



Province of Alberta

The 30th Legislature
Fourth Session

Alberta Hansard

Tuesday evening, December 13, 2022

Day 9

The Honourable Nathan M. Cooper, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta
The 30th Legislature
Fourth Session

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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

7:30 p.m.

Tuesday, December 13, 2022

[Mr. Reid in the chair]

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

Government Bills and Orders Committee of the Whole

[Mr. Reid in the chair]

The Deputy Chair: I would like to call the committee to order.

Bill 2 Inflation Relief Statutes Amendment Act, 2022

The Deputy Chair: Are there any comments, questions, or amendments to be offered with respect to the bill? I see the hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Ms Ganley: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. I'm pleased to rise and speak to Bill 2, the Inflation Relief Statutes Amendment Act, 2022. This is my first opportunity to speak to the bill, so I'm happy to address a couple of different things that have come up. I think – yeah. Let's see.

Maybe I'll start by talking about the changes with respect to AISH, because I think that that is a fairly major concern to a number of Albertans. I, in fact, have a personal friend who is on AISH and has experienced a lot of struggle the last few years as her ability to pay relative to inflation has eroded over time.

I think it's worth setting out again the history of this matter on the record. When we were in government, we brought in a bill to index AISH to inflation, which seems only fair; otherwise, people are getting sort of further and further behind. We indexed a number of other things. We indexed the seniors' benefit and the child tax benefit as well.

I'm probably on the record saying this more than I've ever said anything on the record, but I'm going to say it again anyway, that the moves we made with respect to the child tax benefit when we first came in, in terms of increasing it, admittedly combined with some policy from the federal government: those measures cut child poverty in half. And I think that if there is one thing that we should be concerned about here in this place, it's ensuring that children don't go hungry in a province as rich as Alberta.

That is something that I am very proud of, I continue to be very proud of, and of course this government's members, who were members of the UCP caucus when we were in government, voted in favour of that indexation and claimed to be in favour of it, and then as soon as they got the position to do anything about it, immediately revoked it, which is disingenuous at best and quite harmful to a number of people throughout the province.

I do appreciate that this is a step in the right direction, but I think we all know that inflation has been at record highs in the last several years, this year in particular. I mean, it's outstripping wage growth as well. Like, inflation is a problem for everyone, but particularly for individuals who rely on benefits that have not been indexed for these last three and a half years, it's been a real struggle. So I appreciate that the government is doing this, but I think it is definitely worth noting that an Albertan living on AISH is \$3,000 a year behind right now on where they would have been, and for someone who is living on AISH, it's a real struggle.

Yeah. Like I said, a friend of mine is on AISH. For anyone who has loved ones or friends who are in that situation, I'm sure – and I

expect that there are members on both sides of this House that have this experience – that you are aware of just how much of a challenge, particularly this year, it has been for people to keep up with basic costs like healthy food. I do think it's a step in the right direction, but I think it could definitely go a lot further.

I actually think that this bill could go a lot further in a number of ways. People are experiencing significant challenges right now. Inflation is at an all-time high. Government policy, provincial government policy, has had an impact on that. I'm not going to say that it's the primary driver – I don't think that that's accurate – but it's definitely a driver forcing up things like car insurance and tuition and taxes, both municipal taxes and income taxes. I mean, income taxes was the inflation thing, which is, again, being reversed, but, you know, people are not getting back what they have lost over the last three and a half years in terms of purchasing power.

Again, it's a thing where this government expects to be congratulated on reversing its own bad decisions but not even reversing them all the way, so I think that that is problematic. I think that if there's anything that a government should be concerned about – and maybe I think this because it's where I came from.

One of the things that drove me into politics was the erosion of the middle class, the fact that the cost of things relative to average salaries has been growing disproportionately. We've seen massive growth in the incomes of those at the very wealthy end, but the sort of median income hasn't been increasing as fast as the costs of basics like housing and food and school and the very basics that people need to live. That, in my view, is a problem. It's a challenge that government should concern itself with because government policy has an impact. It has a big impact. It has an impact not only on inflation, but it also has an impact on wages.

Some of the changes that this government made in terms of employment standards in the Labour Relations Code have absolutely had a downward pressure on wages. Real, verifiable studies have been done about this. That is a huge impact. It's complicated and it's difficult to describe, but I think that it is one of the things we should be most concerned about. If we – and I say we in the larger sense – are creating a province in which a person on a median salary is constantly under stress, is unable to afford a comfortable life, is unable to afford the things that we all expected, is unable to afford food and shelter and clothing and education for their kids, that is a problem.

We are getting to that point, and government policy absolutely has an impact. Things like, for instance, the massive cuts that have been made to MSI, the downloading, massive downloading, of police costs on to municipalities. Municipalities can't run a deficit. They can't act as a shock absorber. Their only option in those instances is to raise property taxes, and they have done so. They have done so, and that is absolutely a direct result of government policy. This government, this UCP government's policy has forced those property taxes up, and that is problematic. It hits people right where they live.

Again, like I said, the changes in terms of minimum wage, in terms of overtime pay, in terms of the ability of workers to bargain collectively have all had a downward pressure on wages, and that is why we are seeing, even in a place of record inflation, wages just not keeping pace, and we should care about that because the majority of our population being able to afford a decent life is what we should imagine.

I would like my daughter to have at least as good if not better than what I had. I would like her to live in a world where she can afford to, you know, have a house and to pay for postsecondary for her kids, like I hope to soon – well, not soon; she's only five – at some point in the future. I hope that she's able to live a reasonable lifestyle on a reasonable wage and able to pursue whatever career she wants, and I

would like her to be able to do it here in Alberta if that's at all possible. I think that those things are very reasonable things.

Yes, this bill does some things. Some of those things are good. I think it could do a lot more. I feel like I've said this about almost every bill in this session, but this should be a: yes, and. It should be: yes, and. There should be more: more in terms of indexing of AISH and giving people back that \$3,000, more in terms of the erosion of taxes that this government has foisted onto people and the increases in taxes, and more in terms of utilities as well. So I think it's worth discussing.

7:40

This bill has in it – they call it a rate cap. I feel like that's not an accurate enough description that I want to use it, because it's not a rate cap. It's a loan. Essentially, what the government is doing is they're saying that for everything over 13 and a half cents we will loan you the money, but we'll loan it to you collectively as a pool. So if people move out of province or jump off the RRO, get on a contract, any number of things, then the people who are left on it are paying not only their loan but other people's loans as well. People remain on the RRO for all sorts of reasons, often because they don't feel empowered with sufficient information to sort of assess a contract and make that decision. Most of the contracts are very short term, but, I mean, people are busy. They have kids and lives and jobs, and they're under a lot of financial stress, as previously discussed, and I think the result of that is they don't always have the time to make these assessments.

The idea that everything should be buyer beware, that the government has no place in worrying about this – well, obviously, they don't think the government has no place, because they've done something about it. So they can't claim that position. But the idea that, you know, the government ought not to intervene in any way I think is just wrong.

What you have is a situation where people are going to start paying this rider. Essentially, you have three months where the government loans you money for electricity costs over 13 and a half cents per kilowatt hour – so that's January, February, March – and then starting in April you start paying it back with this rider. Now, people might not notice it right away in April because prices tend to be low in April. They might not notice it right away in May, but in June or July as prices start to increase again, people are really going to notice this. Coincidentally, that happens to be after the next election. Interesting little policy quirk there.

People will notice this at some point, and the people who have the ability may start getting off the RRO so they're not in a position to pay that back, and what that means is that, increasingly, the people who are left – and those will be those who are probably most vulnerable to this. They'll be people who don't have, you know, sufficient English necessarily to be able to get on a contract or to understand what's occurring. They'll be people who don't have, for whatever reason, the ability to sort of understand what's happening with their bill, and they'll be people who don't have the credit rating to get onto a fixed-term contract. So as people jump off, fewer and fewer people will be left to repay this loan that the government has saddled them with. I think that's problematic for a number of reasons. I believe it was described in a tweet, I think, by Blake Schaffer as a “death spiral,” which is a fairly accurate rendition of the policy issues with this. I mean, I think that's really problematic.

I don't think there's anyone out there – and, I mean, it's kind of hilarious, because this is a government who, when bringing in a highly politicized curriculum, sort of tried to defend it by saying that there's financial literacy in it. Incidentally, there was financial literacy in the expert-developed curriculum that they decided to highly politicize – just, you know, for everyone's awareness – but

that's how they tried to defend it. I think if there's one thing that financial literacy teaches you, it's probably that payday loans are not usually the solution to your problem.

In fact, you know, when we were in government, we actually acted to get some products into the market that weren't payday loans, because people were stuck in this horrible cycle – this horrible cycle – where they had one thing go wrong, and they could only get this loan at this high interest rate and just sort of spiralled and spiralled and spiralled. That's what I feel like this policy is doing. It's putting people in exactly that position. It's saying: well, we'll protect you now because we're worried about the next election, but you'll have to pay it back, and maybe you'll have to pay someone else's loan back, too, with it. It's – I feel like “deeply flawed” is an understatement. I'm not really sure what else to say. It's deeply flawed. It's deeply flawed from its inception all the way through. I think it's highly problematic, and I really do find the timing with respect to the repayment just a little too coincidental and extremely, extremely troubling.

I mean, what we're looking at, Mr. Chair, is a government that has contributed to an inflationary cycle, that has contributed to the fact that wages are not growing to keep pace with inflation, that has raised taxes, that has raised tuition, that has raised interest on student loans, that has raised any number of costs in a way that is really harmful to Albertans. And now, for the last year, because that's how long we've been hearing about this for – people have been concerned, they've been worried, they've been wanting action, they've been needing something from the government, and they've been needing the government to listen for a year – the government has done nothing.

Coincidentally enough, six months before an election they're offering people a loan that they'll have to repay mostly after the election. I think that that's extremely problematic behaviour. Extremely problematic behaviour.

Ms Hoffman: Is that how you speak to Wren?

Ms Ganley: It is. That is my mom face.

I think, to sum up, I would say – oh, before I sum up, that's the other thing I should probably point out: the \$100 a month leaves a lot of people out. A lot of people are struggling. Right now young people without kids who are trying to pay off their extra high tuition from this government with their extra high interest payments from this government, who are not able to get jobs that sort of pay a salary commensurate with people coming out of university 20 years ago, who are not able to get housing that's nearly as affordable as for people, say, 20 years ago are some of the most stressed, some of the most challenged by the current state of affairs. They are completely left out.

As I mentioned, folks on AISH, the seniors' benefit, the child tax benefit: they're not getting back, for the people on AISH, that \$3,000 a year that was eroded. People whose taxes have gone up: they're not getting that money back either. I would be remiss if I didn't point out that the government's payments, \$50 a month for utilities, also leaves out a bunch of people who live in condos because of the way that the condos are metered. They don't really seem at all interested in addressing that with a policy fix.

Overall, I would say that this bill is far too little and far too late. I think that is the best way to sum it up. It's too little too late, and I think that Albertans will see through it.

Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Any other members wishing to add comments, questions, or amendments? I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore has risen.

Mr. Nielsen: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Happy to rise this evening and provide some of my initial thoughts on Bill 2. I haven't had the chance to speak to that in second reading, but that's okay. We're in Committee of the Whole here now, which is always the best place to be able to possibly even do some back and forth should I have questions, which I do, around Bill 2, the Inflation Relief Statutes Amendment Act, 2022.

First off, I think it would be important to talk a little bit about the history of how we kind of got here and the reasoning behind, I think, bringing this bill forward. This is the government's attempt to try to reduce the impact that, you know, the past couple of years has had literally on their pocketbooks. We were talking about reindexing personal income tax, reindexing the child benefit, reindexing AISH. I think it's very, very important to remember that the government was very, very adamant earlier in the 30th Legislature that they weren't doing that, that we weren't deindexing. Well, if you weren't deindexing, why are you reindexing now if you didn't deindex to begin with?

7:50

Again I find myself at odds, Mr. Chair, and I've found myself at odds throughout the entire 30th Legislature. I've done my best. I haven't always been successful at it, but it's, you know: what does the legislation say, what doesn't it say, and what have you been saying about it? I've noticed a persistent and consistent effort from the government to conflict with all of those things. When I was trying to explain to them that they were deindexing and they were telling me they're not, of course – I can't even remember some of the things: I was lighting my hair on fire; I was fearmongering. Go ahead and insert whatever word you'd like in there; I'm sure it's fitting. But, then, here I am seeing that we're reindexing. Was I wrong, or were we not entirely accurate with some of the information that was being put forward? I'm picking those words very, very carefully because I wouldn't want to run afoul of some of the standing orders.

So here we are now trying to make up for some of that. You know, again, maybe I'd better layer the sandwich here a little bit. I don't want the minister to think that I'm against this, because I'm not. It's kind of like when you're bargaining contract language. I certainly have what I would like to see as all the language being put into a contract. Sometimes I just don't quite get that, but at least I can get something. In this case some of the relief that I'm seeing here for Albertans in Bill 2 is something. Is it all that I want? Well, no, because I think you have a lot of ground to make up, but at least it's something. But it is my duty to remind you how far you're falling short and maybe some of the things you could do, because we still have the chance to look at things differently in certain parts of the bill at least.

We've seen things around help for electricity in terms of rebates. I'm trying to be nice here to some degree, but I feel that getting, you know, \$200 towards that feels a little cheap. I've shown that just one of my constituents one month saw an electricity bill of \$600. Yes, \$200 would help going towards that, but what about the next \$600 bill? What about the next one after that, that maybe is \$500 or maybe is \$700? We ran out there.

Mr. Nally: Tell them about a fixed-rate contract.

Mr. Nielsen: I look forward to the minister responsible for red tape to participate when he gets his opportunity. I will take notes vigorously, and I'm sure there'll be some red tape in there I'll get a chance to criticize, because I haven't been able to criticize any red tape so far since he's taken over.

You know, we see some relief coming in terms of the fuel tax. Again, I'll take what I can get, but here's the problem. I've got constituents who have parked their vehicles because they can't afford their insurance. If they're not operating their vehicle, how do they benefit from the fuel rate being suspended, the tax on that? There's no benefit to that. The thing is, Mr. Chair, that we've seen significant increases in insurance rates. Just one constituent alone showed me that their condo insurance went up by 46 per cent; their vehicle insurance went up 52 per cent. All it takes is one example. When you have one example, you can't ignore it. You shouldn't ignore that. I think the government is doing that a little bit. Again, I appreciate the attempt here, but it's falling short.

We saw some of the rebates here earlier around, you know, for instance, heating your home, getting \$50 a month for three months, which is \$150. Again, thank you, but you're being cheap with Albertans. There could be more done. I always hear about: we have to be fiscally responsible. Is it fiscally responsible to spend \$30 million a year to chase a cartoon character? So far nobody has told me it is. They were actually kind of surprised when I said: these two logos and a cartoon character later, and it doesn't seem like we're any further ahead.

Is it fiscally responsible to bet over a billion dollars on an election south of the border? I would suggest that maybe it's not. It's not fiscally responsible. You know, we're spending a couple of million dollars to write reports about organizations that did nothing wrong. They were just doing what they were doing. Yet all we've got for Albertans is \$150.

Mr. Nally: Two point eight billion.

Mr. Nielsen: Well, feel free to explain that to my constituent that asked me to bring their question forward, which I did, and they got a really bad answer. I look forward to him jumping up to explain that to my constituent.

Now, when we look at this little – I guess it is a bit of a scheme around putting off the payments, spreading them out over 19 months. Here's the thing. People can't afford their bills now, so over the next 19 months they're going to have to try to catch up on them. They can't pay now. How are they going to pay later on? You're, as they say, kicking the can down the road, giving people false hope. I know. I have a personal friend that's in this boat who decided to take advantage of that little deferral payment that went on and now is looking back and going: wow, that was a really bad decision. But it seemed like a really good thing at the time. It got sold as a really good idea.

Mr. Nally: You voted in favour of it. Zero per cent.

Mr. Nielsen: Yeah. The company got to pay zero per cent on their loan, but Albertans had to pay interest on it.

That's what I'm saying. They're getting into this cycle, this financial rabbit hole that people are getting directed to go down, and it's not beneficial to them.

As my friend from Calgary-Mountain View pointed out, the way this is being set up, you have individuals that will probably temporarily be on the regulated rate option right until the point they realize that it's not to their advantage and they have the ability to get off, making the remaining pool individuals that actually don't have the option.

As we know, there are criteria when you start to go on some of these fixed rates, things like a good credit score. The reality is that some Albertans don't have that, not through any fault of their own. They've been sitting here maxing out their credit cards because – oh, I don't know – their kids decided to go to postsecondary to

increase their education. Their student loans went up. The student interest rate on those loans went up. Their insurance went up in trying to go there every day with their vehicle. So they've run into problems, or they just simply don't have the deposit to be able to put towards that.

It's very, very difficult when you're trying to raise a family on minimum wage. We already know that that's a very, very difficult thing to try to do. You just don't have a whole lot of extra money to spend. While, you know, it'd be great if they had that money to put the deposits so they could maybe get there – but then, of course, that problem starts to expand where we have fewer and fewer people that are going to take on that burden that's left over, as my friend from Calgary-Mountain View had pointed out. There's a very, very big flaw in that.

8:00

Now, because we're in the Committee of the Whole, I'm hoping that maybe someone from the government will be able to rise in the discussion and maybe talk a little bit about: should that scenario start to play out where that pool of people start to leave the RRO, shrinking the pool that's left over, making it a larger burden on those that are left, what's the plan to help them should that occur? I haven't heard anything yet. That doesn't mean there isn't, and I'd be happy to hear more about that should that opportunity arise, and I would definitely take notes on that.

Again, I'm not necessarily opposed to Bill 2. I kind of feel like I'm in that corner where I at least have to accept something on behalf of my constituents, on behalf of Albertans so they're getting at least something, but I think that there is more that could have been done. I think there was a larger opportunity here to be able to help people. So it's my hope that maybe some of the folks that were providing some interesting commentary during my commentary might be able to pop up, might be able to answer some questions. I have a feeling probably not. I might just get a whole bunch of rhetoric, but really, at the end of the day, you can feed me all the rhetoric you want, because Albertans are the ones that are paying the price, and really the rhetoric that you're directing at me you're directing at them, which I don't think is very fair. Hopefully, we get a chance maybe to look at this.

Like I said, Albertans are struggling right now to do things. Kicking the can down the road is not going to help. You know, introducing a rate cap here which is a lot higher than what people are facing right now – people are struggling right now at the rate that it is, and we're not even at this proposed cap. What happens when it gets to there? They're already in trouble here. Hopefully, there's a plan.

I look forward to hearing that more, and perhaps I'll even jump up again as I furiously write notes from members that did decide to jump up.

The Deputy Chair: Other members wishing to add comments or questions to Bill 2, the Inflation Relief Statutes Amendment Act, 2022? The chair sees the hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. Perhaps during what I hope is a riveting 10 minutes, my colleagues across the aisle will feel inspired to speak to what is supposed to be one of their flagship pieces of legislation this session. Bill 1 was supposed to be the big bill, which, of course, we know the government tried to ram through in the middle of the night because they were wildly unsuccessful in their attempts to communicate how their job-killing sovereignty act would be beneficial to the people of Alberta. Albertans aren't convinced; that's for sure.

Number two, I know they keep heckling about how much money they're investing through this bill, but certainly the many, many Albertans who have weighed in on this are saying that, across the board, Alberta families are feeling a real pinch. And when I say "families," I don't just mean your nuclear family; I mean ordinary, everyday Albertans: retired, working, students. Nobody has gotten a break under the UCP or found life got better in the last four years. We're hearing regularly from people that they're really having a hard time making ends meet.

Bill 2 was brought forward to this place. It's titled the Inflation Relief Statutes Amendment Act, 2022, but just to start, Mr. Chair, it leaves out about half of Albertans. It leaves out about half of the people of this province, many of whom are young and working or are in school and have seen huge budgetary pressures. I was really happy to have met last week with SU representatives from the University of Calgary, who made very clear how disappointed they were by this legislation and the fact that we have seen record food bank usage, including the food bank at the University of Calgary itself. We've seen tuition continue to escalate just in the last two years.

This government likes to say that they care about health care workers and that they want to make sure we have enough. At the University of Calgary, because of government cuts and because of a board appointed by the UCP, we've seen the tuition in the Faculty of Nursing this upcoming year and this past year: a cumulative increase of 20 per cent, a 20 per cent increase in tuition for nursing students who want to study in the province of Alberta at the University of Calgary, who would like to probably spend their careers serving the people of Alberta, or at least that's what they were planning on doing.

We know how difficult it can already be to get into these programs, and now the government, for those who are able to get in, is jacking up their tuition by 20 per cent approximately – it was 10 per cent last year and 8 per cent this year, so a cumulative of approximately 20 over two years because it compounds, of course, things that the government certainly should understand – making life incredibly expensive. Those university students, who are seeing their tuition go up, their inflationary pressures, about 6 per cent, go up: many are reporting on the significant increases to rent. We know how difficult it is to buy groceries right now in this province, and there is nothing in this bill to help a single university student who doesn't have dependants, unless they're over 65.

The University of Calgary students' association, rightfully so, was really disappointed when this bill came forward and there was no relief for university students. The government has refused to cap tuition at inflation. That's another thing that they're lobbying for. They would have really liked to have seen a bill that would have capped tuition increases to inflation. They'd like to see some requirements for authentic consultation, and they would like to see some relief for students in terms of their costs but also their income. One said: how is it fair that others will be able to get this money, but those of us who are doing our best to contribute to our postsecondary education and, in turn, to the success of our province aren't eligible? I think that's a very good and fair question.

There are approximately 2 million, almost half of Albertans, who are left out of this. It was mentioned that there are a lot of people working minimum wage, and there absolutely are. Let's look at the income for somebody who is working full-time, 37 and a half hours a week; minimum wage, 15 bucks an hour; 52 weeks in a year. They're taking no time off. They're making 29,250 bucks in a year, and unless they have children or unless they're a senior, they don't qualify for this relief in this bill either. That is ridiculous, to have somebody make less than \$30,000 a year working full-time and for

the government to not even pause for a moment and think that that person might be in need of some relief right now, as we're seeing such significant increases to the cost of everything, including the cost of food, the cost of rent, the cost of transportation.

I am disappointed that there was – it's a big cabinet. It's a big cabinet. There were a lot of people who sat around the table. I'm disappointed that either the people sitting around that table didn't even stop to think about the minimum wage workers of this province or the low-income people in this province or the university students in this province or that they were so incapable of convincing their colleagues to actually put something in this bill to help address them and their needs. The people sitting around that cabinet table should be embarrassed that they've left out almost half of Albertans through this bill.

I guess something is better than nothing. I typically try to come to this place and think: as long as we're not moving backwards, I can probably support it, and we can move forwards. I guess it is a step forward. But at a time when we're seeing significant, record-breaking revenues, due in no way to the decision-making of the current government – we're seeing significant revenues, revenues that belong to the people of Alberta, mostly off nonrenewable resource revenues, including royalties through the royalty framework that was negotiated under the last NDP government. The government of today, though, has decided that they're going to give a very small fraction of that back to the people of Alberta and instead boast about how fortunate they were to stumble into those backwards.

At the same time, we have people making minimum wage working full-time and people going to university having to rely on the food bank, record food bank usage. I know that there were members previously who spoke about how great it is that the UCP is giving money to food banks, and obviously it is desperately needed right now. We've never seen food bank usage as high as it has been. The Member for Calgary-Glenmore scoffed at that and said: well, of course, it was higher when the NDP was in government. It was not. That is well documented, factual, that food bank usage has never been higher than it is right now.

8:10

Getting back to those University of Calgary students, they talked about how international students in particular are having to rely on the food bank in much larger proportions than ever before in the past. And why? Well, one of the reasons is because the current government has decided to jack up tuition, particularly for students who are international students, to use them as an opportunity to make more money to support programs. Or to make more money to support the current government, I guess, would be the other side of that.

The other piece I want to touch on in my brief opportunity here tonight is around the regulated rate option, and I know that the current Member for Morinville-St. Albert yelled out: tell them about the regulated rate option. I will tell them about the regulated rate option, because under the regulated rate option what the government is doing through this utility payday lending scheme is that they're creating a bigger burden for those who are on the regulated rate option to pay off the loan for those who are still stuck in the current RRO when the loan comes due.

You've heard some of my colleagues talk about how – what it is is a short-term payday loan for the period right before the election. Surprise. The government right now is wanting to find a way to earn some votes, so they're telling people: your bills are going to go down. The other part of that is that your bills are going to go way, way up pretty much right after the election, because this isn't actually forgiveness. This isn't actually easing of the pressures. This is deferral. This is a loan, a loan that will see those who are

still stuck in the RRO when this period is up having to shoulder the significant burden that will be left upon them because the current government decided to bring in this toxic loan program. It definitely is not about making life more affordable in the long term at all.

It is simply trying to put a very small Band-Aid in the lead-up to the election, hoping that people will forget about all the harm that's been caused, all the escalation that's been experienced, the vast majority of that through direct decisions that the UCP has made to prioritize friends and insiders over everyday Albertans, friends and insiders like lobbyists for large insurance corporations, automobile insurance corporations, who fought to have the cap lifted from automobile insurance. We saw published across the nation yesterday just what an impact that has had on the people of Alberta, that here in the province of Alberta we have the highest, in every single category, automobile insurance costs, according to EY. We used to call them Ernst & Young, but I think now they've rebranded as EY. They have very clearly documented that in every single category people in Alberta are paying more for insurance than they are in other parts of the country, driving up the costs for ordinary families, making it more and more difficult for people to afford to have a vehicle, to keep it on the road, to buy groceries.

The government wants us to come into this place and do a big song and dance for them. Or maybe they don't, because they can't even be bothered to speak to their own bill. This is, again, Bill 2 under the new Premier, supposed to be the top two priorities. We're going to talk about affordability, and they won't even talk about it because I think that they know, rightfully, that they are leaving half of Albertans out through the formula they created. They are causing an even greater gap between many haves and have-nots in our province, and they are making it harder for ordinary folks to be able to make their ends meet.

I also can't help but reflect on about four years ago, when we brought in indexing of AISH, and the government of the day, the NDP, was really proud to bring in indexing. We put it in legislation. This was going to happen in perpetuity. And the UCP at the time, under the leadership of Jason Kenney, actually voted for it. They said, "Well, of course, the NDP is going to tell you that we're going to get rid of indexing, but we wouldn't do that." "Don't be mean, and don't spread lies to people who are low-income," they said, "to people who are severely handicapped; don't tell them we would do that; of course, we wouldn't do that." "We voted for the bill," the Premier said, then Premier Jason Kenney. Jason Kenney said: "We voted for the bill. We're absolutely going to stand by indexing, and we're going to increase everybody's salaries when the cost of living goes up."

It was the eve of an election, and what happened almost immediately after that election? The summer of repeal. They repealed their promises. That is what they did. They jacked up the cost of living, and they got rid of those inflationary protections for people who were living on AISH. But here they are on the eve of another election, and they want everyone to say: "Oh, don't worry. Trust us. We're going to increase your cost of living. We're going to give you an increase to your AISH. Don't worry; it's all going to be good. Don't tell people who are severely handicapped that we won't do that. Don't tell them to look at our record. Don't tell them to look at what we've actually done and what impacts we've had on their lives. Don't worry. Trust us this time. It's going to be different this time." Are you kidding me?

An Hon. Member: It's never different.

Ms Hoffman: It is never different with the UCP.

I have to say, Mr. Chair, that I don't think this bill moves us backwards, so I guess I will vote for it, but the government sure

could've done a lot better. They sure could've done a lot more in this bill and over the last four years to actually address the pressures that everyone has been telling us have been significant on them and their families. Instead, the government wants to throw about a sixth of what the surplus is anticipated to be at half of the population, probably the half they think they need to vote for them, and say: good enough.

Well, it's not good enough, Mr. Chair. It's not something that I think the people who are sitting around the cabinet table drafting there should be proud of. I think they should be ashamed of how many people they've left out and the huge gaps that they're going to only further through their failure to actually protect every Albertan who is struggling right now.

With that, I guess I'll support the bill.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Other members wishing to add questions or comments? I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-Whitemud has risen.

Ms Pancholi: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I paused there for a moment just to see if any of the government members would want to speak to what should be one of their flagship bills. We also know they were pretty cautious about speaking to their actual flagship bill, which was Bill 1, the sovereignty act.

It turns out that they don't really want to speak to this, which is shocking, because I know – I know my caucus colleagues will share this feeling. I mean, speaking about affordability is probably one of the top issues that Albertans are talking about. I know that we have been committed to speaking to these issues for almost a year now, when we first started to see inflation start to rise significantly in the fall of 2021. It has been something that on this side of the House we have been talking about nonstop. Why, Mr. Chair? Because that's what Albertans were talking about. That's what they cared about deeply. Their ability to pay for the things they needed to live, their utilities for heat and electricity, their groceries – they need to drive their car – their car insurance: they were seeing all those go up while at the same time not seeing their income or their wages go up.

One of the things that I think is really important to keep in context, Mr. Chair, as we think about Bill 2 and inflation relief is that while we have heard great enthusiasm from the government caucus to talk about certain aspects of economic recovery, what they failed to talk about is that wage growth, actually, in Alberta is the second slowest in the country right now. We know that Albertans, while they're seeing their costs go up, are not seeing their income go up. We've seen that reflected in the challenges that all households are facing, including those of my constituents.

I, like my colleagues, have been door-knocking relentlessly for, honestly, almost two years. Even between waves of the pandemic I've never stopped, because that's our number one job, listening to our constituents and hearing what they have to say. I've also been privileged and honoured to knock on doors not just in my constituency of Edmonton-Whitemud but across the province. I've lost track of how many constituencies in Calgary I've door-knocked in and in Fort McMurray as well as other constituencies in Edmonton such as Edmonton-South West as well as in Medicine Hat.

Edmonton-South West is also – I mean, if you're allowed to have a second-favourite Edmonton constituency, there's no doubt that, for me, Edmonton-South West is it. So many of those great people live very close to me, go to the same rec centres. They attend the same schools as my constituents, and they know that they always have a voice in the Legislature for them even if it's not their current MLA. They know that the Alberta NDP caucus as well as myself will take to heart their issues, especially as they raise concerns about

affordability. I'm very proud to represent so many people right now.

In any event, Mr. Chair, affordability is one of the number one issues that we're hearing from constituents, and it's one of the number one issues that I've been talking about and I know my colleagues have been talking about for months. So I'm glad that the government is finally bringing in some inflation relief measures.

Unfortunately, as many of my colleagues have shared – and I want to give a shout-out to my colleagues who've already talked. The Member for Edmonton-Glenora just did a fantastic job articulating some of those challenges as well as the members for Edmonton-Decore and St. Albert the other day and Calgary-Mountain View.

8:20

You know, there is a lot of concern that this could be done a whole lot better. I think what we're seeing is a pattern of behaviour, Mr. Chair, from sort of the rushed way. I guess we've got a Premier who is very enthusiastic about some issues although even her flagship issues she didn't give much thought and attention to because somehow she accidentally gave herself and her cabinet unbelievably undemocratic powers to change legislation. That was, oops, a little mistake.

We know that's the level of attention that she'll pay to her flagship bills. It's not surprising, then, with this one, which has not been a priority for the UCP to talk about or for this current Premier when she was running for leadership – rarely ever heard her talk about affordability – so maybe it's not a surprise that this bill came forward and it was not well thought out. Now, certainly, I think we've been very clear: we will support measures that will address some of the affordability issues Albertans are facing.

It is critically important that we take some action, and I will support a bill that does take some action. But our job in this Assembly, Mr. Chair, is to give some critical thinking and thought to the legislation that's put before us and to suggest changes and point out where things could have been done better, because at the end of the day we are stewards not only in terms of the laws that we pass in this place, but we are stewards of Alberta's taxpayers' dollars as well. We have an interest in making sure that those dollars are being spent effectively.

This is why I think there is significant concern around the parameters that have been laid out in Bill 2 and the eligibility for some of these affordability measures. You know, first of all, I will say that the threshold that was chosen here of the \$180,000 to have a minimum income is, I think – I've heard from some of my constituents questioning how that amount was determined and why that was determined to be the threshold for providing some support.

Should it be higher? Should it be lower? You know, I think there needs to be some clarity around that. I understand that the current Minister of Affordability and Utilities will indicate that it was based on the household income used for the child care subsidy, but of course this is excluding a huge number of Albertans. When we're talking about a child care subsidy – and often in situations we're talking about double income, of course – what about the single-income individuals who don't have children who now don't qualify? I have to tell you, Mr. Chair, I know many of them.

I know many individuals who have been struggling with affordability issues. In fact, many of them who work with us and our colleagues – when I say “colleagues,” I mean work as staff. I'm sure many of the MLAs in this Chamber have constituency staff, for example, who do not qualify because they don't have children or they're not seniors, and that is really difficult for me even as an employer and somebody who works, my staff, to hear that they don't qualify for these measures because they don't have children.

I wish I could pay them a whole lot more, Mr. Chair, because they sure are worth it. I want to give a shout-out to them right now because they're fantastic. A shout-out to Rick and to Melissa in my office; they are fantastic human beings who work so much. I would love to be able to pay them what they're truly worth.

But they don't qualify because they don't have children. Yet I know, in the circumstances that they live in, that they're struggling with utility bills. They are struggling with groceries. They're struggling with a lot of other challenges, and they don't qualify. At the same time, Mr. Chair, I have to tell you I have heard from constituents in my riding who say that they are shocked to find out that they do qualify because they don't believe that they need it. They say that they would rather have those dollars going to people who need it more than they do.

Particularly, I know a number of seniors who qualify because their income is at a fixed-income level and it's lower, but they have a significant amount of, you know, savings and various investments that they're doing just fine. Their income falls below that \$180,000, and they're saying: why do they qualify? When we talk about ways to be stewards of taxpayer dollars, we needed more specificity and, I think, more targeting in these affordability measures to make sure that we're being really clear that those who truly need it get it. That is, I think, the problem that we're seeing.

To me, it's about making sure that we are not drawing arbitrary lines, that we are not making assumptions about people based on having children or being seniors and saying that they can or cannot. We need to actually look at need. I do believe truly, Mr. Chair, that had some more thought been given, more attention – if this had been at all a priority for this government up until two weeks or three weeks ago, then we would have seen a more thoughtful bill that was presented and a more thoughtful program that would have been clear about targeting those individuals who need it the most. That is one of my critiques. It is a significant amount of money that's being spent as a result of these affordability measures. We should make sure they're being spent where they can do the most good. That is my concern.

You know, I actually have had a number of constituents and individuals who haven't typically been Alberta NDP supporters, although they've indicated they will be this time around, saying that they're also concerned that not only hasn't it been targeted properly, but they want to know that this is actually going to go to support the people who need it the most. It feels like, to them, this is just an attempt to buy their support going into the next election.

Ms Hoffman: There's a poll for that.

Ms Pancholi: It sounds like many Albertans actually believe that.

Again, I don't want to help this government with, you know, the very cynicism that they have created and incubated and encouraged in Albertans, but if they don't want this to be seen like a vote-buying measure, then I think they should've been more thoughtful about making sure that it would go to the people who need it rather than the people who they think will support them. I think that's a very important issue that would've given them more credibility. But, by all means, I don't think it's my job to try to encourage this government or try to give them pointers on how to be more credible, because we know they won't take them. Certainly, I think that's one of the concerns. It's a way to make it seem like this is actually about helping Albertans, and I'm not sure that the thought and attention has gone into this bill and this program to ensure that.

I also want to mention, of course, of the many issues that my colleagues have already raised, you know, the reindexing of AISH and indexing of a number of other measures. It's really difficult, Mr. Chair, to sit here and listen. We've heard a parade of various

now ministers, former ministers, backbencher MLAs talking about: oh, they never really liked deindexing AISH. I mean, they all voted in support of it. They never wanted it. They always spoke behind closed doors, conveniently, where there's no record of it, against the deindexing of AISH – that also belies their credibility – but they all voted in favour of it, enthusiastically, in fact, and heckled and critiqued and yelled. We said: you're breaking your word to vulnerable Albertans by deindexing those individuals from those benefits, and it will be a cut. Oh, goodness. I can't even – who can forget?

Ms Renaud: It's not a cut.

Ms Pancholi: It's not a cut. It's not a cut. When individuals on AISH were seeing their costs go up and their benefits stay the same, it was a cut. The semantics that were played by members of the government caucus on that issue – now they're saying: oh, behind closed doors they never supported it. But they did.

What it showed, Mr. Chair, as well as what it shows now, that they're agreeing to reindex AISH just before an election, is that they have always been willing to play games, balance budgets on the backs of the most vulnerable. When it suited their purpose to, you know, try to seem like they were being austere and they were going to rein in spending, they were more than happy to all support deindexing individuals who are on AISH. Now, when it's time for an election, they're more than happy to talk about, "Oh, it was really a terrible idea," and they're going to reindex AISH. I think that makes it very clear that they will do this again. That's really what we have to know.

We will run into tough economic times again. That is likely going to happen. That's the way, you know – we've seen that happen in this province too many times. And when that happens again, Albertans can rest assured that every single member of this government caucus will vote once again to deindex benefits that the most vulnerable Albertans rely upon. Why, Mr. Chair? Because they've done it already. They've made it very clear: they're happy to balance the budget on the backs of those people who are most vulnerable in our society and to do it with a straight face. That's why it's hard to cheer and clap when they're now saying that they're going to index what they never should have deindexed in the first place.

Let's also be clear that they're not talking about reindexing to the point of time where they deindexed. Three years ago, during a pandemic, we saw those individuals on AISH absolutely see their benefit cut. They're not talking about going back in time and even atoning for the mistake they made. And we know that those individuals have lost the equivalent of \$3,000, which is, by the way, quite a significant amount of money for somebody on AISH.

I also want to mention, for example, the indexing of the child and family benefit. Now, again, those are things that we absolutely have been calling on for some time as well as the seniors' benefit. We've been saying that those absolutely should be indexed.

8:30

But I want to go back to 2019 again to actually point out what, again, this government won't talk about, which is that in 2019 they actually combined the Alberta child benefit and the Alberta family employment tax credit into one, into what we have now. What they were not transparent about was that when they did that, they actually cut off a number of vulnerable families. Now, we have to remember, the families that are eligible for this benefit are very low-income families. At the time that they made the changes in 2019, they actually decreased the benefit for a number of very vulnerable families.

In fact, the University of Calgary School of Public Policy did an analysis of the changes that they made, and they found, for example, that a two-child, two-parent family in 2019, under the new benefit as put forward by the government, who lived right at the poverty line – we’re talking about, you know, under \$40,000 per year, two children, two adults – actually lost \$500 in a benefit as a result of the changes that the UCP made. So, again, I’m really happy to hear that they’re going to index the Alberta child and family benefit to inflation, but let’s not forget that they actually decreased the amount of support to vulnerable families back in 2019.

Once again we’re seeing a pattern, Mr. Chair, of trying to – well, they can’t even say that they’re repairing their mistakes because they’re not backdating. It’s not retroactively available, but they want some credit for doing the decent thing that they should have done in the first place. Certainly, going forward, we know how they will act. We know what they will do. They will absolutely go after the most vulnerable once again to balance their books.

Lastly, I want to speak really quickly, Mr. Chair, to the regulated rate option and the changes made to the electricity and the benefit that – well, it’s not really a benefit that’s being provided. I had to, you know, go through this to truly understand what was happening here. So for those who may not be aware, the regulated rate option, which is sort of the default option for Albertans – if you don’t get on to a contract yourself, that is what most Albertans are on. They’re on a regulated rate option until they choose and seek out to be on a contract on their own.

The current scheme – and it’s pretty clear in Bill 2 – is that, essentially, what they’re saying is that, yes, for three months they are going to cap that rate for the regulated rate option, the RRO – at a much higher rate than we had the electricity cap on when we were in government – at 13.5 cents. They’re going to cap it at that point, but they’re not going to cover the cost of the difference between the cap and what the actual price is. They’re not actually saying: “We’re going to help you as the Alberta government. We’re going to cover that cost because we know it’s a big challenge, and it’s a burden, and it’s costing a lot of money at a time when your wages and income aren’t going up.” They’re not saying that they’re going to cover it. They’re actually saying: “We’re actually just going to loan that difference. That money that it costs us as the government: we’re going to loan that to the electricity companies, and then we’re going to let the electricity companies charge you back for that after that three-month period is over.”

So that means those individuals on the regulated rate option are going to be repaying the loan that essentially the government of Alberta has given to utility companies. That means they are going to be paying it back over 19 months, and if that increases – because we don’t know what those prices are going to look like; we don’t know how much that’s going to cost; they won’t know that – they’re going to see their costs go up significantly afterwards. And, as pointed out by many of my colleagues, the individuals who are on regulated rate options sometimes are on that option because they don’t even know that they can go and seek out a contract. I mean, we have to talk a little bit about what we’re doing to actually educate Albertans on their options. But also it means that they’re individuals who may not qualify to go on a contract because they may not have great credit scores. So those are the individuals who may be struggling already financially, and now this government is asking them to pay back a loan that the government has taken out on their behalf.

That is not relief, Mr. Chair. That is not actually providing a benefit to Albertans. It’s actually saddling them with more costs. It is again reflective, I think, of poorly thought out affordability measures. That’s actually a generous interpretation of this, that they

did this because they didn’t think it out carefully. The more cynical interpretation would be that they are pretending like they’re giving relief to Albertans and hoping that they won’t notice that they’re actually paying more afterwards. Seeing as we saw that from a number of their COVID relief measures, I wouldn’t be surprised.

I’d like to err on the side of thinking that it was just an oversight, because we’ve seen many, many oversights already from this new Premier and her government, but unfortunately, I believe, they’re not actually looking out for Albertans, because they’re only just starting to talk about the affordability measures that Albertans have been talking about for over a year, that the Official Opposition has been talking about for over a year; instead, what they’ve brought forward is untargeted relief that is not going to support most Albertans, and it’s going to cost some of them even more because of the way they’ve decided to deliver this program.

Albertans need real support, Mr. Chair. They need authentic support that’s really going to make a difference for them, for all of them who are struggling. They deserve a better-thought-out bill and a better-thought-out program from this government.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Deputy Chair: Any other members wishing to add comments or questions? I see the hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View has risen.

Ms Ganley: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. I rise to move an amendment, so I will just wait for that to get to you.

The Deputy Chair: Hang on for a moment while we get a copy.

Hon. members, this will be amendment A1.

If I could get the hon. member to read it into the record for us, please.

Ms Ganley: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. I move that Bill 2, Inflation Relief Statutes Amendment Act, 2022, be amended in section 3(4) in the proposed section 2 by striking out “the rate of 13.5 cents per kWh” wherever it occurs and substituting “the rate of 6.8 cents per kWh.”

I guess what this amendment does is fairly obvious. Unfortunately, it was difficult to solve some of the more substantive problems, shall we say, with the way that this program has been structured by the UCP, but one thing we could offer Albertans was an attempt to set the rate cap to what it would have been had the UCP not repealed the rate cap originally.

Now, there were a couple of things that we couldn’t do in this bill. One of them was that we couldn’t amend the bill to back index AISH. There were some difficulties with sort of solving the substantive problems with the way the UCP has structured this loan, but one thing we were able to do was suggest that perhaps Albertans deserve a little more relief than this government is providing them. Here what we have suggested is just a return to the rate cap that could have still been in place had the UCP not gone and repealed this.

I think that at this point it’s maybe worth talking a little about the sort of I guess I would say tendency of this government to do one thing and then, you know, three, three and a half years later reverse the thing they did and try to do a victory lap on that. There was a cap in place. The government chose to remove it. There was a cap that was an actual cap and not a loan, and the government chose not to structure it that way. Now they want to do a victory lap on this.

AISH was indexed; the seniors’ benefit was indexed; the child tax benefit was indexed; the government reversed all that. Income taxes were indexed so that people didn’t lose money with inflation; the government reversed that. We had a contract with doctors that was negotiated with them; the government tore that up.

This government just has a history of, shall we say, reversing itself and not apologizing when they reverse themselves, which is very strange. They can't seem to admit: okay; we made an error. They just reverse themselves, they don't apologize, they try to move on, but it doesn't always work. We saw it, incidentally, with Bill 10, too. That was the health statutes act, where the government had to walk back a massive power grab, actually much like the sovereignty act. First, it wasn't a massive overreach. "There's no way it could be a massive overreach. It's fear mongering. The NDP is making things up. It's definitely not that." Then suddenly it was that, but they're reversing it. I don't know. They seem to have a dubious relationship with the facts, shall we say, a dubious at best relationship with the facts.

This is an attempt to at least provide Albertans with what they would otherwise have had. It doesn't do all the things that I think we ought to do, it doesn't do all the things that I think this government ought to do, but it does give them the opportunity to maybe reconsider and give Albertans just a little bit more.

8:40

I think it's an incredibly important amendment. I think that Albertans are struggling, and I think – I mean, we've been hearing from folks on their power prices, their natural gas prices for at least a year. Again, it's additive, right? It's not just one thing that does it. It's increases to taxes and tuition and a whole bunch of other things that this government has allowed to happen, but people really are struggling, because electricity is a basic need. You can't live these days without electricity, and people are really, really struggling, and it's usually those who are least able to afford it who are on the regulated rate option.

I think there are some reasons to think that the regulated rate option itself is maybe not a great product. I would encourage people to get on a fixed rate. I think that's probably a better way to go. That wouldn't be the advice in every instance. I would say in this instance, certainly. Yeah. I would say that's probably actually good advice for several years now. But, you know, the product itself tends to be a bit volatile, and those who are left on it are usually people who don't necessarily feel empowered to understand enough about a fixed-term contract to get on one or who don't have the credit to get on one, which is also a problem that occurs, or who just don't understand the system, whether that's because they're new to the country or they don't have the sort of language facility to understand – I mean, these are pretty complex things – or because they just haven't done it. In any event, I think this is an opportunity for the government to show that they're serious, to go back to what would have been otherwise.

So I hope that all members will vote in favour.

The Deputy Chair: Other members wishing to speak to amendment A1? I see the hon. Minister of Affordability and Utilities.

Mr. Jones: Thank you, Chair, and thank you to the members opposite for supporting the bill. I anticipate that they will support the bill. Just to highlight that the bill we're talking about includes substantial affordability and inflation relief for Albertans at a time when they need it most, including \$900 in estimated benefit to families who are not receiving targeted relief payments, including \$500 in electricity rebates, natural gas price protection, and, of course, savings on fuel tax.

The amendment here proposes that the rate be changed to 6.8 cents a kilowatt hour. Just comparing the previous government's rate cap, which in this case would cost taxpayers – all taxpayers – \$375 million to subsidize 39 per cent of a ratepayer's bills for three months. This ceiling and deferral will cost taxpayers a net \$12 million but still provides ratepayers on the RRO, who are facing

extreme volatility and high prices over the coming winter months, with stability, the same way that fixed-rate contracts provide stability; you pay less in high months, and you pay a little bit more in lower cost months in return for that stability. That's what the ceiling and deferral mechanism does.

Unfortunately, the members opposite have proposed a rate so low that if it were in place, virtually all electricity consumers would likely switch to the RRO, away from fixed-rate protection, causing instability and future volatility for our most vulnerable. I don't think that was their intent, but we certainly don't want to destabilize our entire electricity market.

So I would recommend that we don't support this amendment, but I look forward to the members supporting the broad bill. It's great news, great help for Albertans when they need it. The faster we get it through here, the faster Albertans are going to see it in their hands and for their kids.

Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: Others wishing to speak to amendment A1?

Seeing none, I'm prepared to call the question.

[Motion on amendment A1 lost]

The Deputy Chair: Back on the main bill, Bill 2, the Inflation Relief Statutes Amendment Act, 2022.

I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung has risen.

Mr. Dach: Edmonton-McClung, did you say?

The Deputy Chair: Yes.

Mr. Dach: Thank you. I think you said, "Edmonton-McClung," Mr. Chair. I appreciate that. I didn't hear it clearly.

Mr. Nielsen: There are so many people standing, you couldn't see.

Mr. Dach: There you go.

I am pleased to say that I'm going to be supporting this bill, but I do have severe reservations about it, Mr. Chair. We did just go through an exercise where we brought through an amendment that would have seen the rate of 6.8 cents per kilowatt hour in replacing the 13.5 cent rate in the legislation that was defeated, too, by the government with claims that are dubious at best.

But let me focus on the main bill and what I hear at the doors from my constituents about what they're saying about the bucks that are being passed into their hands by this government right now. It is reminiscent, Mr. Chair, of a time a few years ago when there was another Premier in this province named Ralph Klein, and he left a legacy of Ralph bucks. I think that we may be headed towards the same type of legacy when it comes to the bucks that are being flowed through this government's hands via when we're looking at rebates and we're looking at affordability comforts or affordability efforts to cushion Albertans at a time when they're struggling to make ends meet.

We have a situation where perhaps the government was kind of gleeful about the opportunity to pass money to people in the province so close to an election without it seeming as blatant as Ralph Klein's, former Premier Ralph Klein, \$400 cheques that he gave to every Albertan over 18 years old in the province in 2006. Now, that announcement – they were called then prosperity payments. The election was being lost, and the Premier at the time, Mr. Klein, had this great idea that it would boost popularity, and he could perhaps win the election by handing out these \$400 cheques. It did actually turn the election, but the smile on their faces was short lived in the Klein camp, Mr. Chair.

The Ralph bucks legacy is talked about in a CTV news article, and I'll quote some of it, and I'll table it later. It says that even with oil prices down [they'd] be nowhere near [the] deficit if they'd taken corrective action.

That was Scott Hennig with the Canadian taxpayers' association.

Two months after the cheques were mailed out he announced his intention to resign . . .

This is Mr. Klein, the Premier.

. . . after his fourth term on Oct. 21, 2007, some 19 months later.

"He was beginning to lose his edge,"

as Mr. Mensah says.

"The Ralph edge, the common touch."

But by the end of March, the Progressive Conservatives had had enough with delegates giving Klein an underwhelming 55 per cent . . .

An underwhelming 55 per cent.

. . . show of support at a party leadership review.

That number seems to ring true to the type of numbers and level of support that Conservative leaders seemed to garner from more recent leadership contests as well.

"He was done in by the party establishment,"

the article goes on to say.

Klein eventually resigned near the end of September of 2005.

Oil prices crashed in 2008 and the province has posted deficits in every year since . . . "I don't think any . . . government is going to follow that path [again]," said Mensah. "That path was a unique period in Alberta's history where the government was simply flush with all the money coming in."

"In hindsight, we see that was not an appropriate approach given what we are now facing as a province."

Now, we have political commentary looking backwards on the Ralph bucks saying that it probably wasn't a very good thing to do and in hindsight probably won't be done again, yet here we are in 2022, Mr. Chair, looking at another version of Ralph bucks. I'll leave it to others to give a prefix as to what kind of bucks we're seeing right now, handed out within five months of an election in the hopes that the public will once again reward the Conservatives with a victory as a result of having their pockets filled with Conservative bucks.

8:50

What I'm hearing at the doors, as I began to say, Mr. Chair, when I began my comments, is not a thank you for the upcoming potential money should this bill pass; what I'm hearing is that the public is seeing this as a very, very cynical attempt to buy them with their own money. That indeed is something that has gone on before in this province, as I've alluded to in the CTV news article, and it's something that Albertans are saying very clearly at the doors that I've been knocking on in my constituency, in Calgary, in Brooks-Medicine Hat, in Leduc, in Morinville, and other places upcoming very soon. I hear at the doors that that happened once, but they're not going to be falling for the same stunt. They figure it's a cynical attempt by the UCP to buy support with their own tax dollars at a time when they're using it as a cover for putting a cushion underneath Albertans who are suffering economically.

It's a happy coincidence for the Conservative Party. I think they feel that they're able to cloak these so-called new Ralph bucks in the clothing of support for Albertans during a time of need. They're splashing around the dough to help with the affordability crisis without having to be as blatant as Ralph Klein was when he handed out the Ralph bucks. This is the Conservatives' vision of a social contract, Mr. Chair: we pay you; you vote for us. It's a simple contract, but I'm really hearing at the doors that people aren't falling for it.

I was at a meeting, a Christmas dinner, actually, of former Conservative individuals who invited me to come and join them at

a local seniors' residence in my constituency. I was happily surprised to learn that I couldn't find any one of them amongst the 30 attendees who were going to be supporting the Conservatives; they were going to be coming over to the New Democrats.

That age group typically will be having a few more Conservative supporters in it, but it's very clear, given that anecdotal response amongst a group of former Conservative supporters who voiced actual cynicism about specifically what we're talking about tonight, Mr. Chair, that they felt that all of these dollars that were flowing to so-called cushion Albertans against the cost of utilities and so forth were very, very cynical dollars that were being used to curry their vote, to buy their vote. People were turned off by it. They see this so-called Conservative social contract, this pay-for-play Conservative contract, this new prosperity bonus to help them over this period of economic difficulty, something that in 2005 worked for Ralph Klein – they see it for what it is, once again as a cynical attempt to buy their votes.

That interpretation is not my imagination, Mr. Chair. That's exactly the way it was being told to me at that dinner last week in my constituency by seniors, who were in their 70s and 80s, who have now switched their allegiance. They're not going to be voting for somebody who looks to buy their vote.

This bill was supposed to be a flagship, Mr. Chair. The flag is drooping. The flag is drooping, because people have seen through it. It's a limp rag. This is what folks are saying in my constituency: thanks for the dough, but we're not selling you our vote this time; we see right through what you're doing.

So history seems to be repeating itself in one respect, Mr. Chair, in that the Conservatives are trying to use what was a tried-and-true tactic: spill a bunch of cash into the pockets of Albertans prior to an election in an implicit contract that they would then, in turn, be rewarded with their votes. It's not something that is going over very well in my constituency and, dare I say, in many others that I've campaigned in and canvassed in very recently.

The Inflation Relief Statutes Amendment Act certainly is something that will put money in the pockets of Albertans, but indeed the motivation behind it is something that I seriously question. I can tell this House, Mr. Chair, that the reward that the Conservatives hope to garner from this money is not going to be there. The voting pot at the end of the rainbow is not going to be the same that was rewarded to Mr. Klein in 2005. People are fed up, and they are tired of being treated as though their vote could be bought. They see other things that are motivating them to choose to put their vote elsewhere, other than the Conservatives.

I think this is a concern probably to Conservative members across the way, yet they don't seem to have quite gotten the picture yet. That will become very clear when repeated attempts such as Bill 2 to try to use the royalty surplus that's filling the Alberta coffers right now – when Conservatives try to use that cash to make other attempts to buy the votes of Albertans with their own tax dollars. That's something that I think the Conservatives will probably fail to comprehend over time, and I hope that is something that Albertans remember over the next five, six months because you will see it very clearly, Mr. Chair, in my estimation, in a number of ways.

The current government will be incessant in its attempt to throw money at Albertans in hopes of currying their votes in the next election. Sorry. I'm not focusing on the amount in specific dollar amounts, but that's not what I was hearing at the doors. Basically, the constituents are saying to me that whether it's the electricity rebates or whether it's the elements that will help them in other ways, reindexing the income tax system, the government is not going to end up with the benefit they hoped to receive, and that, of

course, would be a political payoff by getting re-elected in the spring if indeed the government decides to hold the election in the spring.

That's something that I was asked about at that meeting as well, Mr. Chair. What are the rules? Of course, the rules are that a government, under Canada's Constitution, is enabled to hold an election every five years. That is something that people are speculating about – will this Premier decide to go longer should it benefit her politically? – of course, which is what Bill 2 is all about: political benefit.

With that, Mr. Chair, I will take my seat.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Others wishing to speak to the main bill tonight? I see the hon. Member for St. Albert has risen.

Ms Renaud: Thank you, Mr. Chair. It's my pleasure to rise and speak again, actually for the second time, to Bill 2. I was really hoping that some of the ministers or some of the government members would have some answers for the questions that were posed last week, actually. Just to maybe refresh their memory, I just got a copy of one of the press releases that was sent out talking about the huge difference for vulnerable Albertans that this particular piece of legislation will make. Huge remains to be seen, but let's talk about this.

The one bullet under the part where it says if Bill 2 passes talks about

Inflation Relief Statutes Amendment Act... will enable key affordability support measures through legislation.

If you go down, the second bullet says:

Upcoming targeted relief payments to vulnerable Albertans collecting Assured Income for the Severely Handicapped (AISH), Persons with Developmental Disabilities (PDD) and Income Support.

Those are three programs.

9:00

Now, two of these things are income replacement programs – we know this, right? – assured income for the severely handicapped and income support. Both of those programs are income replacement. PDD, persons with developmental disabilities, actually pays for staff. The question was asked for clarification. Now, this release says that it's going to be indexed, so I'm assuming that's about 6 per cent, the way that you're talking about the other products. But what does that mean? Is it 6 per cent overall for the total budget? That's about a billion dollars. Is it going to the service providers, or is it going to the staff? Do you know who the staff are? How are you going to do this? If anybody over there has any answers – if this was an error, a mistake, that's cool – maybe you could just explain that, because people don't understand.

And if you think it's just me, let me just draw your attention to a statement that was made from a validator that I'm sure the government has used before, and that's Inclusion Alberta. On November 24 they put out a release, and they asked the very same question that I'm asking: what on earth does this mean? You've indexed PDD, but you know that PDD is a collection of contracts that either go to families – so there are the financial administrators – or they go to service providers, both nonprofit and for-profit, who then pay staff. So what does this mean? What are you indexing? Where is this money going? Who's getting it? I would suggest that most if not all people that are on PDD, that use PDD as a staff support, are already on AISH or income support. So I'm a little bit confused.

Now, what Inclusion Alberta further said, and I started to talk about this last week when I spoke to this bill, was that what this bill

doesn't do – I mean, you all can give yourselves a pat on the back if you like for undoing the extraordinary damage that you did. Let me just remind everybody in this place what we've heard from this government for the last few years. We've heard: "It's not a cut. It's not a cut. It's not a cut." We heard that for years. It most definitely is a cut. We also heard: it's the most generous benefit in Canada. It is not. Even if it was the most generous benefit in Canada, it is still below the poverty line. That is nothing to be proud of.

Anyway, going back to the statement that was put out by Inclusion Alberta about Bill 2, Inflation Relief Statutes Amendment Act, 2022, they said that what this government failed to do was address the wait-list. Sure, you may have indexed benefits, but what you failed to do was to address the wait-list. If the 6 per cent to PDD is actually meant to provide more support to people, that would be good. That would be a good start. But you have to clarify, because this isn't clear in the bill, it is not clear in the release that you put out, and nobody has really answered any questions, so nobody knows. So perhaps someone could stand up and answer the question.

But you could also address the wait-list. Now, here's what magically happened under the last minister. There used to be a wait-list that was recorded for family support for children with disabilities. Now, that program was left out of this bill. You included PDD, which is for people over 18 with disabilities, but you neglected to include FSCD, which is family support for children with disabilities. I'm not entirely sure why you're indexing one program that pays for staff but you're not indexing the other program that pays for staff. Is this a mistake? Do you have something to clarify? Would you like to explain this to us? It's not just us on this side that are confused; it is service providers that would like some answers.

The wait-list is massive, only what the UCP has done is called it something else. What they call it now is "in planning." That means that you've applied for the benefit or the program that you're eligible for, you've met all of the eligibility requirements, but now you're waiting for a referral to a service provider. You're waiting for a contract. You're waiting for a contract to be signed. You're waiting for it to be mailed to you. This can go on for two, three, four, six, nine, 12 months. This can go on for a long time. To me, that means you're waiting for service. That's a wait-list. But this government, this UCP government, has seen fit to mess around with how they label people as waiting for something else so it looks like they have nobody on a wait-list when, in fact, they have a massive wait-list.

If I look at PDD, the open data – now, unfortunately, this government doesn't update very often, so all I have is December '21. If you add up all the categories where they messed around with the titles and the definition – you can even look at the data descriptions – they have a total of 2,608 people waiting for service, or a service planning caseload. That's PDD. I'm sorry; if you made a mistake with PDD and that 6 per cent was supposed to increase the services that you're providing to people, that's not going to cut it.

FSCD is even worse. That wait-list has completely vanished. It's called something altogether different. It's called in planning, or it's called in planning waiting for a service provider. All that means is that the children are eligible, the families are eligible, they have applied, and they have gone through the steps that they need. They know they need support. They need support now. Early intervention – the key is early – they're waiting for support. They're not getting support. That's a wait-list. There are over 4,000 families that are on those wait-lists. Now, you don't call them wait-lists, but those families are still waiting. You've got 2,000 adults waiting, and you've got 4,000 children and families waiting. That's about 6,000 people.

Now, if your 6 per cent about PDD is in error and you accidentally left out FSCD, just explain that. Just amend this bill. Fix it, or change your release. Put something out. You have clearly made a mistake. We've tried to identify it. We've asked questions, hoping for answers. Now is the time. I hope there's somebody here that has some information or has some understanding. You're spending over \$2 billion. I would hope that you know what you're spending it on.

Mr. Chair, I'm going to take my seat and really hope that someone – oh, actually, I'm going to adjourn debate. Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: Hon. members, having heard the motion to adjourn debate, I'm just wondering if the hon. member may have wanted to mention that they would like to move that we report progress as well.

Ms Renaud: I'm sorry?

The Deputy Chair: In addition to adjourning debate, do you also want to report progress?

Ms Renaud: No.

The Deputy Chair: All right.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Bill 4

Alberta Health Care Insurance Amendment Act, 2022

The Deputy Chair: Anybody wishing to add comments or questions to the main bill? I see the hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View has risen.

Ms Ganley: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. I'm thrilled to get another chance to speak to Bill 4. It's just really thematic of this government, Bill 4. This bill is a bill which reverses a previous – this is funny; I feel like déjà vu all over again. This bill is a bill that reverses a previous decision of this government. The UCP chose to give themselves the power to tear up a contract with doctors.

Now, I happen to think contracts are important. I think the world turns on people making promises and then living up to the promises that they made. In this case, I think that people includes governments. I think it includes corporations. I think it includes a lot of things. So I think it's incredibly problematic that the UCP government chose to tear up that contract with doctors. I think it was disrespectful to doctors. I think it was disrespectful to Albertans. I think it was a violation of the sacred trust that is placed in us by the people of this province. Yeah, I'm not sure that there are enough words to suggest how bad a decision it was.

What we have to add to that is the context. It's bad to break your word at any time, in my opinion. In this case, it was particularly bad because we were headed into a pandemic. The moment at which this government chose to attack physicians was as we headed into a pandemic. And everybody knew what was happening. It wasn't like we were surprised by what was going on.

In addition to tearing up the contract, the government was incredibly disingenuous in its communications with the public in the way it used language. You know, the government chose to attack, in particular, practitioners of family medicine, so primary care.

An Hon. Member: Did she say “disingenuous”?

9:10

Ms Ganley: Yes, I did in fact say “disingenuous.” That was the word I used. Thank you very much to the member for that. It was a

word I chose very carefully. I think it's a word that accurately reflects the situation.

I think that what was disingenuous about it was that this government tried to make it out like doctors were abusing the public purse in some way. They tried to make it out not like they were in the wrong, not like they were choosing to break their word, to go back on their contract, but they chose to make it out like somehow doctors were doing something wrong and that they deserved what the government was doing to them. I think that that is extremely problematic.

I mean, it's bad enough to make a decision like that; it's worse to try to essentially blame the victim for what is happening. I think, you know, those physicians felt the weight of that at the moment when they were being asked to stand on the front lines to deal with a disease that we didn't yet understand, that was killing a lot of people, that was sweeping through the population. We didn't know what to do yet. We didn't have protocols in place yet. We didn't really understand how to make ourselves safe. There were no vaccines yet. To attack the very people that were essentially standing on the front lines for us in that moment: I mean, I think it's a choice that history will always remember. It's a choice that history will always remember.

And it didn't stop there. This government threatened to lay off nurses as soon as the pandemic was over. We're in a massive shortage right now, just to be clear. They threatened to lay off nurses when the pandemic was over. They tried to roll back the wages of respiratory therapists and other health professionals. I mean, the lives of Albertans were at stake, and people were on the front lines, and this government attacked the people that were standing on the front lines. I think that that is a decision that the public will remember, and I don't think the public's memory of this will be undone by the government's reversal of this bill. Certainly, the damage that has been done to the public will not be undone by the government's reversal of this decision.

So the government tore up the contracts. They attacked doctors, in particular family physicians, suggesting that somehow the doctors deserved what they got, and people left. Of course they did. Nobody wants to be in a place where your government talks about you like that. Nobody wants to be in a place where your government treats you like that. And doctors are difficult to train. It is very expensive. There are four years of undergrad and four years of medical school, and there are internships and residencies. It is difficult to create a doctor, and they are people we need. I think that right now we are seeing more than ever how much we need them. The number of Albertans who lack a primary care physician, the number of people who can't get treatment: it's incredibly problematic. We need them very much, and this government chased them away.

Now, I'm sure they're going to get up and they're going to tell us how that didn't happen, but the problem with facts on the ground is that people know them, right? Doctors wrote to us. They told us they were leaving. They told us the reasons why they were leaving. We heard from doctors. I heard from doctors talking about how the family residency program didn't fill on the first attempt for the first time in Alberta. The family residency program in Alberta didn't fill. I heard from doctors who speak to medical students who were looking at going out of province. It was incredibly problematic, the actions of this government, and this doesn't reverse that. It doesn't reverse the breach of trust. It doesn't reverse the fact that physicians left, the fact that nurses left when this government attacked them, the fact that I have no doubt that other health professionals left as a result of the actions of this government. None of that is reversed, and it leaves Alberta in a dire situation.

I know the government is going to get up again and say: “Oh, it’s not so bad. You know, you had to wait two and a half hours outside of the Children’s hospital in the snow and the cold with your child who’s struggling to breathe, but it’s not so bad because it’s like that in other places.” That is not an adequate response. It’s difficult to describe the level on which that is not an adequate response.

This government was handed the best health care system in the country, possibly in the world, and now it’s like it is in other places. Well, Mr. Chair, I don’t know. I’m a pretty proud Albertan myself. I like it to be better than it is in other places. I’d like to think it’s better. I liked a health care system that was better.

I think that, you know, this thing that the government is suggesting, that the public’s concern is somehow misplaced because it’s like that in other places: I just don’t think that that’s good enough. I think that Albertans deserve a government that recognizes the damage that they did and that apologizes. I really think that if there is one thing that is missing from this bill, which I will say I support because it reverses a bad decision, again – I feel like I say this over and over with this government – it can be a yes, and. Maybe this bill could come with an apology. At least that would be a start. It wouldn’t undo the damage that was done, but maybe it could come with an apology.

Ms Hoffman: One of the most Canadian things you can do.

Ms Ganley: One of the most Canadian things you could do.

Maybe this government could stand up and while reversing their decision, tell the people of this province that they’re sorry, tell the doctors that they’re sorry for the way that they talked about them, for tearing up the contract, tell the people of the province that they’re sorry for the damage that was done to our health care system that will take probably a decade to reverse because of the length of time it takes to train health care professionals.

I think that’s what I have to say about Bill 4. Yes, it is a step in the right direction, but writing a bill to let yourself tear up a contract, tearing up a contract, attacking doctors, attacking nurses, leaving every person in this province with worse health care than when they came in is something for which an apology ought to be offered, and I think that this government should do that.

Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Other hon. members wishing to speak to the main bill? I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore has risen.

Mr. Nielsen: Well, thank you, Mr. Chair. I appreciate that you were able to pick me out of so many members that are standing up in the House this evening to speak to Bill 4, but I luckily got the call here. Thank you very much for that opportunity.

Of course, the last time I got to chat about Bill 4, we were running out of a little bit of time that afternoon. In the minute and a half that I did have, I did manage to cover a lot of ground, but I think there are still a few more thoughts that I have to try to bring across. I believe I left off at the point where I was thanking the Minister of Health for bringing the bill forward to reverse, again, what I characterized, quite honestly, as a bit of a childish tirade by the former Minister of Health by tearing up the contracts with Alberta doctors. Certainly, Bill 4 is the right move to try to restore that relationship with doctors. But, you know, as I’ve always said, I try to layer out the sandwich a little bit here, and I know that at the time our current Minister of Health was minister of labour, and I think a decision to tear up that contract would’ve probably maybe thrown up some red flags for the minister of labour at that time because, as we know, that kind of course of action in any kind of negotiations usually never would solve anything.

9:20

So I’m wondering: you know, was there at some point in time maybe some advice to the former Minister of Health, “Hang on; this might not be a really good idea; it might not be productive; you might want to hold up on that decision”? If not, I have to ask. There must have been somebody either within the government bench, within the government caucus that thought perhaps tearing up the contract with doctors was a little bit too extreme, or even one of the many amazing bureaucrats that the government has access to. Somebody must have said: this is not a good idea. But it is what it is. Here we are, and we’re reversing the ability to be able to do that in the future, so definitely the right decision.

Again, some of the comments that I’ve heard, you know, even before Bill 4 but as well during here – I would like to challenge the Health minister just a little bit with some of those thoughts that have been expressed. I think the first one I’m going to bring forward is around some of the comments we’ve heard about the amount of money that Alberta is spending on health care. We’ve heard remarks that have said: well, we are spending the most money we’ve ever spent in the history of Alberta on health care. I’m happy that you’re spending all of that money. I’m not prepared to quite say that it’s because of the goodness of your heart. I’m wondering if perhaps maybe one of the reasons we’ve seen an increase in health spending is because of population growth within Alberta.

I did a little bit of research here, and looking back in, you know, 1998 – Mr. Chair, you’re probably wondering, well, why 1998? That was because that was the year that the Calgary General hospital was blown up, as it probably should have been. A very, very old building. It was at end of life. Way too much money to probably try to fix it; it was easier probably just to demolish it. At that time there were 2.8 million Albertans in the province. As we know, it was previous to 1998 that the last hospital was built in Alberta. Fast-forwarding now to – and I’m picking 2019 because, of course, we had an election at that point, a change in government. There were 4.3 million Albertans, which looks to me just about, you know, double, and in 2022 we have 4.4 million Albertans in the province.

So I’m wondering if population growth has had anything to do with this need to increase spending in health care not just simply because there’s a desire to want to look like we’re spending, you know, all this money; it’s because we have to in order to be able to provide services to Albertans. Again, while I’m grateful that the money is being spent, to sit here and say, “Well, look at us; we’re doing such a great job” – it’s probably because you have to a little bit. That was one of the thoughts I wanted to challenge there.

One of the other things. Obviously, thinking back to when we tore up the contract with doctors, created that strife, created that very confrontational atmosphere: it’s what I like to call a disruptive decision. These disruptive decisions didn’t just stop there. Now, one of the ones that we’ve just recently seen – and we can certainly get into a debate about it at another time around this – is the firing of the entire AHS Board. The reason I’m referencing that – you know, part of my past days, when I was a little bit younger, a little bit fitter, and playing basketball, one of the things that I always noticed: coaches, when they were substituting players, never ever substituted the entire line at once. The reason they did that was because it was too disruptive. You lost that flow. All of a sudden you have five players coming onto the court. They may have been sitting there for a little while; their bodies are cold. They’re not quite as up to speed as the guys that are coming off. What would happen is that you would have a couple of players come into the game, and then after 30 seconds, 45 seconds or so, another stoppage of play, the coach would put in maybe another player and then finally the other two, rotating all five off at that point.

I'm wondering if the Health minister has considered that by the entire board being fired, we might not have created yet another type of disruptive situation here. We know that a couple of the medical health officers have recently resigned. I must admit I am very curious as to what all of a sudden brought that up, that the two of them would resign in the same period of time. I don't know if there's any kind of relation to the firing of the board, but clearly they felt the need, that their place there was no longer viable for them.

When you make these disruptive decisions, it's usually Albertans that end up having to kind of literally pay the price for that. I'm always happy, of course, to hear from the Minister of Health around that. You know, again, I'm genuinely looking for answers here. This is Committee of the Whole, and we get the chance to explore those kinds of things.

I know that throughout trying to be fiscally responsible, one of the things, a decision that was made earlier which the current Health minister decided to reverse – I'm very grateful for that – and I've brought this up on many occasions prior, was around reducing costs for diagnostic imaging. What happened was that there was a call to do that: it's going to save us a bunch of money. It was very, very clear and proven from the physiotherapists and the chiropractic professions that that indeed was not the case; it was costing the province more. It was also costing Albertans not only in money, because if they needed that diagnostic imaging, they either had to go pay for it themselves or they would have to go to their own doctor to get that diagnostic imaging. Then, hopefully, that paperwork was sent back to the chiropractor or the physiotherapist, for instance, and then they'll hopefully get treatment after that. Quite frankly, that was a bunch of red tape, which – again, I'm glad that that has been reversed and Albertans are now getting care much more promptly than what was happening under that.

Again, you know, a bit of a disruptive decision, all trying to find some financial constraints rather than actually consulting with those professions. While I'm definitely going to vote in favour of Bill 4 proceeding, as I said, there were some thoughts that I did want to share with the minister and challenge some things that were said before. My hope is that should cabinet be looking at more kinds of disruptive decisions, perhaps maybe we'll hear the opportunity from folks that actually realize that might be a problem and, hopefully, stop it before it happens, because, as we know, this whole contract tearing-up didn't work out.

I thank the minister for changing that and trying to repair that relationship because we're going to need it going forward. I know you like to mention, you know, that we have more doctors than ever on the list, but there's a difference between having them registered to practise and actually practising. If we actually have more doctors than we've ever had, why are we still experiencing challenges within the system? I can only surmise that we don't have as many actually practising as we have on the list. That's certainly the feedback that I have received.

Appreciate the chance to expand on a couple of the other items that I missed in that first minute and a half that I had at second reading, and I look forward to any further debate here on Bill 4. Perhaps I might even jump up with some more ideas and thoughts.

The Deputy Chair: Others wishing to add questions or comments to Bill 4? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

Ms Hoffman: Thanks very much, Mr. Chair. I'm honoured to take my place in this House and speak to a health care bill because, certainly, it's among the list of major issues that Albertans are raising with me and, I'm sure, with all of us. It's certainly reflected in the polling, the current public health care system and how it's

been managed by the current government. So as we consider Bill 4, the Alberta Health Care Insurance Amendment Act, 2022, I have to say, I do want to say that every Albertan deserves to have the right care in the right place at the right time. While that was consistently our goal while we were in government just a few years ago, although it feels like a lot longer some days, it doesn't seem that that has been the goal of the current government.

9:30

We know how headstrong they were – I was trying to think of something parliamentary to say; I think “headstrong” is parliamentary – in trying to attack and erode public health care, and the way that they dealt with physicians was one key piece among that. And, of course, the relationship with the patient's medical home, with the primary care provider, with the family physician, was incredibly problematic. It included specific incidents, including yelling at doctors in their driveway as well as more general incidents of the type of disrespect that was seen at the bargaining table and through this House, through legislation that was brought in. So it is a significant concern for many Albertans.

I think that the current government could have taken this opportunity through a government bill to bring forward something that would have resulted in improved outcomes for patients, maybe something like what was proposed by a private member, the Member for Edmonton-Strathcona, the Leader of His Majesty's Official Opposition, around having specific benchmarks and metrics and guarantees for the people of Alberta in terms of making sure that we are actually making improvements to the health care system. Instead, what we have here is a quite thin bill to undo some of the harm that they brought in in the first place just a couple of years ago. It definitely isn't the kind of sweeping improvement that I think most Albertans would expect, but it is a small bill that does undo a very small piece of the harm that the current government already caused, so I guess with that, I can speak in support and will vote accordingly.

Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: Others wishing to speak to the main bill?

I am prepared to call the question.

Some Hon. Members: Question.

[The clauses of Bill 4 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

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

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Deputy Chair: Opposed? Carried.

I see the hon. Deputy Premier.

Mr. Madu: Thank you, Chair. I move that the committee rise and report progress on Bill 2 and report Bill 4.

[Motion carried]

[Mr. Reid in the chair]

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Devon.

Mr. Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Committee of the Whole has had under consideration certain bills. The committee reports the following bill: Bill 4. The committee reports progress on the following bill: Bill 2. I wish to table copies of all amendments

considered by the Committee of the Whole on this date for the official records of the Assembly.

The Acting Speaker: Does the Assembly concur with the report? All those in favour?

Hon. Members: Aye.

The Acting Speaker: Opposed? So ordered.

Government Bills and Orders Third Reading

Bill 3

Property Rights Statutes Amendment Act, 2022

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Minister of Justice.

Mr. Shandro: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to be able to rise and to move third reading of Bill 3.

I, first, just want to thank the Member for Highwood, the now Minister of Mental Health and Addiction, and all those who served on the Select Special Committee on Real Property Rights and for their recommendations, their various recommendations. This is one of the recommendations, that government proceed with the great work that was done by that committee but as well by the Alberta Law Reform Institute, that recommended in April 2020 that adverse possession be abolished, and as well, Mr. Speaker, some of the work that was done by the Alberta Law Reform Institute and others who had engaged Albertans for many years.

And a shout-out as well to Ken Allred, who previously had proposed abolishing adverse possession in his private member's bill in 2012. It's taken this long, though, for this to get to this point, but thank you to Ken for starting the conversation. He had been a passionate advocate for abolishing adverse possession in his career as land surveyor for, he says, 50 years.

Some of the feedback that was received by Albertans, the concerns that people had with adverse possession: they wanted to abolish it. I'll advise the House through you, Mr. Speaker, that whoever holds title to the land should be entitled to keep it. No one should be able to take land from the person who paid for it. From one respondent who sent in to one survey: adverse possession is theft, and the law should not reward bad behaviour.

We're very pleased, Mr. Speaker, to have now a piece of legislation to amend the Land Titles Act, the Law of Property Act, and the Limitations Act for the practice of adverse possession to be abolished in the province of Alberta.

Thank you to our friends opposite for their broad support of this bill.

With that, I move third reading of Bill 3, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Others wishing to speak to Bill 3, the Property Rights Statutes Amendment Act, 2022? The hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung.

Mr. Dach: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise and speak to Bill 3 on third reading this evening. Of course, I have always enjoyed the debate whenever it was around the topic of land and property rights in this province, having been a member of the Alberta Real Estate Association for over 30 years in an active real estate career.

Of course, I can tell you, Mr. Speaker, that this issue colloquially called squatter's rights, or adverse possession, has been something that has been discussed in real estate circles since I was a realtor for the first time in 1980, and before then it's been a debated topic. Finally, we're getting around to getting rid of it as a right in Alberta.

It's something we support here on this side of the House, finally abolishing squatter's rights. It was something that was actually a correction to Bill 206, that the UCP brought forward in 2020, which really failed to address many of the concerns that Albertans had been calling for.

We will be watching, Mr. Speaker, for some matters that may not be fully enveloped and encompassed by this legislation, Bill 3. Of course, I'm speaking right now about the effect upon treaty rights that this legislation may have, whether or not the consultation really revolved closely with Indigenous populations to arrive at a spot where they felt that their treaty rights were properly protected under this legislation. We will continue our conversations with the Indigenous leaders to ensure that they see no conflicts in the operation of this bill should it pass this evening or in future sittings of this House.

I also have a concern about the provisions that revolve around compensation for improvements made to the land in question, whereby an individual who had made a claim under adverse possession rules while they were still in force would perhaps be entitled to compensation for improvements on that land and the subject would be coming up between the two parties, the actual owner and the adverse possession claimant, as to what amount of compensation would take place, and there may be a resolution through the courts. But, indeed, if you have a sort of malicious claimant on the one hand versus an owner who supposedly is going to be the beneficiary of the property rights amendment act and not have to suffer losing his land to a claimant, the problem is that we may see individuals who are malicious in their intent taking it upon themselves to drag out this negotiation process in every way, shape, and form.

9:40

That, Mr. Speaker, is something that I think we are very, very much going to be paying close attention to because we don't want to have individuals who would still, for all intents and purposes, be making claims or acting as if they still owned the land by exercising court actions and not seeking to resolve the compensation disputes they may have under a former adverse possession claim for improvements they made to land that was not theirs.

[The Speaker in the chair]

We want to avoid any situations like that. So if we see circumstances, Mr. Speaker, where individuals are dragging their feet in finalizing claims with landowners on former adverse possession claims, certainly that is something we'll pay close attention to and seek to find some resolution. After all these many years we do want to be finally done with all the historical claims as soon as possible to provide resolution to the landowners who seek to have nothing but their title to the land, which they should expect to have, having paid for the property.

Once again, Mr. Speaker, the underlying concern that I always have with respect to property rights is, of course, the Alberta land titles registration system that we hold so dear in this province, especially those that are practitioners in the industry, whether it be realtors, whether it be property managers, whether it be real estate lawyers, mortgage companies, banks, appraisers, you name it. Anybody in the province relies upon a fully functioning and up-to-date land titles registration system, which, of course, we do not have at this point in time.

We're looking at months rather than weeks for registration time in this province, and that is a very, very large cost to the economy of the province. The fundamental backbone of an economy is the ability to transact in land, and if indeed there is a holdup, a time lag on a registration, it costs money for everybody. There's potentially

interest on the unpaid balance until registration is achieved, if indeed there is a system of insuring the land title. There are costs of insurance that companies and individuals have to undergo. There's anxiety and stress and uncertainty created when a title doesn't transfer in a timely fashion, whether it's a homeowner buying their home for themselves or a condominium for themselves or whether it's a multinational corporation or a large corporate individual, client buying a property to invest in and expand their business.

That uncertainty created by the lack of investment over a long period of time in the land titles infrastructure, computer infrastructure, as well as the recent firing of many of the individuals who worked at land titles and now the rehiring by this government to try to catch up because they created a backlog as a result of that, combine to create an unhealthy delay in the land titles system.

It shakes the confidence of business communities in what has been historically a very, very proud system of land registration. Mr. Speaker, when I began my real estate career in 1985, we were still dealing then with a paper system. You'd go to the Brownlee Building on 97th Street and fill out a three-piece carbon form to order a land title. I think it cost a buck or two then. Now they're up to \$10 or \$12. We did transform into a computer system, but it's still very, very archaic. I think most Albertans would be shocked to know that it's a system that actually shuts down over the weekends and after a certain time at night. Can you imagine, you know, Staples or Costco shutting down their store, their online purchases overnight? It doesn't happen, and it shouldn't happen with the land titles registration system, but it does because the system is archaic. The hardware is in need of updating, we need a revamping of our computer system, and the SPIN 2 system, which is the means by which people search for land titles, is something that is underrated and undervalued and is certainly undermaintained and undermodernized. I would hope to see that rectified in the very near future.

We have, particularly, real estate lawyers and corporate lawyers tearing their hair out because it's taking months for a land title transaction or a registration to happen at land titles. Even though there have been some instruments of title insurance made available, including the western protocol, that lawyers use to close transactions, they're reaching the end of their rope, the end of their capacity to do that. There are some title insurance companies, Mr. Speaker, which are saying: no more; we're not taking on any more because it's become just too much of a burden, too much of a risk.

We're reaching an acute point in the history of our land titles office, and I'm hoping the government is not going to use this critical delay that we're suffering right now – it is largely caused by themselves by getting rid of a lot of the land titles staff and now hiring back, Mr. Speaker – to try to privatize the land titles registration system.

As part of the comment that I have on the Property Rights Statutes Amendment Act, 2022, I suggest that while abolishing squatter's rights is certainly something that has been a long-standing desire of practitioners in the real estate industry and, I think, pretty much everybody because it's an antiquated instrument, there have been other things that we look forward to seeing in the real estate world in Alberta. Of course, one of them is the land titles registration system modernization, that can't come soon enough, along with the Bill 3 changes that will abolish adverse possession.

One of the things that we've seen, whether it be corporate registrations or in residential real estate contracts, is that most of the adverse possession claims or disputes which took place were not necessarily malicious disputes, Mr. Speaker. They happened as a result of an innocent mistake, an unintentional mistake, where somebody built a structure, either a fence or a well or some other building, inadvertently across their own property line onto somebody

else's and then, sometimes years later, discovered that they didn't build it on their own land. It's pretty problematic when that happens. I think anybody who's had personal experience with that would know how much of a quagmire that can be and how much of a stigma it attaches to both pieces of land.

One recent example near the end of my real estate career happened at an acreage property, Mr. Speaker, where a water well appeared on the real property report of a property I had listed for sale. It was in an odd location, quite near the property line of the neighbouring property and far away from the house that I was about to list for sale. I asked the landowner whose listing I was about to take. I said, "Why is that well over there?" And he said, "Well, that's the neighbour's." I said, "That's the neighbour's well, but this is your property line, and that well isn't on your property." He said: "I know. It's just been there for a long time. We just left it there." I said: "Well, you're going to have to deal with that now because you're selling the property, and if indeed you want to sell it, you're going to have to get some kind of agreement entered into with the person who put that well on the property. They're relying on that well for their water for their acreage property, and the prospective buyer and their lawyer are going to have some real issues about liability with respect to that well. You may have some real trouble selling this property." Those are the types of inadvertent errors that had to be dealt with and were sort of lumped in with the more malicious and sort of newsworthy stories of adverse possession.

9:50

These are the lingering compensation matters that I referred to earlier in my remarks. It's very concerning as to how indeed the two parties – the landowner who wishes to sell the property to somebody and the individual who in this case built that well – will come to terms that are mutually agreeable to compensate either the person for the well or perhaps have the individual give up rights to the well. There are a number of ways things like that can be dealt with. You may have a willing party who's co-operative, or you may have somebody who just wants to drag their feet. It could cost that landowner, who is fighting the adverse possession claim or the compensation claim from that individual who had a historic adverse possession claim on that land, a sale and thousands and thousands of dollars as a result.

This is a lingering concern that I have about the bill and the compensation elements of it, and I hope that the government has its eye on that ball as well. We certainly on this side of the House will be watching very closely as to what transpires with respect to these negotiations. If we are seeing a number of claims and disputes that seem to be going unresolved, with incessant malicious behaviour on the part of some claimants trying to extend their compensation to avoid having to do anything at all, then we would like to see that issue addressed in this Legislature.

I think there may be others, Mr. Speaker, who wish to address their concerns and/or make comments with respect to this bill, so I'll take my seat. I'll look forward to those comments.

The Speaker: Are there others? The hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek.

Mr. Gotfried: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise again, after Committee of the Whole from yesterday, to address Bill 3, Property Rights Statutes Amendment Act, 2022, or what I like to think of as the abolition of adverse possession, which has been something under discussion in this Chamber for a number of years.

I wanted to take an opportunity, actually – there's been a lot of work done on this through the years on both sides of the House, and I wanted to thank everyone who has done so. I think it would be

remiss of us not to mention the Alberta Law Reform Institute, Sandra Petersson and Stella Varvis, who have done some great work on this and made many recommendations through the years for the abolition of adverse possession, that took us a little while to get around to in this House. The Property Rights Advocate has done considerable work on it and has made many recommendations as well, and those recommendations, of course, were brought through the Resource Stewardship Committee, who also made numerous recommendations for us to abolish adverse possession. Finally, I'll end with my colleague from Highwood, who chaired the Select Special Committee on Real Property Rights, again with a recommendation for us to finally abolish adverse possession. Surprise that we're getting there.

I mentioned the other night that I was brought into the idea and the whole issue of adverse possession through one of my constituents. I said in my previous speech that it is time now, but it's too late for Jim McIndoe, who is my constituent who brought this to my attention in 2016. He lost about \$140,000 of his suburban property because of a fence in the wrong place next to a neighbour who, as I said before, maybe did not exercise the best good-neighbour policy. When he said that we should rebuild the fence and put it on the right property line, he was served with a claim of adverse possession on that property, which can happen to any of us, because I bet you that there are not a lot of fences in an urban environment that are actually in exactly the right spot. You pull a fence post out and you put a new fence in, and the surveyor is not called in: maybe a reminder to us to check those real property reports, to possibly occasionally get a land surveyor in if you're not sure where those are. Drop those pins back in that maybe have been buried for 30, 40 years, and make sure that you know where your fenceline is.

Also, watch out – and I think it was mentioned by the hon. member opposite – when you're making improvements. Make sure it's on your land. I think we can solve this problem. If you're going to do improvements, make sure it's on your land. Make sure that you've got the real property report and the surveys to prove it before you do those improvements. Yes, there can be some extenuating and some unusual circumstances, but quite frankly, when I see what happened to my constituent Jim McIndoe in that particular circumstance, I'm willing to take the risk that they can sort that out with the improvements done on those lands in an equitable manner.

But the seizure of somebody's land without compensation has got to stop in this province. It's past time to do that, Mr. Speaker. It is time for us to respect the fact that when somebody pays for that land, it is their land, that we should have the property rights that go along with that, and that they cannot have that legally seized without compensation, which is exactly what has been happening with adverse possession for a number of years in this province. We can go through the law books and find some examples of that and some egregious ones, as could be represented in Moore versus McIndoe, in my case, for my constituent.

I know he's going to be happy to hear it, and I hope we can pass this bill tonight here and get this moving forward. Again, too late for him, too late for many others, but let's make sure that this egregious piece of legislation can no longer harm hard-working, law-abiding, landowning citizens in this province.

I'll just say that this is not inadvertent. Some of these are very, very deliberate moves to take somebody else's land, and it's very sad that that happens. We'd like to think that we're pretty good neighbours in this province, but that is not always the case, and unfortunately when there are legal remedies and ramifications of that, that's a problem.

Lastly, as was mentioned by the minister, former MLA Ken Allred, the former MLA for St. Albert, brought a motion forward in 2011, which actually passed in the Legislature but was not enacted. He had private member's Bill 204 in 2012, that died after second reading due to proroguing. I recognize Pat Stier from Livingstone-Macleod, who brought forward also another Bill 204 in 2017. In 2018 I was able to bring forward another Bill 204, and that was sort of punted down the road and pushed back to more research and more study.

Mr. Speaker, it's time. It's past time for some, unfortunately a little late for others, but it's time for us to pass this bill. I would like to thank members on this side, and hopefully we'll have unanimous support for this bill once and for all in this House to protect the property rights of Albertans. I hope we can get to that right away.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Hon. members, Bill 3, the Property Rights Statutes Amendment Act, 2022. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Whitemud has risen.

Ms Pancholi: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise in third reading of Bill 3, the Property Rights Statutes Amendment Act, 2022. I simply wanted to add my voice to the colleagues across the aisle and here on our side as well. A shout-out to the Member for Edmonton-McClung for his very thoughtful comments. He has a lot of experience with respect to these issues, and I appreciate it very much.

Certainly, I'd also like to share the accolades that many in this House have already given to former MLA Ken Allred. I was actually quite honoured. After I spoke at second reading on this bill last week, Mr. Allred reached out to me and thanked me for my comments, and I had the great opportunity to actually meet Ken Allred in person today at the reception for former and current MLAs. It was a pleasure to meet him, and I want to thank him for his persistence on these issues and for bringing forward his thoughtful submissions to the committee as well.

I also want to take this opportunity to thank the Alberta Law Reform Institute. As you may recall, Mr. Speaker, the former Minister of Justice and Solicitor General under the NDP government had reached out to the Alberta Law Reform Institute for their thoughts and recommendations as to how to implement legislatively changes to remove adverse possession and what the recommendations were on how to do that thoughtfully across pieces of legislation.

Of course, they brought forward a very thoughtful, long – 137 pages, I believe – report as to how to properly, you know, amend legislation in Alberta to really bring us up to speed with where other provinces across Canada have been and ensuring that we have a very clear process for dealing with disputes related to improvements that are made by somebody on land that is not their registered land but, of course, more importantly, to ensure that Albertans can be assured that their rights to their property are undisputed and are not affected by somebody who may have been making use of the land without having the proper right to do so for years at a time.

Removing the limitation period, clarifying the process under section 69 of the Law of Property Act, and, really, just making it very clear, after thoughtful consultation as well with Albertans who have raised this issue for some time, it is a pleasure for us to speak in favour and support the good work that's been done and to thank all those who contributed to making sure that this bill was finally ready.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to say that I will be supporting Bill 3 in third reading, and I encourage my colleagues to do so as well. Thank you very much.

10:00

The Speaker: Are there others?

Seeing none, I am prepared to call on the minister to close debate.

[Motion carried; Bill 3 read a third time]

Government Bills and Orders Second Reading

Bill 7

Miscellaneous Statutes Amendment Act, 2022 (No. 2)

The Speaker: The Government House Leader.

Mr. Schow: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's an honour to be here with you this evening and an honour to be with all of the members as well. I rise to move second reading of Bill 7, Miscellaneous Statutes Amendment Act, 2022 (No. 2).

Just a couple of details for members about Bill 7. It proposes amendments needed as a result of the government reorganization. The good bill amends 97 acts. Ninety-seven, Mr. Speaker.

The amendments fall into three categories. The first category: direct updates to minister or department titles; for example, the Minister of Justice and Solicitor General is now updated to Minister of Justice. Second, adding and updating definitions to eliminate the need to refer to specific titles; for example, adding the definition of "Minister" that refers to the minister responsible as per the Government Organization Act. And lastly, and certainly not least, other ad hoc changes directly related to changes in titles and responsibilities; for example, updating wording to eliminate an outdated reference to a minister or department but not substituting an updated title.

We have consulted with the Official Opposition as per custom and therefore recommend that all MLAs in this Chamber swiftly pass second reading of Bill 7.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Hon. members, before the Assembly is second reading of Bill 7, Miscellaneous Statutes Amendment Act, 2022 (No. 2). The hon. the Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

Member Irwin: All right. What an absolute honour to rise and speak to Bill 7, the Miscellaneous Statutes Amendment Act, 2022 (No. 2).

Mr. Schow: Have you read it?

Member Irwin: You know what? Through the chair, I was just asked by the Member for Cardston-Siksika if I had read it. I actually do have it open on my laptop, and I have to say that, yes, this is absolutely a miscellaneous statutes amendment act. That's for sure.

You know, it's hard to follow that commentary on second reading, but what's interesting is that the main reason for Bill 7 is due to the fact that under this new Premier this cabinet is the largest in recent history, with 27 ministers, two Deputy Premiers – wait for it – 11 parliamentary secretaries.

Mr. Nielsen: Parliamentary secretaries for everyone.

Member Irwin: Exactly.

You know what? This is truly a dramatic expansion of cabinet, you know, and because of that, it's not just a change in title, which you see multiple times throughout Bill 7; it comes with pay increases, budgetary adjustments, staffing changes, cars, legislative assignments. To paraphrase a journalist from the *Calgary Sun*,

Ricky Leong, he said that everyone is a VIP in Smith's government. Unfortunately, there are few that aren't.

Some Hon. Members: Name.

The Speaker: Oh, that is a name.

Member Irwin: Oh, my apologies. Sorry. I was just getting so passionate. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would not want to say a name.

The point is that, in all seriousness here, most of this bill, Bill 7, would not be necessary if it weren't for this Premier's bloated cabinet. This government in its reallocation of duties and collective back-patting forgot to assign certain key pieces of legislation to a minister. In fact, we've tried – there were a few times that we were trying to figure out who was responsible for what, and it was awfully, awfully confusing. I'm not sure – I could be wrong – actually, if they're totally certain who's in charge of what, but, again, when you have the largest cabinet in recent history, I can understand that there would be some confusion. Again, not only do they have the largest cabinet in recent history; they failed to do the one key step in assigning all pieces of legislation to a relevant minister. But, you know, a rookie government, a one-time government, I'm sure.

You know what? One of the things that was actually really interesting, because I'm thinking about my colleague for Edmonton-Mill Woods, is the fact that for weeks, which is just one example, there was no minister responsible for the labour code – wow; that's big, right? – or the Occupational Health and Safety Act. [interjections] That's exactly right. Again, you know, that is a bit troubling. It shows a lot about the incompetence of this government, the lack of trust that Albertans have in this government, the same government that we've seen has failed to consult with Albertans multiple times; the sovereignty act, as an example. [interjections] Exactly. I feel like we should all be joining in debate here because we've got a lot of really key points. I'll try to bring them all onto the record here tonight.

But, again, you know, the point of this very thick piece of legislation is, for the most part, just to clean up the mess that this government has made with government organization and to account for the fact that, once again, this is the largest cabinet in history. [interjections] You're right. I mean, along with – what was it again? – 11 parliamentary secretaries . . .

Ms Renaud: No francophone one?

Member Irwin: You're right, to the Member for St. Albert: 11 parliamentary secretaries but not one for francophone Albertans, who, we know, are key stakeholders in this province and should be acknowledged, two Deputy Premiers – I know I mentioned that earlier but thought I'd get it on the record again – and, of course, 27 ministers.

I could go on at length here, but I think I've made my point quite clear. I can repeat my points again if the House would like that, but I've made my point quite clear that with Bill 7, while we will agree to pass it, much of this bill would not be necessary if it weren't for the incompetence and the fiscal irresponsibility of a government that insisted on having the largest cabinet in recent history.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Are there others wishing to speak to second reading of Bill 7?

Seeing none, I am prepared to call on the minister to close debate. The hon. the Government House Leader to close debate.

Mr. Schow: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I will be brief in closing debate. Based on the remarks from the Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood, this must be the most controversial miscellaneous statutes amendment act I have ever heard introduced in this Chamber. The reality is that the Premier has done a wonderful job managing this government since she was elected as leader and has chosen a cabinet she feels will take us forward to continue serving Albertans in the best manner possible. [interjections] I'm not sure why the members opposite are heckling, but in any event I will simply close by saying that I reject almost in whole what the Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood said about this bill. I encourage all members to support it. I suspect, without trying to presuppose the outcome, that they will. I'm not sure how all those comments were necessary, but I appreciate the participation.

With that, I close debate.

[Motion carried; Bill 7 read a second time]

Consideration of Her Honour the Lieutenant Governor's Speech

Mr. Toor moved, seconded by Ms Lovely, that an humble address be presented to Her Honour the Honourable the Lieutenant Governor as follows:

To Her Honour the Honourable Salma Lakhani, AOE, BSc, LLD, the Lieutenant Governor of the province of Alberta:

We, His Majesty's most dutiful and loyal subjects, the Legislative Assembly, now assembled, beg leave to thank Your Honour for the gracious speech Your Honour has been pleased to address to us at the opening of the present session.

[Adjourned debate November 30: Mr. Dach]

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Justice.

10:10

Mr. Shandro: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Thank you for the opportunity for me to rise and be able to speak, with a new Speech from the Throne. I was inspired to be able to rise, with the passing of Her late Majesty the Queen recently. Look, even before her passing, for years before her passing, folks throughout the Commonwealth had speculated that perhaps with her passing, if it ever did happen, there might be a growing interest or appetite in republicanism in the Commonwealth. Indeed, we have seen those conversations.

As well, we have seen protests in this province that I saw as alarming, with flags saying, "Republic of Alberta." I think that our friends opposite, I hope, wouldn't consider me to be uncharitable by perhaps describing their interest in the monarchy as one of disinterest. Is that unfair of me to say? I'm looking at my . . .

Ms Renaud: Yeah, it is.

Mr. Shandro: It is unfair? Okay.

Well, on one side of the political spectrum we're seeing protests and flags saying, "Republic of Alberta." On the other side of the political spectrum we often see folks on the left side of the political spectrum, I would say. Our friends opposite: they're obviously loyal to His Majesty but perhaps not always having the same type of interest in the monarchy that – well, anyways, Mr. Speaker, I thought it was important for us in this Chamber to have a case for constitutional monarchy to continue in this country. I wanted to be able to stand and to make a point that it is important for a system of government to separate the chief of the executive from the head of

state, to separate what Churchill described as "what is permanent from what is temporary."

We're all politicians in this Chamber, Mr. Speaker. There are matters which must necessarily be in dispute between parties and factions of politicians. But in the unwritten aspects of our Constitution, which we inherited from the United Kingdom, the wisdom is in placing the supreme position in the state beyond the reach of private ambition. Again, quoting Churchill, perhaps not quoting him but paraphrasing him, he made the case that a constitutional monarchy is the most practical and effective means through which the democracies in the Commonwealth, including a democracy like ours in Canada, can preserve against dictatorship. And why is that? It's because in a constitutional monarchy like ours – this is going to be a quote from Churchill – "no one can presume to set [themselves] up as a national representative against the hereditary rights of the King."

Mr. Speaker, we dwell in our constitutional monarchy more happily, more safely, more prosperously, and more progressively than those who do so in either an oligarchy or a republic. It's because of that that we need to continue to preserve the constitutional monarchy. It's a tradition that we have in Canada. I hope that with the accession of His Majesty we will continue to see support for the monarchy, continue with this tradition.

With that, Mr. Speaker, thank you for the opportunity for me to speak.

The Speaker: Are there others?

Phil, do we need a motion to adjourn on this matter?

Mr. Shandro: You know, Kowalski would never have the table come up to him.

The Speaker: Ain't that the truth. He was twice the Speaker I'll ever be.

[Motion carried]

Government Motions

Address in Reply to Speech from the Throne

10. Mr. Schow moved on behalf of Ms Smith:
Be it resolved that the Address in Reply to the Speech from the Throne be engrossed and presented to Her Honour the Honourable the Lieutenant Governor by such members of the Assembly as are members of Executive Council.

The Speaker: Hon. members, are there any wishing to speak to Government Motion 10?

Seeing none, I am prepared to call on the hon. the Government House Leader to close debate.

Mr. Schow: Waive.

[Government Motion 10 carried]

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Schow: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I think a whole lot of work has been done tonight, and I want to thank all members of the Assembly for their diligent participation. At this time I would like to move that the Assembly be adjourned until 1:30 p.m. tomorrow, Wednesday, December 14, 2022.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 10:17 p.m.]

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