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The 30th Legislature
Third Session

Alberta Hansard

Wednesday morning, May 11, 2022

Day 33

The Honourable Nathan M. Cooper, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta
The 30th Legislature
Third Session

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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

9 a.m.

Wednesday, May 11, 2022

[Mr. Milliken in the chair]

Prayers

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

Orders of the Day

Government Bills and Orders Committee of the Whole

[Mr. Milliken in the chair]

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

Bill 20

Justice Statutes Amendment Act, 2022

The Deputy Chair: Are there any comments, questions, or amendments to be offered at this time? I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadows has risen.

Mr. Deol: Thank you, Mr. Chair. It's my pleasure to rise in the House to add my comments to Bill 20, Justice Statutes Amendment Act, 2022, on behalf of my constituents in Edmonton-Meadows and the concerned Albertans that have reached out to me in different periods of time regarding the issues in the justice system. This bill I'm looking at seems to be making some justice changes, and the biggest concern that I have about this bill is that I don't see much of it that I'm hearing from my constituents that they wanted to see in order to see the improvements, the help they are looking for in the justice system. I don't really see any of those concerns being addressed in this Bill 20, Justice Statutes Amendment Act, 2022.

Affordability has exponential stress and effects on Albertans, particularly for the past few years, and the majority of Albertans are struggling to make their ends meet due to the rising cost of commodities, the rising cost of services. When it comes to the justice system, many constituents who approach me regarding their concerns feel that the access to the justice system is questionable, is not in their range, is not in their reach, and in many ways they find many barriers. This is not something they deal with on a daily basis, and this is not the area where we would expect ordinary individuals in this society to be highly educated and aware and knowledgeable about the whole process.

I've been dealing with one of the community members from Calgary. She is in trouble due to the incident that they were in. They were defrauded by someone by cheating, and they're seeking – they're in a position like they feel that they have lost the savings of their whole life. They worked. They're in their 70s. I think they worked hard to build this life and save for their retirement. At this age, when they were depending on that very savings to live their life worry-free – or you can call it relatively comfortably – I think these savings would help them live relatively reasonable lives without being worried about being able to put food on the table or

afford the daily necessities. Their savings were actually raided by cheating.

They wanted to access the justice system. They found, like, many barriers. That's why they reached out to me, because the barrier was that there were no services available in other languages. The provision in the justice system is to provide the services and translations in many other languages, but the shortage of staff and availability of the services is really impacting those individuals. I tried to help them. I tried to arrange someone from this city who could help them translate with the legal department so they could at least reach the legal aid department, see if they can qualify for the help from legal aid. Without that help that I worked on in this city, it was impossible for them to, first of all, find that the help is there, and second, if they knew that, there were additional barriers that the service was not available in any language other than English.

So what we wanted to see, the reason why I discussed this case and experience – I'm hearing from the very Albertans and racialized peoples; their first language is not English – is to have this on the record, what is happening right now in Alberta and what kind of experience the minorities, the ethnic communities, the racialized communities are having when it comes to the justice system access.

Generally speaking, we all understand – the UCP government has acknowledged this many times – that the justice system is struggling with the staffing issues, correctional officers, Crown prosecutors in a number of ways. We acknowledge that, and the UCP government did acknowledge this in many of their statements and in their announcements. Bill 20 does not address any of these issues.

So it is not possible – it is very hard for the families. They're already struggling to afford the necessities of life, not because just it is their fault, but it has also been contributed to by this UCP government's last three years of their approach of removing caps from a number of other things. I think that was their simplest approach, that they wanted to leave the very Albertans on the free market. The government does not see the responsibility or duty they have when it comes to serving their citizens, making sure that the things they need in their daily life is in their approach. They removed the cap from the insurance, they removed the cap from the tuition fees, and they removed the cap from the utility prices. It's not only that; they also increased the interest rate on student loans.

9:10

This is the approach this UC government had for the past three years, that has made the life of Albertans very hard, and when average Albertans are living this kind of life, it's very hard for Albertans to come up with an additional sum of money when it comes to seeking the access to the justice system. If we do not have enough staffing, if we do not have enough support that is required in the justice system in order to serve the very Albertans, definitely they will need to look into other avenues where they will need to come up with an additional sum of money, and that will just, you know, add another barrier for those people that need the help. In many cases that is the only resort they have to reach the justice system.

This bill does not address those issues that I'm hearing from my constituents, particularly from a racialized group of people, and also from the Albertans from the racialized communities that I talked to across the province. We need to do more. We need to hire more prosecutors, more staff. Not only to hire more staff, prosecutors, or appoint more judges; we also need to increase diversity. We need to have services available in other languages. This Bill 20 does not talk about any of those issues that the very Albertans are feeling very challenged with when it comes to seeking justice for the problems they are struggling with.

We have seen what this government's precedence is for the last three years. We have seen what they have done to a number of other things. I remember standing in this House when the government announced the Police Act review. We proposed that the government should create an antiracism panel that could go out and consult with racialized communities, particularly with Indigenous communities, that are disproportionately represented in our correctional system or justice system, so they could talk to those people and hear their stories and pain and suffering and conduct a report and bring it back to the Assembly with their recommendations. That proposal was defeated by the government House members.

We do not only need resources in the justice system to provide the full support that the justice system is lacking right now; we also need to put our focus on how disproportionately this is impacting the racialized communities, ethnic communities, and Indigenous communities.

Bill 20, Justice Statutes Amendment Act, 2022, does not talk about any of these issues. I'm surprised that this bill does not even care about what Albertans talked about in the government's previous legislation, when the government brought the bill into the House to make changes to the victims of crime fund. The people – professionals, semiprofessionals, agencies, organizations – who are working in our province for decades successfully helping people during their difficult and challenging times spoke against the legislation this government was proposing and eventually passed. The government ignored them all. The people are still concerned that the changes they made to the victims of crime fund eroded the capability of those very agencies. They were there when those very victims needed help.

This was done because the government did not consult with any of the stakeholders. They did not consult with the victims. They did not consult with the agencies. These agencies and the people who are directly impacted by that legislation spoke out loudly against the government efforts and changes eventually passed in this House.

If the government was serious or the Justice minister was serious about making changes in the justice system, this was the time to address those very issues. Not only the people and stakeholders and agencies were concerned with the changes made to the victims of crime fund, but also some of those programs have already acknowledged and recognized what exists in our justice system: lack of support, lack of funding, lack of staff. This bill does not tackle anything.

It's very hard for us to support this bill. The government spent three years, from 2019 to 2022 – I would call it a wasted opportunity. If they recognized the problem and still could not come up with a plan and funding and resources in three years, when will they do that? It means the government is not serious about it.

This is not what I hear from my constituents. This is not what I hear from racialized communities. Their concerns are very different. There was a big incident in my community a few weeks back. There was a young gentleman at the age of 16 who was killed in a very, very bad and violent crime, the family's only child, a 16-year-old boy.

9:20

The people are concerned about their safety. Those are the questions that they're asking. I attended the vigil at the school, and thousands of people came out in support. They were looking for answers from the politicians. Unfortunately, the family had to speak out at that place. None of the government representatives reached out to the family, and they did not even show up for any of the public events either. Those are the concerns. I think politicians need to have answers for those questions.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other members looking to join? We are on Bill 20. I see the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo has risen.

Member Ceci: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair, for the opportunity to speak in committee to this Justice Statutes Amendment Act, 2022. I appreciate the information sharing from my colleague, who works significantly with members of his community and was able to bring a piece or a perspective, I guess, to Bill 20 with regard to how individuals from racialized communities might see the Justice Statutes Amendment Act before us.

I had the opportunity in second to talk about this and to listen to my colleagues, particularly the critic for Justice from Calgary-Bhullar-McCall and the former Justice minister from Calgary-Mountain View. I can say that they centred in on several points, but the main takeaway for me and what I'd like to spend my time talking about is the victims of crime fund and the mess that's been made there by the UCP government.

You know, as a former Finance minister I certainly understand the desire to go looking for funds when you're in pretty dire straits in terms of revenues. We went through a significant negative WTI situation. These are challenges that both the bureaucracy and the cabinet council and the Finance minister and the Finance department struggle with because you've got to kind of understand where the revenues have cratered and what's going to backfill them.

It seems to me that the victims of crime fund was seen as an available pot of monies that happen as a result primarily of driving fine offences and the monies surcharged onto tickets, driving penalties. That probably seemed like a worthy and welcome amount of money to seize on to defer the costs of other police, protective, and justice system programs.

But today the situation is much different. Today the situation is a surplus in this province as a result of the significant rise in the price of oil. Regrettably, the world is in a different place than it was two, two and a half years ago, when these funds were seized on. The unfortunate crisis that is in Ukraine and the unconscionable actions of Russia have driven up the price of oil and energy resources in this world to, well, lengths that, frankly, you have to go back a lot of years, probably to – when was it? In 2004, '05, '06, somewhere in there, it spiked, but we haven't seen a spike in decades in this province.

Now we do. There is an overabundance of money in the treasury, and we don't have to take money away from – the government does not have to take money away from victims of crime anymore. They can go back to the way it was funded, Mr. Chair. They can go back and properly fund these programs out of treasury, not out of funds that are collected for people who have suffered horrendous personal circumstances as a result of crime in the community, crime in their homes, from their nearest and dearest sometimes.

The government is doing the wrong thing, and the government needs to change that. We as opposition members talked about this in 2020. We spent so much time. We had stakeholders come forward who had shared their most difficult personal circumstances with members of the media, with members of the public, with Albertans to try and get across how this is wrong. They're being denied what is theirs. There's less money for victims in the victims of crime fund now because of the government's actions, and this statutes amendment act further solidifies that wrongdoing. So, no, I won't stand up and support this. This act, this bill is doing wrong to victims, doing wrong to Albertans, and it doesn't have to be done.

We're in a different financial circumstance in this province now. The actions that were taken out of desperation before, to fund programs for justice, for prosecutors, salaries, don't have to be

done. But instead of correcting that, private members of this government are standing behind a wrongdoing to Albertans. It's unconscionable. We have raised it over and over and over again, and it has no effect at all, but it does have an effect on victims. It does have an effect on people who have been harmed by crime in this province, and they are not getting their due from this government.

A 45-day limit is put on the ability to access this fund now. Forty-five days. When someone has been traumatized, 45 days is not enough time. You are nowhere – and I'm not talking about, you know, having the experience. I'm talking about listening to victims, survivors, trying to understand what their reality is. The reality is they need more time. So why is a 45-day limit being put on? Why? Why is the victims of crime fund not funded properly? Why are prosecutors and other justice system programs being funded out of this? I don't think it passes any smell test anymore.

The other changes include the removal of the current injury benefit and the witness to homicide benefit. The removal of the witness to homicide benefit may have a negative outcome as therapy is expensive, and someone who has witnessed the homicide of a loved one will likely need it. Like, that's an understatement, obviously. Someone who has witnessed the homicide of a loved one will likely need therapy, but that benefit is taken away. I don't know who on the other side can defend this. I don't know why you would want to defend that.

9:30

The financial benefits are being narrowed, Mr. Chair, to the people who have experienced severe crimes. If witnessing a homicide of a loved one is not a severe crime, to be able to access benefits, I don't know where that's going in terms of what is a severe crime, then.

We talked long and exhaustively when the government introduced Bill 16 in 2020. We said that that's going to be a problem. We are here today saying the same thing. It is a problem. We know it's a problem. Survivors have come forward and indicated that the victims of crime fund does not meet their needs. Instead of addressing that, we have got a government who is plowing ahead, saving funds from treasury when there are surplus funds, when programs should be able to be funded. The government is nickel and diming victims so that they have to do GoFundMe pages. They have to raise funds themselves. They have to take every sort of action to try to address their needs where previously – I'm not saying that the victims of crime fund was perfect, but it was there, and it was doing the job.

There were significant monies in it, Mr. Chair. There were, as I understand, about 70-plus million dollars. That can get eaten up pretty quickly if you're talking about salaries. That can kind of whittle down quickly when you're talking about ongoing operational expenses, which is what salaries are, which is what program support is, ongoing operation. Why is ongoing operation part of a victims' fund? You have to ask yourself. Ongoing operations are part of administration, are part of doing business, are what governments do.

We're just seeing this mess that's been made of the victims of crime fund further, as I said, legislated and put into place, and I and my colleagues oppose that. We need to get back to thinking about the original intent of this fund. While there are many other parts of this bill – the Corrections Act, the Justice of the Peace Act, the Missing Persons Act, the Youth Justice Act – the most egregious part is the one that I have spent the time on and the one that Albertans, I think, recognize as something that should be addressed.

We think that the wide range of community- and police-based services that are getting assistance as well as prosecutors need to be

shifted, shifted to a place where the government acknowledges that they want to keep those programs going and properly fund them through available monies from treasury under the Ministry of Justice. That's what should be done, but instead we have to stand up and argue that victims should be treated properly. Any victim who is unable to access services because there are not the monies or there is a narrowing of parameters needs to hear this, needs to be aware that they are not getting the support that previously would have been offered to them.

I will at this point give way to a colleague who could probably argue better about the victims of crime fund and other things, but my opposition stays solid. Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you very much, hon. member.

Next I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore has risen.

Mr. Nielsen: Well, thank you, Mr. Chair. Happy to rise this morning and follow up on my colleague from Calgary-Buffalo's comments. I don't know if I'll be much clearer than you. I think you've, you know, made the point fairly succinct here.

As he was mentioning, we are seeing various changes within Bill 20, the Justice Statutes Amendment Act, 2022, changes across the corrections, justice of the peace, missing persons, victims of crime and public safety, and the youth justice acts. Now, as some of the opening statements said, some of this is housekeeping, which, of course, I don't necessarily have a problem with. There are always times where you have to look at language, update it because terms may have changed, procedures may have changed and you have to have the language that reflects that, which, of course, does actually, you know, get me to thinking: why didn't we necessarily maybe hand that down to the red tape ministry? We've seen that quite a few times with legislation, where it seems to be handed down to the red tape ministry to try to justify the \$10 million to \$15 million that the government is spending on this endeavour in order to, I guess, at least look like you're doing something.

We certainly saw some of the housekeeping pieces of legislation that came through there that were questionable at times, whether they're actually red tape or not. You know, my favourite one to think of was when the former associate minister crowed very loudly about cutting red tape for Albertans so that they wouldn't have to pay \$10 when cutting their Christmas trees. They still had to fill out all the paperwork that's required for that, but they didn't have to pay the \$10. That was humorous at best. So I'm wondering why perhaps some of these changes weren't handed down to the red tape ministry like we've seen in the past.

But in correlation with Bill 20 I'm seeing some similarities in terms of how some of the changes are being grouped together. We've seen red tape bills that have come forward where you've got, you know, pretty much nothing controversial being brought forward in terms of changes but mashed in an omnibus style with some very concerning changes, to say the least. We currently have Bill 21 that's before us that has this kind of combination although Bill 20 is not what I would consider omnibus because all of these changes are under, at least, one ministry. Although they are multiple acts, they do revolve around Justice, so I'm a little bit more forgiving in that part.

But, again, whereas we have pieces that are changing that I don't necessarily have a problem with, we see a very distinct failure, as my friend from Calgary-Buffalo had mentioned earlier, around changes to the victims of crime fund. I guess you could almost say that it's a bit of a pattern, Mr. Chair, where decisions that are being made by this government are penny-wise but very pound-foolish. You know, we have a need to make lives more difficult for diabetics by taking away insulin pumps, yet we seem to have the money to

go and chase Bigfoot. We seem to have to make the lives of AISH recipients more difficult and more uncertain, yet we seem to have plenty of money to hand out to very, very profitable major corporations. It's this type of thinking that really baffles me.

9:40

With the changes to the victims of crime fund, as my friend had stated earlier, you know, to deny these people access to services in times of great trauma and upheaval, potentially, in their lives begs the question of, you know: what's the government thinking here? Why is it they feel they need to do this? I mean, for instance, a change around having to report and access these funds within 45 days: Mr. Chair, I think everybody knows that for anybody experiencing, for instance, domestic violence or sexual crimes, the thought of even coming forward within 45 days – people can't get there. They're still trying to work through what even potentially just happened to them. What is this rush that the government has? Are they thinking, "Well, it's red tape, and we're trying to be more efficient"? You can't force these types of things to move forward. You have to work with the people experiencing these things.

So why they would come out with a victim or a survivor needs to access these funds within 45 days – come on. You have to come up with something at least a little bit better than that. Like, where did these 45 days come from? You know, what kind of consultations have you heard from victims, from survivors that said, "Oh, yeah; 45 days is plenty; not a problem"? I certainly haven't seen anybody come forward to me about that, and I've had the opportunity to interact over the years, not just over the course of the 30th Legislature but over the course of the 29th Legislature, when I got the honour to serve the constituents of Edmonton-Decore as well.

There's an organization that I sort of feel calls Edmonton-Decore home. The founder is a constituent, which is why I kind of, you know, try to lovingly make that connection with the riding. It's a support group for the victims of homicide in the Edmonton chapter here now. Some of the stories that these individuals tell, frankly, are absolutely heartbreaking. Mr. Chair. I cannot even begin to fathom trying to wrap my head around dealing with that, but these individuals are.

You know, with some of the changes, as my friend from Calgary-Buffalo had mentioned, around the funding of this program: there is so much more that could have been done with these funds. All I'd have to do is connect you with victims of homicide. I remember working diligently with them, trying to find some mental health supports for some of their members, because there was nothing out there for them. The victims of crime fund could have easily funded those kinds of supports for them. Quite frankly, I mean, I got lucky, Mr. Chair, and there was a little bit of help available through the PCN network. But, again, it's a little bit. There's so much more that could be done to help these folks.

Some people think that victims of homicide – I remember clearly this one story, Mr. Chair. Unfortunately, the individual's partner was involved in things that led to a very high-risk lifestyle, but that individual had no idea that that's what their partner was doing. That doesn't make the loss any less for them. It doesn't make the challenges that they end up facing any less. How can we help these individuals?

Again, these stories that I heard from the support group from victims of homicide and how they're trying to find ways, trying to find funding to be able to help their members cope with these losses: we could have easily made changes to help these folks. We have the money here, yet we've decided, "Well, we're going to siphon this off because we've got something else that we're more interested in doing." I mean, I'm sure there are members that can say that, well, these are changes that we can do to deal with other justice matters. Okay; fine. But, as I said, why then are you

spending money chasing around Bigfoot? I keep joking with people now: "What's next? Oogopogo?" Are you going to start chasing that around?

It's this thinking that the only way we can dig ourselves out, as they see it, is to go after the ones that can least afford to be – I don't know – targeted, used to try to achieve those goals. Yet there are other opportunities that we can take. We didn't have to give a great big corporate handout of \$4.7 billion. You know, I've talked to plenty of people, and they're saying that, well, they're not seeing the jobs being created for this money. We know for a fact that, I mean, there was one that just simply took the money and literally ran right for the border and crossed it.

I'm really hoping, perhaps, that members of the government will reconsider some of the changes. Again, I don't have problems with all of the changes in Bill 20. I get the housekeeping part, and that's fine. But why, going into an area, supposedly under, like I said, the guise of red tape reduction being more efficient, with all those great buzzwords – we're going to push a thumb down on those that can least defend themselves. At the very least, reconsider this 45 days. Come on. You're talking a month and a half. A month and a half.

We can do better, Mr. Chair. We have to do better, and we have an opportunity. We're here in Committee of the Whole. There are amendments that could be made. There are things that we could do differently. I would still like to hear some more discussion and debate about this. We can always talk about what changes could be best, but I definitely want to hear from the government side on how they arrived at this 45 days. That is just – that's unacceptable. You can't tell me that you found anybody that said that that was a good idea, that has experienced domestic violence, sexual crimes against them, that 45 days is plenty.

With that, like my friend from Calgary-Buffalo, I'll give way to some of my other colleagues to hear some of their other comments. Hopefully, we'll see some members of the government get up, provide some comments, answers, maybe, to some of the questions. I know that I've stated here, probably, some of the questions that my colleagues will also have around this. Again, when you have a bill where some changes are okay and other changes are very egregious and you expect me to be able to support that bill just because these other changes are okay – you know, I hate to say it, Mr. Chair. At this moment in time the way that these changes being proposed around victims of crime in Bill 20 – on that alone, I can't support it. I cannot in good conscience go back to people saying: yeah; I'm all in favour of giving you only 45 days to come forward. There's no way I can do that, and I won't.

Hopefully, we'll get a chance, maybe, to discuss this further, to propose some changes around that, and make services for people in times of great need, great crisis, great upheaval, and great loss so that they will get a little bit more of a fair shake than certainly what this section of Bill 20 is doing right now.

Thanks, Mr. Chair.

9:50

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

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

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the opportunity to rise and speak to Bill 20, the Justice Statutes Amendment Act, 2022. Now, as my colleagues have noted, we have some real concerns with a particular portion of this bill, that being that it essentially is looking to enshrine and make permanent some troubling changes that this government has made to the Victims of Crime and Public Safety Act, changes which, essentially, have taken significant dollars away from their original intent, changes

that have in fact made it more difficult for victims of crime to receive support.

Now, this is part of a troubling pattern with this government, Mr. Chair. They have a habit of robbing Peter to pay Paul. They made a number of promises, they have made a number of commitments, they have a number of ideological objectives, but rather than being direct with these with Albertans, rather than finding ways to fund those directly, they instead try to find ways using subterfuge and take a little from here, a little from there, take things away from other people to pursue their own ends. In so doing, they do a lot of damage. They hurt and disenfranchise a lot of Albertans. It's fundamentally dishonest and certainly not what I would expect from government.

In this particular case what we have are changes that this government first made when they introduced Bill 16 back in 2020, which changed the victims of crime fund to the victims of crime and crime prevention fund. Now, the fund had always been 100 per cent supported by a surcharge on fines issued by the police or the courts. Prior to that change the funds supported a wide range of community- and police-based services, and funding was available to individual victims of violent crimes to help with injuries and assistance with funerals, supplemental benefits for people with severe injuries, et cetera.

But this government, having run on a platform where they said that they wanted to show that they were going to reduce crime and put more dollars for that, saw the funds that were here for victims of crime and decided that they wanted to crack open that piggy bank. Bill 16 laid the groundwork for that, and indeed that is exactly what they proceeded to do. Now they are taking funds that were originally collected specifically to support victims of crime, and they are diverting them to other areas that have nothing to do with the victims of crime.

Now, they may claim, Mr. Chair, that, well, there were excess dollars there, there was a surplus in the account, you know, the need wasn't really there, so it was okay to redirect those dollars. But that is not what we are hearing from the actual organizations who provide those services or indeed from individuals who have been the victims of crime. Indeed, now they face further barriers under this government, where now they say that the victim must apply within 45 days of the crime occurring. Forty-five days. That's six weeks.

Now, imagine that you have been the victim of a serious crime, one that may have involved physical injury, one that may have involved serious emotional and psychological trauma. Imagine that you are also perhaps a marginalized individual, perhaps under the poverty line, perhaps have other challenges. Six weeks can go by pretty fast. If you don't know all of the systems that are in place, if you don't have all the supports, and even if you do, Mr. Chair, six weeks go by quickly.

But this government has decided, because they want to raid the victims of crime fund for their own political ends, to try to make themselves look better in their tough-on-crime approach, that they are going to put that cap on victims, force them to have only six weeks, and if you miss that deadline, tough luck; too bad. That is what they are saying to victims of crime in the province of Alberta, and they want to enshrine that now in law permanently through Bill 20. I think that's shameful, Mr. Chair. It is callous. It shows an utter disregard for the realities that individuals face, for the challenges that marginalized people, who are more often the victims of crime, face in these systems and are usually the ones, actually, who are in the greatest need.

But this government is choosing to increase bureaucracy and red tape for those individuals because they want to raid those dollars to make themselves look better rather than find those dollars – as my

colleague from Calgary-Buffalo noted, this government is not short on funds at the moment. They have record oil revenues. They've given billions away to profitable corporations. Why are they trying to save pennies in the context of a provincial budget on the backs of the victims of crime?

Again, Mr. Chair, shameful behaviour, but this government, again, is very fond of doing this. They like to find little pockets where they can steal back – well, pardon me; that's likely unparliamentary language; I will correct that and withdraw that particular term – where they can yank dollars out. To quote the Simpsons, perhaps yonk dollars back. But, seriously, what we are talking about is that they try to look for ways that they can take dollars under the table from folks who they figure are not going to be able to push back, who are not part of their political voting base.

Member Ceci: Over the table. They're taking them over the table.

Mr. Shepherd: Fair enough. The Member for Calgary-Buffalo notes that they're taking over the table. That's true. They're not being shy about this in some respects.

But, of course, the fact is they are taking away from marginalized groups, people in need. As I noted, this is a pattern with this government. You know, they actually raised the victim fine surcharge, Mr. Chair, raised it from 15 per cent to 20 per cent, expect it to provide an increase from \$40 million to \$60 million so that they can shuffle more of those dollars over to another portion. They didn't raise that to help more victims of crime. They raised that so they can shuffle those dollars over to their own priorities and other initiatives.

It's stunning to me, Mr. Chair. This government continues to do this in so many other areas. You know, they've taken a larger share of municipal fine revenues. Again, this government could be honest and could find its own way to raise more revenues. If it wants to take more dollars away from Albertans, they could do so directly and honestly. Of course, they don't do that. They do sneaky things like bracket creep.

In this particular case, if they want to talk about how they are funding more in terms of police services or other things in terms of law enforcement to make a safer province for Albertans, they're taking a larger share of municipal fine revenues, Mr. Chair. So they are taking dollars away from municipalities that were being used to protect and support the public. The ironic thing here is that as this government crusades against photoradar, for example, they're taking a larger share of those photoradar dollars from municipalities at the same time as they are making it more difficult for municipalities to proceed with photoradar.

Now, Mr. Chair, of course, our party has been quite clear about our position on photoradar as well. We had taken some actions, and certainly the government has taken some actions, but it is hypocritical that this government on one hand says that it wants to stop this tax on the backs of Albertans while it pockets more of the revenue. Indeed, the province takes now about half of the revenue that is raised through photoradar. This government has cut municipal funding for policing. So they're not content to simply take more dollars away from the victims of crime; they've taken more dollars away to actually pay for the folks that are trying to prevent the crime or prosecute the crime. Then they want to pat themselves on the back and talk about how great they are for protecting Albertans.

10:00

This is a government, Mr. Chair, that continues to pursue the idea of an Alberta provincial police force despite the fact that a majority

of Albertans reject that proposal. Pretty much every municipality in the province rejects that proposal because that proposal would cost Alberta approximately \$200 million more annually than what they currently spend. It would come with a \$366 million price tag for the transition, a transition which would take up to six years.

Again, this government is not interested in actually providing better protection for Albertans or in cost efficiency; it's interested in its own political grandstanding at the cost to Albertans, just as with these changes now they are taking dollars away from the victims of crime, making it harder for them to access services, making it harder for them to access supports, making it harder for the organizations which support these individuals. It is shameful, Mr. Chair, and it is unconscionable. It is the reason why I will not be voting in favour of Bill 20. Again, this government wants to brag about having balanced the budget, but you really have to ask: whose backs are they choosing to balance it on?

Now, as one of the members on the government side observed, yes, they have had a windfall of resource revenues, which is a really good reason why they don't have to pick on victims of crime or Albertans who use insulin pumps for that matter, Mr. Chair, another situation now where we have Albertans who are struggling, who are living with a chronic illness, requiring a simple piece of medical technology to allow them to live a normal life that saves millions in our health care system – those are the folks that this government feels that they should be taking dollars back from, not profitable corporations but individuals who need an insulin pump. These are the folks who they feel should live in fear and anxiety because of this government's choices. [interjections] Now, the members across are commenting and heckling. I can understand that. I'd feel uncomfortable if I was making these kinds of unconscionable decisions, too. I'd feel pretty conflicted.

What we have here is a government which, again, is not honest with Albertans, is not willing to be direct, looks for sneaky ways of subterfuge to try to shuffle dollars around and then hide the actual impacts of those decisions. That is what we have happening here with Bill 20.

Indeed, concerns continue to grow, and we've raised this previously, Mr. Chair. My colleagues have spoken out on this. We've proposed changes to protect the dollars that need to be available to support victims of crime. Indeed, Red Deer county council voted unanimously to call for the UCP to preserve a fund for victims of crime. The government did not listen.

Calgary resident Tarin Arndt, survivor of a serious physical assault – hit multiple times, pushed down a flight of stairs, and then her attacker went on to strangle her – said that if her assailant didn't kill her, she thought her posttraumatic stress disorder would. She had to take six months off work to access an intensive outpatient program to support her psychological and physical injuries. She applied to the victims of crime fund because it gave her hope. She said that it gave her a safety net, assurance that she wouldn't have to pay for services for something that she had never asked for. Her thoughts on this government's changes, Mr. Chair? "This . . . almost feels like another criminal act – it is stealing from the victims who need it the most." The government did not listen to Tarin.

Nikki Tighe, sexual assault survivor, didn't qualify for the victims of crime fund because she reported the crime over two years after her assault. Now, Ms Tighe said, "This money was meant to directly support those affected by crime. People like me need direct funds, and have not received it." She said that she did not feel that "taking money away from victims, and using it to fund policing initiatives in the province will help victims" like herself. She said, "Rather than creating incentives to take money away from the fund I want barriers reduced and more funds going

directly to victims." This government did not listen to Ms Tighe, and indeed with Bill 20 they show that they do not intend to listen to these victims of crime.

You know, in June of last year we proposed an amendment to the legislation that would've ensured 75 per cent of the victims of crime fund would be reserved for victims and victim services agencies. A compromise, Mr. Chair. Seventy-five per cent: that would leave 25 per cent for this government to spirit away to whatever initiatives they feel they want to put it into rather than actually finding constructive ways to provide funding for policing initiatives. The government rejected that; 25 per cent taken away from victims of crime was not enough for the UCP government.

As I've said, Mr. Chair, I consider it shameful. I consider it a betrayal of the intent of the victims of crime fund, taking away from those who need it most. There are many other ways that the government could fund these policing initiatives. There are many other approaches it could take. They have their record oil revenues now. They want to argue that this was necessary two years ago; fine. But it is not now. For them to choose to enshrine that in law in Bill 20 is not acceptable for myself or my colleagues on this side of the House, so we will be voting against Bill 20.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any members looking to join debate on Bill 20? I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora has risen.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair and to the colleagues who spoke before me for laying out some of our caucus' concerns with the bill as proposed. I will do my best to add to the constructive feedback, and hopefully, if enough of us make enough creative presentations of the facts for the government caucus, we can see some movement either through amendments or through opposition.

When I think about the title, Bill 20, Justice Statutes Amendment Act, 2022, I think about some of the promises that were made in the lead-up to the last election and some of the framing that was done on where the current government, the government that was given a mandate in the last election, stood in relation to victims, survivors, and Albertans who have experienced harm from others, who are seeking justice. Definitely, when I think about some of the lived experience of colleagues across the aisle, I know that there are folks there who probably would have, just knowing the statistics for Alberta, been the victims of crime in some way and that there are people there who have been part of law enforcement. I know that there are people who are retired Calgary city police as well as RCMP and others. I imagine that they have seen the impacts of injustice first-hand and have had to work with those who are victims or survivors in trying to seek justice.

I would say that when we saw a bill come forward that touched on five different pieces of legislation – those include the Corrections Act, the Justice of the Peace Act, the Missing Persons Act, the Victims of Crime and Public Safety Act, as well as the Youth Justice Act – I think a lot of people thought: let's see legislation that's going to bring about more justice and fairer compensation for the victims of crime. Certainly, that is on brand with some of the things that members across the aisle have in the past committed their life's work to and argued for in the lead-up to the last election. However, the results have not reflected the language that many have used in the past around respecting the order of law, respecting justice, and wanting to stand up for victims, or as we often say, survivors.

10:10

Let's touch just on that one piece of the five bills, the Victims of Crime and Public Safety Act changes. The changes largely make changes that the UCP already made permanent. They replaced references to death benefits with funeral expense reimbursement. I don't why. You know, families have different ways of grieving and of processing their grief. I know that when my dad died, he made it very explicit that he didn't want us to have a funeral for him. That was not where he wanted our energy to be spent. In the days leading up to and the days following his death, he wanted us to be together as a nuclear family, and for people who wanted to visit him in the lead-up to that, he certainly welcomed it. But a funeral was not part of what he wanted for his death.

To replace death benefit with funeral expense reimbursement – you know, he wasn't a victim of crime. He died of natural causes, but that wouldn't have honoured his wishes. I don't know why we are dictating for those who have experienced a death as a result of being a victim of crime that their compensation only can be focused on funeral expense reimbursement. There might be other ways that the family and community most closely connected to the victim want to process that and honour that.

According to the government that does not change any benefit that Albertans may be eligible for, but the change is to reflect that they felt that the term "death benefit" wasn't adequate and that there isn't a benefit from the death. Well, you know, why would they put this into law and why would they limit it specifically to funeral expense reimbursement? It seems like nickel and diming families who are already experiencing a significant amount of grief, so why is this the government's priority when it comes to talking to victims and survivors? The name of the benefit/reimbursement has been changed in the act.

There's also been a disestablishment of the Criminal Injuries Review Board. The board was already disestablished in the transition section in section 22 of the act. It strikes out the transition sections 19 through 23. This makes a number of controversial changes that the UCP has already made – it actually brings them into law. Most of the transition sections were in place to deal with a class-action lawsuit.

Again, why is the government making these kinds of sweeping, permanent changes that have been seen as quite controversial when they could be focusing on the things that survivors and those who identify as victims have been telling the government would make their lives better? It seems like this isn't an actual change to benefit survivors; this is a change to try to put the government in a better legal situation. Probably not where most Albertans would expect the government – people who have in the past certainly expressed very overt empathy for victims of crime: probably not what they expected from this government when it comes to making changes to address victims of crime.

As we see again, you can't trust the UCP to actually follow through on things that they claim to virtue signal when it comes to actually bringing forward laws to help ordinary families. The trust again and again is broken between this government in the words that they profess and the actions that they actually bring forward when it comes to making changes in law.

There are also some changes to the Youth Justice Act. Just a little backstory. I was in university for a while. When I was in university, there was a summer that I applied on a – oh, I was going to say "internship." Maybe one of my colleagues here can help me out, maybe the former minister of labour. The summer . . .

Member Ceci: STEP.

Ms Hoffman: STEP, summer temporary employment program, a program that was dissolved by the Jim Prentice Conservatives, brought back under the NDP. What's happened with that today? It's gone again?

Member Ceci: Yeah.

Ms Gray: It's gone.

Ms Hoffman: It's gone again. Okay. Well, again, another cut to important programs that help Albertans.

It was the summer, probably around 2001 or 2002, and the Youth Criminal Justice Act . . .

Member Ceci: You're young.

Ms Hoffman: Thanks. My colleague from Calgary-Buffalo just talked about how he thinks I'm so young. I really appreciate that. Sometimes it's nice to hear that from a learned colleague. He's also pretty young.

It was around that time that the Youth Criminal Justice Act came into force here in Alberta. This, of course, is a further iteration of that act. I was hired as a STEP student with Alberta Community Crime Prevention originally. These are the kinds of programs that are in place when you have a government that works in partnership to support university students in acquiring additional life experience and training and also wants them to be able to afford to pay their own tuition. At that time tuition was not cheap, but with a 40-hour-a-week job and a part-time job throughout the year I could afford to go to school and buy books and have a little bit of an extra, you know, quality of life in my budget.

Working on the Youth Criminal Justice Act, that had just come into place – and through John Howard I was later able to do some work with them on developing some resources for presenters to be able to use in schools to communicate with youth about what the changes were in law and what their rights but also what their responsibilities were, because I know that there were a lot of people trying to pretend that everyone just got a free ride in this country until the day they turned the age of majority, but that certainly wasn't the case. It was important to tell children, youth what their rights were under the law but also what their responsibilities were.

So I wish that there were more STEP grants available for university students who – many are already experiencing right now the summertime, where they're working their hardest trying to find ways to make enough money to cover even a fraction of the tuition that's gone up over the last three years under the UCP in the province of Alberta. Instead of being able to find more opportunities to enrich their own learning and work experience or resumé building by having opportunities to work for nonprofits like the Alberta Community Crime Prevention Association, we see that the current government has decided to cancel that program and also has decided to make more changes to things like this.

These are exactly the types of changes that we could have young Albertans engaged in supporting the development of and the education of. I'm sure there are so many Alberta youth right now who are sitting attentively listening to this debate. What are some of the changes to the Youth Justice Act? They probably won't hear about it through organizations like John Howard who've also seen their funding cut. If they are able to provide this additional ongoing education, I certainly appreciate that they do everything they can with the donations that they have and the limited resources that they do have, but certainly they're in a tougher financial situation than they once were.

Some of the changes are to align the provincial act here, the Youth Justice Act, with changes that were made to the federal Criminal Code. Some of the changes are that a notification to parents can be given by a peace officer rather than solely by the officer in charge, so downloading more responsibilities to more individuals. It updates a section on forfeiture. According to the government the changes won't be – there won't be changes in policy, but we certainly wish that there was more opportunity for people to give further feedback on some of these areas of concern.

There are also some changes to the Criminal Injuries Review Board. Injury has been winding down since Bill 16, the victims of crime bill, which was subtitled (Strengthening Public Safety) Amendment Act, and that cut injury and witness-to-homicide benefits, which the board was responsible for.

10:20

Cutting witness-to-homicide benefits. For most of us, when we escape from the realities of the everyday and we turn on something outrageous on Netflix and we see, you know, a re-enactment or a portrayal of something that could be horrific – and anyone who's watched a scary movie with me will know that even that makes me scream, and I'm watching it on TV, right? I'm watching it on TV from a distance. It's not my lived experience, but it creates an emotional response for the person watching it. Being an actual witness to a homicide in real life, often people have connections to those who are experiencing that kind of horrific death. Cutting the benefits for people who are witnesses to homicides seems cruel, and it seems hurtful and incredibly disrespectful to people who have gone through such often traumatizing experiences.

The government is making all these changes at a time where they are boasting about falling backwards into a surplus of revenue, revenue that they did not expect. They certainly weren't accounting for the price of oil to be as high or sustained for as long as it is currently. I hope that none of us saw the horrific war that's unfolding in Ukraine when we were expecting to run and thinking about what kind of things we wanted to implement in a platform, but to know that this current government, at the same time that they are bragging about having record revenues and all this additional surplus, is doing things like cutting the supports for those who've been witnesses to homicide, I think, is terrible. I think it is wrong-headed, and I think it doesn't reflect the kinds of changes that most people, when they heard that a Conservative government was bringing forward a justice bill, would expect to see in black and white as it relates to the way Albertans who are dealing with this kind of trauma are being impacted.

Previously the UCP has also reduced victims of crime benefits for things like injury benefits, suffering an injury as a result of a crime, and now thanks to the current government, the current Premier and the UCP, there are fewer benefits for those who've experienced injury as a result of a crime. I think that again speaks to the lack of compassion and empathy and solidarity that the current government feels with ordinary Albertans who have faced the hardships of being a victim of crime.

To do a little bit more backstory on some of the changes – actually, Mr. Chair, would it be possible to have a time check?

The Deputy Chair: Four thirty-five.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you.

In 2020 the UCP introduced Bill 16, which I've touched on a little bit in previous comments, which changed the victims of crime fund to the victims of crime and crime prevention fund, as also mentioned by my colleague the MLA for Edmonton-City Centre. The fund has always been 100 per cent supported by the surcharge

on fines issued by the police or by the courts. Previous to this change the fund supported a wide range of community and police-based services, and the funding was available to individual victims of violent crimes to help them deal with their injuries, assistance with funerals, and supplemental benefits for people with severe injuries.

When I think about this, I continue to reflect on the fact that these people have often gone through extremely difficult situations, horrific situations. When we think about that to the extreme, we think about those who are putting on a funeral for somebody who died as a direct result of being a victim of a crime. Bill 16 added an emergency accommodation or protective measures, access to counselling for sexual assault victims and families of homicide victims, and court support to victims and witnesses. That piece certainly would be a positive, making sure that those who are experiencing grief as a result of a crime have access to some supports for funeral expenses and counselling in particular.

When I think of one of the most recent very public murders that took place here in Edmonton, I can't help but think about the young man who was killed outside of a school. We've seen many youth charged with that crime here in Edmonton. I'm grateful that the family reached out and invited myself and some of my colleagues to attend the funeral, and I will say that it was an incredibly powerful memorial and a very difficult time for so many families who were in that room. It actually ended up being at least two rooms, maybe three rooms, because there were so many people who wanted to be there and show solidarity, including my colleague the MLA for Edmonton-Mill Woods and my colleague the MLA for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

When I think about the boys, the young men who were sitting at the front next to the open casket, and how much hurt you could very clearly see on their faces and the faces of so many others in the room and when I was thinking about the moment when the family began to move the body of the young man who had died as a result of this horrific murder out of the room, I still am overcome with the sound of so many women expressing their grief and sorrow vocally. It was really an incredibly powerful moment.

I couldn't help but think about the mom who was bearing her son and how, just 16 years earlier, his birth was a marker of so much hope and optimism for a family that had already sacrificed so much. One of the uncles who spoke at the funeral talked about everything the family gave up, including close relationships with family in proximity; their language, having to learn new languages; immigrating to a new culture; food; economic opportunities that existed there in their professions, that they had been trained in. Of course, like many families that come to Canada, their credentials, I imagine, didn't transfer directly. When I think about the nuclear family as well as the very broad extended family and the horrific . . . [Ms Hoffman's speaking time expired]

Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other members looking to join debate? I see the hon. Member for St. Albert.

Ms Renaud: Thank you, Mr. Chair. It's my pleasure to rise and speak to Bill 20, Justice Statutes Amendment Act, 2022. Of course, we know that this particular piece of legislation amends five different acts: the Corrections Act, Justice of the Peace Act, Missing Persons Act, Victims of Crime and Public Safety Act, and the Youth Justice Act.

Number one is the Corrections Act. It changes compensation rates for Alberta Parole Board members. They now can be set by

order in council as opposed to regulation, bringing that in line with other agencies, boards, and commissions, which is fine.

Number two is the Justice of the Peace Act. It gives the Chief Judge of the Provincial Court of Alberta discretion to designate a justice of the peace as either part-time or full-time, meaning that the Chief Judge can change a designation between full-time and part-time if the term has not expired or other conditions are met. I didn't actually understand the scope of this. How many people are we talking about? I actually didn't realize. The most recent stats that I could find are that there are 136 full-time equivalent judges – I think that not all work full-time – but there are only 40 justices of the peace. I wasn't quite sure of the scope of this, but it makes sense to give some flexibility.

The third piece of legislation that I wanted to touch on is the Missing Persons Act. This legislation will add a definition of medical information. Now, the act already had provisions that allowed access to health information. It now allows new TV footage or other video recording to be used in a missing persons case. I think that makes a lot of sense, to update legislation. I think we all understand the need for speed or the need to use any information at hand to retrieve or find a missing person as quickly as possible. It also adds a section that a justice of the peace can seal court records relating to a missing person if that interferes with an investigation or endangers people. Then there's a piece that changes the timeline for review by a special committee of the Legislature and then adds some regulatory-making power that gives the government the ability to define any term not defined in the act. Again, I think it makes sense for anything that speeds up or adds teeth to the actions that are required when there is a missing person.

10:30

I didn't realize until I did a little bit of research that, you know, in Canada in any given year there are between 60,000 and 70,000 people that go missing for a variety of different reasons. Thankfully, the vast majority are found within seven days.

There's a National Centre for Missing Persons and Unidentified Remains. The earliest stats that I could find were 2019, when they noted that in Alberta just over 3,500 people were reported missing and for a variety of different reasons: parental abduction, relative abduction, stranger abduction, runaways. You know, happily, they noted that in 2019 there was only one person that was a victim of human trafficking and went missing for that reason.

Now, a couple of questions, as I looked at this legislation, were that it would be really great to hear from the government side what kind of consultation was done. And if we're opening up this piece of legislation for amendment, why were some things left out? I think that we're really in a state of constant improvement. I think that any time we open up legislation, it's incumbent on us to ask: how can we make this better? How can we make these processes stronger, anything that we can do? What was the consultation that happened? Was there a review of tools like Amber Alert? Was there any review about required education? And then was there anything around changes to regulation?

I know that in the sector that deals with very vulnerable people, whether that's seniors that reside within continuing care that have disabilities of some kind or impairments – people with disabilities, sadly, regularly go missing for a variety of reasons. Sometimes it is because of inadequate staffing levels, actually, or inadequate housing. They're just in places that they shouldn't be. They're living on their own when they shouldn't be. Maybe they only have a couple of hours of home care as opposed to wraparound supports. Dementia has become a very serious problem, and people go missing. Was there a review of this sector? I would love to hear that from the government.

Unfortunately, more often than not we see legislation that comes before us that is questionable in terms of the consultation that was done. It's often very narrow. It's often just sort of friendly groups that have been consulted. When we ask more broadly to stakeholders, "Have you heard about this? Were you consulted by government? Do you have anything to add? Do you have any concerns?" we hear that they've not been included in that consultation process. It would be great to hear from government what the consultation process was like on this particular piece of legislation.

The next piece of legislation that will be impacted with Bill 20 is the Victims of Crime and Public Safety Act. Now, largely, the changes made with this act are to make the changes that the UCP brought in earlier permanent. As my colleagues have noted, it replaces all references to "death benefit" with "funeral expense reimbursement." According to government this doesn't change any benefit that an Albertan may be eligible for, but the change is to reflect that the term "death benefit" was inadequate as there isn't a benefit for death. Fair. There isn't really a benefit for death. The definition in the act stays the same, but the name of the benefit reimbursement is changed. That seems sort of largely an administrative change.

Now, I did want to stop and talk a little bit about the victims of crime. We know that there have been a lot of changes made to the victims of crime fund. There has been some serious spin coming from the other side about why they did what they did. There is a lot of money that has accumulated there, and instead of focusing on victims and individual Albertans, whether they be victims, whether they be witnesses, whether they be families of victims, a lot of the funds here have been used to increase policing and address rural crime.

Now, I am not saying that rural crime or urban crime is not a problem. It absolutely is, and we absolutely have to pay attention and do what we can to address some of the root problems. Now, we can have a whole other discussion on what that looks like, to address root problems, because this government has been horrible at doing that. They have increased poverty. We know this. They have slashed programs that address poverty. We know this.

One very simple example that nobody can turn away from is the fact that right away after being elected, this government used an omnibus bill to deindex benefits that were already well below any line of poverty, so income support. We know there are very vulnerable people that are on income support. Often these are disabled people that haven't yet applied for AISH, haven't qualified for AISH for whatever reason, are chronically unemployed, are mentally ill, are struggling with addiction, and they're trying to live on a base rate of income support that is actually under \$900 per month for a single person. That is awful. You can't live on that. We know people have systematically been removed from this program. Supplemental benefits to this program that actually made it sort of passable have been systematically eliminated. We know this government has made poverty worse, which is a root cause of crime.

Once again, there's an example of this government's very short-term thinking, thinking in terms of election cycles, thinking in terms of budget cycles or talking points. They are not addressing the root cause of crime, one of the root causes, which is poverty. They cut affordable housing. They cut income supports. They do all kinds of things, and then they say: oh, but we're going to, you know, give policing more dollars. Well, that's fine, but you can't do one thing and not the other, and you can't do one thing and then claim that you're making the problem better. You are not. This government is not. Albertans know it. We know it. Everybody knows it.

There's also another problem. I wanted to address one of the changes that is made to witnesses of crime. Now, I can remember in January – it was around mid-January. It was a really cold morning in 2015. My office at the time was at LoSeCa Foundation in St. Albert. That is right across the street from the Apex Casino. It's no longer called Apex, but – actually, is it called Apex? Apex Casino was right across the street. We actually had a board retreat early in the morning, so I was headed to the office to meet with our board and saw all of these police cars, which is very unusual in St. Albert, surrounding this casino.

Now, there was a horrific incident that occurred there. I'm sure many in this House will recall, sadly, that that was where Constable David Matthew Wynn, who was 42 years old at the time, who was married and a father, who was an RCMP officer, was shot in the head and died. He was shot in that casino. He wasn't the only victim that early morning. I think it was about 3 o'clock in the morning that he was shot, but also Constable Derek Walter Bond, who was 49 years old, was an auxiliary officer with the RCMP, who was unarmed, was also shot. He did not die.

But this horrible, horrible crime happened early in the morning, 3 o'clock in the morning. The RCMP were there investigating I believe it was a stolen vehicle. It was a pickup truck in the parking lot of the Apex Casino. They went inside, and whatever happened happened. There was, obviously, a fatality inquiry after the incident, and it was noted that Constable Wynn was shot in the head, and it was at such close range that there was gunpowder residue on his forehead.

Now, I'm not telling you this to exploit this crime. I'm telling you this because I met some of the witnesses to that crime. There was a couple that I met not that long after the crime. Actually, weirdly enough, I met them in MP Cooper's office in St. Albert as they were trying to get some benefits as they were completely unable to return to normal life after witnessing the shootings that they saw at 3 o'clock in the morning in that casino in St. Albert. They were just unable – unable – to get the benefits that they needed.

I do believe that at the time they ended up on income support, which – as I noted earlier, income support is literally under \$900 a month for a single person. You can't live on that. So as a couple – let's be generous – maybe they both got \$900. Doubtful. A couple cannot live on under \$2,000 a month safely. It's not possible. Anyway, I met them there, and just hearing about their struggles and hearing about their complaints, about the limited access to even counselling at the time – because they were witnesses, they could not get access to the other supports that victims of crime got. They couldn't get access to the amount of counselling that they needed. I've not been witness to a crime like that in my lifetime. I'm blessed that way. I cannot imagine what this couple went through, to see that right in front of them at 3 o'clock in the morning at a casino in St. Albert.

10:40

Anyway, fast-forward to a couple of weeks ago. I was at the St. Albert chamber Lifestyle Expo, which is a trade fair in St. Albert, at Servus Place. I was there for the weekend, you know, meeting constituents and meeting people that were stopping by. This couple came by. I looked at them, and they seemed vaguely familiar, but it had been years. They introduced themselves as this couple that I had met many years ago. I think it had been in 2017, so a couple of years after the shooting. They let me know who they were. It was: oh, my goodness; nice to see you. We had a little chat, and then they said: can we take you aside and tell you how it's been? Sure.

So we walked to the side, and we were chatting. This couple told me what life had been like from the time I met them in 2017 to

2022. Because they had not received the support that they needed, things had gotten progressively worse. They didn't have access to mental health supports. They ended up with some very severe addictions. One of the couple ended up with a pretty severe cancer diagnosis and was continuing to have treatment. I'm not entirely sure what that treatment plan looked like. He seemed quite positive that he would survive, but he had successfully transitioned from income support to AISH, thank goodness.

Now, let me just say that AISH benefits were also deindexed and are also well below the poverty line, but it's better than income support. So he had successfully transitioned to AISH. I'm guessing he was successful with his AISH application because there was an end-of-life diagnosis, because that's in the regulations. But, whatever, he had transitioned to AISH. But they had told me what the impact was in those years of not having the mental health supports they needed after witnessing a crime like that. Substance abuse was still an issue. Chronic unemployment, obviously, was still an issue. And then there was a physical disability or physical chronic illness.

These are real people. These are residents of St. Albert. They just happened to be at a casino at 3 o'clock in the morning in January of 2015, and they were witnesses to a crime, to a horrific shooting that ended the life of one RCMP officer and forever changed the life of an auxiliary RCMP officer. They'll never be the same. Actually, I think the city of St. Albert will never be the same.

The day of the funeral, that was held, actually, at Servus Place, I can remember lining up along the streets. The fire trucks were all there with the flags, and there were thousands of people lining the streets to pay their respects. I can remember meeting Shelly Wynn, you know, years after. It was a tragedy, but I'm not telling you about this crime because of the nature of the tragedy. I'm telling you about this because real people are impacted by this. For this government to make supports even more difficult for Albertans is a tragedy.

We come to this place to represent our constituents and to do right by them, and when we hear about where there's a hole or what we need to fix, it's incumbent on us to do better. Time and time again we stand up in this place and we tell the UCP government members and ministers and Premier that this is a problem. I'm more than willing to give you the benefit of the doubt. Perhaps this was an oversight. Perhaps this was a failure to consult. But you have time to fix it. Please fix it. It's a problem.

There are some positive things in this legislation. I think, you know, there are usually positive things in the legislation. Some of them are housekeeping to make things better, to make things faster, to reduce time, to update, and that is fine. But I think along with my colleagues we have gone through a few of the pieces of legislation that should probably be fixed, that should be altered.

I would love to hear from government members or from a minister to talk about their consultation. What did that look like? Who was consulted? How do you know that you did the best job that you could to make this legislation the best piece of legislation that you could?

I know that I would feel quite comforted to know that that work was done because I don't trust this government in terms of consultation. I have seen time and again that changes made impact people's lives in a very negative way, and I think that a lot of the time there are unintended consequences.

I know this government changed payment dates for AISH. Do I think they did it to harm people? No, I don't think that there was a malicious intent. I don't. I think that there was a failure to consult. I think that there was a failure to ask people who will be impacted by the legislation what that would do for them, and that caused harm. That caused people to be evicted, to be threatened to be evicted, to be unable to buy bus passes. It caused a lot of stress and

confusion to people that – let’s be honest about this – are challenged sometimes to understand changes. Change is sometimes difficult. So I don’t think that there is always malicious intent, but I think that when you know better, I hope that you do better.

Mr. Chair, can I get a time check?

The Deputy Chair: One and a half.

Ms Renaud: Okay.

With that, I am going to end my comments and take my seat. Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

I see the hon. Minister of Justice and Solicitor General has risen.

Mr. Shandro: Well, thank you, Mr. Chair. As has been noted before, this piece of legislation, Bill 20, the Justice Statutes Amendment Act, 2022, is amending various different pieces of legislation under JSG: the Corrections Act, the Justice of the Peace Act, the Missing Persons Act, the Youth Justice Act, and the Victims of Crime and Public Safety Act.

It seems that most of the comments from our friends opposite have been related to amendments related to the Victims of Crime and Public Safety Act. I point out that these are really housekeeping changes that are proposed for the Victims of Crime and Public Safety Act. The plan for this piece of legislation is to simply clean up some of the outdated wording and make the language more sensitive to grieving families.

I’ll give an example. One would be that the amendment would be to rename the “death benefit” to “funeral expense reimbursement.” This is in further response to advice that we’ve received from various interest groups about how using the word “benefit” when talking about the criminal death of a loved one is a concern. We wanted to be respectful to those families who are grieving, to be able to make that type of housekeeping change.

We’re also proposing changes to remove items that are no longer required; for example, the references to the old Criminal Injuries Review Board, of which in the past I had actually been a member, Mr. Chair. These references to the CIRB and provisions were only needed while a class-action settlement was completed. That settlement is now complete, so the board is no longer needed.

What we have heard, though, from members opposite is discussion about things related to victims of crime, which is actually not in Bill 20. I’ve heard a lot of concerns alleged about 45 days. Look, Mr. Chair, what I’d point out is that not only is this not in the legislation, but what our friends opposite are talking about is related to a review that two MLAs had done regarding victims’ services units and how victims’ services are provided throughout the province.

We are now reviewing the report that came out of the work that those two MLAs had done, and we intend to implement those changes. In the meantime, on a temporary basis two years ago, there were changes that were made to provide a temporary victims of crime assistance program. That was introduced, as I said, two years ago. It was designed only to provide victims of crime immediate access to emergency-based services and supports while other options were not accessible for an interim period while a future program was then being developed, coming out of, as I said, the report that came from those two MLAs.

10:50

Now, because the program was created specifically to address the immediate needs of victims in the aftermath of a crime, applications were to be made within 45 days of when the crime occurred. However, we did hear feedback from various folks, and the

feedback was that the 45-day limit not always could be met. But I would point out that in policy – it’s not in legislation – that 45-day limit could be extended based on a review, and I understand that that had occurred in this temporary victims of crime assistance program. Now, we are currently reviewing the policy and are planning to extend the limit to two years in the near future. The new two-year limit could be extended further upon further review to account for historical crimes. So that is work that we are doing.

Again, Mr. Chair, this is not related to the legislation at hand. I’m happy to clarify the misconceptions that our friends opposite have about this legislation. With that, I will . . . [interjection] Okay.

Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. minister.

Are there any members looking to – I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood has risen.

Member Irwin: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I am pleased to rise on Bill 20. I believe I’ve not spoken to it yet although I’ve read a lot about it, so it’s always a little bit confusing. I really appreciate the minister joining debate, and I appreciate very much his comments although I would – darn. I would have liked to get a little bit more clarity on victims of crime in particular. Admittedly, I was chatting with my colleague about pressing matters, but I do believe I heard that this bill is not – you know, my colleagues and I were chatting a lot about victims of crime and the egregious cuts to the victims of crime fund.

I believe that the minister was alluding to the fact that the victims of crime fund is not in fact directly implicated in this legislation. I definitely beg to differ from my understanding of Bill 20, the Justice Statutes Amendment Act, 2022, so if there is somebody else who can provide some clarity because it is quite clear that this bill amends multiple acts, including the Corrections Act, the Justice of the Peace Act, the Missing Persons Act, the Victims of Crime and Public Safety Act, and the Youth Justice Act.

In the short amount of time that I have, I want to talk about victims of crime. Again, I’m happy to get some clarity as to what the minister was referring to. Essentially, what I see in Bill 20 is that the changes under the Victims of Crime and Public Safety Act basically make the changes that the UCP talked about earlier – gosh, that would have been in 2020, I think, when they started having conversations around victims of crime – permanent.

You know, I was sort of on the front lines when initially the conversations around changes to victims of crime came up. Immediately I had multiple women – they were actually all women – who reached out to me and either talked about how the victims of crime fund was life saving or talked about how they were now experiencing barriers in accessing funds through the victims of crime fund. I think about the stories that were shared with me around how without those funds some women would have never – again, it’s not just women; those are just the stories that are top of mind for me – been able to access critical counselling and therapy supports.

As I’m sure most folks in this Chamber are aware, counselling is expensive. It’s out of reach for many Albertans, particularly Albertans who don’t have access to benefits, right? You know, we’re talking upwards of \$200, sometimes more, for a one-hour session. If you’ve been a victim of a horrific crime, you’re going to need more than five sessions, which is \$1,000, which is the cap.

You know, oh, gosh, I have to say it again, because it’s very fresh in people’s minds right now, that it seems like this government continually just hopes that vulnerable folks can access supports on their own, that they have benefits and that they’ll be able to pick themselves up by their own bootstraps sort of thing, and we saw that very recently with the cuts to the insulin pump therapy

program, right? Essentially, again, we're still seeking clarity on exactly what the next steps are.

I was inundated, after sharing my questions to the minister yesterday, with responses from people saying, like, you know: there's no way that I can afford this on my own, and this program was very much life-saving. So it's similar. I'll get back to Bill 20, but again it's a similar attack by this government on vulnerable folks. Folks with type 1 diabetes may no longer have access to life-saving diabetes supports. Folks who need access to critical therapy and counselling may not have access.

And the other big challenge we saw with victims of crime was the introducing of a 45-day window for applications for the fund. As has been said countless times in this Chamber, including this morning, somebody who's been a victim, a survivor of a violent crime – first of all, we know the statistics show that many survivors of sexual violence may not even report, and if they do report, it takes time. It takes a whole lot more time than a 45-day window.

Mr. Schow: The minister just clarified this.

Member Irwin: If the Member for Cardston-Siksika would like to stand up and provide more clarity . . .

Mr. Schow: I don't need to. The minister just did.

Member Irwin: . . . because I'm seeing in the act victims of crime – and perhaps the chair can remind folks to speak through him. Certainly, I've said it twice now. I would love just a bit more clarity around victims of crime. Again, the heckling of me is not too helpful. If I can get a little bit more clarity because, again, I'm reading the bill, I've got it in front of me, and that's what I'm seeing.

Again, you know, it's got to be tough to be a UCP MLA right now – right? – with countless examples of cruel, indefensible cuts. I'm hearing from folks in many of these ridings who are just so upset. The diabetes example is just one. I won't name them, but a number of rural supporters reached out to me and thanked us and our whole team, including my colleague from Edmonton-City Centre and our leader and others, for speaking out on this. They said that they're getting nothing – they're getting no response from their rural MLAs – and how happy they were that we continue to raise this issue.

So continue to take your constituents for granted. There are a lot of people who have diabetes in this province. There are a lot of people in this province who've been victims of sexual assault, sexual violence. In fact, the stats show that it's roughly 1 in 4 Albertans. If you continue to take every group of Albertans for granted, it's going to come back and bite you.

With that, Mr. Chair, I would like to conclude my remarks.

The Deputy Chair: Are there any other members wishing to join debate?

Seeing none, are you ready for the question on Bill 20, Justice Statutes Amendment Act, 2022?

Hon. Members: Question.

[The clauses of Bill 20 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

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

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Deputy Chair: Any opposed? That is carried.

I see the hon. Member for Cardston-Siksika.

11:00

Mr. Schow: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I move that the committee rise and report Bill 20.

[Motion carried]

[Mr. Milliken in the chair]

The Acting Speaker: I see the hon. Member for Calgary-Klein.

Mr. Jeremy Nixon: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Committee of the Whole has had under consideration certain bills. The committee reports the following bill: Bill 20.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Does the Assembly concur in the report? All those in favour, please say aye.

Hon. Members: Aye.

The Acting Speaker: Any opposed, please say no. Carried and so ordered.

Government Bills and Orders Second Reading

Bill 23 Professional Governance Act

[Adjourned debate May 10: Mr. Dach]

The Acting Speaker: I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods has risen.

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise in second reading to speak to Bill 23, the Professional Governance Act. This is a big bill. This bill is going to replace nine current pieces of legislation; namely, the Agrology Profession Act; the Architects Act; the Chartered Professional Accountants Act; the Consulting Engineers of Alberta Act; the Engineering and Geoscience Professions Act; the Land Surveyors Act; the Professional and Occupational Associations Registration Act, POARA, which regulates 13 occupations; the Regulated Forest Management Profession Act; and the Veterinary Profession Act. That explains why this is a large piece of legislation.

Bill 23 was introduced to bring in more transparency and consistency when it comes to professional regulatory organizations, when it comes to making sure that these 22 PROs are operating in a way that protects the public interest, that there are clear and consistent guidelines, and that it is fair and transparent for Albertans to understand how they work.

Now, this bill that I hold in my hand, Mr. Speaker, is certainly not the complete story, and in second reading I hope to touch on a few of my concerns when it comes to Bill 23, starting with the amount of detail that will be in regulation and schedules. I'd like to talk about the impact that this bill will have on PROs of different sizes. I'd like to talk about how this bill is going to impact timelines for those PROs, the feedback we've gotten on the consultation that went into this bill, the new powers that this bill is going to give to the minister, the impact this bill will have on advocacy, and the modernization elements of it. We'll see if I can touch on all of those pieces within 15 minutes.

When I say this bill is not the complete story, what I mean is that this bill is deferring a huge, fundamental amount to regulations, and they anticipate there will be profession-specific schedules that need to be created in consultation with these professions, with a timeline

that's already been set out with the announcement that they hope to have this all complete by January.

[The Speaker in the chair]

Let me tie this into some of my comments on consultation with stakeholders. A number of these 22 organizations have said that the consultation up to this point has been incredibly high level, very information out. They were not given drafts of the legislation in advance of its introduction. That sometimes is not possible, but certainly for something as fundamental as the legislation that governs their existence, I know the stakeholders were hoping to have more insight prior to this part. Now they're in a position of having to negotiate with the government to create their profession-specific schedules as well as all of the accompanying regulations that will bring this piece of legislation into action. Now, on top of that, they're also going to need to create their bylaws, and that's set out in the act, how that will happen. This is a huge amount of decision-making and work that is not available for us to discuss here in the act.

One of my major concerns with Bill 23 is how much has been deferred to the regulations and the specific schedules and how much uncertainty there is for the impacted stakeholders and for the organizations that are going to be impacted by Bill 23. I will suggest to you, Mr. Speaker, that we have reached out to all of these 22 organizations, and it is not just my concern about the timelines and the lack of consultation. They shared those concerns as well. Certainly, they are very concerned about how limited the consultation has been so far and concerned that there was a predetermined outcome with the consultation as it took place so far.

The stakeholders, the 22 professional regulatory organizations, who collectively represent hundreds of thousands of working professionals in our province, who contribute to the economy, who contribute to our great province here in Alberta, are concerned. There's no way for the Official Opposition to really understand the ultimate direction that the government will go with the regulations and the schedules, because they do not exist, and I imagine the Official Opposition will not be invited to participate in those conversations. So here we are trying to advocate on behalf of these organizations with very, very little insight as to what that is going to look like and what the final form will be. That's an area of significant concern.

Now, the current nine acts also have 28 regulations, and one of the reasons for Bill 23 to exist is the idea that it's going to streamline, it's going to reduce the number of pieces, and it's going to modernize, which is absolutely correct because some of those pieces of legislation are 20, 30 years out. One of, I think, the positive things of Bill 23 is some of the modernization around allowing PROs to acknowledge the existence of electronic communication. Legislation written 30 years ago really didn't address e-mail, didn't address things like virtual meetings, which, of course, have become far more the norm through the pandemic. I think some of that updating, that modernization is positive, but there's so much more in this act.

I'd like to talk a little bit about the new powers that have been granted to the minister as well as the creation of a new role, the PGOs, the professional governance officers, because the changes and the new powers given to the minister have been described to me as incredibly heavy handed. They've been described to me as an overreach. While the government is pointing to professional regulatory legislation in B.C. as where this was modelled from, some of those new ministerial powers that are being described as incredibly heavy handed don't exist in the B.C. legislation.

In the news release and the announcements around Bill 23 I did not see any good explanation for why there are all these new powers for the minister, specifically powers that I know stakeholders are interested in learning more about because it addresses their fundamental existence, including the minister being able to revoke a PRO's designation entirely, the minister being able to appoint an administrator for the PRO. So if the minister feels that a PRO is not operating in the public's best interest or is not serving the Alberta public, if there are concerns of safety, appointing this administrator who can then be empowered to essentially run the PRO on behalf of the minister.

My question to this government is: have there been situations where this type of intervention, this very extreme taking over of an organization by the minister through his agent, has been necessary? In my time working with these 22 organizations, each one has, to my mind, approached the work they do in the public interest with professionalism and with a deep sense of responsibility. I'm very curious about the new ministerial powers of appointing an administrator as well as the empowering of the professional governance officers and all of the powers they are doing to oversee, to make sure that the public confidence is maintained, and to require PROs to comply with any directions of the PGO. What limits are there to this power? Again, just fundamentally, why did the government see this need? Are there examples in history of these PROs going off the rails and causing serious harm? In my time as a member of this Legislature, these past seven years, that's not something that I have been aware of. Now, the stakeholders impacted are quite concerned about what this may mean.

11:10

The minister is also going to be empowered to propose the amalgamation of two or more PROs. This is something that has happened and, in fact, happened during my time as minister of labour. But prior to this legislation I believe it was voluntary, negotiated. Two organizations coming together and choosing to combine for a variety of positive benefits, coming to that negotiated solution rather than the minister coming in and saying: okay; you two, you need to combine and play better together; I think that'll be more efficient. I'm very curious, given that we have seen successful amalgamations in forestry and accounting because of the groups involved choosing to take those steps, why Bill 23 includes the minister's power to propose amalgamation and to recommend amalgamation.

Of course, I'm certain that the stakeholders are quite concerned around the revoking of a PRO's designation, when and how that may be used and finding out more. Now, those concerns potentially could be allayed with some great communication between this government and the stakeholders. But I'll remind you, Mr. Speaker, that I've already spoken to the concern that there was not robust consultation on this and not a lot of information offered.

We've spoken a little bit about the modernization, some of the new powers, and the need, I think, for some examples. For those who are following along at home, section 20 was one of the sections that I'm concerned about, the revocation of designation and understanding more about what that would look like and in what cases that might be used and whether or not these types of sections are mirrored in other jurisdictions.

We've talked about consultation. I'll probably talk about that a few more times throughout my remarks.

I would also like to really just flag at this point that when we talk about 22 professional regulatory organizations, we are not talking about a homogeneous group. We are talking about some very, very different groups. I have not had the opportunity, Mr. Speaker, to check every single PRO of these 22, but, as an example, the

Association of School Business Officials of Alberta is now covered by Bill 23 rather than POARA, which I spoke about earlier.

Now, I mention them because this is a group that has 180 members. I believe they're organized with a voluntary board and maybe a small staff. Similarly, the Alberta Shorthand Reporters Association is a group that represents 350 members, and they have eight working members who form their volunteer council. So we've got two groups here that are very small, represent a few hundred – 180 in one case, 350 in another – members, and they will be falling under Bill 23, whose regulations are also going to apply to APEGA. APEGA is 70,000 members, Mr. Speaker. APEGA has a council. It has major staff with three different departments. It's operated by boards and committees. It has offices in Edmonton and Calgary. The work that APEGA needs to do in the public interest to manage its memberships, to manage its registrations is going to be significantly different than what the Alberta Shorthand Reporters Association and the Association of School Business Officials need to do. I'm concerned about so many of the sections of this legislation applying to all 22 organizations equally.

Now, I do want to recognize that there will be regulations and there will be profession-specific schedules, but this could be a lot of work for the implementation of eight volunteer members.

Oh, good heavens, I'm out of time already. I haven't even talked about several of my concerns. I thought this might happen. I look forward to the ability to talk more on Bill 23 as we continue, but certainly consultation with stakeholders is going to be incredibly important, finding out more about the details and the regulations and the schedules – time check, Mr. Speaker? – and making sure that we have a better understanding of how this January time frame is going to be met. These are some of the concerns that I have with Bill 23.

In my last, I think, 40 seconds or so I do want to flag that in section 67 this bill also implements some new timelines that I think could be incredibly difficult. Now, it's supposed to be aligning with the Labour Mobility Act and the fair registrations act, but the fair registration practices office and the fair registrations act put into legislation that PROs needed to make an interim decision within six months. This act says final decision within four months, and I'm very curious about how that was decided because the 2020 baseline questionnaire survey that was sent out to all these PROs never even asked them how long it takes to get to these decisions. So how does the government know that four months is going to be sufficient, especially for an organization as large as APEGA?

The Speaker: Hon. members, Bill 23 for second reading. The hon. Member for Edmonton-City Centre.

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the opportunity to rise and speak to Bill 23, the Professional Governance Act. My colleague from Edmonton-Mill Woods, I think, has very ably laid out a number of real concerns that we have with this bill. With this bill, of course, we are here at second reading, so hopefully there is going to be opportunity for us to hear from the minister, from some of the members on the other side on a number of these questions, because as my colleague noted, this is a big bill.

This is an incredibly ambitious bill on behalf of this government, and there are many questions amongst the broad swath of regulators that are going to be affected by this legislation. Indeed, a lot of folks have started to take a look at it, you know, and Field Law did a review. Their comments on this bill were that for regulators this bill represents a massive change, leaves many critical details to regulations and schedules, and regulators will need to carefully

review the transitional provisions, plan and engage with the ministry to ensure that these critical details are considered carefully.

Mr. Speaker, that immediately suggests to me, if they are saying that regulators will need to look at this very closely, plan how they're going to engage with the minister on this bill, that the minister perhaps has not done his work. If the fact is that it's going to be incumbent on regulators to sort through the mass of this bill, the many details, all of the potential regulations in order to be able to advocate to the minister that this does not affect them in a drastically negative way, that says to me that the minister should not be here with this bill yet. There is clearly a lot more consultation that needed to be done. There is clearly a lot more detail that needs to be on the table to understand the kinds of impacts this is going to have.

Again, this is a habit of this government, to bring substantive, massive bills into this House and then defer all of the actual meat of it to regulations, asking members in this House to debate and then approve considerable new powers for government with no details on how they actually intend to use them. Indeed, one of the substantial problems here is that again we have a bill before this House which proposes to substantially expand ministerial powers. Now, I've spoken at great length in this House, Mr. Speaker, about the number of times this government has brought this forward, attempted to drastically expand powers of ministers, and it has ended very badly.

We have seen how this government's ministers like to use these kinds of powers. It is often in ways that have utterly broken the trust of Albertans, have caused serious push-back, and forced this government then to have to retract on its actions, Bill 10, of course, being the one example where they awarded new and sweeping powers to the Minister of Health and certainly every minister in the government in the midst of a public emergency to create full, entirely new legislation without ever setting foot in the Legislature. They had to walk that one back, Mr. Speaker, at the cost of great time and expense.

11:20

Now, the other concern I have here, Mr. Speaker, is what they intend to do with this power they intend to award themselves. The minister is being given the power to determine the scope, the bylaws, even the existence of every regulatory body in the province of Alberta. My concern is that in many respects we have seen that this is an incredibly vindictive government, condescending, patronizing in its approach to those which fall under its governance.

I want to take a walk back, Mr. Speaker. If we want to take a look at how this government has interacted with regulatory bodies in the province of Alberta, let's dial the clock back to the summer of 2020. The then Minister of Health, having made disastrous attempts, after tearing up the provincial agreement with the Alberta Medical Association, with physicians in the province of Alberta, again through legislation that this government had passed, adding those new powers to the minister, then attempted to force through disastrous changes that had multiple MLAs in his own caucus rebelling against him because of the drastic impacts this was having in rural communities, where we saw entire teams of physicians either threatening to withdraw services or, in many cases, actually withdrawing services because the changes this minister wanted to force through would have made their ability to practise impossible.

So this government's own members had to push back against that minister to get some changes. How did the minister respond to that? Was that a moment of humility for that minister? Was that a moment where the minister sat back and reconsidered whether taking that kind of bullying and condescending approach towards

physicians would be harmful to the goals that he actually had set out, not to mention the actual access to health for Albertans? No.

What we saw instead is that that minister then wrote a letter to the College of Physicians & Surgeons of Alberta. He wrote to them and said: I want you to change your standards to stop doctors from being able to withdraw their services. He wrote to them and said: you have until July 20 to change your standards to stop Alberta doctors from leaving their practices en masse. Now, the college registrar at that time replied that, well, there was no evidence that the current practice standards were in fact putting the safety of any patients at risk. Now, certainly, the situation was embarrassing the minister, it was certainly showing how poor the approach of the government was, but it was not in fact putting the safety of patients at risk. But the minister decided that rather than actually try to change his behaviour or reconsider the poor policy of the government, he should instead go to the CPSA and dictate that they change their standards so that he could continue with his aggressive approach.

That is what concerns me here, Mr. Speaker. We have seen with this government that the powers they already have, they use badly. They use them not in the best interests of Albertans. They don't use them in the best interests of supporting the professions. In this case doctors were very clear that to make the kinds of changes that the government was pushing for in the way they were pushing for them would essentially be shackling physicians to their clinics, to their practice, making it impossible for them potentially to be able to take a job elsewhere, to retire if they so choose. These are members that talk often about freedom and freedom from government regulation and government interference, but they are more than happy to weaponize it when they feel it suits their political ends.

I am concerned that with what we have here in Bill 23, awarding once again sweeping new powers to a minister with very little detail on how all of that's going to actually operate, all of that being deferred to regulation at some point down the road, which, again, will be done behind closed doors by the minister himself – I think there's good reason to question that. Albertans have been given examples time and again that this government cannot be trusted with that kind of power.

Now, of course, we have the opportunity – we're here in second reading. There's going to be plenty of room for debate, and perhaps we can get some clarity from the minister on how they intend for this to operate, on what consultations actually took place, on how they intend to mobilize this vast and sweeping change, as my colleague from Edmonton-Mill Woods noted, by next January. Mr. Speaker, this government has been barely able to hold it together over the last few weeks, months as they are caught up in their own political drama, and they are somehow going to push through this massive, sweeping reform and rewriting of how regulatory bodies in this province operate in the next nine months?

I have serious doubts about their ability to meet that timeline effectively, to do the consultation that's required for the vast number of bodies that are included. As my colleague from Edmonton-Mill Woods noted, vastly different groups of wildly varying sizes with very different mandates, very different focuses, very different levels of, for lack of a better term, risk to the public. This is not something to be done on the back of a napkin.

Again, with the track record of this government in how it exercises the kinds of powers it has – just thinking back just recently to March here, when this government went out of its way to introduce a piece of legislation solely to stop pretty much a single municipal jurisdiction in the province of Alberta from continuing with a mask mandate. That's the kind of petty vindictiveness we see from this government, using the vast powers that are put in their hands – for the benefit of the people of Alberta is the reason they

wield that power, but that is certainly not how we have seen it used in multiple, multiple instances during the term of their government.

There are some very confusing aspects in this bill. PROs will now have three different sets of timelines to adhere to; 120 days, four months, to make a decision and notify an applicant of a decision in this act, but in the Labour Mobility Act, that deals with Canadian jurisdictions, it says that they must provide written acknowledgement of the application within 10 days and make a decision within 20 business days of receipt of a completed application and provide written notification of the decision within 10 business days. In the Fair Registration Practices Act it says that they must make an interim decision within six months of a completed application and a final decision within a reasonable amount of time. We need some clarity here, Mr. Speaker. What is this government trying to accomplish? What are the actual expectations? What is actually going to be required here?

Now, by the department's own admission, Mr. Speaker, the consultation that they held ahead of this was not broad across all organizations prior to the legislation being drafted. A bill this dense, having this wide of an implication for PROs, and they did not bother speaking to all of them before they put this bill out. The consultation was not broad, was not doing some heavy lifting there. If it was not broad, then by necessity it was narrow, and that is not what we should be seeing when we are bringing forward this kind of legislation providing such profound new powers to a minister, affecting so many organizations and thousands of organizations in the province of Alberta. [interjection] Certainly. Go ahead, Member.

11:30

Mr. Schow: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for giving way for a short intervention. The member talked about consultation. I'm hoping that maybe that member would want to elaborate on his concerns about the government's consultation because the way I see it, the government did a lot of consultation on this bill, particularly from a number of very important stakeholders, not the least of which is the registrar and chief executive officer for the Association of Professional Engineers and Geoscientists of Alberta. In addition, we have the registrar, the chief executive officer of Alberta Institute of Agrologists and, furthermore, the Chartered Professional Accountants of Alberta, just to name a few. I know that this is a general talking point coming from the members opposite about the lack of consultation, but I can assure Albertans that while the Member for Edmonton-City Centre gives his remarks, he is doing so in error, not referencing the many people that have been consulted on this to ensure that we're streamlining processes and cutting red tape for Albertans.

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, it's lovely that the member is able to mention three organizations, suggests that there are many others. By all means, he could let us know precisely how many. I would welcome that number if you want to share exactly how many organizations were consulted.

All I can say is that the department themselves in our conversation with them when we had the opportunity, my understanding is likely during the bill briefing, said that the consultation was not broad across all organizations prior to the legislation. No one was provided with opportunities to provide input on the drafts of the legislation. No one was shown the actual drafts of the legislation, Mr. Speaker. Now, this is a government that recently killed my own private member's bill, said that it was not even worthy of debate because it required consultation, consultation that they said only government had the resources to undertake.

In this case, as they drafted this very legislation, they did not consult with a single one of these PROs. Not one. That's another habit this government has. They like to talk about how much they consulted by talking to people before they draft legislation and then not a word to anyone afterwards.

We'll have much more to say on this as we continue debate, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. Deol: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Once again it's my pleasure to rise in the House to speak to the bill, Bill 23, Professional Governance Act. This bill makes changes to nine acts and affects a number of organizations under, as the government stated – the announcement made that it will bring more consistency, transparency, and accountability for the professional regulatory organizations. These organizations do very important work. I've been a member and part of very similar organizations for the past 14 years, and I have witnessed, lived experience, the amount of work these organizations undertake in order to provide education to their members to advance their knowledge so they can advance their careers, they can advance their professional expertise to put them in a position where they can serve in the better way the best interests of, I would say, Albertans or their clients.

[Mr. Milliken in the chair]

At the same time these organizations do undertake the work of advocacy on behalf of their members, where they try to make sure that their members also get fair treatment for the work they are doing for the public and the work they are doing while serving the industry. If this were all about to, you know, promote the consistency, transparency, and accountability, we would have been more than happy to support this piece of legislation, but what the government says about this bill and what they propose in this are two different things. Even the government announcement: they tried to say that they are trying to make something in line with what already exists in the neighbouring province of British Columbia. That information is also not true.

As my colleague the Member for Edmonton-Meadows – Edmonton-Mill Woods. Pardon me.

Mr. Nielsen: It's pretty close.

Mr. Deol: That was my own riding. Mill Woods is also my neighbouring riding.

The bill affects these 22 PROs in three different ways. It imposes timelines and what they do for advocacy, and suddenly there's a slightly good thing that could be supported, that an organization – the process where it acknowledges that the technology exists in these days and technology is useful. Specifically, something coming from this government – I understand probably maybe one thing, as the member of government caucus said, named some of the organizations. Maybe this very recommendation coming from one of those organizations that were able to outreach and consult with is modernization.

But other than that, my caucus has worked and has been in touch with the majority – not majority; all of these organizations – did a number of those communications. All of the organizations said that the consultations will not happen or that if anyone replied, the consultation that they had was not broad enough, it didn't provide the proper feedback. A number of those changes that are being proposed in this bill were not asked for by them.

These are unprecedented changes that we are discussing under this bill. That bill that was passed gives sweeping powers to the minister that can change the whole process in this case. The minister will have the authority, and the PROs are concerned that the minister can, in section 20 of this bill, which would allow the minister to either dissolve or cease the existence of those PROs – these organizations, 22 organizations, which replied back to our request that we wanted their feedback, what they're thinking about this bill and where they stand on this: specifically, what they see is good faith in what they have advocated for and that they see this bill address that issue for the betterment of those organizations. So far there is none.

11:40

Tens of thousands of people are represented by these 22 organizations providing wonderful, wonderful services and contributions to our province. They'll be affected, and the minister did not consult properly with all those organizations before bringing this piece of legislation for debate in this House. The sweeping power changing the balance in the hands of the ministry is very concerning.

I do not understand how the minister actually decided to propose these changes even after we know the incident around that particular minister just leaving from one portfolio to another, specifically related to the personal behaviour of interpreting specific powers that do not exist in the system. There is no such precedent that any elected officials or elected member or the member of council would ever try to use those powers. [interjection] Sure.

Mr. Nielsen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. You know, the Member for Edmonton-Meadows was commenting a little bit on the consultation or, shall I say, the lack of consultation. I sometimes refer to it as the government more consul-tolding people what's going to be happening. But I know that with some of your experiences in your past – for example, the Member for Cardston-Siksika was talking about this bill reducing red tape, yet part of this now has these organizations having to adhere to three different timelines around the approving for applications of registrations. I'm just wondering if maybe the Member for Edmonton-Meadows might share his thoughts around: does he think bringing in additional timelines sounds like red tape, or does that sound like more burdening red tape, thereby slowing down the process? Maybe he might share some of his thoughts on it.

Mr. Deol: Thank you, hon. member, for your intervention and allowing me to speak specifically on this red tape perspective the government always has. Something that really always concerned me and confused me: the government's understanding, particularly this UCP government's understanding, of red tape, the definition of red tape for them. When it has come to reducing red tape and barriers, we don't see, like – we just discussed the other bills, like, not a while ago. There was no simple piece of legislation that we could discuss that would help, probably, or make it easy for ordinary Albertans to seek justice in the justice system. So that is what it means to me for red tape, when you're talking about red tape: how you're contributing to your very citizens, Albertans, and make it easy for them to see the services they need. All the bills and the legislation we have discussed under the name of red tape: I have never heard anything from the government caucus members on how those changes are going to impact those very citizens, Albertans, and would make their life better by removing some of those legislations or making the legislation changes.

That is why a number of those particular organizations, specifically the organizations impacted by this piece of legislation, Bill 23 – none

of them actually acknowledge that that is going to help them in a way to do their job, what they're doing right now. None of the organizations came out in the media publicly to support this Bill 23. That is very concerning after the episodes we have seen in the past months and particularly concerning the minister's behaviour, and now the minister is coming to a different portfolio and wants to propose sweeping changes into his hands so he could single-handedly be able to make changes, decide on behalf of 22 different organizations that are professionally serving their members.

Not only that; he will be able to dissolve and cease their status of working. It's totally unacceptable, particularly when it comes to the very ministry that has been – I will just try to stay within the range of parliamentary language and parliamentary behaviour, I would call it. But it is very serious. It's hard to express my concern and the concern of all those that are being affected by these changes and our constituents.

Where I am coming from, I said that, like, my organization was not probably under the definition of PRO but more of a self-regulatory organization. It has been so much concerned by what is happening for the past some years in this province. So when it comes to the brokers association that I was part of – and I'm still holding the designation – they're concerned with all the changes coming into the laws, and they're feeling helpless to advocate on behalf of their members.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other members looking to join debate? I do see the hon. Member for St. Albert has risen.

Ms Renaud: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure to rise and speak to Bill 23, Professional Governance Act. This is a hefty piece of legislation. You know, I just wanted to first comment on – there was an interjection earlier. I don't recall, actually, who was speaking, but one of the members opposite rose and sort of seemed a little defensive about the UCP's – the fact that they had consulted.

I think, you know, there's a lot more to consultation than just talking to friends or talking to one or two stakeholders, and I think it's really important for us to recognize that and talk about it. Honestly, I don't think that any government gets it a hundred per cent right, but I do think that there are some that don't get it right at all. I think that this UCP government has demonstrated time and again that their failure to consult has resulted in legislation that has a lot of unintended consequences, as I said earlier, and makes a lot of changes that are not in the best interest of Albertans.

11:50

One of the things that we have seen time and again with this government is a lack of transparency around their consultation. By transparency I mean: what is the purpose of the change? What problem is the government trying to address or fix, and what is the plan? The plan should be commensurate with the expected impact and scope of the proposed legislation. We don't see that. I mean, you know, all the way from – we don't actually get invited to many briefings anymore to even know what the legislation is about, let alone do we hear about the consultation plan, what tools are being used. Very often we see the very minimum being used by this UCP government. Often it's just an online survey, particularly during COVID. I understand that it was a difficult and trying time to try to consult with stakeholders, but I think that it's incumbent on governments to do far more than that.

I think if this government, if there are members that have more details about what the consultation included other than picking up the phone and talking to a couple of stakeholders or having an

online satisfaction survey or an open survey – like, truly, what was the goal of the consultation? What was the problem that the legislation or the changes intended to solve? I think that that has been a problem with this government over and over again. We don't understand, number one, what the problem is, what problem they're trying to prevent, the problem they're trying to fix and, really, what the range of stakeholders is, not just friends, not just lobbyists but the whole range of stakeholders. Friends, maybe not friends, NGOs, community: who are the stakeholders? We don't get that.

Anyway, going back to the legislation, we do – as my colleagues have said, while we support the consistency and the transparency and accountability for the professional regulatory organizations and all areas of governance, the overreach of this bill is a little bit astounding, and it goes far beyond just the basic. Based on the proposed amendments, the professional regulatory organizations can be reduced to self-regulatory organizations in name only. Once again we see legislation that is opening the door for a ministerial overreach that is concerning.

I think it's important, again, as my colleagues have said and we continue to say over and over, that this government has probably stepped into their governing role with not a lot of trust, based on things that went on in their leadership race, in the election, but they have consistently eroded the public trust over the just over three years of their term so far. We have seen example after example of this government demonstrating they are not to be trusted. The leadership race: as I mentioned, I'm quite sure that there is still an open RCMP investigation going on. We have heard again and again of different people being interviewed. We still don't know what the results are, and now we're hearing rumblings of some allegations of problems in another race. Not surprising. We have seen questionable decisions made. We know, via lobbyist registries, who the lobbyists have contacted, who they are, and then, surprisingly, we see legislation or regulatory changes come in soon after that that don't benefit Albertans but actually benefit the lobbyists.

Again and again we see examples of this government that are not to be trusted. We have seen – coal mining, eastern slopes, curriculum, health care – example after example of this government eroding trust. That is why when we see a piece of legislation like Bill 23, which is massive – and my colleagues have talked about the extensive work that needs to go on after this is passed – it does give more power to the minister, and that is definitely concerning.

I would like to know. As I asked in an earlier debate on a separate piece of legislation – that was Bill 20, and I was happy to see the minister stand up and attempt to answer some of those questions. Maybe a minister will come back and answer some of these questions. Who precisely was consulted? I think the member not too long ago mentioned a couple of organizations that were consulted, but what was the consultation plan? What was the problem that was going to be addressed, and who specifically was consulted? Then what is the work plan after that?

Bear with me. Now, one of the concerning things is that this piece of legislation, Bill 23, will repeal governing statutes for 22 different professions and replace them with one umbrella statute. If that makes sense and if all of the professional organizations are okay with that and this is something that they and their memberships support and they've been consulted about and they see a path forward that is positive for them, that is one thing. If they do not, that is quite another. But I think I'm going to list them because I think it's important for people to understand who these organizations are.

We've got the Alberta Assessors' Association, Alberta Association of Architects: were they consulted? Alberta Association of Landscape Architects: were they consulted? Alberta Human Ecology and Home Economics Association: were they consulted by the UCP? Alberta Institute of Agriologists: were they consulted?

Alberta Land Surveyors' Association: did the UCP consult them? The Alberta Professional Planners Institute: were they consulted by the UCP? Alberta Shorthand Reporters Association: were they consulted by the UCP? Alberta Society of Professional Biologists: were they consulted by the UCP? I know the UCP sometimes has issue with science. I'd like to know that they were consulted. Alberta Veterinary Medical Association: I hope they were consulted, but we'd like clarity. Were they consulted? Association of Alberta Forest Management Professionals, a vitally important group: were they consulted? I'd also like to know if they were consulted when the rappel firefighters were cut.

Anyway, were the Association of Professional Engineers and Geoscientists, APEGA – yes, they were consulted. I think the member did note that. The Association of Science and Engineering Technology Professionals of Alberta: were they consulted? How about the Association of School Business Officials, the chemical profession, the Information Processing Society of Alberta, chartered professionals – yes, I do believe they were consulted – the Consulting Engineers of Alberta, Electrical Contractors Association, Institute of Certified Management Consultants, the Society of Local Government Managers of Alberta, and Supply Chain Management Association of Alberta?

The reason I'm listing these is that there are so many different associations and we only heard from one government member noting a couple of associations. So given the sweeping nature of this piece of legislation I think it's incumbent on this government to actually stand up and tell us the consultation that was done. Were

these organizations consulted, what was the result, and how is that included in this piece of legislation?

The bill proposes to substantially expand ministerial powers to include determining the regulatory model for each organization. Again, I would hope that each and every organization impacted by this legislation was included in the consultation and it wasn't just an exercise of checking the box and saying: all done; we called a couple of organizations, and they're good.

The sweeping powers of a minister that this bill proposes, the appointment of professional governance officers in the department to inspect the PROs or undertake a designation review of the PRO: what does this mean in terms of the number of staff within government? I hear from this government all the time: we want smaller government; we want to spend less on bureaucracy, on bureaucrats. Okay. Fair enough. What does that mean? When you look at this legislation, is this legislation doing that, or does that mantra from the government members only come into play sometimes?

The bill also proposes to expand ministerial powers to include the ability to appoint an administrator to assist or take over the PRO, which is a professional regulatory organization.

The Acting Speaker: I hesitate to interrupt the hon. member; however, under Standing Order 4(2.1) we are adjourned until 1:30 p.m. today.

[The Assembly adjourned at 12 p.m.]

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