I talk about this experience is because when people are the victims of a crime, in coming to terms with what's happened in their lives, they should be allowed to grieve in whatever way they need to grieve. I want to say that up front. I want to say that not having to worry about things like timelines and statutes and trying to receive some compensation, some recognition for what you and your family have gone through should be the minimum that the government provides to families and to individuals who are the victims of crime. Some survive, and certainly some don't.

I was able to hear very clearly the minister responsible, the present Minister of Justice – I think he's our third Minister of Justice in three years. I had to stop and count for a second. Everyone is still on the front bench, but the chairs have definitely changed. The current Minister of Justice, the present one, talked about how the changes to the Victims of Crime and Public Safety Act shouldn't be concerning for folks because the UCP already largely made these changes in practice, and this was about actually enshrining them in law.

9:40

What I will say is that the changes in practice have not been good. They have not benefited the community. They have not benefited survivors and victims. To say, "Oh, don't worry; this isn't significant" when it's actually taking practices that have been broadly critiqued by advocacy organizations and individuals who have to live through these processes and then putting it into law and saying, "Don't worry about it" – it's just taking bad policies and actually enshrining them in the law. It doesn't give me a lot of solace. It actually implicates all of us because we're being asked to endorse that, right? We're being asked to actually substantiate the bad decisions that the front bench has made through our vote and through our recorded vote in this place.

Some of the sections that relate to the Victims of Crime and Public Safety Act that are being changed: there's a section, of course, that I did touch on previously where it talks about replacing "death benefit" with "funeral expense reimbursement." Again, who are we to tell victims' family members who are grieving how they should spend their compensation, that it needs to be tied to a funeral

expense specifically? Not everybody grieves through those more traditional forms.

Then the other piece I want to highlight is that it actually strikes out transitional sections 19 through 23, and this is the bulk of where the controversial changes were. I'm going to go through a couple of them and read some sections where I think we should all in this place be well aware of what we are being asked to endorse by the government in bringing this forward.

On page 17 of the hard copy – it's subsection (18) of the bill, which is removing sections 20 and 21 from the law – section 20(1) says,

A person entitled to submit a request for reconsideration under the former Act and the regulations under that Act concerning a member of the class described in the Class Action Settlement Agreement may submit the application under this section and the application must be dealt with in accordance with this Act and the regulations under this act.

So a person entitled to submit a request for reconsideration, so an appeal process under the former act, and then it explains how you do that. We're saying that we're getting rid of that opportunity for people to ask for reconsideration and for people to appeal.

This is 21(1). I'll skip over to it. It's very housekeeping in terms of the way the language is written. Section 21(1) says:

If a person has applied to the Review Board for a review of a decision of the Director and the review has not been concluded or dismissed before the coming into force of this section, the review must continue to be dealt with in accordance with this Act.

Again, people asking for an appeal, people asking for reconsideration. We're taking out of the legislation that if that is still in the middle of the process and it hasn't been concluded – we're taking away their ability to actually appeal. We're taking away their ability to have the decision reviewed and to have an opportunity to continue to advocate for what they feel is appropriate compensation under the former act.

Again, when I think about all of the things that members on both sides of this House have said while advocating to be in this place and to be in the position to make decisions, I would say that telling Albertans that we're going to make it harder for you to file appeals and to try to get compensation when you have been the survivor of a crime or the victim of a crime or somebody you love has been horrifically killed, for example, saying that we're going to make it harder for you to file an appeal: I don't remember anyone in this House saying that that was one of the things that they wanted to do as it related to justice and the treatment of survivors or victims in law.

Section 21(3):

Where a person has applied to the Review Board for a review of a decision of the Director [and] the review has not [yet] been dismissed nor a decision rendered under section 14.01 before the coming into force of this section and the benefit under review is not referred to in subsection (1), the review is terminated and the Review Board, chair or member designated by the chair, as the case may be, must refer the review to the Director.

Right now there is very definitive "must" language. I know that some people who are in this place have read reports by people who don't like the word "must" because it actually is a directive, that if somebody has applied for a review, applied for an opportunity to have their case reconsidered, it must be elevated to the director. The reason why we say "must" in laws is because we're not coming to this place to say, "You should do this," or "You might do that," and I know sometimes that works its way into bills. I don't love that kind of language. I think that bills, laws should be clear and definitive. I think that people should know what the rules are so that we can follow them. If a person applies for an appeal and it hasn't been heard properly, it must be elevated to the director: I think

that's very clear. I think that's very black and white, and to take that away I think could be an impediment to justice.

[Mrs. Frey in the chair]

Let's go on to subsection (4):

- (4) Where the Director receives a referral under subsection (3), the Director may, as the Director considers appropriate,
 - (a) reconsider the matter, or
 - (b) notify the applicant in writing that the applicant may, within 30 days from the date of notice, apply for judicial review of the decision.

This has the provision of "may" because it's giving a choice, right? You can either reconsider the matter, the director can either review it, or they can notify the person who has applied for the review of an alternate process, a judicial review, expediting or elevating the decision of that to a judicial review rather than it being heard by the director.

These are all things about how people can seek some kind of remuneration and some kind of compensation for the harms that have been inflicted on them as the victims of crime or as the survivors of crime or as the family members of somebody who did not survive a crime, and we're taking away – we're being asked to take away; we haven't done it yet; we're still in third, but we're being asked to take away their rights to have appeals and their rights to have reconsiderations.

The minister might say: "This isn't significant. This is just enshrining what we've already done." But we are asked to enshrine it. We are asked to validate this. We are asked to say: "Yeah, we're good with that. What the past, past Justice minister did is fine." You know, here we are on Justice minister 3 in three years, and we've seen that this Justice minister has, at least in one situation that's been made public, taken a decision by a former Justice minister – not the former, former Justice minister; just one minister before – to undo one of the bad, bad decisions that were made.

Member Ceci: Who could be next?

Ms Hoffman: Who knows who will be next? Yeah. There are certainly a lot of rumours circulating about who might be best suited to be making these decisions.

The current Justice minister, in some regards, or at least in one that's been very publicly referred to even in this House, took the decision by the former Justice minister to bring in fear, attacks for people wanting to appeal a traffic violation, that they'd have to pay, I think it was about \$100, and they'd have to file within a very short period of time. For a lot of people in Alberta – we know right now that many Alberta households are within \$200 of not being able to make ends meet. So for many families, that additional application fee of \$100 to be able to challenge a traffic violation would be the brink of financial instability for them, right? I don't want to go as far as to say "ruin," but I think that for many they would feel a sense of dread and ruin and not being able to pay their bills. We've seen how, over and over again over the last few years, life under the UCP in Alberta has become more and more expensive.

I do have to say to the current Justice minister that I'm really glad that that decision was overturned. I think it was the right thing. I think that there shouldn't be barriers to people getting their day to have an appeal heard when it comes to a traffic violation, having the opportunity to ask for the decision to be reconsidered, for the evidence to be reviewed. That's what these families and victims had under the Victims of Crime and Public Safety Act; the victims of crime compensation fund had appeal mechanisms for people to have an opportunity to make a case about the types of supports that

would benefit them in trying to recover from the impacts of the crime that was inflicted upon them.

9:50

So the current Justice minister has, at least on one occasion, very publicly in this place overturned a decision by a former Justice minister. These decisions that were made by our former, former Justice minister: they're wrong. I certainly don't want to be on record having endorsed the decisions of the former, former Justice minister because I think that they are moving in the wrong direction. I don't think that they reflect the values that virtually all of us campaigned on when it comes to safety and fairness for citizens in the community. I don't think that this bill furthers that call to action for a more just and fair society when it comes to fair and appropriate compensation for victims of crime.

I know that many people in this room, statistically, have probably been a victim of crime. I know that many of us, many more probably, do know other people who have been victims of crime. I think that they deserve to have people on the record in their government, in the Legislature, no matter what party or whether independent, stand up and stand with victims and survivors. Those are the sections that probably, as it relates to the Victims of Crime and Public Safety Act, have had the broadest criticism publicly, and I think for good reason.

I know I focused the vast majority of my remarks both in committee and now in third on one piece of the bill, the Victims of Crime and Public Safety Act, and probably because that's the piece . . .

The Acting Speaker: Hon. members, we are on Bill 20, the Justice Statutes Amendment Act, 2022. Are there any other members wishing to speak? I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

Member Irwin: Thank you, Madam Speaker. There have been a lot of really thoughtful remarks from my colleagues and some important questions raised. You know, I know it certainly feels like déjà vu every time we're in this Chamber and we don't hear from the members opposite, from the governing party, particularly on a bill as, arguably, to them, critical as Bill 20. So I hope, and I appreciated the comments – well, I appreciated all the comments today, but the Member for Edmonton-Glenora basically called on this government to think about whether they really want to – I'm putting words in her mouth a little bit here, but my interpretation – whether or not the members in this Chamber would really want to support a bill that brings our justice system backwards and potentially hurts a lot of our constituents.

I hear members in this Chamber talking, as they often do, but not choosing to join debate. I'd love to hear some of those members join debate, particularly on this bill because, as I said, you know, we've asked a lot of, what I would call, thoughtful questions. We did get – time is confusing. St. Albert, you might be able to help me on this. Was it yesterday we did get the minister responding a little bit . . .

Ms Renaud: Yup.

Member Irwin: . . . on some of our questions around victims of crime in particular? But then I asked some clarifying questions and did not get any follow-up. I got a few heckles, but did not get any follow-up and did not get anyone else from that government side joining debate to answer some of our questions and to try to explain how they could possibly justify what we see in Bill 20. Always the optimist I am, I am hopeful that we will hear again from the minister or perhaps somebody else on that side. I know there are some

members on that side who have connections to the justice system. You know, there is at least one lawyer on that side, probably more, who could join debate. So I'm hopeful.

All right. One of the other themes that I see in Bill 20, that aligns with a number of the pieces that we've pointed out in other bills presented to us this session, you know – this was an opportunity in Bill 20. If this government really wants to improve the justice system, improve the remand system, improve supports for survivors, for victims, then they could have done that in legislation. They could have righted some of the wrongs of the past, including the raiding of the victims of crime fund. They could have taken tangible steps to improve the remand system, improve incarceration in this province, but they've chosen not to. They've chosen instead, for the most part, with a few exceptions in this bill, to really just make some housekeeping changes. That's what we've seen in multiple bills this session from this government.

This is a government that's so focused on just trying to save their own seats that instead of putting forth robust, transformative legislation, they're doing a whole heck of a lot of housekeeping. That's frustrating for many of us. Why is that frustrating? Let me tell you a story of what I see in my riding of Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

Yesterday morning, as is often the case – I pretty much always take the same route to work every day. That route takes me – well, I don't need to tell you the entire route. That could get – it could be too much for you. Plus, I probably shouldn't exactly identify where I live. But long story short: from my house I head over to 96th Street; 96th Street, if you don't know, is also called Church Street. It goes through the, well, Alberta Ave, McCauley and Boyle Street neighbourhoods. Yeah. My colleague from St. Alberta knows, because she lived not far from 96th Street when she lived in the Alberta Avenue area many, many years ago. So she knows 96th Street; she knows Church Street. It's called Church Street because there was, at one point – and I forget the year. I'm bringing you all more fun facts today. That's a lot of fun facts for one morning. It's called Church Street because at one point – and I believe it was in the '70s, maybe the '80s; I will find out the details – it was in the Guinness book of world records for the most places of worship in a small area. Just countless churches and places of worship along Church Street.

[The Speaker in the chair]

There are still, actually, a number of churches on Church Street, including Sacred Heart, which, if you haven't been before, is an incredible building. A part of the Catholic church, but they really focus on Indigenous supports and reconciliation. It's a really fantastic building, although they were hit with a fire, I believe just last year.

Anyways, I digress. But it is – you know, any time, if anybody would love to come and visit 96th Street, Church Street, with me, I would love to have you. We have also seen some of the old churches that had been repurposed. There is Rhema chapel, which are Nigerian folks, who've taken on a church which was, I believe – oh, gosh. No, I won't speculate. But it was a church that was repurposed, and they took it on. It's kind of really cool just to see the diversity still in a very small stretch.

Also interesting – coming back to Barrhead and my fun facts earlier today: Barrhead, Alberta was actually also once in the Guinness book of world records for the most churches per capita. They don't have quite as many anymore. I know a few of them have shut down, but kind of interesting. I believe that was 1979. But, again, my memory is terrible, so please do not quote me on that one either.

Anyways, let me get back to some seriousness here. Every day I do take 96th Street to work, to the Legislature. I purposely take that route, because it gives me an opportunity to interact with unhoused folks and to see just the real struggles that people I represent face every day. While they may not have homes and while they may be unhoused, they're still my constituents, right? They matter. It's harder when you drive because you don't get to interact quite the same way that I used to, especially when I would run to work every day and I was car free. That was my life for years. I really got to, you know, better hear people's stories. But I still do bike a lot as well. Again, that gives you a little bit more perspective.

10:00

As I was driving to work yesterday, just in front of the Bissell Centre, which is on 96th and about 105th, there were a whole heck of a lot of police cars and, I believe, a couple of fire trucks and ambulances. I thought: "Oh, gosh. What the heck is going on? There's a whole lot of resources." My heart kind of just jumped because I didn't know what was happening. I soon realized, as I was paused there for a bit, that they were clearing out encampments. They were removing all of the tents that had sprung up there. Anybody who spends time in my riding and in my colleague from Edmonton-City Centre's riding as well: you see encampments, and particularly you see a rise in them when the weather gets better.

I understand completely that there are people who are concerned. A lot of times the residents, particularly in Boyle Street and McCauley, who reach out to me concerned about encampments are coming from a perspective that they want to support people. They want people to have housing. They want people to have access to harm reduction supports. Simply clearing out actual humans' belongings, in some cases all they have, clearing them, throwing them into bags, treating them as if their belongings don't matter – there has to be a better way, and we're not seeing it from this government.

We've asked so many times in this Chamber for this government to take permanent supportive housing seriously, to acknowledge that permanent supportive housing can actually save lives. I've talked many times in this House about Ambrose Place as an example of permanent supportive housing that works. To bring it back to 96th Street, not too far from 96th Street in the McCauley neighbourhood, Ambrose Place takes in some of the hardest to house folks, folks who've been on the streets, some people for years, offers them a roof over their head.

I know the Minister of Indigenous Relations has visited. I know there are government members who've seen the great work that Ambrose Place does, the incorporation of Indigenous cultural perspectives so that folks feel like they're safe and they won't be discriminated against in housing, which we know is a very real issue for a lot of folks. We know Indigenous people are incredibly overrepresented on the streets, and you don't have to walk too far along 96th Street to see that.

What an opportunity this government has to invest in permanent supportive housing. Guess what? We're not asking for billions of dollars. The city of Edmonton in their last budget asked for the provincial government to chip in, I believe it was – was it \$6 million or \$9 million? Edmonton-City Centre, you'll probably know. Was it \$9 million?

Mr. Shepherd: Nine.

Member Irwin: Nine million dollars. An absolute drop in the bucket. They refused.

The city is committed. We heard the mayor's address to the chamber of commerce I believe on Tuesday. We heard him talk

about the desperate need for support from this provincial government. It's not about pitting Calgary against Edmonton. It's not about the mayor just wanting to get more funds for pet projects. No, this is about investing in people. This is about not only saving lives but money, too, and the research on permanent supportive housing shows that. But that's evidence, and we know how this government feels about evidence-based decision-making.

Anyways, I now only have three minutes left, and I've only talked about one aspect of housing. I haven't even really tied it back to Bill 20, but I'll do that, Mr. Speaker. We see the impacts of choosing not to house people and choosing not to invest in harm reduction. We see the impacts of that in the justice system. We see that in the overrepresentation of Indigenous folks in the justice system. We see that in federal prisons. Half of the women are Indigenous. The Elizabeth Fry Society, which does amazing work here in Edmonton and sure could use more support from this government, has highlighted some of the real challenges, the need for supports for Indigenous women in particular. But again – why? – this government chooses not to.

You can point to countless examples of this government making short-sighted decisions, making cuts that will have huge, long-term costs. You're not saving money, and you're not saving lives. That comes with permanent supportive housing, with affordable housing. Something recent is cuts to insulin pumps. The long-term costs of people having to seek health care, having to be hospitalized potentially: why continue to make these short-sighted cuts that are going to cost us all so much more in the long term? It's unbelievable, and it's unacceptable.

The remand system: I haven't even touched on some of the concerns there, another area where this government could have made transformative change. We can talk about the absolute terrible conditions that we heard about in the remand centre when COVID was at its peak, with people getting so, so sick and not feeling like they were having support. Or we could talk about the fact that overdose deaths are happening in the remand centre. Just recently a young person passed away, and he wasn't supported. A judge is calling on this government to take significant action to ensure that no other person dies while in remand, and I haven't heard... [Member Irwin's speaking time expired]

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Are there others? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadows.

Mr. Deol: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise in the House to add comments to Bill 20, Justice Statutes Amendment Act, 2022. What we are hearing in our communities and what we're hearing from our constituency members and what we are hearing from the ethnic communities, racialized communities and what – I got a chance to meet with Indigenous community members two years ago in Calgary. The community had just lost their member the day before I met them. What these communities are feeling, what they're going through, and what they're asking for: none of that, I see, is being discussed or considered to be debated in this House under this bill. We don't even see, like, that in the last three years the government really cared about this, to discuss those issues. I don't see any other the bill before us where the government could answer that. If this bill is not for those questions, areas of concern that people are sharing, do they have another piece of legislation to debate on or to support those people?

This bill does nothing, just taking the very valuable time of this House, using this time for not doing anything for those folks. What we need to do in the justice system right now: it badly needs to expand in some areas that are badly lacking, specifically when it

comes to the accessibility of the justice system for racialized folks, the people who do not speak English or do not speak fluent English. When it comes to justice, it's not even easy for an ordinary person to interpret all the legal language or understand all the legal steps and legal processes, but once it is not your first language, there is a bigger challenge.

10:10

The justice system lacks the amount of translators it needs. It lacks the diversity of professionals it needs. That is the area that my constituents in Edmonton-Meadows, one of the diverse ridings in this province, and the racialized folks – there is even an issue, like I was discussing, that I participated on. I was trying to help the family even after leaving the House yesterday at 6 p.m. Those vulnerable people, specifically the people living on very limited income if they're at the age of retirement, don't really have lots of money to spend to seek the justice that they deserve, and there's not much help on this.

That always has been in the public discourse, the public debate. That's in the media, that's in newspapers, and that's what I have heard the government House members talking about, too. They recognize that there is more that needs to be done. We need more correctional officers. We need more prosecutors. We need more judges. We need more staff. Particularly what I didn't hear was anything from the government caucus members – and they're probably not aware of it – about how we need support in the justice system for racialized communities, racialized folks.

I'm very sad to say this and to have this on the record. I met with the family of Karanveer Sahota, and with my colleague the MLA for Edmonton-City Centre we also met the family of Latjor Tuel. What those family members have been demanding – they are trying to reach government members in Calgary. They couldn't. They came all the way to Edmonton to protest their frustration and communicate with the government members. They came to the Legislature. I don't think any of the government caucus members had the courage or have the courage to go out and even speak to those families who have lost precious family members: the family of Karanveer Sahota, the only child of the family, at the age of 16 – they have a lot of questions – and similarly the family of Latjor Tuel.

On top of that, what the experts and researchers and the community leaders and the members have been asking for, this government continuously keeps ignoring. The family I spoke with in Calgary, an Indigenous family, said: "Our lives, the lives of our family members for them is just a file token. It's just a file number for them. We lost a family member yesterday. We got a file number, and that's it. This is how they value us."

The opposition called for it, the experts called for it: the improvement of law enforcement services and the improvement of the justice system. None of this is part of Bill 20, Justice Statutes Amendment Act. This is very frustrating.

The community members have called many times on the NDP to echo their voice that we need to improve our law enforcement system, specifically when it comes to dealing with racialized communities, racialized folks. The law enforcement needs to have continued, ongoing antiracism, cultural knowledge, and sensitivity education training, trauma-informed training. That was the concern of the Indigenous family I met with in Calgary. This is sad to see, that for the past three years this government had time and they were privileged and they knew the issues and they talked about these issues, too, they recognized some of them, and they did not even take one step to address any of those issues.

On top of this, the government voted down my colleague's antiracism bill, the very first step, that was not going to do a lot but

had been the first step in the right direction. They voted it down without having their alternate plan. If they had another plan to tackle racism, they could bring it forward; they didn't. They just demonstrated that they're not serious about it. That is true.

That's what these families are telling us. All these three families I'm referring to have concerns that none of the government caucus members or the representatives of this government reached out to their families even though thousands of people showed up at McNally high school to attend the vigil in memory of that young man. Not even a single member. Not even a single member of this caucus had the courage to get out and speak to the family and show some respect for this young man who lost his life.

I know the Minister of Labour and Immigration talks a lot about ideology. This is about ideology. This is about that sort of ideology. If you don't have that much sensitivity, that is what you talk about, when he was speaking about ideology yesterday.

On top of this budget, what did this government do in the last three years? They raided the victims of crime fund, and they were there to support the victims of heinous crimes. I wanted to speak to the 45-day limit. It's not a car accident. I don't know what word I should use for you. None of the government caucus members stood up and spoke to this and answered this question. Victims of heinous crimes could be as young as a child or at different stages of their lives in different circumstances and suffering for their lifetime, and they added the limit of 45 days to come out to seek support. Where are you going with this?

I wanted to share the story that in 2016 one of the, I would say, world powers, India, with a population of 1 billion people – the Chief Justice of India was addressing the premiers' convention in the presence of the Prime Minister. There were so many question to the Chief Justice around justice being delayed and people suffering. The justice just broke down while addressing the convention. He cried. He said, "Let's see, like, it's not our fault; we wanted to help people; we wanted this country to move ahead," but what had happened was there were law commission recommendations. They were there from '87 to 2016, 19 years ago. Every single standing committee of the Parliament supported that. Parliament supported that. Law commissions recommended it. What happened? No implementation.

10:20

The 15 judges to 1 million people: how can we address this issue? The law commission said that you need minimum 50 judges. Minimum. Minimum. To do the bare minimum. Nineteen years after they did not even have one more extra judge to implement the report.

I'm not saying this government is purposely doing this or knowingly doing this, but this is the direction this government is moving to or moving in, and that is dangerous. That is pretty sad for Albertans. Whether it's intended or unintended – we don't want to get into this debate – we know what the outcomes are of not taking actions.

I hoped that I would have something better to say about Bill 20, Justice Statutes Amendment Act, 2022, but unfortunately I cannot support this bill, Mr. Speaker.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore.

Mr. Nielsen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Happy to rise here this morning and provide some final, closing comments on Bill 20, Justice Statutes Amendment Act, 2022. I know I had quite a lot to say around one section of the bill. Not much to say around the other four, around corrections, justice of the peace, missing persons, and the Youth Justice Act. As we can tell, mostly just housekeeping

items with regard to changes there, which, of course – again I'll reiterate that I'm wondering why perhaps maybe the Justice minister didn't just hand this down to the red tape minister to present in the big omnibus bill that's still before us here in Bill 21, because that's usually what I seem to see ministries doing. They'll take rather innocuous bills and just kind of hand that down to the ministry, trying to call it red tape.

Then, of course, we do see some changes that seem to come through the red tape ministry that, quite frankly, should have stayed within the host ministry itself. I specifically remember one bill and the minister being asked a bunch of questions about it, and all we kept seeing was fingers being pointed in other directions saying, "Well, go ask that minister and ask that minister," and we didn't really get any answers there. Sometimes that's dismaying, especially considering that Albertans are on the hook between \$10 million and \$15 million over the course of this term for that ministry.

Again, I guess I'll focus some of my last comments here around the key piece that I have considerable concerns about, and that's around the Victims of Crime and Public Safety Act. You know, we've seen changes around the victims of crime fund that – quite frankly, it seems like it was a little bit of a honey pot sitting over there that was just too tempting for the government to leave alone and had to get in there and grab some of that money that's actually meant to try to help victims of crime.

I had mentioned that one organization that could've greatly benefited from some funding out of that was the Victims of Homicide. The founder of that organization, Jane Orydzuk: we've had many conversations over the years that I've been her MLA and trying to bring that organization to the forefront rather than simply trying to scramble to find help for their members. You know, I've attended some of those meetings. Some of the stories, their trips through the justice system, the barriers that they face are quite heartbreaking to say the least. When you have an organization like that, why don't we help them out? In terms of funding it could be mental health supports for some of their members. It could be funding so that they're able to let others know that they're out there to be able to provide supports when families are devastated due to a homicide.

But, you know, over the course of this government's term we've seen many different choices being made: spending tens of millions of dollars to do things like chase down Bigfoot; we see commissions made to develop reports to find out nothing wrong was happening; we look to try to save money by doing things like cancelling insulin pump programs. The feedback that I've recently received on that has been quite profound, actually. As I said, my very own daughter is one of those individuals that are affected by that program. She's worked incredibly hard to try to get that under control, and it was actually potentially in sight for her to be able to gain an insulin pump. Because she doesn't have a company that has that kind of insurance, that change may very well likely put that out of her reach now financially. But, hey, like I said, let's fund pet projects like chasing a cartoon character.

It's unfortunate that we see a bill like this. It kind of hearkens me back to the days in the 29th Legislature when my friend from Edmonton-Mill Woods brought in the changes to the labour bill and members, the opposition at the time, losing their minds, calling it an omnibus bill and, you know: "This is ridiculous. How can you do this kind of thing?" When I look at this, technically, according to those definitions back then, this would've been an omnibus bill. I would of course disagree because all of the changes here do reside under the Justice ministry, just like all the changes back then to the labour bill resided under the labour ministry. It's always interesting once you see the shoe on the other foot and how people react to

these things, but I guess we'll continue to try to point these things out, perhaps maybe urge members of the government to stay true to their beliefs, their concerns going forward about the things they held back then and seem to be pushing to the wayside now.

Currently the way that one section here in Bill 20 and the changes around victims of crime – with that alone, I just simply can't support those changes. You know, perhaps if things were done a little bit differently, if maybe members of the government, members of the government caucus would've taken suggestions by the Official Opposition to try to make the bill a little bit better, I would've found myself in a position to support it. Since they've chosen not to, like they've chosen not to on just about every other occasion that the opposition has brought forward some suggestions to make those a little bit stronger – who knows? Maybe one of these days we'll actually get a few more of these through. I would, of course, urge members of the House to not support Bill 20. At this point I guess I'll take my seat.

10:30

The Speaker: Are there others?

Seeing none, I am prepared to call the question.

I see the hon. Member for Grande Prairie could be called upon to close debate as she was the mover.

Mrs. Allard: Sure. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'll be very brief. I just wanted to thank everyone for the great debate. I appreciate the comments from the members opposite with respect to the victims of crime act, and I want to assure you that we are taking that feedback. With respect to Bill 20, though, it is truly an administrative bill, and as members opposite have alluded to, it's primarily housekeeping on those five acts.

With that, I will close debate and hope that everyone will support the bill. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[Motion carried; Bill 20 read a third time]

Bill 22 Electricity Statutes (Modernizing Alberta's Electricity Grid) Amendment Act, 2022

[Adjourned debate May 11: Mr. Schmidt]

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Whitemud.

Ms Pancholi: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I wanted to give an opportunity for any government member to rise to speak to Bill 22, but it didn't seem to happen. I am pleased to offer my comments today on Bill 22, the Electricity Statutes (Modernizing Alberta's Electricity Grid) Amendment Act, 2022. This is my second time speaking to this bill and having the opportunity to speak to it.

I want to mention that I believe the last time I spoke to it, I made a number of terrible electricity puns and electrical puns. To be fair, I wasn't the only one in the House that night, Mr. Speaker, who was making those puns. There was a hockey game going on, so we were feeling quite electrified that night. Might I add that there is a hockey game happening again tonight, of course many hours from now, a critical one, so perhaps we're getting that electrical charge a little early today. [interjection] Oh. I'm getting some groaning from my colleague the Member for Calgary-Buffalo, but ultimately . . .

Member Ceci: Go Flames.

Ms Pancholi: Oh. Yeah. Well.

A slight digression, Mr. Speaker, if I may. I had a conversation with my son last night who is, of course, as he should be, a hardcore Edmonton Oilers fan. I said to my son: what happens if – knock on

wood – the Oilers unfortunately do not win? I said that we have to cheer for Calgary because it's still an Alberta team. I'm sorry to say that my son was adamant. I'm apologizing to the Member for Calgary-Buffalo. He adamantly said that he would never cheer for the Calgary Flames.

But I said to him, I was like: we are Albertans, so we cheer for an Alberta team. I regaled him with the story of me living in South Africa in Cape Town when the Calgary Flames were in the Stanley Cup finals in 2004. Although being an Edmonton Oilers fan, I got up in the middle of the night in South Africa with a couple of other Canadians to watch the Calgary Flames in the Stanley Cup finals that year. We are Edmontonians first in my household but Albertans second.

I will work on my husband – not my husband, on my son. I'll work on my husband, too. I'll work on my son, but ultimately I don't need to worry about it because the Oilers are going to win tonight. Anyways. A brief digression. I appreciate you allowing me to do that, Mr. Speaker.

Okay. On to Bill 22. We have spoken quite a bit on this side about this and actually expressing that overall there are a number of pieces of this legislation that we, at least myself and I think a number of my colleagues, do support. Certainly, there are objectives that are being served here that are going to serve us well in Alberta in the long term despite the fact that, you know, this is a little bit – as I said last time, better late than never. We had seen essentially this legislation come before this House more than six months ago. Of course, it was not given priority by this government, and therefore it did not pass.

That being said, you know, there are certainly some objectives here which we do support and think are important for our electricity grid, and I want to walk through a little bit because we are in third reading of this bill. Just to summarize, we have not seen amendments. We haven't had a lot of fulsome discussion from the other side about their thoughts on this bill. To summarize for those Albertans who are riveted and watching this debate right now, it's important to kind of outline the elements of this bill and why it is important and is going to serve our purposes in the long run.

Bill 22 essentially does have four main areas that it addresses. First of all, I want to address the fact that it really provides a definition for the concept of energy storage in our electricity market. This is important because this is something that has been undefined up until this point. Largely that was because energy storage has not been a big factor within the electricity grid. I spoke about this last time, about how electricity storage is something that we are more and more cognizant of as we know that our electrical demands are going to increase. We see that in terms of – there's obviously a large movement towards electrification of vehicles. I talked about last time how we're seeing that incredible rise in the demand for electric vehicles. That demand is going to need to be met not only in the production of those vehicles but also being able to service those vehicles on the roads.

That's something I know my family has considered as we just purchased a plug-in hybrid vehicle, so we operate it in EV mode quite a bit, you know, because we can. We don't drive the long distances with it. I actually recently just saw an article that talked about how Mercedes-Benz just actually apparently came up with an EV vehicle that will be able to travel a thousand kilometres on a single charge, which is outstanding although it also is going to change our demand on our electricity system. That is promising, being able to travel that far of a distance on a single charge, but we're not there yet, Mr. Speaker. We know that many vehicles still can't quite do that.

Many more Albertans and Canadians are seeking electric vehicles. We know many car companies – I was trying to search for

it, and I couldn't find it in my research. I saw an announcement recently of one major car company that said they're planning on going to all EV vehicles by a set timeline, so that's happening. It is happening. There is the demand there. It's been very difficult, I know, for many Canadians to actually get an electric vehicle right now. The demand is so high. Wait-lists are quite high. Because of that, we need to be prepared, and there are a lot of things that are going to create some challenges for us.

As we shift that way, it challenges, of course, our oil and gas sector here in Alberta. What does that mean for us in terms of our production but also the infrastructure required to accommodate the further electrification of vehicles? It's going to require charging stations at certain places. We're going to require more energy storage. We may have philosophical or ideological or value differences around whether or not we want this to happen or not, although I will say that a low-carbon market is – you know, for climate change we need to address it.

Moving towards addressing that through more low-carbon emissions is important. We have to take those steps. We recognize the impact of climate change, so there's definitely some significant value moving away from high-carbon transmission. At the same time, you know, we have to be cognizant about whether or not we're ready to do that, the implications, because there are certainly environmental implications of moving to further electrification as well. Nobody is denying that. So managing all of those. Again, the global market and the way the demand is going, we will see further demands on our electricity system. Moving towards energy storage and talking about that as a key part of our electrical grid is important.

10:40

This bill, as I understand it, essentially does allow for, you know, more companies to be able to – sorry. I should just say it goes back a bit. It addresses the regulatory issues around energy storage projects and actually makes it clearer that, for example, the Alberta Utilities Commission will bring energy storage under their processes and clarifies how storage has to follow the rules and mandates of the electricity market. So that's a little bit different than what was happening before because it wasn't defined or regulated. Essentially, it recognizes that this is going to support more energy storage projects going into the future. A number of pieces of legislation are amended by this bill to allow for that.

The other piece, of course, that Bill 22 does is that it allows for unlimited self-supply with export. You know, what that means, Mr. Speaker, is that self-supply is the electricity that is produced and consumed on-site and then hence not usually supplied through the grid. So somebody is generating that electricity on their own property, and they're not necessarily buying it from the grid. Usually that's treated differently because of the fact that they aren't accessing the grid, but there may be times where they do access the grid. Even if you're a self-supplier – for example, somebody might think about a solar panel on their home. They're able to generate some electricity, but there may be times where they need to still access the grid.

Now this is going to allow for more of that happening for industrial suppliers. This is not meant to address that instance I just described over residential solar panels. That's already kind of allowed, for residences to be able to sell their excess electricity back into the grid, but this is going to allow for larger industrial companies to be able to do that. Again, more and more of, I think, a realization that the grid is going to be supplied in different ways as we move to different types of electricity generation as well as different types of electricity use.

You know, the bill has a number of other changes. It requires distribution facility owners to prepare long-term distribution system

plans which will have to receive regulatory approval. This model is in place for transmission right now, and this can help with planning for the transition to increase electrification as more use electric vehicles, as I just described.

These are all things – you know, when I talk about these are good ideas, these are good things we support doing, this will definitely address some longer term challenges and opportunities that we face in Alberta, as I described, but I think we also have to continue to be cognizant of the fact that there are pressing needs facing Albertans right now when it comes to electricity rates and natural gas rebates in particular. Yet – let's be clear – Bill 22 does not address any of those, nor has anything coming forward from this government significantly addressed what average Alberta families are facing right now with respect to their electricity costs. This is not going to make a difference for that, and nothing this government has put forward so far is substantially going to make a difference for Alberta families.

We've spoken at length, Mr. Speaker, and I will do it again, about the failure of this government to respond both quickly and effectively to the needs of Alberta families and the rising costs that they're facing. Not only have they failed to respond, but of course they've exacerbated and caused some of the huge increases that families are facing, whether it be in their property taxes, the increased tuition, the increase in their car insurance. In fact, we know that was directly as a result of this government caring more about the lobbyists who within basically a month of this government being elected were knocking on their door saying, "Lift that rate cap on insurance rates." Sure enough, this government was quick to respond to them and to allow for Albertans' car insurance rates to go through the roof, yet they are not quick to respond at all to the needs of Alberta families.

[Mr. Reid in the chair]

We know that the regulations that have now been released around the electricity and natural gas rebates – first of all, there is no clear timeline for the natural gas rebates. We don't even know if that's ever going to happen. Even the electricity rebates, well, that's not going to happen: December, Mr. Speaker. If you're an Alberta family who has been paying hundreds of dollars more every month, yeah, it's no big deal, right? You can wait till December. December is not really, I mean, an expensive month for anybody. It's like that's not expensive or anything. So go ahead, wait until December. They hope – they hope – it will come out by December.

As a reminder, Mr. Speaker, you know, we stood in this House and demanded that there be action and rebates issued to Albertans by the end of the month we are currently in, by May. But no, this government couldn't respond that quickly to Albertans. But, as a reminder again, it was only a month before they could respond . . .

Ms Hoffman: They announced it in March.

Ms Pancholi: Yeah. Oh, that's true. The Member for Edmonton-Glenora indicated, of course, that they announced it in March. I don't know how much more time they need to do it.

There are certain things they have that they do do with amazing speed: firing an Election Commissioner, firing 20,000 educational assistants during a pandemic by tweet . . .

Member Irwin: Cutting off people on insulin pumps.

Ms Pancholi: . . . cutting people off insulin pumps. I mean, the list . . . [interjections] I know.

We could go through – I mean, those things can happen just like that, but rebates to average Albertans who are facing rising

electricity costs: oh, well, you're just going to have to wait for that. Oh, and let's be clear that even if they do get those rebates by the end of December, it's \$50 for three months, so \$150, which I don't even think covers the increases that many families have faced in one month, let alone what they'll be facing by the end of December. Even though we've talked about the delay in delivering it, we should also be clear about how paltry a rebate this is and how it's not really going to be much assistance to Alberta families. Those are some things to highlight, Mr. Speaker.

Overall this bill is fine. We've talked about it. It's good. There are going to be some good outcomes long term for our electricity grid. It allows for some, you know, more flexibility in addressing the realities of the challenges and opportunities facing our electrical system. But right now if you ask most Albertans – and I did this last time, Mr. Speaker. I can't remember the bill number now which was the insurance bill that came forward this session: 16, I think it was. I said that my test would be that if I go to a constituent's door – and it inevitably comes up that the cost of living is hitting them hard. I say: "You know what? There is an insurance bill before the Legislature right now. What do you think it's about?" They'd be, like, "Oh, you're going to make insurance more affordable for me." But, no, that's not what that insurance bill was about. It had nothing to do with that.

I think the same is true of Bill 22. If I went before my constituents and I said, "Oh, I know you've been facing really high electricity bills. Guess what? There is a bill before this House right now on electricity," they would think: "Oh, good. There's going to be that relief that I need to manage." And then we'll say, "No; actually, that's not what this bill is about."

I think that throughout this session we have seen that this government is not actually responding at all to what Albertans are saying, and it seems like they are not committed to actually helping out the very people that they're supposed to represent. Luckily for Albertans, Mr. Speaker, the Official Opposition and the Alberta NDP are prepared to do that, and we will continue to do that.

Thank you very much.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-City Centre has risen.

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the opportunity to rise and speak to Bill 22, Electricity Statutes (Modernizing Alberta's Electricity Grid) Amendment Act, 2022, at third reading. I can see that, you know, for all members in the House this is a very riveting and scintillating debate. One might say that the atmosphere is electric in the House as we continue this debate. [interjection] Thank you. Thank you. I will not be here all week, but please try the veal.

Mr. Speaker, what we have in front of us today is a bill that is looking to address issues that the government sees within the electricity market. When this bill was introduced, the associate minister for natural gas, also responsible for electricity, said that this bill would be a step towards eventually, at some point, seeing a reduction in costs for average Albertans for electricity. One of the ways this bill does that is by allowing unlimited self-supply – that is, allowing more industries, more companies, others to create and use their own electricity and then sell it back onto the grid – in this way looking to create additional capacity in the system that isn't dependent on the major power providers, then, to my understanding, looking to increase competition in the market, the hope being that that will bring prices down.

What we have in fact seen, as noted by economist Blake Shaffer and others in Calgary in a report they released, is that the largest portion, the biggest reason that electricity prices have gone up is

simply because the major power companies have decided to put them up because they decided they needed more profit. Now, to be clear, Mr. Shaffer is not necessarily saying that this was gouging on the part of these companies. What he notes is that there was perhaps some calculation on their part that their costs would be increasing or that they had other expenses. But the fact is that over the last few years power companies in Alberta have reaped much higher profits by raising the price of electricity, and they have the ability to do that due to a lack of competition in the market and a decision by this government to remove the cap that existed on electricity prices, thus allowing those companies to simply freely raise those rates as they saw fit.

10:50

That has brought us to the situation we have here. Now, of course, this is a government that came in with a very distinct agenda, Mr. Speaker. I don't think anyone would argue that this government did not come in saying that they had a lot of things that they wanted to do. Indeed, they had a very large, exhaustive, and lengthy platform laying out many things. Now, to the best of my recollection, that platform didn't say a lot about what they intended to do in terms of the electricity market. I could be wrong on that point. Maybe these actions here were actually listed in that platform. I don't recall that being there. But certainly this is a government that has been almost slavish in its focus on the things that it said it was going to do, and it is a government that has shown itself very reluctant, in fact, at times absolutely incapable of pivoting when circumstances change.

[The Speaker in the chair]

Unfortunately, that's what we have seen in so many respects, and that is what has led, in many respects, to soaring costs for Albertans in so many areas. This government decided it was going to remove the cap on insurance rates regardless of what the impact might be. What is the impact, then? It has been soaring insurance rates for Albertans, Albertans paying much higher prices. The government has offered no solution for this so far. They've focused on that thing they said they were going to do. It has been the same with the removal of the cap on electricity and natural gas. As we have seen these prices soar, the government has remained steadfast that they would not take action on that. Instead, what they do is that they say: well, eventually we will do something that may make a difference somewhere down the line.

Certainly, as the critic for health care I have seen that that has been a major issue there, where this government has utterly cratered the health care system. We're in a crisis, Mr. Speaker. The government says: well, this is not unprecedented. Front-line health care workers absolutely disagree. I can't even count now the number of doctors, nurses, others who are the front-line people in the system who are standing up and saying: this is absolutely unprecedented, the level of chaos and disruption that has been introduced by this government. When they are questioned about this, the minister stands in this House and says: well, we're investing in eventual capacity somewhere down the line. No action to meet the current crisis. No action to address the damage that they have done with their multiple attacks on front-line health care workers, utter mismanagement of the COVID-19 pandemic, that has brought us to this point of crisis.

The relevance, Mr. Speaker, is that that is what we have here in Bill 22. Now, of course, we support the kinds of things the government is putting forward. We are going to vote – at least I am personally going to vote in support of this bill, but it is a textbook example of a government that says, "You know what? Albertans are dealing with problems now. Too bad. The solutions we'll bring to the table will eventually maybe increase capacity somewhere

down the line,” refuses to acknowledge the mistakes that it’s made that have brought us here, the damage that is done, and slow to take actual action to fix that problem.

Certainly, I agree that offering folks the opportunity to store more electricity, put that back out onto the market, sell that into the market, make use of it themselves indeed is likely to relieve some pressure on the system somewhere down the line. But, you know, the thing is, Mr. Speaker, that the associate minister of natural gas said that the government has no timelines or targets for adding capacity to the grid. They have no sense of when any of these benefits might actually accrue to the system.

That is, again, something that we repeatedly see with this government. Their investments in health care: they like to brag and try to deflect from the fact that they have driven doctors out of the Red Deer regional hospital, utterly cratered their ability to provide service, diverting surgeries, ambulances lined up outside the door because they can’t get into the emergency room. The government says: but, ah, we have put the money in to expand the Red Deer regional hospital in four or five years. Of course, they have not provided any details – no timelines, no specifics – which is what I hear from the health care workers and the folks at the hospital as well as from municipal leaders and others there. They really want to see.

But here we have a bill which indeed may be successful but for which the government can provide no timelines or targets for when it will add capacity to the grid, much like this government was unable to and still is somewhat unable to tell Albertans when they will actually receive the rebate, which is the sole step this government has taken to address the soaring rates of electricity. Today marks 100 days, Mr. Speaker, since the Premier and this government first promised a rebate on natural gas. One hundred days. It was sometime after that that they eventually got around to saying: oh, yes, and electricity, too. At this point Albertans certainly have no idea if and when they might actually receive a rebate on natural gas. Certainly, it won’t be any earlier than October because the government introduced a rebate that does not actually kick in until then.

For anything Albertans have faced over the past winter, this government says, “Too bad,” because, again, it’s not a government that’s interested, apparently, in helping Albertans now. They’re interested in talking about the things they might someday do sometime down the road. As my colleagues have also noted, this is a payment, the electricity rebate, of \$150, \$50 a month for three months, when Albertans have seen their bills double, some triple in size. Fifty dollars per month for three months. Of course, again, that’s par for the course with this government.

In so many areas of policy this is a government that takes a lot away and then wants to pat itself on the back for giving a little bit back. We’ve seen this repeatedly with the Minister of Advanced Education: massive, sweeping cuts to postsecondaries like the U of A, huge cuts that are driving up tuition, cutting staff, gutting that university. But then the minister shows up and wants to be applauded for giving dribs and drabs of little bits of investment back. All this week, Mr. Speaker, every single day there was an announcement from this government of another little trickle of money that they are putting into something after everything they have taken away.

No better example, Mr. Speaker, than one that’s very relevant to the minds of people in Alberta right now, and I can tell you that every member of this House is receiving hundreds if not thousands of e-mails about the ending of the insulin pump therapy program. Now, when the government made the announcement they were cancelling this program, they were patting themselves on the back, saying: hey, we are going to give people access to far better

technology, newer insulin pumps. No details on how that actually is intended to work. No details at all on any of this, really, other than that they intend to force Albertans to move on to external insurance plans, private health insurance, to pay for something that up until now had been covered by government.

Now that they are going to be facing, likely, increased costs – how much exactly we don’t know because, again, the government will not release those details or speak to that. They simply repeat the same talking points over and over and over. Here we have the government taking something major away and then trying to spin that as if they are giving something good back and again, as we have here in this situation, unable to provide an actual timeline or any information on it. No detail on something that is causing very real fear and anxiety and potentially real damage to the health and the income of Albertans and, frankly, to our health care system.

Again, Mr. Speaker, I do not have a problem with the provisions of this bill. These are likely prudent steps to take. Indeed, I will give this government credit. At times, it does manage to do that. We have an awful lot of administrative legislation that comes in front of this House. It seems there are some folks in this government that love to spend time consolidating bills and pulling things together and doing that administrative work. As much as that’s not generally my interest, Mr. Speaker, admittedly, yeah, perhaps at times that needs to be done.

11:00

So I’ll give this government credit that it has done some reasonable systemic work and some reasonable groundwork, but oftentimes, as, say, for example, with Bill 11, the Continuing Care Act that we have in front of this House, which is one of those kinds of bills, we have a lot of consolidation, a lot of housekeeping and everything but again absolutely no details. Many big promises about what the government intends to do and the potential benefits down the road but absolutely no detail in getting there. I think in so many aspects this is a government that has utterly lost the trust of Albertans. As I say, it has proven itself unable or unwilling to pivot to changing circumstances around us to the great detriment of Albertans and, I think, damage to a number of our systems here.

So it’s my hope that, you know, Bill 22, these provisions will indeed have the effect that the government hopes they will have. Indeed, as I said, they are likely to have some effect. I can’t speak to how great an effect they are likely to have in terms of addressing the kinds of costs we have in Alberta’s electricity system, to be clear, a system that has been largely constructed and is still largely functioning as it was set up by previous Conservative governments in the province of Alberta. But I recognize there is indeed work that needs to be done, and I see no reason not to support these particular provisions as one step in moving towards that goal.

Certainly, we’ll be watching closely to see when this government might actually get that rebate out to Albertans. It is only \$150, which is a small drop in the bucket of the costs that this government has raised on Albertans. But, hey, I think Albertan families will welcome any dollar they can get given the number of costs that this government has raised on them. We’ll be watching closely to see when those rebates might get out. Hopefully, it will be earlier than the end date this government has set of October, November, December. I guess we will see. The government said that it likes to move at the speed of business. In this case business does not seem to be moving particularly speedily.

That said, I will be supporting Bill 22, the Electricity Statutes Amendment Act, and watching closely to hopefully see it eventually provide some benefits for Albertans. Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore.

Mr. Nielsen: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the chance to also add some final thoughts here on Bill 22, the Electricity Statutes (Modernizing Alberta's Electricity Grid) Amendment Act, 2022. Again, some of my colleagues have mentioned – I'm not opposed to Bill 22. There are a lot of changes that need to be done in terms of modernizing the language around the electricity grid, specifically for things such as defining energy storage.

It reminds me a little bit of, you know, over the course of time how we've had to adapt to new things. At the risk of maybe dating myself just a little bit, remembering, say, for instance, when the Internet started to become a thing and having to change some of the language to incorporate that. I can almost go as far back as, say, cellphones and things like that, too. That might date me just a little bit too far on that although I still remember buying my very first cellphone in my vehicle for the whopping price tag of \$1,500. It was crazy, but it was very cool driving around with a full-sized . . . [interjection] Oh, the brick phones. Yes. I remember those. You'd try to talk to somebody. We would be, like, literally as far across the aisle as we are now and, you know, you'd be like, "Hello." "What?" Anyway.

Mr. Dach: You weren't driving.

Mr. Nielsen: Well, back then you were allowed to drive, though, with your cellphones. Again, see, things have changed, and we have to update the language to show those things, like we've recently done that you don't talk holding your phone while you're driving your vehicle. It doesn't work out. Usually you'll get a ticket for such things. So, obviously, we always have to be mindful of those changes.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

I remember a discussion I had participating in one of the Council of State Governments conferences down in the U.S. and the whole topic around autonomous vehicles and some of the things that legislators were going to have to start thinking about going forward in terms of: how do you legislate these types of things in terms of if indeed something does tend to go wrong? I can tell you that some of the conversation was actually quite frightening, Madam Speaker, the level of responsibility in terms of, you know, how do you come up with that language to deal with the situation. I have to say that by the time I was at the end of that discussion around autonomous vehicles, I was hoping that any kind of legislation that would need to come forward with that in terms of new technology changes, hopefully I would be retired at that point, and I would leave that to the younger generation to try to work through.

Other than that, I mean, again, you know, requiring distribution facility owners to prepare long-term distribution plans and have them go through a regulatory approval process and sections, of course, dealing with dissolving the Balancing Pool: as I'd mentioned, not really any problems with some of those changes.

But I have to mention my friend from Edmonton-City Centre who had mentioned some of the opening comments from the minister of gas saying that a step towards reducing on costs for Albertans – it was interesting because I actually forgot that during his opening comments. It kind of reminds me of, you know, when this government was first elected, came in and wanted to stop the direction of the type of market that Alberta had with that.

Of course, the only other jurisdiction in all of North America that shared that same type of market was Texas. We all know the saying that everything is bigger down in Texas, and that was including their electricity bills, which was part of the reason why we had been looking at going in another direction like just about every other jurisdiction. But, of course, that was halted, and sure enough, you

know, just like Texas and their big electricity bills, now Alberta shares that same problem. So perhaps the minister probably should have maybe paused for a moment and taken a look around as to what was going on.

Nonetheless, that does bring us to the point, as some of my colleagues had mentioned, that Albertans' energy bills have spiked dramatically. I'd even mentioned in the House one of my constituents that came to my office with a bill for \$500, and he said that was, you know, the second one that he's seen. I'm assuming he's probably seeing two or three more, and he's still of course waiting for a paltry rebate of \$150 that for some reason the minister can't seem to get out the door.

I don't buy the whole argument that he made at the time that, you know, the opposition was simply slowing things down. As we know, that debate has concluded. That bill was passed. Why hasn't that rebate still gotten out the door yet? What's holding it up now? It can't be me. The government controls the purse strings. I certainly don't. You know, why are people still waiting for this to be able to help them out?

You know, in the situation of my one constituent who has now I'm going to guess got at least three months' worth of bills totalling \$1,500, you're going to help him out with a mere 10 per cent of that? On top of all of the other costs that we've seen Albertans have to face because of the decisions by the UCP government. Rising insurance costs. I've mentioned some of the numbers that I've seen from constituents who have contacted my office over that. Rising school fees that people are facing. Then with all that stress of that and trying to make ends meet, they try to get away, you know, going camping or something. Now all of a sudden they're facing fees for that as well.

11:10

It's actually not even to the point where people are getting nickelled and dimed because it's much worse than that. You know, I guess with my friend from Edmonton-City Centre talking about a step towards reducing, I would suggest that the minister maybe speed up and take several steps quickly in terms of helping out Albertans, and the first one is: get the 150 bucks out the door already. What is the holdup?

But, again, as I've mentioned, changes around energy storage: we have to keep up with that, and I know that my friend from Edmonton-Whitemud had gone through that section quite effectively around that.

Also talking about allowing unlimited self-supply with export. Now, it's unfortunate, because of the number that was set here of I believe it was five megawatts – if I'm wrong on that, I'm happy to stand corrected. Likely, that's only going to be able to affect industrial producers with that number. It's not really going to allow anybody smaller than that to be able to participate in that. I don't know if that was, you know, maybe just an unintended consequence or why potentially the minister had looked at sort of locking out anybody smaller than that from potentially being able to get energy back onto the grid that they're not using or overproducing on. Unfortunately, we've never really heard any of the answers to these questions. It just would have been nice to have heard a little bit from that.

Also, one of the other comments that I know my friend from Edmonton-Whitemud had brought up was around the delay of this bill coming forward initially, because we did of course see one iteration of this bill earlier. I believe it was Bill 86. I could be wrong on that. In any case, very similar to what we're seeing here in Bill 22 with a few slight changes. Again, simply asking the minister why that was the case. You know, why the delay in bringing that original bill forward only to then later, six months later, bring forward pretty

much almost the same bill? I could almost say I'm starting to see a habit of delays here with things: delays in legislation, delays in getting rebates out the door, delays in getting Albertans to be able to qualify even for a rebate, as we've seen with natural gas, because those expenses have gone up as well.

It's unfortunate that, you know, we can't seem to get just some of these simple answers so that we can go back to our constituents and explain to them why these kinds of things are happening rather than just, unfortunately, having to shrug our shoulders and say: well, the government won't tell us why; they won't provide an explanation. Unless, of course – the only other thing I can think of is that the answers that they would actually give they know Albertans aren't going to like, which we've certainly seen over the course of the 30th Legislature here. My friend from Edmonton-City Centre and myself in just the previous debate on this bill around the changes, like I said, to insulin pumps: they probably didn't talk to anybody because they knew they would get some significant push-back on that.

Again, I guess when it comes to updating the language, I don't necessarily have any issues. I don't see why this bill can't go through. I guess it's just one more example of a missed opportunity with which to be able to improve the situation for Albertans.

We'll just have to keep waiting, hoping that some of these changes, which will be the step towards reducing the costs, will come a little bit sooner rather than later because, as my colleagues have said, Albertans need that help right now. Well, they actually needed it several months ago, but I guess for the purposes of the discussion today, they need it right now.

So I would highly encourage the associate minister of gas to, well, step on the gas. You know, you're saving 13 cents a litre now, so let's get that truck moving quickly, get it to the bank, deposit that money, and get it out to Albertans immediately. I guess something is better than nothing.

But, as I said, I don't have really any problems with Bill 22. We do need to update things as situations change and new technologies come onboard, new ways of thinking that have just never ever happened before in the past.

I look forward to supporting it, and hopefully, maybe at some point here in the later stages of third reading we might get a chance to hear from the minister, and in his final comments he'll be able to at least quickly answer some questions that have come up throughout debate so that we can go back to our constituents and provide them with fulsome answers rather than simply shoulder shrugging, saying: well, the government never tells us anything.

Thanks very much.

The Deputy Speaker: Are there others to join the debate? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise this morning to join in debate on Bill 22, the Electricity Statutes (Modernizing Alberta's Electricity Grid) Amendment Act, 2022, at third reading. From second reading through Committee of the Whole and now at third reading, we've had the opportunity to consider Bill 22. Now, we did also have the ability to essentially consider Bill 86 in the fall, when it was first introduced and then not passed at that time. My understanding was that the government needed to do a significant amount of additional consultation and development on this piece of legislation prior to bringing it back here for our consideration in the spring.

I'm pleased that the government has been able to go and do that additional consultation. Inadequate consultation is certainly a recurring theme when it comes to legislation introduced by this government. It's something I have spoken about a number of times

in this place as we have debated a number of different bills this particular session.

As some of my colleagues have noted, in many of the pieces of legislation this session there does tend to be a bit of an administrative nature to them. Here with Bill 22, electricity statutes, as in the title, modernizing is absolutely the name of the game. Let me say early in my remarks, Madam Speaker, that I will be pleased to support Bill 22, but I'm glad I have the opportunity to offer some comments.

Bill 22 is going to modernize by defining energy storage, something that's currently lacking in our current legislation. It's going to make sure that we've got the rules around self-supply and export and allowing unlimited self-supply and export. Self-supply, of course, Madam Speaker, being electricity that's produced and consumed on-site and not supplied through the grid. Bill 22 is going to require distribution facility owners to prepare long-term distribution system plans, that will need to get approval, and will deal with the dissolving of the Balancing Pool.

11:20

Now, during debate on Bill 22 certainly much has been said about the cost of utilities on Alberta consumers. I would like to note, as I prepared to respond to this bill in third reading, that during the committee process there was an amendment introduced, amendment A1, that would have stopped the UCP government from adding more fees on to Alberta families. The amendment essentially suggested that administrative fees would, rather, be charged to the utility companies, to the electricity generators within the system. Now, the fees are coming as a result of the dissolution of the Balancing Pool. The Official Opposition was seeking to limit the costs to Alberta families, given the high costs that have been piled on not only in the utility sector but in a number of other ways. Certainly, this is something I hear about a great deal with my constituents in Mill Woods.

But, Madam Speaker, as I reviewed the debate – because we do not always have the opportunity to be in the Chamber for every stage of debate and for every speaker. I am more than happy to be corrected, but it appears that the government and the associate minister of natural gas and no member of Executive Council chose to respond to that amendment and to explain to the Official Opposition or to the public why they were rejecting an amendment that would have saved costs from going to Alberta families. Now, that amendment was discussed across different sittings. There were different people speaking to it, yet the government never chose to respond to that, and I . . . [interjection] Oh, please. Thank you very much.

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I appreciate the opportunity to briefly intervene. I appreciate my colleague from Edmonton-Mill Woods raising this issue. Of course, in my debate I noted that I did not have significant concerns with the aspects of this bill, but certainly the one she is raising is one that was of concern. I do appreciate that you brought this amendment forward or that our caucus did. I was just wondering if she could outline a bit of the detail about the kinds of potential costs Albertans could face due to the government's lack of consideration on that.

Ms Gray: Thank you very much to the hon. member. The amendment was brought forward by the Member for Calgary-Bhullar-McCall, and that specific amendment, which, again, based on my reading of all of the debate through *Hansard* – and for those watching at home: *Hansard* is an excellent source where we can find out more about the debate on individual pieces of bills and who has said what – it was amending section 1(6) specifically to ensure that the administrative fees of the Alberta utilities advocate would

not be charged to anyone but the utilities. Now, my understanding from this amendment is that the administrative fees are resulting from the dissolution of the Balancing Pool. At the time the MLA for Calgary-Bhullar-McCall put forward a very reasonable argument that it would not be fair or reasonable for Albertans to be charged with those additional fees.

He and others who spoke to this amendment went on to outline the number of ways in which Alberta families have been hit with additional fees because of the UCP government, starting with, if we just speak about the electricity and energy world, the UCP government removing the rate cap on electricity prices, and now Albertans are paying more. That removal of that rate cap has directly led to the spike in utility prices that Albertans pay. Now, much has been said as to why those prices are spiking, but we know from research by some very learned colleagues, economists, like University of Calgary economist Blake Shaffer, in recent reports that have been widely reported in the media, that the largest factor in the record-high power prices is profits at this moment because, of course, market power is being exercised by the few electricity generators we have in the system and power companies have pulled in nearly five times the profit during winter rate spikes, according to this. The economist Mr. Shaffer was quoted as saying, "Simply put, they have more control of the supply in the market, and they're charging more." That is one additional cost that I have certainly heard about when talking to my constituents.

At the same time the UCP government removed the rate cap and is now, through Bill 22, putting in an ability to continue to put additional charges on to the Alberta public rather than accepting an amendment from the Official Opposition. At the same time as we're seeing that, we're seeing natural gas prices increase, we are seeing the UCP government updating the tax code to essentially create a tax on inflation, something that the Premier, when he was a member of the Canadian Taxpayers Federation and for much of his time in federal government, spoke against, something he referred to as sneaky bracket creep, and those increases are costing families roughly \$500 more.

At the same time as we've seen these electricity and utility prices increasing, we are seeing tuition increasing at universities, we are seeing inflation impact food prices as well as other costs for families. Certainly, we've seen gas prices rising to a huge extent, park fees, school fees, on and on and on these costs continue to go up. I may be repeating myself, but I have to make the point that it's insurance costs as well. Again, similar to removing the rate cap on electricity, the UCP government chose to remove the cap on insurance prices that was keeping insurance to reasonable increases for Alberta families rather than 30 per cent or higher increases on insurance.

So we're in this environment of increased costs, and the Official Opposition brings forward an amendment to stop the government from piling on more fees to Alberta families, and, again, reviewing *Hansard* – prepared to be corrected and happy to be corrected – it appears that the government did not deign to rise to explain why they did not support the amendment or how they would be managing costs for families. So in third reading, as we make our final comments on Bill 22 and reflect on the debate that has happened so far, the question I have is certainly: is the government not concerned about the additional costs that they're layering onto families? Because this bill, which I support, which is going to modernize the system, may also add costs to families.

Now, in its introduction the minister certainly said that the bill would be a step towards reducing costs and should eventually bring costs down through the modernization pieces we were talking about around self-supply and export, being able to define energy storage. All some very long-term, laudable goals. Unfortunately, not a lot of

detail on timelines for when Albertans will have that relief and not a lot of support for Albertans today. We've talked in this place about the importance for this government to provide support for Alberta families, and, certainly, back in March, the government did announce natural gas rebates and, following that, announced there would be electricity rebates as well, but here we are 100 days after that announcement, and the government has not provided the support to Alberta families who are experiencing high costs over the past several months, and instead have passed legislation that will allow for a very small, \$50 per month – \$150 total – that might be delivered by December. In the case of the natural gas rebate: October, at the earliest.

We're in a situation where the government keeps layering on costs, and even during the debate on Bill 22, the electricity statutes amendment act, not only did they not accept an amendment that would have ensured additional costs were not layered onto Alberta families; very specifically, they did not speak to that amendment and are proceeding apace with this piece of legislation. Now, that does not change my support for it, but it certainly adds to my disappointment when it comes to dealing with this UCP government. The associate minister of natural gas is certainly known as a colourful individual, very passionate about what he does in this place, and he has certainly been very direct in why he believes costs have increased. But it differs significantly from what the experts have said and from what researchers at the universities have said.

Now, to be clear, in the articles that have been published around profits being the largest factor on record for high power prices, there's certainly an acknowledgement that there were lower power prices across the last few years, but today for the families, when I'm knocking on doors in Mill Woods, it's an incredibly stressful time and an incredibly expensive time. We know that there are hundreds of thousands of Albertans who are within \$200 of not been able to make their bills. We know that there are families that are being forced into very tough decisions because it is so difficult to make ends meet and to stretch every dollar.

11:30

Today we are talking about the importance of modernizing our electricity grid, but at the same time, when we're looking at an electricity statute here at third reading, I have to reflect that it's unfortunate that it does not do more to support Alberta families. In fact, although the minister says it should eventually bring down electricity costs in the short term, it could also add administrative fees to Alberta families. The government chose not to respond to the Official Opposition's amendment and to speak to how that would be managed. If our amendment was not necessary, they did not describe why, so I'm left with concerns that this will, even in the short term, add additional costs to Alberta families at a time when they can least afford it.

Now, a big part of why this legislation is necessary is, of course, the decarbonization that is happening in our utilities right now. In response to what we're seeing when it comes to climate change and its impacts, the ability to really take full advantage of renewable electricity, both in the cost savings that it will provide, not only to individual families but to companies and to Alberta as a whole, as well as the opportunity for job creation, I think, is really important to reflect on in the debate. I had the chance to review some of the comments from the Member for Lethbridge-West and the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar, who really spoke to some of those opportunities and those benefits that this bill is helping us to take advantage of. So I'm very pleased to be able to rise and reflect again on . . . [Ms Gray's speaking time expired]

Oh, thank you very much, Madam Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Are there others to join the debate on Bill 22? The hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung.

Mr. Dach: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I'm really pleased to rise and debate this afternoon, actually nearing noon, on Bill 22, the Electricity Statutes (Modernizing Alberta's Electricity Grid) Amendment Act, 2022. In the spirit of the bill one would have expected to see a real recognition of the transition period that we're in with respect to energy, not only in Alberta but globally.

Of course, in the lifetime that I've lived and, of course, in the lifetime of the perhaps parents or grandparents of hon. members throughout this Legislature, we've seen a historic transition from different energy sources from one to another which have been phased in over time but certainly resulted in massive changes to how we operate our society and how industry operates. I'm speaking, of course, about the transition originally from wood-burning sources of fuel to, ultimately, coal. I know that my own baba had a wood-burning stove. That was her source of heat and cooking in the house. I visited that house as a child, and that was it, a wood-burning stove. That was her source of heat, using wood.

Coal, of course, was something that came afterwards. We had an abundance of coal in this province. We still do, but we recognize there are health concerns with continuing to burn it. Those deposits were found close to the village of Thorhild, actually, where I spent some of my early years. I remember making sure that the coal never got wet because, of course, wet coal will heat and perhaps burn your house down. When the coal delivery happened and I helped my grandfather shovel that coal, because they had a coal-burning furnace, we made certain that there was no water coming in the chute that we shoveled the coal to.

It was a major shift in transition from coal to natural gas when that furnace was converted to natural gas – actually, no; to propane, Madam Speaker. The propane tanks proliferated throughout the province of Alberta. People transitioned away from coal for home heating to propane, and then that succession, of course, became natural gas afterwards to replace the propane in most instances when gas lines were brought throughout the province.

So in our lifetime, Madam Speaker, we have seen – in my lifetime and in the lifetimes of the grandparents and parents of members who are younger in this House, we've seen a major, major transition, and we're undergoing another transition now in terms of our energy sources. There are many new sources of energy being contemplated to move away from the petroleum-based sources of energy production that we have relied upon for over 100 years, and that's, of course, due to global warming and greenhouse gas production that results from burning fossil fuels.

Now, in bringing forward a piece of legislation, Madam Speaker, that is purportedly modernizing Alberta's electricity grid, as is postulated in the title of the legislation, one would have expected that we would have seen some recognition of this transition and some realization that there are some risks that we are facing with respect to the electricity grid, where we have brought in changes with this bill to assist the grid to accommodate battery power or battery storage, whether it be hydro pumping or other means of battery storage of power. That's certainly one element of the recognition that needs to be made of the new technology and the new movement away from fossil fuel consumption, but it also has a total silence – and this is a shocking silence to me – on the risk of a cyberattack to our grid.

There's nothing in this legislation. I scanned the bill itself. I couldn't find anything that speaks to the risks that electricity grids, not only in Alberta, Madam Speaker, but globally, face as a result of cyberattack. It was not long ago that in the United States, in the infrastructure which moved gasoline from Texas to New York state,

a major pipeline was shut down by a malware attack, a cyberattack that caused a shortage of gasoline in the United States. It was a huge, huge issue of concern, and it really exposed the vulnerability that major infrastructure has to the Internet and cyberattacks that might be sourced from there.

I don't believe, based on this legislation that's before us, Madam Speaker, that the government is paying enough attention to the risk of cyberattack, and it can come from not only a malware attack or an Internet attack from a criminal element or a country that has got bad intentions, but it also may come from what's called the Internet of Things. That is something that we are all more and more aware of because everything from your fridge to your stove to, of course, your vehicles are becoming smart. They, of course, require components that are produced around the world; namely, chips, computer chips that don't necessarily have the manufacturing oversight that one would hope they would have and can be potentially embedded with malware software that will trigger on command from the vehicles or the appliances that they are part of, that they're components within.

11:40

I did attend an Internet webinar about this topic, and it was hosted by some eminent scientists in the field. They were bringing forward their concerns about this risk, and I think it's something we have to be aware of, Madam Speaker, that when we're considering the modernization of our electricity grid, we really, really pay attention to the risk from cyberattack that might exist and, not only that, the risk from components that may be mass-produced in other countries that are not friendly, necessarily, and pose a risk to the electricity grid in, for example, electric vehicles. That's something that we need to be aware of because they do draw a fair bit of electricity, much more than your, you know, television or your fridge might do so at home. If indeed a co-ordinated attack could be made to trigger the components, the software that's embedded in some of the chips in electric vehicles, it could potentially cause a surge in demand, a false surge in demand, or perhaps a shutdown of elements of the grid. That was a very, very informative webinar that I attended.

I wanted to bring it to the attention of the House and the public to have people investigate a bit more fully on their own, to ensure that they put pressure on the government to be very aware of and take steps, when modernizing the electricity grid, when changing the legislation and regulations around the governance of the electricity grid and taking into account the responsibilities that we want the generators of electricity and the transmitters of electricity to have in protecting that grid from cyberattack, that it be recognized in the legislation. It's not, and I was pretty disappointed and startled to see that, Madam Speaker.

There's no mention of protecting the grid against a cyberattack, and there's evidence around us all over the place that this is something that we have to be cognizant of. The transition that we've gone through is more and more technologically advanced, you know, from the burning of wood to coal to petroleum, now to green energy, electrical solar panels. All of these things are more vulnerable to cyberattack because they are actually exposed to the Internet, and that potential meltdown of our grid is something that even the Auditor General mentioned in 2017 in a report saying that more attention had to be paid to cybersecurity in our electrical grid. So I think it's incumbent upon us to make sure that we do pay attention to this risk and make sure that our grid isn't vulnerable to that threat.

Another element that I wanted to mention. In debate a day or two ago in this House, Madam Speaker, I spoke about and made comments about the phase-out of coal for electrical generation in this province. I commented that, of course, it was something that

was done to actually save lives, and it actually did save lives. As early as 2013 there were reports talking about the health impact of the burning of coal in Alberta. It's a report that was put out by I believe it was the Pembina Institute, and it estimated back then, in 2013, that the health impact costs associated with burning coal for electricity in Alberta are close to \$300 million annually. It was actually a report released by a coalition of Canadian health and environmental groups, not the Pembina Institute.

Now, I'll table this later on, but it's a major source of information for those members opposite who were laughing and guffawing when I mentioned that phasing out coal was a health issue and was going to save lives. That is something that they should read. It goes on to say in this report:

"Pollution from coal power contributes to thousands of asthma episodes every year," says Dr. Robert Oliphant, President and CEO of the Asthma Society of Canada. "On average in Alberta, a child visits an emergency department for asthma every 34 minutes, with pollution from coal power being a major contributor to these episodes."

Madam Speaker, when I speak about phasing out coal as a positive for the health of Albertans, I wasn't doing so to elicit laughter from the other side of the House; I was doing so to bring forward facts that are hard and true. We are seeing and we have seen a reduction in health impacts in Alberta, particularly to those asthma sufferers, and also a reduction in deaths since the reduction and phase-out of coal. It was pretty disappointing for me to hear the smirks and laughter of members of the government caucus when I

talked about coal being something that is a health danger. It's well recognized, so I think we should be cognizant of that.

When we're looking at transforming our grid and modernizing our electricity grid, the phasing out of coal in a way where workers are protected and we transition to natural gas, which has at least a 50 per cent less harmful impact in terms of production of greenhouse gases and particulate matter, is a good thing for the health of Albertans as well as modernizing the grid to be less reliant on coal, that is creating a global problem, with greenhouse gases producing global warming.

Those two things are elements I wanted to bring to the debate that I haven't heard people speak about before. The risk to the electricity grid from cyberattack, that this piece of legislation is absolutely silent on, is a very unfortunate and perhaps ill-conceived omission by the government that I'm hoping we don't regret.

The Deputy Speaker: Are there others to join the debate?

Seeing none, I will call the question.

[Motion carried; Bill 22 read a third time]

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Cross.

Mr. Amery: Thank you, Madam Speaker, and thank you to all members of the House for their robust debate. At this point in time I'd like to move that the House be adjourned until 1:30 p.m. today.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 11:49 a.m.]

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