

Legislative
Assembly
of Ontario



Assemblée
législative
de l'Ontario

**Official Report
of Debates
(Hansard)**

No. 131A

**Journal
des débats
(Hansard)**

N° 131A

1st Session
43rd Parliament
Wednesday
6 March 2024

1^{re} session
43^e législature
Mercredi
6 mars 2024

Speaker: Honourable Ted Arnott
Clerk: Trevor Day

Président : L'honorable Ted Arnott
Greffier : Trevor Day

Hansard on the Internet

Hansard and other documents of the Legislative Assembly can be on your personal computer within hours after each sitting. The address is:

<https://www.ola.org/>

Index inquiries

Reference to a cumulative index of previous issues may be obtained by calling the Hansard Reporting Service indexing staff at 416-325-7400.

Le Journal des débats sur Internet

L'adresse pour faire paraître sur votre ordinateur personnel le Journal et d'autres documents de l'Assemblée législative en quelques heures seulement après la séance est :

Renseignements sur l'index

Adressez vos questions portant sur des numéros précédents du Journal des débats au personnel de l'index, qui vous fourniront des références aux pages dans l'index cumulatif, en composant le 416-325-7400.

House Publications and Language Services
Room 500, West Wing, Legislative Building
111 Wellesley Street West, Queen's Park
Toronto ON M7A 1A2
Telephone 416-325-7400
Published by the Legislative Assembly of Ontario



Service linguistique et des publications parlementaires
Salle 500, aile ouest, Édifice du Parlement
111, rue Wellesley ouest, Queen's Park
Toronto ON M7A 1A2
Téléphone, 416-325-7400
Publié par l'Assemblée législative de l'Ontario

ISSN 1180-2987

CONTENTS / TABLE DES MATIÈRES

Wednesday 6 March 2024 / Mercredi 6 mars 2024

ORDERS OF THE DAY / ORDRE DU JOUR

Strengthening Accountability and Student Supports Act, 2024, Bill 166, Ms. Dunlop / Loi de 2024 pour renforcer la responsabilisation et les mesures de soutien aux étudiants, projet de loi 166,

Mme Dunlop

| | |
|--|------|
| Hon. Jill Dunlop | 7587 |
| Mr. Sol Mamakwa..... | 7596 |
| Mr. Will Bouma | 7596 |
| Ms. Peggy Sattler | 7596 |
| Mr. Mike Harris | 7597 |
| Ms. Peggy Sattler | 7597 |
| Second reading debate deemed adjourned | 7597 |

Report, Financial Accountability Officer

| | |
|--|------|
| The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes)..... | 7597 |
|--|------|

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS / DÉCLARATIONS DES DÉPUTÉES ET DÉPUTÉS

International Women's Day

| | |
|-----------------------|------|
| Mr. Steve Clark | 7597 |
|-----------------------|------|

Conflict in Middle East

| | |
|----------------------------|------|
| MPP Kristyn Wong-Tam | 7597 |
|----------------------------|------|

Newmarket Lions Club Effective Speaking Contest

| | |
|---------------------------------|------|
| Mme Dawn Gallagher Murphy | 7598 |
|---------------------------------|------|

Subventions aux résidents du Nord pour frais de transport à des fins médicales

| | |
|-----------------------|------|
| M. Guy Bourgouin..... | 7598 |
|-----------------------|------|

Consumer protection

| | |
|-----------------------|------|
| Mr. Mike Harris | 7598 |
|-----------------------|------|

Child care

| | |
|-------------------------------|------|
| Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong | 7599 |
|-------------------------------|------|

Brian Mulroney

| | |
|---------------------------|------|
| Mr. Logan Kanapathi | 7599 |
|---------------------------|------|

Tenant protection

| | |
|-----------------------|------|
| Mr. Adil Shamji | 7599 |
|-----------------------|------|

Volt hockey

| | |
|---------------------|------|
| Mr. Dave Smith..... | 7599 |
|---------------------|------|

Women's issues

| | |
|------------------------|------|
| Mrs. Robin Martin..... | 7600 |
|------------------------|------|

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS / PRÉSENTATION DES VISITEUSES ET VISITEURS

| | |
|----------------------------|------|
| Ms. Sandy Shaw | 7600 |
| Ms. Stephanie Bowman | 7600 |
| Hon. Doug Downey | 7600 |

| | |
|----------------------------------|------|
| Ms. Peggy Sattler | 7600 |
| Ms. Laura Smith..... | 7600 |
| Mme France Gélinas | 7600 |
| Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon | 7600 |
| Hon. Charmaine A. Williams | 7601 |
| MPP Kristyn Wong-Tam | 7601 |
| Hon. Andrea Khanjin | 7601 |
| Ms. Catherine Fife..... | 7601 |
| Hon. Michael Parsa | 7601 |
| MPP Lise Vaugeois..... | 7601 |
| Mr. Brian Riddell | 7601 |
| Mr. Chris Glover | 7601 |
| Mr. Steve Clark | 7601 |
| Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong | 7601 |
| Mr. Andrew Dowie | 7601 |
| Mr. Sol Mamakwa..... | 7601 |

Brian Mulroney

| | |
|--------------------------|------|
| Ms. Marit Stiles | 7601 |
| Mr. John Fraser | 7602 |
| Mr. Mike Schreiner | 7603 |
| Hon. Doug Ford | 7603 |

QUESTION PERIOD / PÉRIODE DE QUESTIONS

Government accountability

| | |
|--------------------------|------|
| Ms. Marit Stiles | 7604 |
| Hon. Paul Calandra | 7604 |

Government accountability

| | |
|--------------------------|------|
| Ms. Marit Stiles | 7605 |
| Hon. Paul Calandra | 7605 |

Highway tolls

| | |
|------------------------------------|------|
| Ms. Jennifer K. French..... | 7606 |
| Hon. Prabmeet Singh Sarkaria | 7606 |

Taxation

| | |
|---------------------------------|------|
| Mme Dawn Gallagher Murphy | 7607 |
| Hon. Peter Bethlenfalvy | 7607 |

University and college funding

| | |
|-------------------------|------|
| Ms. Peggy Sattler | 7607 |
| Hon. Jill Dunlop | 7608 |

Taxation

| | |
|-----------------------------|------|
| Mr. Matthew Rae | 7608 |
| Ms. Jess Dixon | 7608 |
| Mr. Stéphane Sarrazin | 7609 |

Blood and plasma donation

| | |
|---------------------------|------|
| Ms. Sandy Shaw | 7609 |
| Hon. Sylvia Jones..... | 7609 |
| Miss Monique Taylor | 7609 |

| | |
|-------------------------------------|------|
| Government appointments | |
| Mr. Stephen Blais..... | 7609 |
| Hon. Doug Downey | 7609 |
| Hon. Doug Ford | 7610 |
| Taxation | |
| Ms. Patrice Barnes | 7610 |
| Hon. Prabmeet Singh Sarkaria | 7610 |
| Tenant protection | |
| Ms. Jessica Bell..... | 7611 |
| Hon. Doug Downey | 7611 |
| Government appointments | |
| Ms. Bobbi Ann Brady | 7611 |
| Hon. Doug Downey | 7611 |
| Taxation | |
| Mr. Ross Romano | 7612 |
| Hon. Greg Rickford..... | 7612 |
| Small business | |
| Ms. Bhutila Karpoche | 7612 |
| Hon. Nina Tangri | 7613 |
| MPP Kristyn Wong-Tam | 7613 |
| Taxation | |
| Mrs. Daisy Wai | 7613 |
| Hon. Michael S. Kerzner..... | 7613 |
| Forest firefighting | |
| Mr. Guy Bourgouin..... | 7614 |
| Hon. Graydon Smith | 7614 |
| Notice of dissatisfaction | |
| The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott) | 7614 |
| Members' photograph | |
| Hon. Charmaine A. Williams..... | 7614 |

**INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS /
PRÉSENTATION DES VISITEUSES
ET VISITEURS**

| | |
|--------------------------|------|
| Mr. Anthony Leardi | 7614 |
| Mr. Mike Schreiner | 7614 |

**INTRODUCTION OF BILLS /
DÉPÔT DES PROJETS DE LOI**

| | |
|--|------|
| Keeping People Housed Act, 2024, Bill 170, Ms. Clancy / Loi de 2024 pour que chacun puisse garder son logement, projet de loi 170, Mme Clancy | |
| First reading agreed to..... | 7615 |
| Ms. Aislinn Clancy | 7615 |

PETITIONS / PÉTITIONS

| | |
|---------------------------------------|------|
| Blood and plasma donation | |
| Mme France Gélinas | 7615 |
| Tuition | |
| Ms. Jennifer K. French..... | 7615 |
| Post-secondary education | |
| Mr. Dave Smith..... | 7615 |
| Long-term care | |
| Ms. Catherine Fife..... | 7616 |
| Renewable energy | |
| Ms. Aislinn Clancy..... | 7616 |
| Sexual abuse | |
| Mr. Anthony Leardi..... | 7616 |
| Sexual violence and harassment | |
| Ms. Peggy Sattler | 7617 |
| Home care | |
| Ms. Natalie Pierre..... | 7617 |
| Education funding | |
| Mr. Chris Glover | 7617 |

ORDERS OF THE DAY / ORDRE DU JOUR

| | |
|---|------|
| Concurrence in supply | |
| Mr. Trevor Jones | 7618 |
| Mr. Rudy Cuzzetto | 7618 |
| Ms. Catherine Fife..... | 7622 |
| Hon. Victor Fedeli..... | 7632 |
| Motions agreed to..... | 7635 |
| Royal assent / Sanction royale | |
| The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes) | 7635 |
| Get It Done Act, 2024, Bill 162, Mr. Sarkaria / Loi de 2024 pour passer à l'action, projet de loi 162, M. Sarkaria | |
| Mr. Trevor Jones | 7635 |
| Vote deferred..... | 7635 |

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

Wednesday 6 March 2024

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

Mercredi 6 mars 2024

The House met at 0900.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Good morning. Let us pray.

Prayers.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Next we'll have a moment of silence for inner thought and personal reflection.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

STRENGTHENING ACCOUNTABILITY AND STUDENT SUPPORTS ACT, 2024

LOI DE 2024 POUR RENFORCER LA RESPONSABILISATION ET LES MESURES DE SOUTIEN AUX ÉTUDIANTS

Ms. Dunlop moved second reading of the following bill:
Bill 166, An Act to amend the Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities Act / Projet de loi 166, Loi modifiant la Loi sur le ministère de la Formation et des Collèges et Universités.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Would the minister care to lead off the debate?

Hon. Jill Dunlop: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and good morning, everyone. I'm happy to lead off the debate for the Strengthening Accountability and Student Supports Act, 2024.

I'm delighted to have this opportunity to speak about our proposed legislative changes. These changes will better position Ontario students and the post-secondary education system for success.

Since becoming the Minister of Colleges and Universities, I have had the privilege of visiting the majority of our post-secondary institutions, and I can tell you from first-hand experience that Ontario is home to some of the brightest and most skilled graduates and researchers in the world. The people of Ontario are the greatest asset we have. We need to continue to provide the right conditions for students during their academic journey to better position them for success in the workforce.

Ontario will continue to safeguard its competitiveness and build our economy because, after all, our post-secondary education institutions are hotbeds of innovation and entrepreneurship that support local economies and they are places for creativity and respectful debate. Post-secondary institutions are pillars of their local communities and leaders in preparing the people of Ontario for the jobs of today and tomorrow.

Campuses across the province, from the GTA to rural and northern Ontario, are not only places of learning, they are also centres of employment and economic growth for their communities, cities and regions they call home. Whether I'm in Sarnia, Thunder Bay, Ottawa or anywhere else in the province, I see the importance of ensuring our students have access to the best learning environments possible.

For students to flourish in post-secondary education and beyond, we first need to provide them with a solid foundation that fosters success. The measures we are proposing today as part of the Strengthening Accountability and Student Supports Act, 2024, are first and foremost student-focused. All students in Ontario—domestic, out-of-province and international—deserve to learn in a supportive, safe and respectful environment, an environment where they feel comfortable, not an environment where they fear discrimination or harassment.

The safety and well-being of everyone on Ontario's post-secondary campuses is a critical responsibility of our colleges and universities. Our government will support institutions in their efforts.

That's why today, I'm proud to bring forward the three initiatives outlined in the Strengthening Accountability and Student Supports Act, 2024. As I mentioned before, all three of these initiatives are about creating the right conditions for student success. They are about creating affordable, inclusive and safe environments for learning.

The first set of amendments in the Strengthening Accountability and Student Supports Act, 2024, is what I'd like to focus on first, as it is a top priority for my ministry: the mental health of post-secondary students. To be more specific, these amendments will require colleges and universities to have mental health policies in place outlining mental health and wellness supports and services available for students and, going forward, to report annually to their board of governors on the implementation and effectiveness of these policies.

The amendments would also enable the minister to provide further direction to colleges and universities about the topics and elements in their student mental health policies. This will help build common ground among the institutions while also allowing them to take a tailored approach that meets the unique needs of their student communities.

I'd like to thank my parliamentary assistant, the MPP for Burlington, for all the hard work that she has done specifically on this initiative. The PA travelled across the province, met with institutions, held consultations and looked at the mental health supports available. We're very

excited about the framework that's going to come as a result of this bill, if passed.

As an added measure, our government will help institutions to enhance mental health supports by investing \$23 million, including \$8 million for the post-secondary mental health action plan over three years, starting in 2024-25.

The mental health challenges that students face have become increasingly complex. I have three post-secondary-aged daughters myself, and I have also taught college students, so I understand the significant impact mental health can have on students' lives. The best way to make progress is to ensure that all students have access to the mental health supports they need. That's why our government has enhanced resources for students attending post-secondary institutions across the province.

In 2023-24, we are investing more than \$32 million in mental health supports for post-secondary students. This includes funding provided directly to post-secondary institutions through multiple grants.

For example, the Mental Health Services Grant helps colleges and universities to develop and expand mental health services on campus, such as specialized supports for at-risk groups, peer-to-peer supports as well as mindfulness and resiliency building programs.

There is also the Mental Health Worker Grant, which helps post-secondary institutions hire mental health professionals like counsellors, social workers, nurses and care coordinators to help meet the needs of students. In 2023, more than 160 positions were filled with the help of this grant, which resulted in shorter wait-times for students and less pressure on campus-based services.

We also recognize the important role that international students play in fostering the talent, skills and prosperity of the province, as well as their positive contributions to their campuses and communities. That's why we are working to ensure students from around the world who come to Ontario to study have access to the mental health supports that they need to succeed.

In 2023, our government invested close to \$3 million in four special projects, all with the goal of supporting the mental health of international post-secondary students in Ontario. The projects provide supports that range from access to peer mentoring and mental health courses, individual and group workshops, counselling, peer support networks, cultural awareness programs and informational videos. Importantly, one project provides mental health intervention services, like primary care, peer-to-peer support, and counselling in French to ensure international students do not have to deal with a language barrier when getting help.

0910

Supporting ongoing initiatives that help provide direct one-on-one support for students continues to be a high priority for our government as well, like the Good2Talk mental health help line for post-secondary students. In 2023-24, our government is investing over \$5 million in this initiative so the organization can expand its services

and continue to provide free, bilingual and confidential services to students. Good2Talk actually provides these services 24/7, 365, through telephone, text and live chat, meeting the needs of our post-secondary students. Because when students are feeling anxious, misunderstood or overwhelmed, just having someone to talk to about it, someone who is truly there to listen, can make all the difference in the world.

To ensure all students in the province have access to mental health services, our government also invested more than \$12 million in 2023-24 in another important resource, the Get A-Head portal. Those seeking care can access the portal to match with a student in training and their supervisor based on an area of support, gender, age and ethnicity. This tool not only provides critical and timely mental health services to post-secondary students at little to no cost, but also gives students in mental health fields of study the opportunity to gain experience delivering supports. The AI embedded in the platform produced more than a 76% improvement in performance outcomes for student trainees, so a win-win for students who are training in this area and those students who are using the services.

I'm pleased to report that in 2022-23, the Get A-Head platform served over 27,000 post-secondary students, and, according to a survey carried out by those overseeing the online tool, more than 80% of students who responded reported improvements in their mental health and well-being, and about 70% of graduate student trainees surveyed believed the platform enabled them to deliver effective care—a winning combination on both sides of the platform. That's why I'm pleased that our most recent investment in this platform will expand access across all publicly assisted colleges, universities and Indigenous institutes in Ontario.

In 2023-24, our government also provided \$750,000 for another important initiative, the Centre for Innovation in Campus Mental Health. This is a partnership between Colleges Ontario, the Council of Ontario Universities, the College Student Alliance and the Ontario Undergraduate Student Alliance. With this additional funding, the centre will continue to promote the exchange of knowledge in the student mental health sector, foster collaboration and research, and facilitate access to expertise to meet the mental health needs of all of our students.

The Ministry of Colleges and Universities is also a partner in the government's multi-year mental health and addictions strategy that is led by the Ministry of Health. The strategy, the Roadmap to Wellness: A Plan to Build Ontario's Mental Health and Addictions System—and I'm proud of my colleague, the Associate Minister of Mental Health and Addictions—seeks to address key challenges in the system, including long wait times, barriers to access and uneven quality of service.

Our government committed \$3.8 billion over 10 years in this strategy. We have fulfilled this commitment by flowing \$525 million in new, annualized funding into the system since 2019-20. These investments are helping to deliver high-quality care and are filling important gaps in

the care continuum. Through all of these efforts, we want post-secondary students to know they are not alone, and help and resources are always available.

The legislative amendments proposed today which further build on our government's efforts to support the well-being of students, requiring all public colleges and universities to have blueprints for their mental health supports and services, will help students in Ontario have the access to the right resources when they need them the most. I think back, Speaker, to when I was in university and I don't remember having access to the kind of services that are available now or even knowing where to find these services. This framework will ensure that all students have access to understand the services that are available in their campuses.

When I taught at Georgian College in my life before politics, as faculty, we all took the Mental Health First Aid program because we were dealing with post-secondary students, who are in that high-risk group for mental health, and how important that was to be able to recognize that in the classroom, or to be able to support students who maybe came directly to us. Like I said, sometimes it's just having someone to listen to, and sometimes that person is your faculty member, a close friend, or the mental health supports on campus.

Looking at my own daughters and their post-secondary journey—and I think of my youngest, who was one of those COVID kids who didn't have a grade 12 graduation. They didn't have the prom and all the glitz and things that happen in grade 12. And then they go on to post-secondary and that first year. Some were living at home because classes were all online. My daughter was living in residence, but then they were in their bubble with the folks on their floor and not really getting that full experience. We've seen that wearing on students, not just that cohort but all post-secondary students.

It's so important that they know where to access the supports on campuses. Institutions are doing a great job in the variety of services that they offer on campus, but ensuring that students know where to find those supports is important.

The second set of amendments in the Strengthening Accountability and Student Supports Act, 2024, will introduce changes that emphasize our government's very clear stance on condemning discrimination, hate or any form of harassment in our communities. We know that a healthy, safe and respectful campus environment is crucial to student success. At a fundamental level, no student in Ontario can reach their full potential unless they are safe and have a full sense of belonging on campus.

Speaker, I have heard from students and from faculty as well about the lack of policies on campus, and I can tell you that the stories that we hear in the media about some of the hateful acts happening on campus, those aren't directly reported to the ministry. I am hearing about them as minister just like everyone else is, through social media and in the media. With the new amendments, we will ensure there is a policy in place, that there is reporting in place, that there is follow-up reporting back to the

ministry, and also ensure that the public has access to that data and that it's dealt with in a timely manner.

All students should be able to pursue their studies on or off campus without having to worry about racism, hate or discrimination. We've all heard reports in the news recently of unsettling incidents happening at colleges and universities here in Ontario, across Canada and across North America. It is really concerning to me, as Minister of Colleges and Universities, that incidents of racism and hate on post-secondary campuses have been escalating over the past few months.

Since the outbreak of the war between Israel and Hamas on October 7, 2023, the media have reported that there have been rising tensions among students on campuses across the province, and many students have reported that they feel unsafe due to incidents of discrimination, anti-Semitism, anti-Palestinian racism, anti-Arab racism, Islamophobia and hate on post-secondary campuses. Concerning incidents have been reported at institutions throughout Ontario and have involved students, staff, student groups and visitors to post-secondary campuses. Due to the serious nature of these incidents, institutions have pursued internal or external investigations and many have requested the involvement of law enforcement.

While post-secondary institutions have taken action to address these incidents, it's clear that a broader, more proactive approach is needed so that all incidents are dealt with in a consistent manner. Our government's position on this issue is crystal clear: Hate of any kind has no place at our post-secondary education institutions.

Colleges and universities should be places where students feel free to exchange ideas and have open and respectful debate. Since January 2019, all publicly assisted colleges and universities in our province have implemented a free speech policy that meets a minimum standard prescribed by the government and based on best practices from around the world. The policy protects free speech at colleges and universities but does not allow hate speech, discrimination, harassment or any other illegal forms of speech.

0920

The Ontario Human Rights Code, which applies to all Ontario colleges and universities, prohibits discrimination. This includes discrimination based on race, place of origin, disability, age, religious beliefs, sexual orientation and more.

Free speech policies at colleges and universities apply to all faculty, students, staff, management and guests, whether on campus or in virtual learning delivered by these post-secondary institutions. The safety and well-being of everyone on our post-secondary campuses is a critical responsibility of our colleges and universities. Institutions have a responsibility to provide a safe and supportive learning environment and must adopt appropriate measures to address issues of racism and discrimination.

Since last year, I have sent two letters to the presidents of our publicly assisted colleges and universities to remind them of their role in supporting safe and respectful places of learning and their obligations under the Ontario Human

Rights Code. The most recent memo specifically referenced recent events in Israel and the heightened risk of anti-Semitism and Islamophobia. While post-secondary institutions have taken action to address these recent incidents, issues still continue to exist today, which means that more needs to be done.

As I mentioned earlier, the second set of amendments in the Strengthening Accountability and Student Supports Act, 2024, introduce changes that underscore that our government does not condone discrimination, hate or any other form of harassment in our communities. For example, our government believes that everyone should be able to pursue their studies on or off campus without having to worry about sexual violence, harassment or misconduct. Our government has zero tolerance for sexual assault, harassment and any other forms of violence in our communities.

This is not something we merely believe in; as a government, we have acted on it. That's why, in 2022, the government passed the Strengthening Post-secondary Institutions and Students Act, 2022, which will help publicly assisted colleges, universities and career colleges better address faculty and staff sexual misconduct toward students.

But that's not all we've done since forming government. Over the years, we have listened, and we have addressed sexual violence matters in various ways. For example, since July 2019, colleges and universities are required to report annually to their boards of governors, including on the number of reports of sexual violence by students as well as the supports, programs and initiatives that are available to students.

Publicly assisted colleges and universities must also have and publicly post a stand-alone sexual violence policy, which must be reviewed at least every three years and amended as appropriate. Student input must also be considered during the development of the policy and every time the policy is reviewed or amended.

Additionally, the government required each publicly assisted college and university in Ontario to have a task force devoted to addressing sexual violence on campuses. Since 2019, the government has invested \$6 million annually in the Campus Safety Grant. These funds help publicly assisted colleges and universities implement campus safety initiatives, including campus sexual violence prevention programs and supports.

While our government has done a lot of great work over the last few years, more can be done to ensure post-secondary campuses are free from discrimination, hate and any form of harassment. That's why today, we are introducing amendments that, if passed, would help create inclusive, safe and welcoming campus communities for all students.

As part of these changes, the first measure is all public colleges and universities would need to have clear, outlined policies and rules in place to address and combat racism and hate, including but not limited to anti-Indigenous racism, anti-Black racism, anti-Semitism and Islamophobia.

Secondly, as part of our policies, all institutions would be required to have policies and rules in place to address

incidents of racism and hate when they do occur. Direction to publicly assisted colleges and universities would ensure greater consistency with how these incidents are dealt with. We would work closely with our post-secondary education and community partners as institutions implement these policies and report on their implementation.

I know we can work together to build more diverse and inclusive campus communities where everyone feels welcome and has opportunities to succeed. The legislative amendments we're introducing today would get us one step closer. Our government wants to produce a better future for everyone across the province, including students from all walks of life, to promote economic prosperity for all. Today, more than ever, access to good jobs depends on access to a good post-secondary education. We, as a province, must make sure that we keep the doors of opportunity open so that everyone in Ontario who has the willingness to learn can access an affordable post-secondary education. However, we must also ensure that what we do is sustainable so that the doors of opportunity remain open for students of the future as well.

I know that during these challenging times, when the rate of inflation and the cost of living is forcing Ontarians to make some tough financial decisions, students and their families could also use some help. For many students, every dollar counts. As an educator, a parent and public servant, I strongly believe we need to further reduce barriers to higher education, both by improving access to post-secondary education and by making it easier for students to succeed once they get there.

As a first step toward this goal, we announced last Monday that Ontario is maintaining the domestic tuition freeze for publicly assisted colleges and universities for at least three more years, while allowing limited increases of up to 5% for domestic, out-of-province students. This tuition freeze builds on the government's historic 10% reduction of tuition in 2019-20, along with tuition freezes over the past four years. These changes have made post-secondary education more affordable for Ontario students and their families and must continue.

Prior to 2019, Ontario had the highest tuition fees for undergraduate and graduate programs in Canada. Currently, Ontario's average tuition is the fourth highest in Canada for undergraduate students and the third highest for graduate students. This is good progress in our efforts to increase affordability.

In addition to the tuition fees they pay, students also pay fees for learning materials and activities associated with their programs; however, they don't always have a line of sight on these additional costs until after they have selected their programs. Textbook costs in particular can pose an additional financial burden to students and their families that they weren't expecting and couldn't plan for. In fact, textbook costs have increased dramatically over the years, by more than 800% since the 1980s. That's more than double the Canadian house price indexes and triple the rate of the consumer price index. I think back to even when I was in university and the costs of textbooks, and being surprised when you got your list and you went to the library and it was hundreds of dollars.

That's why the third set of legislative amendments we have introduced in the Strengthening Accountability and Student Supports Act will require public colleges and universities to follow ministry directives to increase the transparency of student fees, including learning materials. As mentioned earlier, students have been facing financial burdens due to the costs of materials and activities associated with their programs and courses. If passed, Ontario's measures to increase transparency around the costs of ancillary fees would help students prepare for these costs and provide them with greater options when selecting courses. Faculty, of course, would continue to be able to make the decisions around the educational materials for their classes; however, as always, our government is requesting that both faculty and institutions keep students' best interests in mind when selecting learning materials.

I've heard from students—the costs for textbooks; the additional cost maybe for subscriptions they need for the class, any additional reading materials; or sometimes additional lab costs that they didn't realize were an associated cost to that program until they were signed up for it.

0930

Separate from these legislative amendments to further support transparency in the post-secondary education sector, in the coming months we will also be working with publicly assisted colleges and universities to provide greater details around how tuition fees are allocated and used. After all, if students and families are making such an effort to invest in their post-secondary education, it's only fair that they understand exactly what they're investing in. I look forward to working with the post-secondary institutions to determine how best to achieve these shared objectives so that students and their families can have confidence and transparency that all fees are allocated appropriately.

Madam Speaker, I mentioned at the beginning of my remarks that our greatest strength in this province is our people, and if we develop the highly skilled workforce that today's economy demands, we can create jobs and lay the foundation for long-term, sustainable growth. Our government is committed to helping all learners access and succeed in post-secondary education. That's why we've taken significant steps over the past few years towards ensuring that meaningful educational and economic opportunities are available to learners from all walks of life and in all parts of the province, because our government supports a post-secondary education system that is affordable, respectful and inclusive for all learners, including Indigenous learners.

We work with colleges, universities and Indigenous institutes and Indigenous partners to create those conditions that make it easier for everyone to access a high-quality education. We want to build and encourage a post-secondary system that embraces inclusivity and promotes success for all learners so they can find meaningful and rewarding careers.

Indigenous institutes are an important pillar for our post-secondary education system and can act as a major local hub for their communities. Not only do they provide education and training for hundreds of Indigenous learners,

they offer programming in a culturally holistic and safe learning environment, an environment where Indigenous knowledge and ways of knowing are woven into all aspects of the learners' experience. Most institutes serve communities in northern, rural and very remote parts of the province, providing critical access to learners who might not otherwise participate in post-secondary education and training.

I had the opportunity to visit Six Nations Polytechnic, where we were meeting with PSW students—and this was the PSW Challenge Fund. That was free tuition and free educational materials for students in this program. I had an opportunity to talk with some of the students. There was one that stood out in particular. His name was Mark, and he was actually a bylaw officer. All of his family was involved in health human resources and he saw this opportunity for free tuition and thought, "What a great chance to make a career change." So he was in the PSW program and was loving it, and there's also the opportunity for him to build upon that to become an RPN or an RN. That's what I saw in the program: students who were building those bridges and moving into those areas where we really needed them, and an opportunity for someone to change into a different field. It's really exciting to see.

I've also visited First Nations Technical Institute and the amazing programs that they offer there. We met with students who were in the social service work program and also students who were in the aviation program. These young students, who are about to become pilots—but a lot of them were also looking at staying at the First Nations institution as trainers because there was such a need for more instructors in this area. So it was great to see that some are going to return to the communities to work there, but also to continue training future pilots.

I'm looking forward to my visit up to NOMA in Thunder Bay in April, and we're going to have a chance to leave Thunder Bay and go to Fort Frances to meet with the folks at Seven Gen. I've had a chance to meet with them here in Toronto but now I'm going to get up to Fort Frances and meet on campus, so I'm looking forward to that opportunity.

On our part, our government is committed to supporting Indigenous institutes to help them flourish and respond to community demands and the needs of the local labour market. That's why our government continues to invest in Indigenous institutes across Ontario and to reduce financial barriers for Indigenous learners.

Ontario has one of the highest levels of participation in post-secondary education in the world, yet we know there is an attainment gap in post-secondary education between Indigenous and non-Indigenous learners. Approximately 53% of Indigenous people aged 25 to 64 hold a post-secondary credential, compared to 65% of the non-Indigenous population.

To this end, colleges and universities across Ontario are committed to improving Indigenous learners' access, inclusion and participation in post-secondary education. They have prioritized many activities, some in response to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada's calls to action, including hiring and retaining more In-

Indigenous faculty and staff; increasing recruitment, bursaries and scholarships for Indigenous learners; including more Indigenous content in courses and offering new courses, programs and degrees specializing in Indigenous subject matter; and increasing partnerships with local Indigenous communities.

I see the member from Brantford—Brant here, who we were with when I was on the tour at Six Nations Polytechnic. I was just telling everyone about the students we met in the PSW program. I've been there a couple of times with you, and we talked to some young women who were also in the welding program, too—huge, in-demand programs. These young women were graduating right from the program into jobs in the community.

Our government also supports colleges and universities in providing culturally appropriate services and student supports to Indigenous learners through the Indigenous student success fund. Through this fund, our government invests \$18.2 million annually to fund programs and services such as Indigenous counsellors, post-secondary education experience camps, elders-in-residence, academic supports, access to mentoring and counselling and advising services, and partnerships development and student and community outreach activities.

To further ensure that universities and colleges include culturally appropriate services, institutions that receive the grant are required to maintain an Indigenous education council. Each respective council is comprised of Indigenous community members who provide advice and input on programs and services. To respond to the community needs, colleges and universities also offer Indigenous study programs such as social work, teaching and early childhood education.

I'm proud to say that our government has made it easier for Indigenous people to access a culturally supportive and high-quality post-secondary education by opening the doors to Ontario Student Assistance Program—or OSAP—eligibility for Indigenous institutes as of the 2020-21 academic year. In addition, Ontario offers a range of grants and loans through OSAP to support the unique needs and economic circumstance of Indigenous learners.

These supports include the Ontario Indigenous Travel Grant, which addresses the high costs of travelling to college or university for Indigenous students living in remote First Nations. Through this grant, Indigenous learners can receive funding for travel costs to attend eligible institutions within or even outside of Ontario.

In 2021, Ontario also introduced a new Indigenous Institutes Accessibility Fund for Learners Grant: \$650,000 was provided to the institutes to support accessibility for students with disabilities in the 2022-23 year, with this number increasing to \$700,000 in 2023-24.

Reducing financial barriers to educational opportunities will help Indigenous learners and communities to have the tools and resources they need to build solutions, develop economies, revitalize languages and cultures and become empowered leaders.

Last year, our government also provided \$1 million in funding through the Indigenous Institutes Mental Health

Grant to support the provision of culturally relevant, trauma-informed mental health supports and services at nine Indigenous institutes. However, despite the important gains we have made, there is more work that we can do to support Indigenous students. Later this year, we will be holding discussions with the Indigenous institutes sector to determine how to best support Indigenous institutes and their learners going forward.

0940

Our government is committed to helping learners throughout Ontario get the education and training they need to find rewarding careers, because, as I noted earlier, there is no greater investment than in the talent and skills of our next generation. As the Minister of College and Universities and the MPP for Simcoe North, I see every day how important post-secondary education and training are in rural and northern areas. In fact, I have Georgian College in my area, which—if you didn't know already, you're going to hear now—is my former employer, prior to politics. I had the opportunity to work there. I also have a Lakehead University satellite campus in my area, which has been there now, I think, for close to 25 years.

I think back to the work that was done in the early days within the community to really get behind that project, because the opportunity to have more post-secondary and to have the university in our area was really important to the community, and everyone really pulled together to ensure that it started there. It has been great for our area and the partnerships that happen in our community because of those two institutions.

To learners, to employers and to the broader community, how important post-secondary is—they make our communities stronger and are a large part of reason that I became a politician. We want to help students to get more opportunities to prepare for the in-demand careers our workforce needs, particularly in areas such as health care. Often, that help comes in form of reducing financial barriers to post-secondary education.

One of the exciting ways we are delivering on these goals is through the Ontario Learn and Stay Grant. Last spring, when the grant was launched, we marked an important milestone in our government's plan to both deliver more convenient and connected care for people across the province and to help students to pursue in-demand careers. The first two years of the grant will focus on health human resources to help get health care workers into the communities where they're needed most. The Ontario Learn and Stay Grant is the first of its kind and offers students full, upfront funding for tuition, books and other educational costs. I'll say that again: full, upfront funding that covers their tuition, books and more.

Actually, one of our colleagues, MPP Anand—I can't remember his actual riding name at the moment, but his daughter is—

Mr. Will Bouma: Mississauga—Malton.

Hon. Jill Dunlop: Mississauga—Malton. Thank you. His daughter is actually in her first year at the University of Windsor and is part of the Ontario Learn and Stay program. It's exciting to see a new young nurse will be

graduating into the Windsor area to help with the nursing that will be needed at the new Windsor hospital and all the that's work being done in their community.

Interjections.

Hon. Jill Dunlop: Thank you. It is an exciting program, isn't it? In fact, when we launched the program, we earmarked 2,500 spaces because we thought there would be a lot of interest in the program. I can tell you, there are almost 5,000 students who are registered in the program, and it's for nursing, for lab techs and for paramedics in northern, rural and some underserved areas. So it has been quite successful.

This type of program can truly make the difference between a student who has maybe never even considered post-secondary education because they believe that they can't afford it and a student who has the opportunity to train for and land an in-demand job when they graduate, with many of their education costs completely paid for.

I'll tell you, Madam Speaker, when I was in my riding last spring at the high school graduations that were happening, I was paying special attention to the students who were going into nursing programs, paramedics and lab tech programs. I actually went over to one young lady and her family after because I remembered the school she was going to, and she was going into nursing. I said, "Have you heard of Ontario Learn and Stay?" Her mom said, "Yes, and we are registering for it." It's good to see these young people getting their tuition paid for and helping to serve in those underserved areas.

Specifically, the grant will support students entering eligible nursing, paramedic and medical lab tech programs in underserved communities across Ontario. Once the students finish their training, they are incentivized to remain in the underserved regions of Ontario for a period of service—places where they will have already started laying down their roots, making friends, supporting local businesses and building connections with the community, maybe even meeting that special someone there and deciding that this is where they want to continue after those two years are over. They might find themselves working at a local health care facility or directly for one of the local ambulance services.

The Ontario Learn and Stay Grant gives students a helping hand in their decision to not just study in underserved communities but also stay there to begin rewarding careers and make an impact in the communities. We need a strong, sustainable system with a trained and professional workforce ready to support underserved regions, bolstering the province's health care system to support the people of Ontario now and in the future. Training health care workers will add much-needed capacity to our health care system, ensuring our families, friends and loved ones get the level of care they need and deserve, no matter where they live in this province. The grant is a win-win for both post-secondary students as well as communities and folks across Ontario. I look forward to seeing the first round of graduates coming out of these programs within the next few years.

Madam Speaker, up until now, I have talked about removing barriers to post-secondary education and how to support learners once they get there. But now I'd like to touch on some steps our government is taking to ensure students can successfully transition from post-secondary education into the workforce. It is up to us, in partnership with all of our post-secondary institutions, to establish the pathways to help set students up for success.

Like the rest of the world, as we continue on our road of economic growth, Ontario continues to face challenges. To navigate this ongoing global economic uncertainty, our government has a plan—a plan to build an Ontario that the people of this province can be proud of, not only today but in the future. The goal of this plan is to make sure students are prepared for the jobs of a modern economy, with the skills to be adaptable lifelong learners in an ever-changing world.

People are keener than ever to explore faster pathways to meaningful and rewarding careers. They want to ensure that the training they put their time, their money and their effort into is going to pay off. That's exactly what micro-credentials offer—a faster, affordable and more flexible pathway to employment. We know that lifelong learning is becoming more and more commonplace across sectors, as the skills and knowledge needed continually change. We also know that lifelong learners are busy people and need to be able to hit the ground running to make an immediate impact with their employers or to pursue new job opportunities. Offering micro-credentials alongside degrees, diplomas and certificates opens the doors of opportunity to those who are looking to develop new skills quickly and empowers learners with options. They also provide businesses with the talent they need. We know that Ontario's economic growth and future prosperity are dependent on a workforce that is nimble, adaptive and responsive to an evolving labour market.

Speaker, our government is committed to supporting learners at all stages of their careers and recognizes the significance of micro-credentials and the value they provide to the growth and development of the province's economy.

That's why we are proud to have announced over \$60 million in Ontario's first-ever micro-credentials strategy, a bold, forward-thinking plan to support the expansion of Ontario's micro-credentials—the kind of flexible training that people truly want and the kind of training opportunities that prepare them for the in-demand jobs of today and tomorrow.

I'm proud to see the many micro-credentials being offered at our institutions across the province, including Indigenous institutes and career colleges, from the fields of technology to research to manufacturing and more. As micro-credentials gain momentum worldwide, it is critical that we home in on this type of training option right here in Ontario.

This year, Ontario invested \$5 million to launch a second round of the micro-credentials challenge to support the creation of more micro-credentials projects. This in-

vestment is stemming from the success of the first round of the challenge fund, when post-secondary institutions and industry worked together to create over 300 new micro-credentials to support approximately 6,000 learners across the province.

As we work to expand program offerings, we want to keep our learners in mind and make sure that micro-credentials are affordable and accessible so that anyone who wants to take this training can, regardless of their circumstances or financial situation.

0950

Madam Speaker, I'm going to show you a list of some of the micro-credentials that I think maybe you might have some interest in, in your Durham area—maybe after politics. There's a micro-credential using construction tools—maybe something you might even want to pick up during politics.

The London members: Fanshawe College has some digital literacy micro-credentials. They also offer a Microsoft formulas credential.

Our Toronto members: Rotman “health care analytics: AI, big data and digital transformation” at U of T. So lots of great micro-credentials that you could be studying now, because they are micro, but things you can look forward to maybe after politics, because learning is a lifelong adventure.

To that end, I'm proud to say that Ontario is the first jurisdiction in Canada to offer student financial assistance for micro-credentials. So you could even be eligible for OSAP if you decide to take these micro-credentials. As of today, more than 1,900 micro-credentials are approved for OSAP loans and grants, with more being added regularly. So whether it's the mid-career parent looking to move from health administration to coding, or a new post-secondary graduate interested in honing their skills in AI, or a politician who is looking at their next career, there is a micro-credential for everyone.

As more people discover micro-credentials, we move closer to a world that recognizes and embraces flexible, labour-market-driven learning. Madam Speaker, we know that Ontario's economy is becoming more knowledge-based and technology-driven, so a skilled workforce is an important driver for the province's economy and competitiveness. That's why, as we announced last Monday, Ontario is investing \$100 million in 2023-24 to help cover the operating costs of science, technology, engineering and mathematics programs at publicly assisted colleges and universities that have enrolments above their funded levels.

On average, STEM graduates have better post-graduation outcomes than their non-STEM counterparts, with lower unemployment and higher wages. Therefore, it makes sense to provide enhanced support for these programs, as they will help post-secondary students secure good, in-demand jobs.

Our government has also recently announced a new way to connect students to rewarding careers by creating a career portal. This portal will help students understand labour market needs and make informed decision on their post-secondary education journey. There are so many

sources of labour market information out there; it can be overwhelming to navigate and choose the best educational path. The creation of a government portal will help to strengthen how students, workers, employers and newcomers access education and career pathways in Ontario. Obviously, we'll be working very closely with our post-secondary education sector and various ministries to identify the needs and the paths to get to those in-demand jobs.

I hope to share more details about the portal with everyone soon, as we work through our consultations. I am looking for a great portal that's going to help students to navigate that pathway, to look at the jobs that are available, because sometimes we don't even know the things that are out there—but how to look at those programs, the courses you would take, the schools that offer those programs, and the outcomes.

Madam Speaker, students deserve the best opportunity to gain the skills they need to get good-paying, high-quality jobs. So our government is taking steps to help our post-secondary institutions offer more in-demand programs and adapt to changing labour market needs.

Pending regulatory changes, we are planning to allow colleges to submit applications to offer applied master's degrees. These programs would give students more choice when it comes to innovative applied master's programs that lead to in-demand jobs, helping them to graduate with the skills, the expertise and credentials to successfully transition to the workforce. It will also give employers access to more industry-ready employees who can immediately meet labour market demands in specialized fields, fields such as advanced manufacturing, computer science, artificial intelligence and animation. Again, finding new ways like this to prepare students for great careers is a win-win for all of Ontario.

Actually, when I was in the riding last weekend, I was talking to a gentleman; his son is a student at Sheridan College in the animation program, doing the degree program. He was saying how much his son loves his program and the opportunities that were going to be out there for him upon graduation, but he was also excited about more learning opportunities. We made the announcement last Monday, so I heard from him afterwards about the applied master's, because Sheridan will be offering this in their animation program, and how excited his son was to be able to continue his education and do the applied master's.

As you can see, Ontario is putting students first, with a continued focus on removing barriers to post-secondary education and ensuring that learners are equipped with the skills and experience they need to successfully transition to the workforce. However, it's important to recognize that the supports that we put in place for students are only as useful as the strength of Ontario's post-secondary system as a whole.

Our government provides more than \$5 billion annually to Ontario's publicly assisted colleges and universities. We do this because we recognize they are important contributors to the economy of our province, to our local

communities and the individual impact that higher education can have on Ontarians. That said, we are continuing to focus on efficiency, accountability and financial sustainability within the system. Why, Madam Speaker? To ensure our post-secondary institutions can deliver high-quality education for years to come and generations to come.

We recognize that our colleges and universities were hit hard during the pandemic. On our part, we took action to support institutions during that time in as many ways as possible:

- providing \$25 million in 2020 to assist colleges, universities and Indigenous institutes with immediate COVID-related expenses;

- investing another \$106.4 million to help them address COVID-related financial impacts; and

- providing \$5 million to help institutions transfer in-person career services to virtual.

Today, our post-secondary institutions continue to navigate the increasing costs of delivering programming, as well as some significant recent changes to the education landscape across Canada. Therefore, Ontario is taking further action to ensure the continued viability of the post-secondary education system in a responsible way, a way that supports students and post-secondary institutions today, while building an even stronger foundation for future generations. That's why, to bring financial sustainability to post-secondary institutions, our government announced this past Monday that we're providing nearly \$1.3 billion in new funding. This funding includes the \$100-million investment in STEM costs that I mentioned earlier.

We are also creating a three-year post-secondary education sustainability fund valued at approximately \$903 million. This fund will provide \$700 million in broad-based support for all institutions and will offer \$203 million in additional top-up funding for institutions with the greatest financial need. This funding will help institutions address their immediate critical costs, so they can continue delivering high-quality education to students.

We're also supporting the world-class research being done in our post-secondary institutions, with more than \$65 million to support the continuation of research and innovation. And to help post-secondary institutions provide modern and safe learning environments for students, faculty and staff, we are providing over \$167 million in additional funding for capital renewal and equipment. These capital investments will allow institutions to address their deferred maintenance backlog, undertake critical repairs, modernize the classrooms, update the technology and improve their environmental sustainability, while continuing to offer a safe experience for students, staff and faculty on campus.

Madam Speaker, it is not lost on us that our northern and smaller post-secondary institutions face unique financial challenges. They are more reliant on operating grants and domestic tuition. In 2022-23, our government provided \$409 million in operating grants to northern institutions. In 2023-24, we're providing northern colleges with \$83 million through the Small, Northern and Rural

Grant and \$16 million for northern universities through the Northern Ontario Grant. Our government appreciates the special role that our post-secondary institutions play in northern Ontario, providing learners with access to high-quality education close to home and helping to prepare them for in-demand jobs in their local communities and beyond.

1000

Madam Speaker, I don't know if you've ever had a chance to travel up to northern Ontario to visit some of those schools, but I have. I was actually talking with the folks at Boréal at PDAC the other day, and some of the great work that they're doing—not just in northern Ontario, but also here in Toronto, where they will be offering the new stand-alone nursing program in French in both areas. I know they're doing great work in the health human resources as well as skilled trades. I had an opportunity to chat with them there—some great work at our northern institutions.

I also announced last Monday that our government is providing a one-time additional investment of \$10 million in 2024-25 through the Small, Northern and Rural Grant and the Northern Ontario Grant. This will help northern universities and small, northern and rural colleges to maintain a full range of programs and provide students with local competitive choices for post-secondary education.

I want to be clear about something, Madam Speaker. Our government's approach to ensuring the financial sustainability of our post-secondary sector does not just include infusing more money into the system. We know that taxpayer dollars need to be spent wisely while still maintaining the high-quality level of education that Ontarians deserve. That's why, to further support publicly assisted colleges and universities to operate in an efficient, accountable and transparent manner, our government also announced on Monday that we're creating an Efficiency and Accountability Fund. The fund will provide institutions with \$15 million over the next three years, starting in 2024-25, to support third-party reviews. These reviews will identify actions that institutions can take to drive long-term cost savings and positive outcomes for students and communities.

Ontario will continue to work with all post-secondary institutions to create greater efficiencies in operations and program offerings because, at the end of the day, our government will hold colleges and universities accountable and ensure they are taking the necessary steps to operate as efficiently as possible.

Madam Speaker, as I'm in my last minute of time, I had better start to wrap up. In the weeks and months ahead, I look forward to continuing to work with all of our post-secondary institutions and partners to continue finding solutions that will ensure our province remains home to the best education system and workforce possible. I feel optimistic about the historic changes being proposed as part of the Strengthening Accountability and Student Supports Act, 2024. I appreciate everyone's support as we move forward.

As we are approaching the last few weeks of the school semester, I want to wish good luck to all of the students out there as they are quickly coming into exams, but a special good luck to my youngest daughter, who is graduating from Western University and looking forward to her last couple of weeks.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Questions?

Mr. Sol Mamakwa: Thank you for adding a student mental health policy in the legislation, but I will say this: In Kiiwetinoong in the north, Ralph Rowe in the 1970s and 1980s is probably the most unknown, the most prolific pedophile that this country has ever known. He was an Anglican minister of Canada. He was a Boy Scout leader of Canada as well. He had his own plane. He's a former OPP officer. And he abused 500-plus boys where I come from.

This bill needs to do more. How will you go further for First Nations students?

Hon. Jill Dunlop: Thank you to the member for that question. As I said before, we can always do more. I am meeting with the Indigenous institutes coming up shortly, where we'll be consulting on what more we can be doing. The blue-ribbon panel did address some of the issues that Indigenous institutions are facing, and that's why we have decided to specifically consult with all the institutions together on what more we can be doing on campus.

Indigenous institutes are very important in the communities, important for accessible education for First Nations learners, but also, they're an economic driver for communities. Ensuring that they do offer the program that is needed for local labour market needs—so addressing the needs of learners being close to home, but also the needs of the local labour market, ensuring that those students are rolling right into jobs.

I look forward to consulting with the First Nation institutes to ensure that we can be doing more to support those institutions.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Question?

Mr. Will Bouma: I know the minister mentioned it in her remarks, but one of my favourite places to visit in the riding is at Six Nations Polytechnic institute, the Indigenous college and university in my riding. Visiting there with the minister is wonderful. That's not to knock Conestoga or Laurier, because they do great work in our community too, but I really appreciate the responsiveness and support and the partnership that I have with that stakeholder in my community.

To see languages that were practically gone being brought back to life at Six Nations Polytechnic, but not even that—the STEAM Academy, where high school students get a whole new way of being taught on a college campus and even the other programs. To visit with the minister and see how we are providing training to fill the gaps, is so appreciated. I look forward to more programming coming out to support Indigenous students at our colleges.

I'm wondering if the minister could comment on that a little bit further.

Hon. Jill Dunlop: Thank you to the member for Brampton—Bradford—what was it again?

Mr. Will Bouma: Brantford—Brant.

Hon. Jill Dunlop: Brantford—Brant, sorry. You can tell I'm not the Speaker; I don't know people's ridings. My apologies.

We have had the chance to visit. Actually, I had mentioned earlier about the welding program. I remember that programming was funded specifically through the associate minister of women's economic empowerment, a specific fund that was set up for students as well as the institution that provided all the wraparound supports for those students. That included things like associated costs of transportation and daycare. It was really setting these women up for success. They were working with mentors as well. In the welding situation, they were entering into programs that are highly male-dominated and setting those women up for success.

I appreciate the work that Six Nations is doing, as well as all of our institutes in Ontario, setting students up for success.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Further questions?

Ms. Peggy Sattler: I listened with interest to the minister in her lead speech on Bill 166. As the minister said, this bill was introduced as part of a package of announcements that the government claims would stabilize colleges and universities, who are facing a financial crisis in this province as a result of years of chronic underfunding and cuts that have been made by this government.

The government's financial investment was \$1.3 billion over three years, which is half of what the government's own expert panel said was needed just to keep the sector afloat, which was before the international student cap was announced, which will make the financial pressures in the sector even worse.

My question to the minister is, why did this government ignore the advice that they received from the expert panel that they struck?

Hon. Jill Dunlop: Thank you to the member. You mentioned cuts, but the only cut we made was to tuition, and that was a 10% decrease in tuition back in 2019 to ensure that students had access to affordable education. The Premier was very clear when he announced and then we further announced a three-year tuition freeze for students. So we want to ensure accessible, affordable education in this province.

To your comment about the blue-ribbon panel: The panel also stated that it was a shared responsibility of students, of institutions and of the government. The government stepped up. We did our part. We provided \$1.3 billion in new funding for the sector. But to help institutions, we also provided the efficiency fund of \$15 million so that they can apply directly to the fund to be able to do those audits. The shared responsibility for the students—we didn't see a tuition increase as the panel had suggested as being something that we were interested in doing. We want to ensure affordability for students and—

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): My apologies. Further questions?

1010

Mr. Mike Harris: I want to thank the minister for this and for the investment that she and our government have made in our community in Waterloo region, totalling almost \$30 million in STEM funding, which is very important. I know she has spent a lot of time engaging with Laurier, University of Waterloo and Conestoga College and many of our other educational partners in the region.

I'm wondering if she could expand a little bit more—I know she talked about it in her lead, but just what that specific carve-out for the STEM funding means and how that's going to help these universities and post-secondary institutions train the next in-demand jobs.

Hon. Jill Dunlop: Thank you to the member. You have some great institutions in your area. I appreciate visiting and meeting with not only administration but also with the students. I love the student experience on campus when I get to chat directly with them about how they ended up at that institution and the program they were in.

I know, for myself, I was interested in STEM when I went to university. But then, when I got there—I thought I wanted to be an engineer—I realized that physics in university was much harder than physics was in high school, and my STEM career suddenly changed.

But the number of engineers, for example, that we're going to need in this province alone—Minister Fedeli is bringing these companies. They are needing thousands and thousands of STEM workers. We wanted to ensure that government wasn't going to be a barrier to training more STEM workers. We were hearing from institutions that the interest in STEM programming at their schools is very high. That's because it's very high in in-demand jobs for those students. We wanted to ensure that we were providing the funding for those students in those labour demand programs.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Further questions?

Ms. Peggy Sattler: This bill requires colleges and universities to develop and implement policies on student mental health and also anti-racism and hate. The government has committed \$8 million over three years for the student mental health piece, which, with 47 institutions in Ontario, means \$57,000 per institution for each of those three years. There's no additional funding for colleges and universities to implement the anti-hate policies.

How does the government expect institutions to be successful in developing and implementing these policies when there are no additional resources, and our sector is already in such a financial crisis?

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Quick response?

Hon. Jill Dunlop: Thank you to the member for the question. These are policies that should already be in place on campus. When we're hearing incidents of racism and hate on campus, this should already be addressed. There should be a means in place to addressing this.

We're going to work closely with Colleges Ontario and Council of Ontario Universities in ensuring that there is a standardized approach to reporting incidents of hate or racism on campus. Whether you are at U of T or a George Brown campus, it's the same policy in place. We want to ensure that—because I was hearing from students that they weren't reporting incidents because they said, "There's never any follow-up. Nothing happens." We want to—

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Thank you, Minister. We have come to the end of that session. We are moving on to members' statements.

Second reading debate deemed adjourned.

REPORT, FINANCIAL ACCOUNTABILITY OFFICER

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): I beg to inform the House that the following document has been tabled: a report entitled Expenditure Monitor 2023-24: Q3, from the Financial Accountability Office of Ontario.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY

Mr. Steve Clark: Today, I rise to recognize International Women's Day on Friday, March 8, and want to reflect on an exciting day in my riding of Leeds–Grenville we had last month.

Our region is rich with women entrepreneurship, and that was evident on Monday, February 12, when I welcomed the Associate Minister of Women's Social and Economic Opportunity, the Honourable Charmaine Williams, the 10th ministerial visit to my riding since Labour Day.

The visit began with an informative "women in business and entrepreneurship and skills development" round table discussion. Speaker, it was very successful, with 16 women leaders across our region sharing very meaningful feedback as women in business.

We followed that up the same day. The minister and I toured our riding, presenting congratulatory scrolls to five women-owned businesses. We were welcomed by Lynn Libbos at Echo Clothing Co.; Cynthia Peters at Maison Maitland; Brenda Visser at Flowers of the Field; Jenni Stotts at Tandem Unified Wellness; and Kathy Lewis at the Boboli Cafe, where we enjoyed a delicious soup and sandwich.

I'm so grateful for the women who make a difference in Leeds-Grenville and communities across Ontario through their skilled work, their resiliency and their leadership.

Happy International Women's Day.

CONFLICT IN MIDDLE EAST

MPP Kristyn Wong-Tam: Today marks 150 days since the start of the war on Gaza. We grieve with every-

one hurting from the senseless violence unfolding in the Middle East. We grieve every innocent civilian life loss.

Instead of seeing the freeing of hostages and the capture of Hamas, we have witnessed the brutal massacre of over 30,000 Palestinians, the wounding of over 71,000 civilians, and the collective punishment of Gaza by the Israeli government.

While we condemn the October 7 attacks, the International Court of Justice's interim measures to prevent genocide cannot wait. This issue might be international, but our local communities' grief knows nothing of borders or jurisdictions.

I hope that this House and all members can reach out to their federal representatives—and all Ontarians can do the same—and urge them to support the NDP motion scheduled for debate on March 18 that calls on the government to, amongst many things:

- demand an immediate ceasefire and the release of all hostages, as the NDP has called for since October 11;

- suspend all military trade and technology with Israel and increase efforts to stop the illegal trade of arms to Hamas;

- as April is too far away, immediately reinstate funding to UNRWA and support the independent investigation;

- demand unimpeded humanitarian aid to Gaza; and

- advocate for an end to the decades-long occupation of Palestinian territories and work towards a two-state solution.

Speaker, “Never again” means never again for everyone.

NEWMARKET LIONS CLUB EFFECTIVE SPEAKING CONTEST

M^{me} Dawn Gallagher Murphy: This past Saturday, I had the honour of serving as a judge at the Newmarket Lions Club Effective Speaking Contest. The Lions Club is a network of community-minded volunteers who continue to live up to their motto, “We serve.” The effective speaking contest is the largest bilingual contest of its kind in Canada. The goal is to promote competitive speaking to stimulate independent thinking among students.

I was asked to judge speakers in the French portion of the contest—junior, grades 4 to 6, and intermediate, grades 7 to 9. Students delivered a prepared speech, followed by intermediate students presenting an impromptu speech. Topics ranged from the importance of teaching history to animal companionship, to the impromptu speeches on who they admire most and the impacts of social media. Criteria for assessment included subject selection and organization of material, how the student kept the interest of the crowd, the delivery of that speech etc.

Congratulations to the intermediate French speaker, Riley, and the junior French speaker, Romy, for their outstanding speeches, earning first-place accolades. They will go on to compete in the regional contest and perhaps to the provincial contest this May.

Congratulations to all the volunteers.

SUBVENTIONS AUX RÉSIDENTS DU NORD POUR FRAIS DE TRANSPORT À DES FINS MÉDICALES

M. Guy Bourgouin: Il n'y a pas une semaine qui passe sans qu'au moins trois ou quatre citoyens de mon comté viennent me voir au sujet du « northern Ontario travel grant ». Dans la dernière année, alors que la clinique d'accouchement de l'hôpital de Hearst annonçait devoir fermer ses portes jusqu'à ce qu'elle trouve un médecin obstétricien, plusieurs femmes se faisaient diriger à la clinique la plus proche, à Kapuskasing, qui n'avait pas de place. Ces mêmes femmes se sont fait envoyer à Timmins et on leur disait de rester à Timmins durant le dernier mois de l'accouchement—à trois heures de chez elles.

Quand on demande au gouvernement comment aider ces femmes et enlever le stress financier pendant leur grossesse, il les réfère au « northern travel grant ». Le « travel grant », c'est 550 \$ maximum pour se loger durant le mois. Trouvez-moi un hôtel à ce prix; vous n'en trouverez pas. Ça coûte cher, avoir un bébé dans le Nord. Ça, c'est un exemple parmi des centaines et des milliers.

À Kapuskasing, une ville de 8 000 habitants, la liste d'attente pour un médecin de famille est de 2 500 personnes. À Hearst, on parle de la moitié de la population. Mais, un « travel grant », ça s'applique juste si vous visitez un médecin spécialiste.

1020

Quand le gouvernement a vu un projet de loi pour améliorer le « travel grant » et vraiment servir la population du nord de l'Ontario, il a décidé de faire de la partisanerie et de laisser tomber les Ontariens du Nord. Si seulement la ministre de la Santé pouvait mettre ses deux pieds dans le Nord et voir que l'accès à la santé est à deux vitesses pour nous, peut-être qu'elle pousserait son gouvernement à changer le piètre état du « travel grant ».

CONSUMER PROTECTION

Mr. Mike Harris: I want to talk to you a little bit today about NOSIs. A notice of security interest, commonly referred to as a NOSI, is a tool similar to a lien that can be placed on the land registry system by a business on personal property without the individual's knowledge. This NOSI placed on the title of the home creates an encumbrance on the title that they must clear before they sell or refinance their home.

Scammers target vulnerable people and can leave them with massive debt. This is an issue right across the province, but Waterloo regional police have been dealing with it for years. Detective Adam Stover, who is here joining us today, whom I've had the pleasure of discussing this issue with, is an expert on the subject.

Over the past few years, these scams have evolved, Mr. Speaker. A recent CTV News article stated that Kitchener resident Ian Craig has seven NOSIs on his property, totalling more than \$150,000. He's fighting to make sure others aren't scammed too. Ian said in the

article, “This is not right, for people who have invested in their homes, that somebody comes along and puts [NOSIs] on it for” more than “half of it. The way they can take advantage of people is just disgusting. This is why we need protection.”

Speaker, it’s not right, and that’s why we are fighting back. The Ministry of Public and Business Service Delivery recently ran consultations to get to the bottom of this issue. I want to thank the Minister, Waterloo region police, PA Riddell and the entire team at the ministry for their hard work. Let’s stop this unscrupulous practice. Let’s say no to NOSIs.

CHILD CARE

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: Today, I would like to use my platform to amplify the concerns expressed by those in the child care sector regarding issues attracting and retaining staff and early childhood educators. I share these concerns on behalf of child care providers across the province, but specifically, one child care provider in my community. They are losing 15 ECE graduates of Fanshawe College, because they are leaving Ontario. They are relocating to take advantage of the better immigration pathways for ECEs in other provinces.

The loss of these workers directly impacts the care and education of 120 preschoolers who would benefit from their expertise. Without immediate action, we risk compromising the quality of early childhood education in our communities and hindering the future success of our children.

The Ontario Immigrant Nominee Program serves as a gateway for individuals with the skills and experience that our economy needs to obtain permanent residency in Ontario. We must recognize and take proactive measures to retain and attract skilled professionals to this vital sector. I call upon the Ministers of Labour, Immigration, Training and Skills Development; Education; and Colleges and Universities to address this urgent matter by implementing a comprehensive provincial immigration pathway tailored explicitly to early childhood educators.

Investing in our educators and prioritizing the quality of early childhood education is not only essential for the well-being of our children but also for the prosperity and success of our province as a whole. Together, let’s work to create a more equitable and prosperous future for all Ontarians.

BRIAN MULRONEY

Mr. Logan Kanapathi: I rise today with a heavy heart, full of sadness. We mourn the loss of a truly remarkable leader. Brian Mulroney was a visionary and principled Prime Minister of Canada. He dedicated his life to pursuing Canada’s national interests and humanitarian issues worldwide.

Mr. Speaker, when I came to Canada in 1983, I was inspired by Prime Minister Mulroney and what he represented to people like me coming from a war-torn country.

His compassion, his leadership and his dedication to freedom, democracy and social justice improved the lives of millions of people around the world. He was truly a dynamic leader for Canada—a transformative force for positive change.

During the 1983 pogroms against the Tamil people during the civil war, thousands of Tamils came to Canada seeking asylum and a better place to live. Prime Minister Mulroney faced strong pressure not to accept such refugees. As a man of principle and strong moral conviction, he simply replied that Canada is “not in the business of turning away refugees.”

Prime Minister Mulroney didn’t shy away from international pressure either. Despite the opposition he faced from his allies, Prime Minister Mulroney’s support of Nelson Mandela against the apartheid government of South Africa helped bring about the end of that ugly regime. He was always committed to doing the right thing, not the popular thing.

Mr. Speaker, leaders are never born, they are made. Prime Minister Mulroney’s spirit burns bright, a candle that will light the world forever.

TENANT PROTECTION

Mr. Adil Shamji: Today, I rise to discuss an issue affecting many of my constituents in Don Valley East: demovictions.

Demovictions occur when, under existing regulations, landlords evict their tenants to demolish and rebuild. Under the current government’s lack of oversight and tenant protections, this often leaves tenants with nowhere to go, and if they can ever return, it’s to significantly higher rent.

This is the case for tenants of 10 different buildings in my riding. These tenants have a limited safety net under current regulations, predicated on something called rent-gap payments. In this, developers can pay the rent gap between a tenant’s current rate and, in most cases, the CMHC’s 2022 average rate for a similar apartment. The problem, though, is rents have skyrocketed since 2022, meaning the present rate is entirely insufficient for my constituents. At 48 Grenoble Drive, a low-rise apartment in Flemingdon Park, the rent-gap payment falls \$1,500 short of competitive pricing. That’s not right.

My community is made up of new immigrants, seniors, people dependent on fixed incomes. These buildings represent stability in troubled waters. We need more housing, but we’ve got to protect tenants and lighten their load so they’re not left high and dry. That means fixing rent-gap payments, ensuring tenants have the right to return and making sure that no tenant is ever left behind as we fight to ensure everyone in this province has access to affordable housing.

VOLT HOCKEY

Mr. Dave Smith: On March 1, I had the pleasure of introducing a brand new form of hockey to Peterborough.

Volt hockey is played using specially designed power wheelchairs. The stick blade is attached to the front of the chair and a big whiffle ball is used for the puck. It's played on a basketball court with pond-hockey-style nets.

I was first introduced to it by Karen Stintz from Variety Village when I attended the North American championships. I had the opportunity to speak to a family from Boston whose daughter was a quadriplegic. Their daughter was able to play volt hockey because the controls were adapted to work with the movement of her head. Her parents told me that they never thought that she would be able to play a team sport, and yet, here she was at the North American championships. They described it as life-altering. I knew instantly that I needed to find a way to bring this to my community.

Speaker, we worked with Variety Village, Five Counties Children's Centre, the YMCA of Eastern Ontario, the Kawartha Komets, community alternatives and the council for people with disabilities to create the team. The final hurdle was the start-up funds. But, Speaker, Sanj Sukumaran, Deanna Hayes, Peter Lemelin and Glen White from the Under the Lock Hockey Tournament—the tournament I founded and chaired for 10 years—agreed to donate all of the proceeds from Canada's most inclusive hockey event to start volt hockey.

Thank you to everyone who helped bring this vision to help kids with disabilities play Canada's favourite game.

WOMEN'S ISSUES

Mrs. Robin Martin: Friday is International Women's Day, a global annual holiday drawing attention to women's human rights, but this year, it's hard to celebrate.
1030

On October 7, Hamas terrorists made systematic sexual assaults and barbaric sexualized torture and violence a weapon of war, and the evidence has been available from that moment. The terrorists broadcast their depraved actions. The world saw the footage of multiple women being carried away on vehicles with telltale bloodied sweatpants, and many "bodies that speak" were recovered.

On November 14, a young woman reported to international media that, hiding in the bushes, she witnessed a horrific gang rape, mutilation and murder. Corroborating physical evidence of this assault was found at the scene.

After that report, there was no excuse for any women's or international group to equivocate, and yet many have been shamefully silent or worse. According to the #MeToo movement, we're supposed to believe all women who testify about sexual violence, but this year, we learned that apparently for some, that does not apply to Jewish or Israeli women.

This week, a UN report found evidence of sexual violence by Hamas on October 7 that was conflict-related, and there are indications sexual violence continues to be carried out against those still being held hostage by that group, which includes 14 Israeli women.

On October 7, 2023, and its aftermath, we're marking a very dark period in the history of the international women's

rights movement as women in Israel have been betrayed by many. Women's bodies are not a battleground on which to wage war. There's no excuse for sexual assault. It cannot be contextualized. There is no "yes, but" when it comes to rape. Now more than ever, women need to stand together to support all women, because they are human beings.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): That concludes our members' statements for this morning.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

Ms. Sandy Shaw: It gives me and my seatmate the MPP for Hamilton Mountain great pleasure to welcome a true Hamiltonian, Mike Fortune. He's a well-known journalist. He's a supporter of all community events. It's a pleasure to see you here today in your House. Thank you for being here.

Ms. Stephanie Bowman: I'm pleased today to welcome a constituent, Christine Pisapia, as well as Susan McKenzie, leader of the Kidney Patient and Donor Alliance of Canada, and the rest of their team. Christine is a transplant ambassador at Sunnybrook Hospital in Don Valley West and made the brave decision to donate a kidney to her brother. She now advocates for more people to become donors.

They're hosting a reception at lunch today in room 228 in honour of World Kidney Day on March 14, and I encourage members and their staff to join them to learn more about their transplant-first work to advance kidney donation, which I support. Welcome to Queen's Park.

Hon. Doug Downey: It's a privilege to welcome members of the Ontario Trial Lawyers Association to the Legislative Assembly today. They have a delegation here and I'd like to introduce four of them: Laurie Tucker, president; Sandev Purewal, president-elect; Barb MacFarlane, vice-president; and John Karapita, CEO. They have a reception from 5 to 7 in rooms 228 and 230. All MPPs, of course, are welcome. I hope to see you there.

Ms. Peggy Sattler: I would also like to welcome members of the Ontario Trial Lawyers Association, and in particular two OTLA members from London: Barb MacFarlane is here, who is the vice-president, and Mary-Anne Strong, on the executive board. I'm looking forward to our meeting later this afternoon.

Ms. Laura Smith: It is my very great pleasure to welcome Meghan Walker, who is a board member with the Ontario Trial Lawyers Association, and Jeffrey Shinehoft, a Thornhillier, also a board member with the Ontario Trial Lawyers Association. I'm going to be meeting with them later today. Welcome to your House.

M^{me} France Gélinas: It gives me great pleasure to introduce Cathy Orlando, who is a member of the Citizens' Climate Lobby, and here at Queen's Park today. Welcome to your House, Cathy.

Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon: Good morning, everyone. I'd like to introduce jazzy James Page, awesome Antonia Hristova and my lovely resident marvellous

Matt—congratulations on your new baby—all amazing people with the Ontario Trial Lawyers Association. Welcome.

Hon. Charmaine A. Williams: I'd like to recognize today's page captain, Sarah Salman. She is joined by her family here today: Sumaira Salman, her mother; Muhammad Salman Bhatti; and Muhammad Zohaib Bhatti, her brother.

MPP Kristyn Wong-Tam: Good morning, everyone. I have a number of people I'd like to introduce. First of all, I'd like to begin with an introduction to Taylor Pizzirusso, my OLIP intern. Welcome to your House. It's wonderful to have you here today.

We also have the Ontario Society of Professional Engineers, who are hosting their reception this evening at 5 o'clock. I'd like to welcome Sandro Perruzza, Stephanie Holko and Paola Cetares. Thank you for the meeting this morning—very informative; always looking forward to working with you.

I also want to extend a welcome to the Ontario trial lawyers, beginning with president Laurie Tucker, vice-president Barbara MacFarlane, Sandev Purewal and all other board and staff who are here for their reception and lobby day in Queen's Park; and then finally, to Cathy Orlando from the Citizens' Climate Lobby.

Thank you very much, everyone. Welcome to your House.

Hon. Andrea Khanjin: I'd like to introduce some guests who aren't quite here yet. I want to introduce Alan Bostakian, Nayereh Dabiri, Neda Akhavan and Mandana Hezar.

Ms. Catherine Fife: I'd like to welcome Jan Marin and Daniela Pacheco from the Ontario trial lawyers. We had a great meeting, and I look forward to joining you in your lobby day.

Hon. Michael Parsa: I'd like to welcome from my riding Marian Reich, a member of the kidney alliance foundation and a kidney donor herself. Welcome to Queen's Park, Marian.

MPP Lise Vaugeois: I would like to welcome today, from the Ontario Trial Lawyers Association, Vanshika Dhawan, Sean Hayward and Maria Damiano. Welcome to your House.

Mr. Brian Riddell: Today, I have the honour of introducing two very important people who have helped in the fight against NOSIs. I'd like to introduce detective Adam Stover from Waterloo regional police and liaison officer David Mullock to this House. I would like to thank them for the work that they do.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Unless there are objections, I'd like to continue with introduction of visitors.

Mr. Chris Glover: I'd like to welcome to the House the Ontario Trial Lawyers Association, including the three people I met this morning: Barbara MacFarlane, Mike Giordano and Jay Ralston. Welcome to the Legislature.

Mr. Steve Clark: As mentioned earlier, the kidney alliance of Canada is here today for a lunch and reception and an advocacy day. It's great to have Lynn van der Linde

from the municipality of North Grenville here. I had a great meeting in my riding. Welcome to Queen's Park.

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: I, as well, met with the Ontario Trial Lawyers Association this morning. I see that one of the people that I met with here, James Page, is in the House. I want to welcome him and thank the other members that I met with: Nital Gosai, Barbara MacFarlane and Mike Santilli. Thank you very much and welcome to your House.

Mr. Andrew Dowie: First, I'd like to welcome all my fellow professional engineers from the Ontario Society of Professional Engineers here to the House today. And from Windsor—Essex, representing the Ontario Trial Lawyers Association, we have Joanna Sweet, Steven Bezaire, Jaclyn Habas, Myla Picco and Jacqueline Staley. Welcome to Queen's Park.

Mr. Sol Mamakwa: *Remarks in Anishiniimowin.* Good morning. I'd like to welcome some people from the riding of Kiiwetinoong in northern Ontario: Ruth Sainnawap, Naomi Chikane, Eunice Mamakwa, Shirlene Anderson, Mary Lou Winters, Alice Sabourin, Jessilyn Winters, Ida Mielke, Sharon Quequish, Cheryl Sakchekapo, Nathaniel Anderson, Sonny Mamakwa and Deputy Grand Chief Anna Betty Achneepineskum. Meegwetch for coming.

1040

BRIAN MULRONEY

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): I recognize the government House leader on a point of order.

Hon. Paul Calandra: If you seek it, you will find unanimous consent to allow members to make statements in remembrance for the late Right Honourable Brian Mulroney, 18th Prime Minister of Canada, with five minutes allotted to His Majesty's loyal opposition, five minutes allotted to the independent members as a group and five minutes allotted to His Majesty's government.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The government House leader is seeking the unanimous consent of the House to allow members to make statements in remembrance for the late Right Honourable Brian Mulroney, 18th Prime Minister of Canada, with five minutes allotted to His Majesty's loyal opposition, five minutes allotted to the independent members as a group and five minutes allotted to His Majesty's government. Agreed? Agreed.

I recognize the leader of His Majesty's loyal opposition.

Ms. Marit Stiles: It's a pleasure to rise today on behalf of the official opposition to share our deepest condolences on the passing of the Right Honourable Brian Mulroney, Canada's 18th Prime Minister.

I want to start by offering, of course, our most sincere sympathies to the family of Prime Minister Mulroney: his wife Mila; our colleague the President of the Treasury Board and the member for York—Simcoe; Ben, Mark and Nicolas; and all of his grandchildren, family, friends and loved ones as they find themselves in the midst of such a huge loss. I want you to know that as you find yourselves

navigating through this new grief, a nation is grieving right alongside you.

Brian Mulroney's commitment to Canada and its people cannot be understated. He's left a legacy that will be remembered and recounted for generations to follow. I want to reflect for a moment on what that legacy means as we face, in this moment, the very real and looming threat of climate change. Every day we are breaking new records—and not the good kind—but climate change denialism persists as a major challenge.

Decades ago, when climate activism wasn't as loud or as visible, Brian Mulroney campaigned for the planet. Under his leadership, Canada broke ground on a number of environmental policies. It was Prime Minister Mulroney who led the signing of the acid rain treaty with the United States. It was a unique first step in managing cross-border pollution. As well, there was the Montreal Protocol, an international treaty to ban CFCs that were burning a hole in the ozone layer. That's still one of the most successful international environmental treaties.

I could go on listing his environmental accomplishments: the Canadian Environmental Assessment Act, the Environmental Protection Act, ratifying the Convention on Biological Diversity, recognizing conservation of biodiversity as a common concern of humankind—under Prime Minister Mulroney's leadership Canada was the first industrialized country to do so. His government released the Green Plan, with millions in funds and policies to bring carbon emissions under control. For Prime Minister Brian Mulroney, the environment and the Earth's well-being was not a partisan issue. He understood the importance of coming together to save the planet that we all share and his actions on this matter reflected that.

Many will also remember that under Prime Minister Mulroney's watch Canada was one of the first countries that Nelson Mandela visited upon his release from prison after nearly 27 years. We don't have to tell anybody in this room, probably, but Prime Minister Mulroney repeatedly called for the release of Nelson Mandela and he took on Margaret Thatcher to impose sanctions on the apartheid regime. Back when I was a young thing, that was an issue that I cared very deeply about. And while there's no question that, certainly, the fight for liberation in South Africa was won by South Africans, by people organizing and resisting, sanctions were an absolutely critical factor in applying international pressure to the apartheid state.

Personally, I saw another side to that role that Canada played, because Canada also used, under Prime Minister Mulroney, our international development heft to support the front-line states in their resistance against apartheid as well.

My family's life changed under Prime Minister Mulroney's policies. We were living in Newfoundland, and my father got a contract doing work for CIDA in international development in southern Africa, working with the SADC states. At that time, there was enormous resistance to apartheid in South Africa. His project was to ensure industrial energy conservation was taking place in those front-line states. What was important about that was

it allowed for those states to remain independent of the South African apartheid state. It was a critical thing. It was another way—and I think there were many of these tactics that were used by Canada in that moment—to use our policy and our money and our decisions to put pressure to end apartheid. It's something that changed my life, and it changed my family's life.

Mr. Mulroney's legacy is folded into Canada's story, and that's quite a legacy to leave. He also leaves a more personal legacy for many of us in political life, as a mentor and as someone who was always willing to reach across party lines to give advice. He even left me a message or two, I will say.

I was reminded at Ed Broadbent's memorial not very long ago—another great Canadian—of their friendship. A friend of mine was reminding me that at the inaugural Broadbent Institute gala a number of years back, Mr. Mulroney sent in a lovely little video, and it started out with him saying, "Hello, Brian Mulroney here. Bet you're wondering what I'm doing at the Broadbent gala." I know they had a very close friendship and respect for each other, and I think that was very important to Mr. Broadbent as well.

On the other side of someone's passing, the loss feels so huge. It is huge, and it is sometimes insurmountable. This morning of tributes is our human attempt to fill the vacuum that can otherwise feel so overwhelming. As we remember a Prime Minister and a global leader, we are really remembering a person: a brother, a father, a husband and a valued community member.

So to Caroline, to Mr. Mulroney's family, I can only hope there is some solace and smiles and warmth to be found in the very rich life that Brian Mulroney led. And I say this again: Those whose lives were touched by your father across this country and around the world are standing right beside you. I hope you're all feeling our support that is there with you today.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Next, I recognize the member for Ottawa South.

Mr. John Fraser: It's an honour today to rise to pay tribute to the Right Honourable Brian Mulroney, Canada's 18th Prime Minister.

Brian Mulroney's impact on Canada and the world was significant: the fight against apartheid in South Africa, the GST, fighting acid rain and championing free trade. It was free trade, John Turner and Brian Mulroney that got me off the couch in 1998 to go and knock doors in Ottawa South, and that was the spark that led me here some 25 years later.

Since then, I've come closer to his position on free trade. That's the thing about political legacies: Our victories, our mistakes, our missed opportunities are always looked at through the lens of the present. They're subject to debate. There is a legacy that is more important, and that is the mark that you leave on people's hearts.

Our colleague the President of the Treasury Board introduced me to her father at the tribute to another great leader, former Premier Bill Davis. And I don't remember his words as much as I remember how he made me feel—

warm words of encouragement, a genuine interest. After that conversation, I thought to myself, I understand why Brian Mulroney is so special, but it wasn't until reading the tributes that poured in after his death that I realized his lasting legacy. There was a recurring theme: He was always the first to call a colleague or a political rival who had suffered a defeat, a victory, a personal loss or was just having a hard time. He took time with them. He left an impression on everyone he met. Not only was he a friend to many, most importantly, he was a dad, a granddad, a husband and a son.

1050

In closing, I'd like to use some of Brian Mulroney's own words to pay tribute to him. Late one night, he asked Arthur Milnes, who helped him write his memoirs, to review a passage he wrote about the death of his father, Ben. I'll try to get through this. "In the evenings I would take him in my arms like a child—he was losing weight very quickly—and carry him downstairs to the living room so he could watch TV and tune in to the CBC ... news. In those days the lead announcer was Earl Cameron, who always concluded his newscast with the words, 'This is Earl Cameron saying good night from Toronto,' and my dad unflinchingly replied with a smile, 'Good night, Earl.' He continued to do this right to the end."

To the Mulroney family: I'm sure that your father is in his dad's arms right now.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Next, the member for Guelph.

Mr. Mike Schreiner: It is an honour today to rise to pay tribute to the Right Honourable Brian Mulroney. Prime Minister Mulroney was one of a kind, with his baritone voice, remarkable storytelling ability and his courage to take extraordinary risk as Prime Minister. His remarkable ability to connect with people, building relationships through his persistent work on the phones is a lesson for all politicians that, even in this day and age of social media, taking the time for the personal touch makes a difference.

It's hard to imagine another Prime Minister winning the landslide majority that Prime Minister Mulroney won in 1984, and he put that majority to work, proposing transformative changes that few Prime Ministers would dare to advance, from economic reform, such as free trade and the GST; to constitutional proposals in Meech Lake and Charlottetown; to international efforts, highlighted by his efforts to end apartheid in South Africa.

What I want to highlight most is to emphasize Prime Minister Mulroney's game-changing work on environmental issues. Securing a treaty on acid rain with the US made our lakes and rivers cleaner. Making Canada the first industrialized country to ratify the Convention on Biological Diversity is even more relevant today. His passing of the environmental assessment and environmental protection acts protects the places we all love in Canada. His support for the Montreal Protocol and the ozone layer shows how international co-operation can help us fight existential threats such as the climate crisis.

I want to extend my sincerest condolences to the Mulroney family, especially our colleague, his daughter, the member from York-Simcoe. Brian Mulroney was a devoted husband to his wife, Mila, and father and grandfather to his many children and grandchildren.

I hope you all find comfort in the outpouring of support and love and tributes across the country for Prime Minister Mulroney. Thank you for sharing him with us, for his work transformed Canada.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Next, the Premier.

Hon. Doug Ford: I rise today to remember the remarkable life of Prime Minister Brian Mulroney, who sadly passed away last week. Prime Minister Brian Mulroney had a massive impact on Ontario and Canada. His vision and his leadership profoundly shaped our nation.

Serving as Prime Minister from 1984 to 1993, he challenged the status quo for a better country from coast to coast. He championed economic and tax reforms to build a stronger economy. He was the driving force behind the Canada-US Free Trade Agreement and later NAFTA. He's the reason that today we do over \$1.2 trillion in two-way trade with the United States every single year.

He was a larger-than-life figure who not only reshaped Canada's political landscape but also its place on the world stage. He gave our country confidence that we never had before. He carried great influence with global leaders like President Ronald Reagan, President George H.W. Bush and Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher. And he used that influence to play a leading role in ending South Africa's racist apartheid system and in the international response to the Ethiopian famine.

Prime Minister Mulroney was instrumental in negotiating the landmark acid rain treaty. He knew that a strong economy and a strong environment go hand in hand, and it's a lesson that I carry with me today.

Even after politics, he never stopped serving the people. He became an elder statesman, an adviser to so many of us.

On a personal note, he was a mentor, he was a role model and a friend. I have so many fond memories of him. I used to call him when I needed advice. When I was faced with a tough decision, he was always quick to answer the phone. And he had the best stories. If you've ever heard Prime Minister Mulroney's stories—he had the best stories, and he always had a way to lift you up. I used to tell him after our chats that I felt so inspired and ready to take on the world.

Mr. Speaker, I'll tell you a personal story: My mother, when she was sick—she loved the Prime Minister. He gave her a CD. I don't know if people realize there's a CD out there of the Prime Minister with all his songs and with his voice. She would be playing it all the time. I came home one day and heard Brian Mulroney's voice singing, and I thought, "Okay, Mum, where's he hiding?" She had his CD, and I thought, "Boy, wouldn't this be an appropriate time to give him a call?" I gave him a call. He answered, and I said—I always called him "Prime Minister"—"Prime Minister, I walked into the house and

my mum was listening to your song.” He said, “Can you pass the phone to your mother?” I passed it to her, and he started to sing. By the time he was done, my mother was a puddle on the floor. He was such a true gentleman.

Brian was so proud of his family: his wife, Mila; his four children, Caroline, Ben, Mark and Nicolas; and his many grandchildren.

I see so much of Brian’s best qualities in Caroline. I see the kindness, the intelligence and selfless service. I told him—just bear with me. I told him that when his daughter—because anyone knows that when you have a daughter—sons are sons; they’re great too. But when you have a daughter—now his daughter was stepping into the big leagues. She was coming down here, and I think—when you talked to him about Caroline, you could hear it; you could see it in his eyes. She was the apple of his eye. I think I gave him comfort—and not that she needed this, believe me. Caroline is one of the smartest, toughest women I know, and everyone knows that. I said, “I will protect her with my life. I’ll make sure I look after her.” The ironic thing is she’s protecting me and looks after me all the time. It just gave him comfort. When you would talk to Caroline about her dad, she would light up, just light up. You could see the glow in her face.

1100

I just want to say, our prayers are with the Mulroney family, and especially Caroline. On behalf of the people of Ontario, I want to offer our condolences, our prayers, our thoughts to the family.

And I want to thank you for sharing your dad with us, Caroline, for so many years. While he’s left us now, he leaves behind a legacy as a trailblazer, as a visionary, as one of the greatest Prime Ministers in Canadian history, as a great man. He’ll be dearly missed by all.

I just want to say thank you to his family and to the Prime Minister for serving. May God bless Brian Mulroney.

Applause.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): I thank the members for their eloquent tributes as together we give thanks for the life and public service of the Right Honourable Martin Brian Mulroney. We should almost have a recess.

It is now time for oral questions.

QUESTION PERIOD

GOVERNMENT ACCOUNTABILITY

Ms. Marit Stiles: This question is for the Premier. Recently, through a freedom of information request, the NDP has obtained nearly 4,000 pages of records from the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing that discussed the Premier’s infamous greenbelt grab. The documents include emails that were forwarded to Ryan Amato, the former chief of staff to the former Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing. One thing that kept coming up in these documents is several uses of the phrase G-asterisk or G-star.

So my question to the Premier is, does the Premier have any idea what that means or why it would be used in internal communications with Mr. Amato and the minister’s office?

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing.

Hon. Paul Calandra: I appreciate the question from the member opposite. Look, I think I’ve addressed that on multiple occasions, as has the Integrity Commissioner. What we’re continuing to focus on is ensuring that we put in place the conditions that will help more homes be built across the province of Ontario.

Look, we inherited a situation in the province of Ontario where the previous Liberal government, supported by the NDP, frankly, have put obstacle after obstacle in the way of getting homes built. Those obstacles have led us to a housing crisis which we have been relentless in trying to get resolved.

Now, Mr. Speaker, during the time of the Liberals, you saw housing starts either decrease or be levelled below what was required. Since we have come to office, since we’ve started removing those obstacles, you are seeing year after year not only the highest level of purpose-built rental housing ever in Ontario’s history, but you’re also seeing that housing starts have averaged up each and every year. So we’re going to continue to remove the obstacles that were put in the way by the previous Liberal government, and we’re going to continue to build more homes for the people of the province of Ontario.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The supplementary question.

Ms. Marit Stiles: No, I don’t think it has been addressed, actually. While this G-star, G-asterisk or whatever could be a cute shorthand, it carries a lot of significance here, because when we compared the original emails with those forwarded to Mr. Amato, it was very obvious that “G*” meant “greenbelt.” It means that a search, though, of Mr. Amato’s account using the term “greenbelt” wasn’t going to return those particular emails. It means that replacing the word “greenbelt” with “G*” is evidence of an intent to conceal, like someone was trying to cover their tracks.

So my question back to the Premier: Was anyone directed to avoid or conceal references to the greenbelt in their written communications so they could avoid being captured in a freedom-of-information request?

Hon. Paul Calandra: Look, as I just said, the Integrity Commissioner has issued a report on that, and I think I’ve answered the question on numerous occasions. But at the same time, it doesn’t change the fact that we are faced with a situation in the province of Ontario and, frankly, across the country in very many respects, where we need to get more homes built. We need to put in place the conditions that will see more homes built, especially in the province of Ontario.

Look, we inherited an absolute mess—not just a mess that led to a housing crisis, a budgetary crisis. We inherited a mess that saw manufacturing leave the province of Ontario at record levels. It is no secret that when this

government took office, we wanted to remove those barriers. Those barriers that we have been lifting have seen record job creation across the province of Ontario.

More people setting up businesses in the province of Ontario, billions of dollars' worth of economic investment, hundreds of thousands of people coming to this province for the hope and opportunity that this government has allowed to flourish across the province means more homes need to be built. We'll remove the obstacles that the Liberals put in the way, and we'll get the job done.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The final supplementary.

Ms. Marit Stiles: In addition to "G*," the government adopted the term "special project" to refer to the greenbelt grab. The term is used at least 80 times just in the FOI records that we've acquired. Mr. Amato and Patrick Sackville—who I will remind folks watching is the Premier's current chief of staff—exchanged multiple emails referring to this "special project," including between their personal accounts. According to the Integrity Commissioner's report, Mr. Amato identified Mr. Sackville as the "decision maker in the Premier's office for this project."

So I'm going back to the Premier again, hoping for an answer: Did anyone in the Premier's office direct others to avoid email or use code words when discussing the special project of carving up the greenbelt, and when is the Premier going to be disclosing this to the RCMP?

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Members will please take their seats.

The Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing.

Hon. Paul Calandra: Look, as I said, the Integrity Commissioner has issued a report, and I think I've answered the question on numerous occasions.

But getting back to the facts as they stand, in the province of Ontario we inherited a situation in 2018 that saw Ontario not only in a housing crisis but in an economic crisis. We were faced with a situation where we needed to balance the budget, we needed to reduce taxes and we needed to eliminate red tape that was stifling growth across the province of Ontario.

Now, housing affordability isn't just about removing obstacles, Mr. Speaker. I can remove all of the obstacles that I want, but housing affordability also has to do with people's ability to—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Order.

Hon. Paul Calandra: —that housing. And the high interest rate, high inflation policies of the federal government are removing too many people from the ability to buy their first home, from their ability to rent that home. On April 1, you will see again even more costs at the feet of the people of the province of Ontario with another increase in the carbon tax.

You want housing affordability? We'll remove obstacles. Help us keep taxes down so more people can afford those homes.

GOVERNMENT ACCOUNTABILITY

Ms. Marit Stiles: You think you can hide, but you cannot hide from this. You cannot hide from this. It's going to come out.

Speaker, back to the Premier: The reason this is important is because it is part of a growing mountain of evidence that the government has deliberately tried to cover up the details of its \$8-billion greenbelt grab. Last year, the Auditor General uncovered evidence that government officials had inappropriately used personal email accounts and devices when discussing the greenbelt grab. Today's FOI shows more of the same between Mr. Amato and Mr. Sackville in the Premier's office.

Back to the Premier again: Is it standard operating procedure to have staff use personal devices and accounts when discussing the "special project" known internally as "G*"?

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): I remind the members to make their comments through the Chair.

The Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing.

Hon. Paul Calandra: As I said, the Integrity Commissioner has issued a report; the Auditor General has issued a report. This government has acted on a public policy decision that was not supported by the people of the province of Ontario. But what we are doing, Mr. Speaker, and what we have been doing since day one, is focusing on rebuilding the province of Ontario that was left a mess by the previous Liberal government, supported by the NDP.

We had the highest over-regulated economy in Canada, and now we have removed those obstacles. We removed that unnecessary red tape and regulation. The Minister of Economic Development, Job Creation and Trade has attracted over \$28 billion worth of investment to the province of Ontario. Where before, manufacturers were leaving Ontario, now they are coming back and fighting to be part of this economy. That is what we are accomplishing. Where before our students were failing in school, now they are not only leading Canada; they are leading the world. We're putting more money back in the pockets of the people of the province of Ontario, but unfortunately, the high-inflation, high-spending, high-debt policies of the federal Liberal government have led to a crisis that is seeing interest rates putting too many people out of the ability to buy their first home.

1110

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Member for Hamilton Mountain will come to order.

The supplementary question.

Ms. Marit Stiles: Speaker, the stench of this scandal has seeped into everything this government touches. That's the truth.

The Information and Privacy Commissioner has already warned the government, I'll remind them, about deleting emails and concealing information through the use of personal emails and personal devices after we uncovered that government officials were already doing that.

Deleting emails related to this massive government policy, using personal accounts or not, is in contravention of the law. When the Liberals did that, someone went to jail.

So back to the Premier: Why did your staff delete emails related to the greenbelt grab?

Hon. Paul Calandra: I'll remind the Leader of the Opposition that when the Liberals broke the law it was the NDP that kept them in power, which has led to the economic catastrophe that was the province of Ontario in 2018.

Now, we have moved on so many fronts to restore Ontario as the engine of the Canadian economy. Look, we're doing things that put more money back in the pockets of the people of Ontario. Look at what the Associate Minister of Transportation has been able to accomplish with respect to One Fare. Now, they talked about it a lot, but they were never able to get it done. This government got it done. That's about \$1,600 in the pockets of the people of Ontario.

We are able to build subways. Do you know why? Because we're focused on getting results for the people of the province of Ontario. Now, they announced it a million times. They kept announcing and announcing and announcing, getting nothing done. We're building hospitals and long-term-care homes in parts of the province that have never had them before. We are restoring Ontario as the best place to live, work, invest and raise a family, not only in Canada but the entire world.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Final supplementary.

Ms. Marit Stiles: Speaker, Liberals went to jail because we found them out, and people in Ontario shouldn't have to use a code breaker to know what their government is up to.

We know it wasn't just emails. The Premier has admitted to using his personal phone for government business. He says it all the time, every day, and yet he refuses to share his phone records. Why? What is he hiding?

Brown envelopes, coded messages, burner phones, Speaker—at every turn, it looks like the Premier's office took deliberate steps to cover their tracks. We're going to get to the bottom of it. We sure will, or the RCMP will, because this government is under criminal investigation. But they could come clean right now, and they might help themselves.

Speaker, I want to ask the Premier again: When will he finally own up to his role in this scheme, or do we have to wait for the RCMP?

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Members will please take their seats.

Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing.

Hon. Paul Calandra: Look, I think the Leader of the Opposition has to stop watching Netflix, because do you know what the people of the province of Ontario are focused on? I'll tell you what they're focused on: They want better results for their children when they go to school. This Minister of Education has not only delivered

peace in our schools, but he is delivering a better quality of education and seeing our students—imagine this—leading Canada, leading North America. They're no longer “discovering” math; they're learning math because of this Minister of Education, while at the same time, this Minister of Long-Term Care is the most successful Minister of Long-Term Care, bringing long-term care to parts of this province that have never had it before. Do you know why, Mr. Speaker? Because when the Liberals, supported by the NDP, were in power, they built only 611. There are more long-term-care beds being built in my own riding than there were across the entire province under the Liberals. We're building roads: the 413 in Brampton. Do you know why? Because it means more jobs and opportunity for the people of Brampton, and we'll get the job—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Thank you. Order. The next question.

HIGHWAY TOLLS

Ms. Jennifer K. French: My question is to the Minister of Transportation. When the 407 was built, there was a plan for it to be paid by 2027 and then we would own it. Instead, the Conservatives sold it for a song, the tolls have gone up about 300%, and the 407 ETR owns us. The 99-year lease was highway robbery, actually.

People resent that the 407 tolls are out of control. People want to get where they want to go, and this government could save people time, make the 401 safer and improve the flow of goods. We proposed a solution to help, and this government voted against it.

So my question is, why isn't the government willing to talk about the 407 and toll relief?

Hon. Prabmeet Singh Sarkaria: Mr. Speaker, once again, we know what this is all about: It's about their campaign to stop Highway 413, and we will not listen to them. The people of this province elected us to build Highway 413. In fact, they lost three members for being on the wrong side of that.

Everything that this government has done under the leadership of Premier Ford has put more money back into hard-working families of this province, whether it's 10 cents a litre on the gas tax; whether it's removing tolls on the 412 or 418, which that member voted against when this Premier put that forward; or whether it's removing \$125 val-tag fees from each car or truck that an individual owns in this province.

And on top of that, we are fighting against the 23% increase of the carbon tax that's coming on April 1. I hope that member also raises her voice to the federal members that she knows and her counterparts to make sure that we keep more money in the pockets of hard-working families in Ontario.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Supplementary?

Ms. Jennifer K. French: The 407 is an existing highway we are barely using. I introduced my private member's bill to remove tolls from the 412 and the 418, and the government took four years to make it happen. I'm

suggesting we remove 407 truck tolls, renegotiate the contract to better serve commuters. But we'd like to be able to do it faster, please; no wants to wait another four years.

So let's take the tolls off the trucks, get the trucks off the 401 and make traffic better for everyone. Let's renegotiate the 407 ETR contract. Everyone knows traffic congestion is already brutal, but we could do this now.

So my question is, when will this Conservative government be willing to do something about the 407?

Hon. Prabmeet Singh Sarkaria: Every single step this government has taken has been around building infrastructure in this province, whether that's our commitment to build Highway 413 or invest \$27 billion in roads and highways across this province. But do you know what, Mr. Speaker? Whether it's the Liberals or NDP, they don't believe in building roads or highways; in fact, they're doubling down on comments from the federal environment minister, who said there's no need to invest in any more roads or highways in Canada.

My message to both the Liberals and the NDP is: Get out of the bubble. Come to cities like Brampton. Come to cities like Mississauga. Travel the streets and roads all across this province, whether they're in northern Ontario, southern Ontario, and listen to the drivers. We need to build more infrastructure. We need to build the Bradford Bypass. We need to build Highway 413, and as we do that, we're going to continue to fight against punishing policies like the carbon tax, which is about to go up by 23% on April 1.

We will continue to fight for hard-working families in this province and put more money back into their pockets.

TAXATION

M^{me} Dawn Gallagher Murphy: My question is for the Minister of Finance. The carbon tax drives up the price of everything from filling up our cars to heating our homes in the winter. It hurts our economy and punishes the hard-working people and businesses of our province.

At a time of high interest rates and high cost of living, Ontarians need more financial relief, not another tax. While our government has been speaking up against this punitive tax since day one, the opposition NDP and independent Liberals continue to ignore its harmful impacts. Ontarians deserve better from their elected officials.

Speaker, can the minister tell this House what our government is doing to protect Ontario families and businesses from the high cost the Liberal carbon tax has on gas?

1120

Hon. Peter Bethlenfalvy: Thank you to the hard-working member from Newmarket–Aurora for that great question.

Interjections.

Hon. Peter Bethlenfalvy: Yes, I would give her applause.

You know, Mr. Speaker, the independent Liberals must think that money grows on trees, because their continued support for a carbon tax on Ontarians makes no sense.

Somehow, they continue to reject our great members' motions to eliminate the carbon tax and save businesses and consumers money when shopping for the goods they need to live. Instead, our government is the one standing up for the hard-working people of Ontario, day in and day out, by stepping in and cutting the gas tax and providing savings for people and businesses across this province.

I look forward to that member and the independent Liberals and the queen of the carbon tax voting against a new carbon tax and for our new bill, the Get It Done Act, 2024.

Mr. Stephen Blais: H-S-T. H-S-T.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The member for Orléans, come to order.

Supplementary question.

M^{me} Dawn Gallagher Murphy: Thank you to the minister for that response.

Speaker, we hear it from everyone: The carbon tax is simply not worth the cost. Across Ontario, households are struggling to make ends meet, and businesses continue to face economic uncertainty due to ongoing global supply chain challenges. They need support, not a tax that will cause unnecessary harm.

We know that the independent Liberals refuse to stand up for their constituents and call on their federal counterparts to end the carbon tax. Our government will continue to lead by example and fight the carbon tax, while keeping costs down for Ontarians.

Speaker, can the minister please explain how our government is supporting Ontario businesses and families?

Hon. Peter Bethlenfalvy: Thank you to the great member for that question.

You know, Mr. Speaker, for too long, governments here and in Ottawa have left Ontarians behind. Workers, families and businesses have had enough, and that's why they elected our government and our plan to get it done.

That's why it's our government who is building infrastructure, who is building more and more in Ontario and keeping costs down. It's our government who is standing up to protect Ontarians from any party or government making life unaffordable, and it is this government who will continue to build Ontario into the best place to heat your home, fill up your tank and buy your groceries. We're getting it done.

UNIVERSITY AND COLLEGE FUNDING

Ms. Peggy Sattler: My question is to the Premier.

Speaker, last week, the federal immigration minister said that comments about the international student cap made by the Minister of Colleges and Universities were "complete garbage." Now, we may never know what really happened between those two ministers, but we do know that the cap was announced on January 22, and it's now March 6.

Meanwhile, the application process for international students in this province is at a complete standstill until the government makes a decision on how the cap will be allocated and how attestation letters will be issued.

Speaker, how much longer do Ontario colleges and universities have to wait?

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): And to reply, the Minister of Colleges and Universities.

Hon. Jill Dunlop: I'm surprised to hear the NDP defending Justin Trudeau, frankly. And yes, I have expressed my dissatisfaction with the lack of consultation by the federal government. But don't just listen to me: In fact, the BC Premier, who is an NDP Premier, said, "My message for Minister Miller would be to work with the province on this.... A federally dictated cap could have profound and negative impacts."

From the NDP BC housing minister, Minister Kahlon: "The concern I have is they need to talk to the provinces on how they are going to do this. Saying they are going to put a cap on might sound good and get them through a media cycle, but these are people we are talking about."

New Brunswick Post-Secondary Education Minister Holder said the cap "is going to be a major challenge. It's going to throw a major wrench into the whole recruitment side of things this year ... penalized for their good work" when it comes to recruiting international students needed to help address the local labour market needs.

In fact, the federal minister did absolutely no consultation with any of the provinces, and yes, we are all dissatisfied with the result.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Supplementary question.

Ms. Peggy Sattler: The cap is now in place. This government should be trying to figure out how to move forward. While Ontario drags its feet, international students who want to study here are applying elsewhere: to BC, where they have figured out a process, or Quebec or the UK or Australia. Every day that goes by without an announcement just increases the financial uncertainty and chaos for Ontario colleges and universities.

Can the minister at least tell this House how the cap will be allocated? Will the government take into account the track record of individual institutions in their approval rates for international study visas and in the supports they provide to international students?

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Members will please take their seats.

Minister of Colleges and Universities.

Hon. Jill Dunlop: Thank you to the member for that question. We have been working directly with OUAC and OCAS, which are the systems that are in place for colleges and universities, for the attestation letters. So we will be providing our response shortly.

But myself and many members of this House—and I spoke with the minister of small businesses about the impact that we're going to see on our local economies. Again, not just from me, but I have a quote from the CFIB president Dan Kelly: "The recent changes will impact many small businesses who are grappling with labour shortages, particularly those in smaller and rural communities.... While it's understandable why government wants

to put some limits in place, it needs to move carefully and consider implications for the whole economy."

The Niagara chamber of commerce, Hugo Chesshire: "If there is a sudden drop in the number of graduating students in these professions, in these trades and then, years down the line as that gap works down into the labour market, there'll be another labour shortage to come." There just won't be "enough students."

Mr. Speaker, we will be looking forward to our response coming shortly.

TAXATION

Mr. Matthew Rae: My question is to the great Minister of Energy. The federal carbon tax is raising prices on everything, from energy bills, groceries, into everyday essentials. That's why this Premier and our government fought this punitive tax all the way to the Supreme Court. Our government will always fight for the taxpayer in Ontario.

Last fall, the federal government chose to merely suspend the carbon tax on home heating oil, a source of higher emissions utilized only by 2.5% of Ontarians. But the tax on natural gas, which I use and 70% of Ontarians use, is going to go up. It's unfair that the federal Liberals and provincial Liberals—who don't call their colleagues in Ottawa—are ignoring the burden being placed on most Ontarians.

Can the minister please tell this House why the federal government's selective exemption on the carbon tax is unfair?

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The parliamentary assistant and member for Kitchener South—Hespeler.

Ms. Jess Dixon: I thank the member for his very passionate question. I know that he is a dedicated representative of his constituents, many of which can include rural communities and farmers who are particularly impacted by this devastating tax. We have heard time and time again in this House just how damaging this is for greenhouse growers, for small businesses, for farmers and for families.

For the federal government to continue ignoring our pleas for a break, to axe this tax, there really is no answer for it. This is the most damaging thing that Ontarians are currently facing, and the fact it's going up even higher is unconscionable.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The supplementary question.

Mr. Matthew Rae: Thank you to our great parliamentary assistant for the response.

Home heating is not a luxury; it is a necessity in Ontario. However, many Ontarians cannot afford to pick and choose what heating fuel they can use. Whether it's home heating oil or natural gas or other forms of gas, like propane—and they were here last week; great propane members and businesses in my riding—Ontarians should not be unfairly forced to pay additional costs to stay warm during the winter months. And it's unfortunate that the only party in this Legislature that is focused on providing

real relief to Ontarians is this party on this side and the missing middle over there, Speaker.

While the Liberals and NDP are content with the carbon tax going up on April 1, as you can hear in this place, our government continues to keep costs down for the people of Ontario. Can the parliamentary assistant please share the steps our government is taking to provide more affordability for home heating as the federal carbon tax skyrockets?

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The parliamentary assistant, the member for Glengarry–Prescott–Russell.

1130

Mr. Stéphane Sarrazin: I guess it takes two parliamentary assistants to be just as great as the minister.

I'd like to thank the member for that additional question.

Our government continues to make investments aimed at keeping energy costs affordable for families.

In the past year alone, we've announced the enhancement of the Ontario Electricity Rebate, ensuring stability and predictability in electricity bills. That's going to save an average household more than \$300 this year alone. But that's not going to help if the opposition and federal government keep pushing a painful carbon tax.

We urge the federal government to join efforts in terminating the carbon tax on home heating for Ontarians, just like they have done for a majority of people in Atlantic Canada. It is imperative for the federal government to act promptly. Winter isn't over yet, and folks are still paying for the electricity bill.

BLOOD AND PLASMA DONATION

Ms. Sandy Shaw: I have a question for the Premier.

Paying for blood and plasma donations is banned in Ontario, but incredibly, this government is allowing a Spanish company to open a centre in Hamilton that will pay for plasma. Ontario's Voluntary Blood Donations Act prohibits payment for blood. This is a law which the Minister of Health herself voted in favour of.

So my question to the Premier: Will you stand by and allow a for-profit plasma industry, or will you enforce the law?

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): To respond, the Deputy Premier and Minister of Health.

Hon. Sylvia Jones: I think it's important to remind the member opposite and everyone that Ontario continues to monitor Health Canada's regulatory approach to drugs for rare diseases and how it can impact our communities. Some of the changes outlined mean that we have seen Health Canada and Canadian Blood Services make some partnerships with others to ensure that we have critical plasma supply in the province of Ontario. There is no doubt the plasma supply need increases. It is a critical part of what we need to do every time there are operations in the province of Ontario.

Canadian Blood Services has made some partnerships, and we will watch to ensure that they follow all Ontario regulatory pieces.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Supplementary question. The member for Hamilton Mountain.

Miss Monique Taylor: That sounds like a no to enforcing the law.

Speaker, back to the Premier: Almost 10 years ago to the day, the headline of pay-for-plasma centres is back in the news.

Grifols, this private for-profit company from Spain, has pinpointed it down to postal codes with the highest unemployment rates and the lowest income in the province. They plan to set up shop and prey on our most vulnerable by way of an exemption loophole, in a community where many are unhoused, waiting in long food bank lines and struggling day to day to make ends meet.

Does the Premier think it's appropriate that people will be selling their blood to survive?

Hon. Sylvia Jones: Just a reminder: Canadian Blood Services is a national not-for-profit charitable organization and is the only national manufacturer of biological products. In Canada, we know that blood donations have, unfortunately, decreased in the last decade. Canadian Blood Services has a partnership with another supplier. All medical operators in Ontario, as always, are required to comply with those Ontario laws.

We will monitor what Canadian Blood Services is doing. But I do not want to lose sight of the fact that donations of blood, donations of plasma, donations of organs are a critical part of our health care system, and that voluntary piece is some of the work that Canadian Blood Services does.

GOVERNMENT APPOINTMENTS

Mr. Stephen Blais: My question is for the Premier. The Premier says he wants judges who will be tougher during bail hearings, and on this we can agree. That's why we worked with the government last year on bail reform. But the Premier also says he wants to abolish the independent judicial system in exchange for a politicized one with like-minded judges—one that's used and abused south of the border. So he has appointed biased, unqualified political insiders, notably his former deputy chief of staff, to lead the panel that makes judicial recommendations.

But the problem with politicizing the judicial system, Mr. Speaker, is that the Premier's former deputy chief of staff is also a paid gun lobbyist for Colt's. How can we expect judges to get tougher on gun crime when the guy recommending them for the job is the guy who sells the guns?

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): To reply, the Attorney General.

Hon. Doug Downey: I think the member opposite has a reading comprehension issue, because that is not what we have been saying at all.

Here's the thing: They continue to raise the same issue over and over because they don't want to talk about things like the fact that the carbon tax is going up. The only stated

position of the Liberal Party on the carbon tax is that it's good for people.

Interjection.

Hon. Doug Downey: The member in the back is laughing, but she said it's good for people. That was doubled down on by the NDP, who said, "Get over it."

Well, I'll tell you something, Mr. Speaker: There is some hope. They have a new leader, and the new leader has never heard of the issue before, so here's what she needs to know: The carbon tax is going up by 23% on April 1, and that should be job one.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The supplementary question.

Mr. Stephen Blais: I'd like to thank the Premier for that answer. Next thing you know they're going to appoint a tobacco lobbyist to lead Smoke-Free Ontario.

Gun crime is no laughing matter. Police in Ontario reported 4,791 violent gun crimes in 2014. That's 1,000 more than the previous year. Homicide by gun crime is at an all-time high. The Premier has nice catchphrases like "stop the crime" and "get tough on bail reform," but he has asked the guy who sells the guns for advice.

Mr. Speaker, there is a violent gun crime in Ontario every two hours. How can we believe the Premier's tough-on-crime stance when he has asked the guy who sells the guns to appoint the judges?

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): To reply, the Premier.

Hon. Doug Ford: Here we go again, Mr. Speaker: not doubling down, tripling down, quadrupling down; quintupling down, and I'm proud of it. I'm proud to go out there and tell the people who are seeing violence in their homes, violence on the streets, violence in our subways that we're going to get judges that are actually going to keep these criminals in jail.

There isn't a person around the Toronto GTA who hasn't faced some sort of crime—a gun to their heads in their homes, hand over the keys, kick in the doors—only to see these—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Stop the clock. I must be able to hear the member who has the floor. In this case it's the Premier. I'm going to ask the member for Ottawa South and the member for Orléans to come to order.

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): I'm going to ask the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing to come to order.

If this persists, I will start warning members. Do you hear me?

Start the clock. The Premier has the floor.

Hon. Doug Ford: —only to see these violent criminals get out on bail. And guess what they do? The next day, they're out on bail. After our police officers put their lives on the line the arrest them, they're back kicking in the doors again, putting guns to peoples' heads, stealing the cars, trying to run over our police officers.

But the Liberals and NDP, they think that's fine: "Let's stay the status quo." I'll tell you one thing: We aren't

staying the status quo. We're going to get judges that are tough on—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Stop the clock. The House will come to order.

Order. The Premier will come to order. The member for Ottawa South will come to order.

Start the clock. The next question.

TAXATION

Ms. Patrice Barnes: Thank you, Speaker. I was waiting to exhale.

My question is for the Minister of Transportation. The rising cost of fuel is greatly impacting individuals and families in every corner of the province, including mine. Unfortunately, at a time when Ontarians are already struggling with rising inflation costs, the federal Liberals continue to raise the carbon tax.

1140

I've heard from logistics and distribution companies in my riding who have been very vocal about the impact of the carbon tax on their bottom line and the truckers in their industry. It is unacceptable that the federal government continues to punish the truckers that drive Ontario's economy forward with this regressive tax. Speaker, can the minister please tell the House how the carbon tax is hard on Ontario's trucking industry?

Hon. Prabmeet Singh Sarkaria: Thank you to the member for Ajax for that question. We know that the federal environment minister is completely out of touch with the realities of Canadians and especially Ontarians. We have called on him—I have personally called on him—to come drive on the 427, the 401, the 410 to see for himself the challenges our truckers and drivers are having across this province. But Minister Guilbeault spends more time flying around the world in airplanes, trying to meet with elites across the world, rather than meeting with truckers that are driving every single day on our roads across this province to put food on the shelves, to put groceries on shelves across this province.

They shouldn't have to worry about the rise in the cost of gas as they do their job. I've stated in the House before that \$15,000 to \$20,000 are the current costs on a long-haul trucker in this province with the current carbon tax today. That's about to go up by 23% on April 1, and I hope the members opposite join us in calling on the federal government to stop the carbon tax.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The supplementary question.

Ms. Patrice Barnes: Thank you to the minister for that response. We're all indebted to the dedicated workers in the trucking industry who deliver essential goods that Ontario's families and businesses rely on. It is unfortunate that the impact of the carbon tax on the trucking industry ultimately affects the consumers and the drivers. We are all forced to pay for the additional cost to fuel the trucks that transport the essential items for our everyday living. That's not fair, Speaker.

Our government hears these concerns day after day, and that is why we will not stop until this tax is scrapped. Can the minister please explain further why the carbon tax must be eliminated to protect Ontario's trucking industry?

Hon. Prabmeet Singh Sarkaria: That member is absolutely right; that tax is not fair. It punishes families. It punishes truckers—as I said, \$15,000 to \$20,000 a year for long-haul truckers on the cost of the carbon tax. We know that it's going up 23% on April 1, and that's going to impact truckers, but it's also going to impact drivers and families all across Ontario, Mr. Speaker.

As this government has committed to putting more money back into the pockets of families across this province, the federal carbon tax will increase by 23%. That is unacceptable. We're always looking at ways to make sure we put more money back in your pockets, whether it's by reducing the gas tax by 10 cents, whether it's making sure we eliminate the val tag, a \$120 savings for a car or truck for families across this province.

We're going to continue to urge both the Liberals and NDP to call on their federal counterparts and stop the carbon tax on April 1.

TENANT PROTECTION

Ms. Jessica Bell: My question is to the Premier. Ontario can now fine landlords that illegally evict up to \$250,000, but it never does. A Toronto Star analysis found that the Rental Housing Enforcement Unit and the Landlord and Tenant Board issue very small fines to guilty landlords, fines the landlord can quickly recoup by hiking the rent on the next tenant.

My question is to the Premier: Will this government start enforcing its own illegal-eviction laws?

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): To reply, the Attorney General.

Hon. Doug Downey: I'm wondering if the member is asking me if we will pierce the independence of the Landlord and Tenant Board adjudicators. I'm hearing an inconsistency. I'm not quite sure what direction they want us to take in terms of the independence of adjudicators and the enforcement of orders. For us to reach in and make the adjudicators do something—now that would be a question; that would be something that we would have to discuss.

Mr. Speaker, I'd like a clarification, if I could, in the second question.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The supplementary question.

Ms. Jessica Bell: Back to the Premier: It is the government's job to enforce its own laws. Stop trying to pass the buck.

Rental protection laws are useless if they're not enforced. We have presented practical solutions to this government to help renters stay housed. We have introduced amendments in committee. We have introduced bills in this Legislature. When will this government start taking effective action and do its job and start enforcing its illegal eviction laws?

Hon. Doug Downey: Having passed a lot of laws, and a lot of those laws go to court and the judges make decisions about the laws, are they asking us to make adjudicators do things just because we passed the law? That we have the right to reach across that line and make adjudicators do things? It's entirely inconsistent with the previous questions.

We are investing in the Landlord and Tenant Board. We have doubled the number of adjudicators. We've added more staff. We've had more hearings than we've had intake. We are making sure that they're properly resourced and people are having a place to have their hearings.

But tenants also need a place to live. You can take Mississauga as an example, where they only built 12 housing starts in the last term and the development charges are up 27%. That's a problem because, no matter whether you have a hearing, you wouldn't have a place to live.

GOVERNMENT APPOINTMENTS

Ms. Bobbi Ann Brady: My question is to the Premier. Once again, this morning, there's been a lot of talk about like-minded appointments, but while this House has had their eyes set on judicial appointments, I've had mine set on the Ontario Land Tribunal.

Just before Christmas, I hit refresh on the Public Appointments Secretariat page, and exactly as I had expected: the appointment of the former mayor of Haldimand county, Ken Hewitt, to the Ontario Land Tribunal.

Keep in mind, this is a tribunal meant to protect public good. Speaker, I respectfully ask if the Premier can articulate what skills and qualifications one must possess to be considered an appointee to the OLT?

Hon. Doug Downey: I'm proud of the members that have been appointed to the Ontario Land Tribunal. It's a very important tribunal. You'll recall that we combined five other tribunals to make the system more streamlined.

The individuals who apply through an open process are evaluated by the chair of the tribunal, and recommendations come forward for appointment. And I don't want to speak on behalf of the chair who does the interviews and does the recruitment because that's a hands-off process, as you would expect it to be. But I can tell you, any mayor of any municipality in this province likely has some exposure to how things work in terms of committees of adjustment and otherwise.

So through you, Mr. Speaker, back to the member: What disqualifies that member?

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Order.

The supplementary question.

Ms. Bobbi Ann Brady: I'll answer that question, because the member opposite said it's a "very important tribunal," so I would expect the prime qualification would be to uphold the mandate of the OLT. But interestingly enough, in February 2022, Mr. Hewitt called on this government to dissolve the Ontario Land Tribunal because it was slowing development. He then proposed a city of 40,000 at the Nanticoke industrial park, and then the

Premier appointed him the PC candidate in Haldimand–Norfolk.

But it gets worse: A developer friend of the Premier’s plans to build a seasonal cottage development on agricultural land at Lowbanks in Haldimand county, and just days before that developer is to appear before council, he coincidentally cancels and says he’ll take his chances at the OLT.

It’s difficult not to conclude that the tribunal has been hijacked. The Hamilton Spectator reported in 2022 that the OLT rules in favour of developers 97% of the time. Speaker, through you, to the Premier: Is the OLT in place to protect the public good or is it in place to accelerate development and feather the nest of developers and friends of this government?

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Order.

The Attorney General to reply.

Hon. Doug Downey: I do appreciate the question. The excellent adjudicators that we have at the OLT and our other tribunals—you know, we’re talking somebody with an accomplished public career. We can go down the rabbit hole on any given scenario, but the important thing is this: We are getting the job done by having hearings that are fair, equitable and timely.

We have 1.5 million homes to build, and we want to make sure that matters are moving through that tribunal. And if you want to accuse us of meddling because we’re getting homes built, I will tell you, there are rules and professionals in place to help get the job done, and we will get those homes built.

1150

TAXATION

Mr. Ross Romano: My question is for the Minister of Indigenous Affairs and Northern Development. The carbon tax is essentially a tax on everything, Speaker. It’s on your groceries, your gasoline, your home heating and every other day-to-day essential.

For over a year now, the Chiefs of Ontario have been calling on the federal government to consult with them on the impact that this harmful tax is having on all of their communities. Due to the federal government’s failure to address the First Nations’ concerns, the Chiefs of Ontario filed for judicial review into the application of the carbon tax in Indigenous communities. They have called this tax anti-reconciliatory and discriminatory.

Can the minister please tell the House how this carbon tax is disproportionately impacting northern Ontario communities?

Hon. Greg Rickford: They did so with good reason, Mr. Speaker. And I want to thank the honourable member for his question.

We heard earlier this morning about a Prime Minister who backed up his words with policies, commitment and change. So I’ve got to take the Prime Minister at his word when he says, “We’re walking the road of reconciliation,” and then says, with respect to costs, “Indigenous commu-

ities on affordability and supports”—you’d think he would do something. Silence, Mr. Speaker.

The calls from First Nations communities across the province, but particularly from communities in the isolated parts of northern Ontario, who look at \$7 loaves of Wonder Bread with a built-in cost for transportation of those goods, have put the carbon tax front row and centre. And what did the federal government do? Well, they have pledged 0.7% of total charge proceeds to First Nations communities in Ontario. We don’t know where this is and how it will materialize, Mr. Speaker, but it’s a small sliver, a fraction of the costs that First Nations communities are paying as a result of the carbon tax—

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The supplementary question.

Mr. Ross Romano: Thank you to the minister for his response. The carbon tax is making everything more expensive for Ontarians, especially those of us in northern Ontario. Unlike other parts of the province, the north has very unique barriers when it comes to fuel costs.

Instead of helping northern Ontario foster economic growth and to reach our full potential, the federal government is bringing one tax hike after another after another. It is clear that neither the Liberals nor the NDP understand, respect or care about the financial hardship that many individuals and families are going through.

Northern and Indigenous communities should not be paying the price of this harmful and regressive tax. Speaker, can the minister please explain further why the carbon tax has such detrimental effects on northern Ontario and especially First Nation communities?

Hon. Greg Rickford: For anybody who has visited or has spent time in the isolated communities, you gain a deep appreciation for the costs that are associated with shipping goods into those communities. It’s why our government took the extraordinary step to reduce the taxes off of airline services that were offering shipping of goods and services to those communities, Mr. Speaker.

In light of a difficult winter road season, all-season roads have become the topic. And since it will be a little while before electric vehicles provide part of that transportation solution, not only communities on diesel but communities who need transport this winter and winters moving forward—you’d think the federal government would remove the carbon tax as a starting point and join in our discussions around all-season roads, Mr. Speaker. Again, radio silence.

This government is laser-focused on challenging the federal government to reduce costs for our northern communities, and it starts with scrapping the tax.

SMALL BUSINESS

Ms. Bhutla Karpoche: My question is to the Premier. Small businesses have not fully recovered from the pandemic. They are still struggling with inflation and economic uncertainty. The government’s website encourages small businesses to sign up for the Digital Main Street grant program, but this Conservative government told the

Toronto Association of Business Improvement Areas members that the funding for the program will be cancelled in three weeks.

Why is the government abandoning small businesses yet again?

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): To reply, the Associate Minister for Small Business.

Hon. Nina Tangri: I want to thank the member opposite for the question. The Digital Main Street Program was a phenomenal program. Although brought in prior to the pandemic, throughout the pandemic it was key to helping many of our businesses—actually, over 82,000 businesses—to get an online presence and about 24,000 businesses to start or expand their e-commerce journey over two years.

But do you know what's really exciting, Speaker? The sudden concern for our small businesses by the members opposite. We are talking to our stakeholders. We're engaging with them constantly. But let me talk about some of the other wonderful supports available to our businesses.

The Digitalization Competence Centre connects companies with innovative digital solutions and helps SMEs across all sectors implement new digital technologies. The Canada Digital Adoption Program—

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Thank you.

The supplementary question: the member for Toronto Centre.

MPP Kristyn Wong-Tam: Back to the Premier: As someone who has owned several small businesses, I know first-hand how hard it is to get a small business off the ground. I launched my businesses before today's challenges of every fast technology change and costly inflation hikes.

Sonja Scharf, a small business owner in my riding, told me, "The Digital Main Street Program helps small businesses like ours offset costs and build an online presence. This program is an extremely valuable asset to small businesses. I can only praise their work."

Now is not the time for the Premier to pull the plug on Digital Main Street funding, and it's never time to abandon small businesses in Ontario. Yes or no: Will the Premier reverse course, listen to the small business owners and maintain funding to keep the lights on for the Digital Main Street Program?

Hon. Nina Tangri: Thank you again to the member opposite for the question. First, I would like to remind all members in this House that it was the opposition members who voted against the funding for the Digital Main Street Program. But it's no surprise, because they really, really do not understand their small businesses.

What would have helped small businesses recently was where the federal government provided absolutely no relieve for the CEBA loan repayments. When I asked everyone in this House to contact their federal members, they did nothing. They stayed silent.

Another area that could really help our small businesses is if they would pick up the phone, talk to their federal cousins and ask them to scrap the carbon tax, because it

hurts every single business and individual in this province. But they won't do that. They will not call their federal cousins. And Carbon Crombie's Liberals over there? Silent. They will do nothing.

Pick up the phone. Scrap the carbon tax right now. You can do that for your small businesses today.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): I'll remind the members to make their comments through the chair.

The next question.

TAXATION

Mrs. Daisy Wai: My question is for the Solicitor General. We all know that the carbon tax is making it more expensive for Ontario families and businesses. Not only is it increasing the cost of goods, but it's also driving up the cost of fuel and gasoline for everyone in our province.

What's more, public safety services across the province are being impacted by the carbon tax as well. Our police services need more support and resources to protect our communities, not additional fuel costs because of the carbon tax.

Speaker, can the Solicitor General please explain the negative effects of the carbon tax on law enforcement and public safety agencies across Ontario?

Hon. Michael S. Kerzner: I want to thank my colleague for the question. Ontarians have told us very clearly: Public safety means everything to them. And do you know what, Mr. Speaker? It's a top priority for our government, led by Premier Ford.

The carbon tax has significantly increased the cost of public safety, and in a few weeks, as we know, the federal government will do it again and raise the carbon tax by 23%. It's affecting our firefighters and our police officers, our special constables and our first responders—people who are there to fight crime. Every day, thousands of vehicles are on the road that help keep our province safe, and the police budgets have to cover the carbon tax on these cars that get fuelled up.

1200

My message is simple: The Liberals across the way can call their friends in Ottawa and say, "This is not fair. Scrap the tax."

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Supplementary?

Mrs. Daisy Wai: Thank you to the Solicitor General for the response. It is concerning to hear that the carbon tax is affecting public safety efforts in Ontario. With the media reports about the crime and illegal activities in many areas of our province, residents in my community of Richmond Hill are concerned about the financial impact of the carbon tax on the day-to-day work of our front-line police workers. They are worried about how the carbon tax is placing a strain on policing services as well as on the budget. Our government must ensure police officers receive support as they carry out their duties.

Could the Solicitor General provide further details about the government's initiatives to strengthen Ontario's public safety in light of the carbon tax?

Hon. Michael S. Kerzner: When people are being confronted by having their doors kicked in and their cars stolen, when people are being confronted by violent and repeat offenders on our streets, we need more boots on the ground as soon as possible.

When we look at what the carbon tax is doing for police service budgets—the OPP alone has spent almost \$4 million on carbon tax; \$4 million could have put 40 new boots on the ground, and that’s just the OPP. When I look around this chamber and I think of the First Nations police services and the other municipal police services across the province, how many more boots on the ground could we have?

The carbon tax is regressive. It hits us everywhere. It’s hitting us on public safety. The Liberals across the way can do the right thing. Pick up the phone, tell them, “Pause the tax. It is affecting our public safety.”

FOREST FIREFIGHTING

Mr. Guy Bourgouin: Last year, the Minister of Natural Resources started the spring with a shortage of 50 crews to tackle forest fires, lacking preparedness and seeking help from across Canada and Mexico.

My question is simple: Given the extreme lack of snow conditions this year, how many wildfire ranger crews do we need to be prepared for wildfires this season, and how many do we have as of right now?

Hon. Graydon Smith: I’m glad the member opposite asked the question, because recruitment is open right now for more fire rangers in Ontario. We’ve got many, many great returning crews from last year. We know that we’ll have new recruits this year to supplement a crew of those in the air, those on the ground fighting fires, keeping communities safe, keeping infrastructure safe in small communities all throughout the north, Indigenous communities—incredibly important.

I’m very, very glad that the member is supporting recruitment and retention of our firefighters. We want more to come into the fold, so I’d encourage everybody to make sure that you’re letting people know that recruitment is open right now and everyone is welcome to apply.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): That concludes our question period for this morning.

NOTICE OF DISSATISFACTION

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Pursuant to standing order 36(a), the member for Orléans has given notice of dissatisfaction with the answer to their question given by the Attorney General regarding the appointment to judicial review panels. This matter will be debated today following private members’ public business.

The member for Ottawa–Vanier has a point of order.

M^{me} Lucille Collard: I seek unanimous consent that, notwithstanding standing order 40(e), five minutes be allotted to the independent members as a group to respond to the ministerial statement tomorrow on International Women’s Day.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The member for Ottawa–Vanier is seeking the unanimous consent of the House that, notwithstanding standing order 40(e), five minutes be allotted to the independent members as a group to respond to the ministerial statement tomorrow on International Women’s Day. Agreed? I heard a no.

MEMBERS’ PHOTOGRAPH

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The Associate Minister of Women’s Social and Economic Opportunity has a point of order.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): I would ask the House to come to order so that I can hear the member’s point of order.

Hon. Charmaine A. Williams: I would just like to remind all the women in the House that tomorrow, after question period, we will be taking a photo for International Women’s Day here in the chamber.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): There being no further business at this time, this House stands in recess until 3 p.m.

The House recessed from 1205 to 1500.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

Mr. Anthony Leardi: It gives me great pleasure to introduce a constituent from my riding today. She is a full-time student at the University of Amsterdam. She’s studying in the department of communications, which is the number-one-ranked department of communications in the world. As part of her program of study, she is required to do an internship, which she is completing at the Ministry of Education. Please welcome my daughter, Miriam Leardi.

Mr. Mike Schreiner: At the risk of getting the MPP from Kitchener Centre in trouble with her daughter, I would like to welcome Zidra Fobel, who is up in the members’ gallery, to Queen’s Park today.

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

KEEPING PEOPLE HOUSED ACT, 2024

LOI DE 2024 POUR QUE CHACUN PUISSE GARDER SON LOGEMENT

Ms. Clancy moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 170, An Act to amend the Residential Tenancies Act, 2006, the City of Toronto Act, 2006 and the Municipal Act, 2001 to implement various measures respecting rental accommodation / Projet de loi 170, Loi modifiant la Loi de 2006 sur la location à usage d’habitation, la Loi de 2006 sur la cité de Toronto et la Loi de 2001 sur les

municipalités pour mettre en oeuvre diverses mesures relatives aux logements locatifs.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

First reading agreed to.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Would the member care to briefly explain her bill by reading the explanatory note?

Ms. Aislinn Clancy: This bill aims to provide rental protections at a time when more and more renters are facing high rents and displacement. It asks to reinstate rent control on units built after 2018. It asks to reinstate vacancy control, to prevent high increases between tenants. It asks for a rental task force to investigate above-guideline increases that have been rampant these days. It amends a requirement for landlords who are looking to renovate tenants, so that they provide protections to tenants to ensure that they don't lose their housing.

This is what we are doing today—trying to ensure that there are mechanisms in place to make sure people keep their shelter—and we are calling it the Keeping People Housed Act.

PETITIONS

BLOOD AND PLASMA DONATION

M^{me} France Gélinas: I would like to thank Barb MacFarlane for this petition.

“Blood and Plasma Donations Not for Sale...:

“Whereas in the 1980s, 30,000 Canadians were infected by HIV or hepatitis and 8,000 died after receiving tainted blood transfusions; and

“Whereas the resulting royal commission of inquiry led by Justice Horace Krever made recommendations to protect the integrity of blood-product collection; and

“Whereas recommendation 2(b) of the Krever inquiry states donors of blood and plasma should not be paid for their donations; and

“Whereas British Columbia and Quebec have forbidden deals between Canadian Blood Services and the for-profit plasma industry to outsource collection and pay donors;

“Whereas Ontario has legislation that forbids the private sale of blood and plasma under the Voluntary Blood Donations Act;”

They “petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

“To immediately act to forbid Grifols pharmaceutical from setting up for-profit clinics and paying donors to sell their plasma...”

I fully support this petition, will affix my name to it and ask page Paras to bring it to the Clerk.

TUITION

Ms. Jennifer K. French: I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario that has been signed by thou-

sands of students, but this particular page is signed by students at Trent University.

“Whereas since 1980, whilst accounting for inflation, the average domestic undergraduate tuition has increased by 215%, and the average domestic graduate tuition by 247%; and

“Whereas upon graduation, 50% of students will have a median debt of around \$17,500, which takes an average of 9.5 years to repay; and

“Whereas the average undergraduate tuition for international students has increased by 192% between 2011 and 2021, and in colleges, they pay an average of \$14,306 annually compared to the average domestic fee of \$3,228; and

“Whereas the government of Ontario made changes to OSAP and student financial assistance in 2018-19, resulting in over a \$1-billion cut in assistance to students; and

“Whereas the so-called Student Choice Initiative was defeated in the courts, students need legislation to protect their right to organize and funding for students' groups;

“Therefore we, the undersigned, support the Canadian Federation of Students—Ontario's call and petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to commit to (1) free and accessible education for all, (2) grants, not loans, and (3) legislate students' right to organize.”

I am happily signing this and will send to the table with Mesapé.

POST-SECONDARY EDUCATION

Mr. Dave Smith: I also have a petition from some Trent students.

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas to support students and their families, Ontario is extending the tuition fee freeze for publicly assisted colleges and universities for at least three more years. While increasing tuition for out-of-province domestic students;

“Whereas colleges and universities will have policies in place relating to mental health and wellness supports and services. Every college and university is required to have policies and rules to address and combat racism and hate, including but not limited to anti-Indigenous racism, anti-Black racism, anti-Semitism and Islamophobia; and

“Whereas providing information about ancillary fees and including costs for textbooks or other learning materials. This could include ensuring that fees are published by institutions in a consistent manner the province will also engage with colleges and universities to create tuition fee transparency to help students and their families better understand how tuition fees are used; and

“Whereas to help more students find jobs, the province intends to allow colleges to offer applied master's degrees in areas of study that will help students graduate with in-demand skills, expertise and credentials. This approach will also provide employers access to more industry-ready employees that meet labour market needs in specialized fields such as advanced manufacturing, artificial intelligence and animation; and

1510

“Whereas introducing measures to protect students and improve the integrity of career colleges. The province will better integrate enforcement efforts across ministries to strengthen oversight of career colleges and will ensure timely responses to concerns and complaints by improving data management, documentation processes and the efficacy of compliance investigations; and

“Whereas launching a career portal to help students understand labour market needs and make informed decisions on post-secondary education. This will consolidate various sources of information to help students and newcomers access education and careers in Ontario;

“Therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

“To urge all members of the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to take on a responsible approach to allow flexibility amid a challenging financial climate, while protecting students and parents from additional costs.”

I fully endorse this petition and will give it to page Anushga to take to the table.

LONG-TERM CARE

Ms. Catherine Fife: This petition is entitled, “Support Bill 21, the Till Death Do Us Part Act.

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas there are 38,000 people on the wait-list for long-term care; and

“Whereas the median wait time for a long-term-care bed has risen from 99 days in 2011-12 to 171 days in 2020-21; and

“Whereas according to Home Care Ontario, the cost of a hospital bed is \$842 a day, while the cost of a long-term-care bed is \$126 a day; and

“Whereas couples should have the right to live together as they age; and

“Whereas Ontario seniors have worked hard to build this province and deserve dignity in care; and

“Whereas Bill 21 amends the Residents’ Bill of Rights in the Fixing Long-Term Care Act to provide the resident with the right upon admission to continue to live with their spouse or partner;

“Therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to direct the Minister of Long-Term Care to call Bill 21 to the Standing Committee on Social Policy to find a compassionate solution to provide seniors with the right to live together as they age.”

It’s my pleasure to affix the signature to this petition and give it to page Isaac.

RENEWABLE ENERGY

Ms. Aislinn Clancy: I want to thank the residents of Waterloo region for sending this petition:

“Pause the Expansion of Methane-Fired Electricity Generation

“Whereas the Earth just passed through the hottest three months on record;

“Whereas Canada is experiencing the most severe wildfire season on record;

“Whereas the Ontario government is preparing investments for electricity supply for the long term;

“Whereas in light of recent reports by the RBC Climate Action Institute, Dunsky Energy and Climate Advisors, and the Sustainability Solutions Group;

“We, the undersigned, call upon the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to pause the expansion of methane-fired electricity generation and evaluate the role of renewable energy and storage, conservation, distributed energy resources, and municipal net-zero plans in meeting Ontario’s electricity needs.”

I support this petition, will sign it and ask page Jeremy to bring it to the table.

SEXUAL ABUSE

Mr. Anthony Leardi: “To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas Erin’s Law amends the Education Act to ensure every board shall develop a policy to engage their pupils annually in all schools under their purview, in a developmentally appropriate manner, regarding the topics of child sexual abuse prevention and reporting, including age-appropriate techniques to recognize child sexual abuse and tell a trusted adult;

“Whereas each board is also required to provide information annually on these topics to parents and guardians, as well as teachers and other staff in schools;

“Whereas to ensure the workforce is prepared, it will include:

“—building upon the mandatory sexual abuse prevention training introduced in September 2022, the zero tolerance for sexual abuse policy by the Ontario College of Teachers and the health and physical education curriculum introduced in 2019; and

“—personnel curriculum must cover the warning signs of child sexual abuse and mandated reporting, how to appropriately respond to disclosure, how to talk to parents, and how to speak to students about child sexual abuse prevention;

“Whereas every board shall ensure that information respecting child sexual abuse prevention and reporting, including information on available counselling and resources for children who are sexually abused, is available to all parents and guardians of pupils enrolled in schools of the board; and

“Therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

“To urge all members of the Legislative Assembly of Ontario support the passage of the Education Amendment Act (Erin’s Law).”

I will affix my signature thereto and give it to page Charles, who will dutifully deliver same to the table.

SEXUAL VIOLENCE AND HARASSMENT

Ms. Peggy Sattler: I would like to thank the many London residents who signed this petition, entitled “Pass the Safe Night Out Act.” It reads:

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas we are experiencing a sexual violence epidemic, with Statistics Canada reporting in 2021 that sexual assault was at its highest level in 25 years and community support organizations reporting more crisis calls than ever;

“Whereas 65% of women report experiencing unwanted sexual advances while socializing in a bar or restaurant, and incidents of sexual assaults involving drugs and alcohol most often occur immediately after leaving a licensed establishment or event; and

“Whereas there is no legal requirement for the people who hold liquor licences and permits, sell and serve liquor, or provide security at licensed establishments and events to be trained in recognizing and safely intervening in sexual harassment and violence;

“Whereas servers in licensed establishments also face high risk of sexual violence and harassment from co-workers and patrons;

“Therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to immediately pass the Ontario NDP’s Safe Night Out Act to make Ontario’s bars” and restaurants “and nightclubs safer for patrons and staff by requiring training in sexual violence and harassment prevention, by strengthening protections for servers from workplace sexual violence, and by requiring every establishment to develop and post a policy on how sexual violence and harassment will be handled, including accessing local resources and supports.”

I fully support this petition, affix my signature and send it to the table with page Sarah.

HOME CARE

Ms. Natalie Pierre: “To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas Ontario is taking the next step to better connect and coordinate people’s home care services through Ontario health teams; and

“Whereas the province has already approved 57 teams across the province that will help people experience easier transitions from one provider to another, with one patient record and one care plan being shared; and

“Whereas the government is investing over \$128 million to provide OHTs with \$2.2 million over three years to better coordinate people’s care. This would establish a new single organization called Ontario Health atHome that will coordinate all home care services across the province through the Ontario health teams; and

“Whereas instead of navigating a complex system and waiting for a call at home, Ontario health teams will be able to provide people with easy-to-understand home care

plans and what care they will receive before going home from the hospital; and

“Whereas care coordinators would be assigned to work within OHTs and other front-line care settings to facilitate seamless transitions for people from hospital or primary care to home care services; and

“Whereas an initial group of 12 Ontario health teams have been chosen to accelerate their work to deliver home care in their local communities starting in 2025. With support from the Ministry of Health and Ontario Health, these teams will start by focusing on seamlessly transitioning people experiencing chronic disease through their primary care, hospital, and home and community care needs;

“Therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

“To urge all members of the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to build on the progress this government has made on building a patient-centred home and community care system.”

Speaker, I support this petition, affix my name to it and ask page Max to take it to the table.

1520

EDUCATION FUNDING

Mr. Chris Glover: I want to thank the students, the staff and the parents from Ossington/Old Orchard school for submitting this petition. The petition is entitled, “Petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario from the Elementary Teachers of Toronto to Stop the Cuts and Invest in the Schools our Students Deserve.”

“Whereas the Ford government cut funding to our schools by \$800 per student during the pandemic period, and plans to cut an additional \$6 billion to our schools over the next six years;

“Whereas these massive cuts have resulted in larger class sizes, reduced special education and mental health supports and resources for our students, and neglected and unsafe buildings;

“Whereas the Financial Accountability Office reported a \$2.1-billion surplus in 2021-22, and surpluses growing to \$8.5 billion in 2027-28, demonstrating there is more than enough money to fund a robust public education system;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to:

“—immediately reverse the cuts to our schools;

“—fix the inadequate education funding formula;

“—provide schools the funding to ensure the supports necessary to address the impacts of the pandemic on our students;

“—make the needed investments to provide smaller class sizes, increased levels of staffing to support our students’ special education, mental health, English language learner and wraparound supports needs, and safe and healthy buildings and classrooms.”

I fully support this petition, will affix my signature and pass it to page Mercy to take to the table.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

CONCURRENCE IN SUPPLY

Mr. Trevor Jones: I move concurrence in supply for the Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Debate?

Mr. Rudy Cuzzetto: It's an honour to rise in the House this afternoon in my role as parliamentary assistant to the President of the Treasury Board and as a member of the Standing Committee on Public Accounts to discuss the process of concurrence in supply, particularly with respect to estimates for the 2023-24 fiscal year. This is the third year that I've had the privilege to rise in this House to speak in favour of concurrences.

But first, before I begin my remarks, I want to take a moment to offer my deepest condolences to the minister and her family on the passing of her father, the Right Honourable Brian Mulroney, the 18th Prime Minister of Canada. Speaker, Brian Mulroney was the reason that I first got involved in politics in Mississauga, in the local campaigns of MP Don Blenkarn and then MPP Margaret Marland.

For them and for all of us, Brian Mulroney was a transformative leader and a reminder of what can be possible in public life. He was the driving force behind NAFTA, an incredible success in North America and an example of the benefits of free trade for the rest of the world. His acid rain treaty was one of the most successful environmental initiatives in history, with our emissions of chemicals like sulphur dioxide down by 90% or more.

As former US President George Bush said, Mulroney helped to end the Cold War. Along the way, he made Canada the first Western country or government to recognize the independence of Ukraine. He also holds a special place in the history of South Africa as a leader in the international campaign against apartheid.

Speaker, his position was not always popular at the time, but as Mulroney said a few years ago at the Albany Club event in honour of Sir John A. Macdonald, "Leaders must have vision and they must find the courage to fight for the policies that will give that vision life. Leaders must govern not for easy headlines in 10 days but for a better Canada in 10 years."

I will always remember him with the deepest admiration and respect, and I'm so honoured to be able to work together with the minister to fight for our Premier's vision, including the investments outlined in Ontario's 2023 budget, Building a Strong Ontario Together, and supported by the 2023-24 estimates.

Speaker, concurrence in supply will not be the subject of the water cooler discussions tomorrow. It won't trend on Twitter or appear on the nightly news. But as I've always said before, during this annual process, I believe it is important for the general public and, in particular, for all members of this House to understand every detail of the procedures of our fiscal cycle.

It can't be said enough that every dollar spent throughout the fiscal year comes out of the pockets of hard-

working Ontario taxpayers. In times like these, it is very essential that the government be held to the highest standards of fiscal accountability and transparency for all of the decisions that we make. And the concurrence in supply debate is a key part of meeting that high standard.

So, to begin, I would like to outline the government's fiscal cycle. The former President of the Treasury Board tabled volume 1 of the 2023-24 expenditure estimates on April 20, 2023. This part of the expenditure estimates provides a detailed public record of government ministry and office budgets, based on the spending plans outlined in the 2023 Ontario budget.

Of course, the government may also table supplementary estimates to ensure the government has the funding it needs through the year. In this fiscal year, supplementary estimates were tabled on November 29, 2023, and again last week, on February 29, 2024. Combined, they provided additional funding for the contingency fund, to add greater flexibility to the fiscal plan, and for education and transportation initiatives.

The President of the Treasury Board tabled volume 2 of the 2023-24 expenditure estimates on November 29, 2023. This second volume of estimates outlines the spending plans of the independent legislative offices, including the Office of the Assembly, the Auditor General, the Chief Electoral Officer and the Ontario Ombudsman.

Speaker, all together, the estimates provide details of the operating and capital spending needs of ministries and the legislative offices for the 2023-24 fiscal year. They represent the government's formal request to the Legislature to approve its spending requirements for the fiscal year. This is an annual process that every Ontario government completes to provide each ministry with the legal authority to spend their capital and operating budgets. Basically, it allows us to proceed with the business of government.

For everyone curious about estimates, I should note that they are all available to the public at ontario.ca/estimates. This an excellent resource because it provides information on estimates going back more than 20 years.

Once the estimates are tabled, they are referred to the relevant standing committees for review. The committees then select ministries to appear and answer questions about the relevant estimates. The 2023-24 cycle is the second time that we have used this approach. Previously, the estimates were referred to the old Standing Committee on Estimates. And as a member of that committee at the time, I can recall—and I'm sure other members will agree—under the old standing orders, many fewer ministries were selected for the estimates review process.

So, again, I want to thank the government House leader for his approach, which ensures that there can be a more rigorous review of the estimates of almost every ministry, every year.

Speaker, committee members have the opportunity to review specific allocations. These allocations are referred to as votes, because the committee votes on each allocation. Committee members review the estimates briefing books provided by the ministries, including the published

plans and annual reports for each ministry, which provide important context for every vote item. Members then have the opportunity to question representatives from the ministry and give them an opportunity to explain the proposed spending.

The reasons for this process are clear: It provides oversight of the government's spending and ensures that spending is 100% accountable to legislators, and through them, accountable to the people of Ontario.

1530

Standing order 66(a) requires that the committee must complete their work by the third Thursday in November of each year. After this process, the estimates of all the ministries and offices that were selected for review by the Legislature's committees are reported back to the House for concurrence. Which brings us to the issue that we're dealing with today.

This process known as concurrence, together with our review of the supply bill later this month, represents the final steps toward the approval of all spending proposed by the government in the estimates and supplementary estimates that have been tabled for the current fiscal year, which ends on March 31, 2024. This, along with the public accounts process, can be seen as crossing the finish line for the fiscal year.

It's very important for me to note that the government is not proposing any new spending today. Those debates and those votes have already taken place. What the government is asking for is for the House to approve the spending plans that are outlined in the 2023-24 estimates.

Speaker, it is important to note that the spending plans outlined in the 2023-24 estimates are consistent with the 2023 Ontario budget, *Building a Strong Ontario*, published a year ago. As the parliamentary assistant at the Treasury Board, I had the opportunity to work with the Minister of Finance and with our colleagues to help ensure that the 2023 budget is a fiscally responsible plan for a stronger Ontario.

I also had the opportunity to travel around the province last year for pre-budget consultations with the Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs. As I've said before, the 2023 budget reflects the concerns and priorities of the Ontarians who were heard from during the process.

It was also a long-term, prudent and realistic path forward for Ontario. Speaker, that path has been clear. Throughout the estimates process, it focused on driving growth and lowering costs, getting key infrastructure projects built faster and attracting more jobs and more investments right across Ontario. This was a budget designed to help businesses, families and workers.

The people of Ontario deserve a government with a clear vision for the future. As Brian Mulroney would say, they deserve leaders who govern not for easy headlines in 10 days, but for a better Ontario in 10 years. Because we know that the hard-working people of Ontario were not served well by the government that looked only at short-term political consideration.

Before we were elected in 2018, companies were leaving Ontario. Ontario had lost over 300,000 manufac-

turing jobs, including many in the auto sector. Sergio Marchionne at Fiat Chrysler said Ontario was the most expensive place to do business in North America. My friends and I at the Ford assembly plant in Oakville, where I worked for 31 years, watched as Ontario lost auto sector jobs, while a former Liberal Minister of Finance from Mississauga-Lakeshore told us that assembly line manufacturing was just a thing of the past.

Speaker, 15 years of Liberal mismanagement and underinvestment left us with an infrastructure deficit, overcrowded hospitals and badly outdated facilities that simply were not up to the challenges we faced during the pandemic. As the former Liberal Deputy Premier and the Minister of Health George Smitherman said, Ontario Liberals really starved health care for five years, and that is not spoken enough. Former Premier Wynne admits that she would not have done this if she had known a pandemic was coming. I was shocked last year when the current Liberal leader, Bonnie Crombie, who did know a pandemic was coming, told TVO that she would have spent even less on health care.

Speaker, we have a very different approach. The Premier, the Minister of Finance and our team have made Ontario open for business again. We're cutting taxes and energy costs; we're building a world-class skilled workforce; and we're reducing burdens and red tape. These policies have produced an economic recovery that leads the country, and they give us the revenue we need to invest in world-class infrastructure and service.

Since 2018, Ontario has added over 715,000 new jobs. In fact, in 2023, Ontario created more manufacturing jobs than all 50 US states combined. In the last three years alone, we have been able to attract over \$28 billion of investment from global automotive manufacturers.

As the Premier said last month at the event at the Pioneer gas station in Port Credit, provincial revenue in 2017 and 2018 in the last full year of the former Liberal government was \$150 billion. This year, 2023-24, provincial revenue is projected to be almost \$203 billion, a \$53-billion, or 35%, increase over six years. Growth has given us the revenue we need for the specific investments in hospitals, schools, transit, highways and other key infrastructure that are included in the estimates, and I'd like to speak about some of these today in great detail.

Speaker, we all recognize the Ontario population is growing rapidly. That is one of the reasons this government has developed the most ambitious capital plan in Ontario's history. Ontario's Plan to Build includes investments of \$185 billion in infrastructure over the next 10 years, including \$20.4 billion this year alone and almost \$26 billion next year, in 2024-25. This is real investment and a real commitment to the growth and prosperity of this province.

But, Speaker, since we are discussing the finances of the province in this fiscal cycle, I think it would be a good time to provide some top-line numbers. As you know, a month ago, the Minister of Finance released the province's third-quarter finances to provide an update on the overall

picture of Ontario's economic and fiscal outlook. This is the most up-to-date financial information that we have.

Of course, the deficit is a key measure of the province's financial health and stability. As the government upholds the highest standards of fiscal responsibility, it is always important to understand exactly how much of a burden that a deficit represents for future generations of this province. With this in mind, the province's 2023-24 deficit is now predicted to be \$4.5 billion. Now, there is no denying that this is a significant number. However, it should also be noted that this deficit is \$1.1 billion less than what was predicted in the 2023 fall economic statement. This means that we're moving in the right direction.

The reduction of the deficit was mainly due to increased revenues and lower debt interest expenses. This is very good news for the fiscal health of our province. It means that we're reducing the burden on future generations of Ontarians, on our children and our grandchildren and on their children as well as the many newcomers who will come to Ontario in the next year.

Setting my red pen aside now and picking up my black pen: Overall government revenues in 2023-24 are now projected to be \$202.7 billion. That's \$942 million higher than the forecast from the 2023 fall economic statement. Now, it's a fair question to ask: How did the fall economic statement underestimate government revenues by nearly a billion dollars? Well, the answer is actually quite simple: The new revenue forecast reflects stronger-than-expected college sector revenues. It also reflects higher tax revenues as a result of new information received from the federal government since the fall economic statement.

In 2023-24, overall program expenses are now projected to be \$193.4 billion. That is \$424 million higher than the forecast in the 2023 fall economic statement, and it's \$2.8 billion higher than the 2023 budget plan. Again, the obvious question is "Why?" Well, there are a few factors that explain this increase. Firstly, there was an additional \$1.7-billion investment in the health care sector, mainly to address the pressures related to the compensation costs, cancer treatment services and other health care initiatives. As well, there was a new \$704-million investment as part of the New Deal for Toronto, including \$504 million for transit and transportation.

1540

Speaker, I would now like to move into some of the particular details about the government's fiscal activities over the past year, including some of the key investments that the government has made in 2023-24.

As you know, Speaker, the health and well-being of the people of Ontario has always been and always will be the top priority of this Premier and this government. We continue to make investments to improve health and long-term-care infrastructure right across the province, from Fort Frances to Cornwall, from Pickle Lake to Kingsville, and everywhere in between.

Under the leadership of this Premier, in the 2023 budget the government committed more than \$54 billion over 10 years in the largest hospital and long-term-care building programs in Canadian history. That includes \$32 billion in

capital grants—grants that will get shovels in the ground to build the health care infrastructure that Ontario needs, including over 50 hospital projects that would add 3,000 new beds over 10 years.

In long-term care, the government is making an historic investment of \$6.4 billion to build over 30,000 new beds and to upgrade 28,000 long-term-care beds across the province by 2028.

In my community of Mississauga-Lakeshore alone, this includes an historic multi-billion dollar investment to build the largest hospital in Canadian history and the largest long-term-care home in Ontario, which we just opened in November. At 22 storeys, three million square feet and almost 1,000 beds, the new Mississauga Hospital will be the most advanced in the country. It will include a 200,000-square-foot women's and children's hospital, which will be the first of its kind in Canada. In total, it will be triple the size of the current hospital, which first opened in 1958.

And in one of Ontario's fastest-growing communities in Brampton, we're working together with the William Osler Health System to transform Peel Memorial hospital into a 24/7 in-patient hospital and urgent care centre.

Speaker, we promised to make investments to improve health care in every corner of this province, to ease pressure on hospitals, to help doctors and nurses work more efficiently, and to provide better, faster health care for patients and their families. And we're keeping that promise.

In the 2023 budget, the province announced significant investments to reduce hospital wait times by offering more surgeries at community surgical and diagnostic centres. This investment allows hospitals to turn their attention to more complex and high-risk surgeries, reduce surgery wait times, and ease emergency department pressures. And I'm pleased to be able to say that this approach has already seen results. As of June 2023, the wait-list for surgeries has been reduced by more than 25,000, from its peak in March 2022. The government is committed to learn from this and to reduce wait times even further, by expanding funding to existing community surgical and diagnostic centres and funding new centres for MRI and CT imaging and orthopaedic surgeries and procedures.

Of course, reducing hospital wait times is just one part of our vision for the health care system in Ontario. We're also making important progress on our plan to build modern, safe and comfortable long-term-care homes for seniors and residents.

From 2011 to 2018, the former Liberal government added only 611 long-term-care beds for the entire province; as the number of Ontarians over 75 increased by 75%, the number of long-term-care beds increased by less than 1%.

When I was elected five years ago, there were over 4,500 people on the wait-list for long-term care in Mississauga alone, and we had 20% fewer long-term-care beds than the provincial average, with many of them badly out of date.

This government has a very different vision. When I joined the Premier just over three years ago to announce

the accelerated build program in an empty field on Speakman Drive in Mississauga–Lakeshore, he had a clear vision of what it could be: a modern, comfortable and safe new home for hundreds of seniors. As I said, 632 new residents have just moved into Wellbrook Place, the largest long-term-care home in Ontario—larger than the Credit Valley Hospital was when it was first built 38 years ago. It will be part of the new campus of care for seniors, including a new health service building and the very first residential hospice in Mississauga.

And, Speaker, there are projects like this under way right across Ontario. Since the 2023 budget, a number of new long-term-care homes have been completed and opened to new residents. Of course, any new facility that is built is going to require staff: more trained physicians, nurses, personal support workers and other health care professionals. That's why we're building a stronger health care workforce that will be able to meet the needs of our growing province.

Over last five years, Ontario has added over 10,000 new doctors and over 80,000 new nurses to the health care system. Thanks to this government's investments, Ontario now leads the country, with 90% of people connected to regular health care providers. But, Speaker, this is just the start. As the Deputy Premier announced last month, the government is investing \$110 million to connect up to 320,000 people to primary care teams.

Combined with this historic investment to expand medical education, including in growing and underserved communities like Brampton and Scarborough, and the work that we're doing to allow highly skilled but internationally trained doctors to care for patients in Ontario, the Minister of Health expects that up to 98% of people—almost everyone in Ontario—will be connected to a regular health care provider within the next few years.

Of course, Ontario's growing population also means that there is a need to continue to build the province's infrastructure. As I've mentioned, the government plans to invest over \$185 billion over the next 10 years in public infrastructure. Speaker, I'm proud to say that this is the largest capital plan in the 156-year history of Ontario.

This plan includes \$71 billion for transit infrastructure, including \$7.5 billion this year, the largest investment in transit in Ontario's history. It includes game-changing new projects like the Ontario Line here in Toronto, which will connect to over 40 other transit routes, including the GO train line, TTC subway and streetcar lines, and the Eglinton Crosstown LRT line. In my community of Mississauga–Lakeshore, it includes the new 18-kilometre Hazel McCallion LRT line on Hurontario and the new BRT line on Lakeshore.

The government's plan also includes \$28 billion over 10 years to support highway expansion, maintenance and repair projects right across the province to improve our highway network, because, whatever the federal environment minister may say, we know that highways and roads are critical to the economic well-being of Ontario. This includes Highway 413, which will connect Peel, Halton and York regions to support the moving of people and goods across the western GTA.

As the Minister of Transportation said earlier this week, the GTA is adding hundreds of thousands of new residents every year. We simply don't have the highway capacity that we need to support this growth. All the major highways in the western GTA, including the 407, will be over capacity within the next 10 years. The 413 will finally bring relief to an area that clearly needs it, saving drivers up to 30 minutes of commute each way. That's five hours per week, 260 hours each year, or a total of 11 days every year.

The Bradford Bypass, from Highway 400 in Simcoe county to Highway 404 in York region, is expected to save commuters even more, up to 35 minutes per trip. That is six hours each week, or 300 hours each year. In my community, the first phase of the QEW/Dixie interchange improvement is now completed in Mississauga–Lakeshore, and the \$314-million QEW/Credit River Improvement project is well under way, with traffic now on the new twin bridge over the Credit River.

1550

Speaker, this government is also making improvements to ensure that we can build highways, transit and other community infrastructure better and faster. For example, we are looking at how big projects were delivered in the past, and we found that we could do this better and more efficiently. We are improving our procurement process to reduce the risk of delays.

The government is now using a variety of delivery models and innovative procurement strategies to make it easier to work with builders on project requirements, design and pricing. This will help to ensure that Ontario gets the most competitive bids for our infrastructure projects.

We have re-examined the bidding process, looking through new lenses that value creativity and efficiency. We are now separating large complex projects such as the Ontario Line into smaller contracts to generate more market interest and to lay the foundation for future work.

The government is continuing to use modular bids and promote design standardization while also working with municipalities to enable faster improvements. All of these initiatives are helping us get shovels in the ground while creating new jobs to help us build our much-needed new infrastructure. That is why we introduced the Building Transit Faster Act, to streamline processes on priority projects.

I would also like to highlight the important initiatives from my ministry, the Treasury Board Secretariat. In just a few weeks, on April 1, a new regulation under the Building Ontario Businesses Initiative Act, the BOBI, will come into effect. This will help provide businesses across Ontario with greater access to procurement opportunities right across the public sector, including ministries and agencies but also hospitals and schools in the broader public sector.

It will do this by changing the way we evaluate bids to help level the playing field for Ontario businesses. Because of this initiative, Ontario businesses will be able to sell more goods and services and create more jobs in their local communities.

In fact, our government expects, through BOBI, at least \$3 billion in contracts will go to Ontario businesses every year by 2026. That's \$3 billion back into our own economy. And when you think about this, it only makes sense that Ontario businesses should benefit from the spending of their own government. But beyond the actual dollar amount, I bring up the example because it demonstrates the kind of innovative thinking and approach that our government is taking. This is not a time for businesses as usual.

I have mentioned some of the economic pressures that are affecting the people of Ontario in their every day lives. It is because of these factors that the Premier and this government have made it a top priority to help keep cost down for families, businesses and people right across Ontario. The province has taken many actions this year to do just that, and I'd like to take an opportunity to speak about just a few of them now.

After much consultation, we have extended the province's gas tax and fuel tax rate cuts until the end of June 2024. That means savings for the people of Ontario every time they go to the pumps.

As Jay Goldberg, Ontario director of the Canadian Taxpayers Federation, said, this will ensure that critical tax relief continues into 2024. At the same time, we have called on the federal government to stop their carbon tax increase, which would add 17.6 cents per litre to the price of gas on April 1. That increases the price of everything.

I want to take a moment to thank my friend from Leeds–Grenville–Thousand Islands and Rideau Lakes for his motion number 82, which I look forward to supporting.

Speaking of putting more money back in people's pockets, I also want to congratulate my friends the Minister of Transportation and the Associate Minister of Transportation on the One Fare initiative, which eliminates double or triple fares for most local transit services in the greater Golden Horseshoe when commuters also use GO Transit service.

With the One Fare program, commuters in Mississauga–Lakeshore and across the province are now able to travel more easily and affordably, saving an average of \$1,600 each year on an expanded and electrified GO Transit Lakeshore West line, on the new Hazel McCallion LRT and on the new Lakeshore BRT corridor, on the TTC or on other municipal transit systems right across the GTA.

Speaker, the 2023 budget also provides financial support for more seniors by expanding the Guaranteed Annual Income System program—100,000 more seniors will be eligible for this program beginning this July, including payments of up to \$166 per month for single seniors and \$332 per month for seniors in couples. I think it's important to note that this benefit is now adjusted each year based on inflation, which is a critical detail in these times.

Our government also committed to invest in supportive housing, with an additional \$202 million each year for the Homelessness Prevention Program and the Indigenous Supportive Housing Program, a 40% increase over the 2023-23 budget. Both of these programs were designed to

help those at risk of homelessness and those escaping domestic violence.

In my community of Mississauga–Lakeshore, this investment is helping to double the capacity of Armagh house, the only transitional housing facility in Peel for victims of domestic violence. Again, I want to thank the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing and his team for all their great work on this program.

These are just a few examples of the concrete actions that this government is taking to keep costs down for some of this province's most vulnerable people.

Speaker, I would like to close my remarks today by thanking all the members who are here today to listen to the debate, and I hope all members will vote in support.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Further debate?

Ms. Catherine Fife: It's a pleasure to join the debate today. This is actually the first time I've been able to get up to speak to a broad piece of legislation or, as today, a concurrence motion.

I just wanted to start with some good news. In my family, just before Christmas, my son, Aidan, proposed to his long-time love of nine years, and she said yes. So I think you should be prepared to hear a lot about the wedding industry and that sector. I can tell you one thing that won't be happening, though: I will not be inviting any stakeholders to the stag and doe. I've learned the lesson here from Queen's Park.

The other thing that happened is that now I have VIP parking at Rexall because I turned 55, and it's a really good program. I'm taking all the perks that I can get wherever I can get them.

Also, I just want to say, we had a very successful pre-budget consultation, and this is my first opportunity to thank the broadcasting staff, the Clerks and, of course, the research staff. I'm really hopeful, when the government reads the report that we prepared for the finance minister ahead of the budget, which will be on March 21 or March 28—he will not tell me—that those voices across Ontario inform that budget, because that is actually our responsibility here in this House. I want to thank the Chair of the finance committee, who I see here in the House as well.

I also just want to say, before I get into the substantive comments about the finances of the province of Ontario, that this morning's tribute to Brian Mulroney was really touching. I have to say I think that our leader really brought it home, the impact that public service can have, the long-standing impact on communities, on our reputation as a country, on our own families. I thought everybody did a very good job. I also want to say, including to the Premier—he actually made me cry a little bit and not for the usual reasons. That is my attempt at humour in that regard.

1600

It is also worth noting that in my office here at Queen's Park, I have this beautiful scroll that is signed by Brian Mulroney. It was signed to my father-in-law, Walter Fife, who is deceased. It indicates how politics used to be so

very different, because it's a thank-you note for his service to the country in national defence. I keep it there as a reminder that none of us do any of this work successfully, meaningfully, without the people who help us, the staff in this place and our own research staff. We really are very fortunate and very privileged to be in this House, to hold this responsibility.

It is with that that I will make some commentary on where the finances are in the province of Ontario. I'm going to start with housing, because in every riding across this great province, housing is the number one issue, I would say. It's very much connected to the cost of living, which will underpin my entire commentary.

When you look at where we are right now, in March 2024, I don't think anybody expected the housing crisis to worsen. Housing starts are down significantly. They are down from 96,000 in 2022 to 89,000 in 2023, and 24 of the 50 municipalities are below 80% of their annual target of housing, including my own city of Waterloo. I'm going to talk about why they are there and the role that the provincial government could strengthen, to come to the table as a true partner to municipalities in the housing crisis.

I'm going to quote from one of the first articles. This is a CBC article by our own Mike Crawley. It examines the tools—or the stick; whatever you want to say—and how this government is trying to motivate housing. Based on the housing starts, based on the fact that we are losing ground, those mechanisms that this government is using—those tools at your disposal, some of them legislative tools—are not succeeding. This could be a very dangerous tipping point for this province, because without shelter, without stable housing, it is so difficult to move forward as an economy, to ensure that people in this province reach their potential. Housing underpins the economy and we must get it right, and I would argue that right now the government is not doing that.

This article is called “What Should the Ford Government Do about Developers Who Go Years without Building Homes?” This is happening in all of our ridings. “Some Ontario cities want power to slap ‘use it or lose it’ penalties on stalled housing projects.”

Let me tell you why this is so important. Some of you will know this very personally. “The town of Newmarket approved rezoning of [a] property along Yonge Street to allow a high-rise development of more than 500 housing units back in 2018, but construction is yet to begin.

“At least 20 Ontario municipalities are so far away from reaching their provincially mandated targets for new home construction starts that they have virtually no chance of hitting the mark, and will face stiff financial consequences in 2024.

“The problem is something municipal politicians say puts Ontario at risk of failing to meet the goal of 1.5 million new homes.” This is a fictional goal as it stands right now, Madam Speaker—essentially just talking points.

“Under current rules set by” the Premier's “government, cities that fall short of the 2023 target for housing starts will not get any money next year from the province's

\$1.2-billion fund to help cover the costs of housing-related infrastructure.”

Now, we all know there is such a strong connection to having that infrastructure, those roads, those sewers. Without that, you cannot build houses, right? With this partnership, the government has intentionally created an imbalance between municipalities and the province.

Now, I will admit that municipalities are creatures of the province. This is a well-known relationship, but it has never become this hostile. It very much feels to many cities across this province that this is a very punitive measure of this government.

One councillor, who happens to be in that place called Mississauga, Councillor Tedjo, “feels particularly frustrated when he looks across the half-empty parking lot” that I just referenced. So cities have made these approvals. They have approved these developments and developers are not moving forward. And then, in turn, what happens here? The government punishes those municipalities.

But he goes on to say, “I don't think it's fair at all that the province is measuring our success on housing starts and not on housing approvals.” He's not the only one. He's not the only municipal politician raising concerns about the role developers play in Ontario's housing crisis. They're pointing to housing projects that have all the necessary municipal approvals, but developers have yet to put a shovel in the ground. Some of those nine municipalities in York region include the cities of Vaughan, Markham and Richmond Hill. They've approved more than 49,000 housing units that are not yet under construction. That's a lot—49,000, Madam Speaker.

So these councils are doing their work. They are fast-tracking and streamlining the approvals, but at the end of the day, the housing is not coming to fruition and that leaves so many Ontarians really—some of them, literally—out in the cold.

Some of these titles are—“Ontario's Road to 1.5M New Homes Has Gotten Rockier, Construction Insiders Say.” So whatever you are doing, you've actually put up more barriers to housing. The question this provokes in city halls around Ontario is, why is this government taking such a punitive approach to municipalities? It really does. This is a really important question. We know that the minister has said that he's not even considering changing the rules on how municipalities qualify for the fund, so this \$1.2-billion pot of money is held out here in front of municipalities, and yet, even when they go through a successful approval process, they can't build the houses themselves. This is the role of the developers. Some developers are land banking, right? They're banking that land until prices go up, until things become more stable—who knows? But this is what Newmarket Mayor John Taylor calls “the policy not only unfair to municipalities, but also potentially damaging to the government's own plan ... because he believes it will hamper the building of the water and sewer facilities needed” to build housing.

So some people think that some pressure should be put on some of those developers, but I actually have an example in my riding of Waterloo where we do have a

progressive developer. It's called Solowave. His name is Richard Boyer. These are 3,400 purpose-built rental units—that's a huge number. It's up by the Conestogo Park Square. But right now, it isn't the city of Waterloo who is holding up this development and it certainly isn't the developer. The developer has been working on this plan for almost four years; that's how slow it has been.

The city of Waterloo—they're on board. The region of Waterloo—on board. You know where the problem is? The problem is with the Ministry of Transportation, because MTO expects this developer to upgrade the highway to address traffic. And then every time there's a new housing development, they have to do another traffic study. I think they've done three traffic studies. So what's happening right now? Instead of building houses, developers are paying for traffic studies. It makes zero sense.

This developer, by the way—and I did write to the Minister of Transportation and there is a letter coming to the Minister of Housing—he's about ready, if there's one more barrier that's set up in front of this project, to plant beans. So instead of building houses, we're going to have non-descript farming. It doesn't make any sense, Madam Speaker.

So the housing file is not going well. I think that would be an understatement. And just for context, in some part of Ontario, the number of homes sold in 2023 dropped to levels not seen for 20 years.

1610

So we have a stagnant housing market in Ontario. The actions of this government have further destabilized that market, and the combination of high interest rates and buyers waiting for prices to tumble further certainly is not helping it.

But at the end of the day, the number of home sales in the greater Toronto area in 2023 is on track to be lower than in any year since 2001. And we all know that the population is increasing. So the housing specialists, the housing leaders across this province have said that we're looking at housing stagnation. All of us need to make sure that the municipalities are supported in their work. This 2023 low, we have not seen it since the turn of the century.

When I looked at the FAO report this morning, and I see where some money is going some places and some money is not going some places, this government has to get your act together on housing. It's long overdue.

This speaks, really, to the priorities of this government. We hear so many throwaway lines from this government, like: "We're putting more money in your pocket. We're taking our hands out of your pocket." It's really very interesting to see which pockets you are really concerned about, because the best predictor of future behaviour is past behaviour. And one of the first things that this government did was freeze the minimum wage, you'll remember. What a devastating impact this had on front-line workers. This happened in 2018. The government froze the recently changed minimum wage, which at that point was \$14, and they did it for two years.

They also cancelled a series of planned increases that had been set to begin with the 2019. What Deena Ladd has

said is that, "What he did was basically take away a dollar increase, then take away the adjustments for two years, and then start to adjust it again in 2021."

It's really interesting, if cost that out—and we did raise this during the debate at the time. If you cost it out, one estimate—and this was from a research study—confirmed that if this government had not "instituted the freeze, each minimum wage worker would since have earned between \$3,000 and \$6,000 more between 2018 and 2021. These lost potential wages came at a bad time, the authors of the estimate write: 'Many minimum wage workers put their own health at risk to keep working on the front lines of our economy throughout the pandemic. The three-year delay in raising the minimum wage to \$15 cost them dearly.'"

So once again: very selective about who you're saving money for and who you're not. And let's remember, this study could not even quantify the impact on racialized minimum wage workers, and that gap and that disparity in wages is well documented.

When we look at the findings of the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives around the minimum wage, because we hear lots of talk about how generous and compassionate some of these changes have been, this is a hard and cruel change which we are still feeling today. The impact of those decisions are still being felt today. But the findings from the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives report says, "The discrepancy between the rental wage and the minimum wage is such that, in most Canadian cities, minimum wage earners are extremely unlikely to escape core housing need. They are likely spending too much on rent, living in units that are too small, or, in many cases, both."

So, I'm connecting your policy decision to freeze the minimum wage and that impact on people's ability to be housed, to find shelter. These are core issues that Ontarians face.

Even with the catch-up, the 6.8% raise, "A full-time minimum wage worker in the GTA will still be short by \$260 a week in trying to make ends meet... There's nowhere in the province where you can survive off the minimum wage, now, or after Oct. 1." This quote was from Craig Pickthorne from the Ontario Living Wage Network.

These are important policy decisions that the government has made, that have not been in the best interests of Ontarians.

I'm going to move on to energy costs too, because as I mentioned in my opening comments, the cost of living is really having such a negative impact on the quality of life that Ontarians are experiencing. And what I will say about energy costs—I think that my parents from Peterborough may be watching. Energy costs are something that impacts their daily lives because most seniors are on fixed incomes, and there is not a lot of wiggle room there at all. But the decision by the Minister of Energy to override the Ontario Energy Board—and we read about this just before the House came back. This story, you couldn't write this story because—please remember that I served with many of the PC MPPs that are across the row today. When the

Liberals interfered and politicized the Ontario Energy Board, there was such a hue and cry. You could not believe it, quite honestly. What I'm seeing is such a complete reversal in how politicians act when they're in opposition versus when they are in government, and I'm going to give some context for this.

This is an article by John Woodside. He writes: "Ontario Premier Doug Ford's government is tabling new legislation to overrule the provincial energy regulator in a move worth billions of dollars that benefits gas giant Enbridge," and it goes on to say that if passed, this "move would effectively strip the regulator of its arm's-length role."

Now, we know that this government is not really big on independent arm's-length agencies or, for that matter, independent officers, quite honestly, as demonstrated by their removal of the child advocate and the francophone—

Mr. Terence Kernaghan: Environmental.

Ms. Catherine Fife: Environmental, oh my God. I mean, I know the independent officers are sort of on eggshells a little bit, because this government is not a fan of impartial non-partisan critiquing.

But this case is so interesting, because the Ontario Energy Board, please remember, is responsible for ensuring that energy policy in Ontario serves the people that we're elected to serve, that it's in their best interests. In this instance, the OEB decision reviewed where the government was going with natural gas, and the "decision requiring new gas infrastructure to be paid upfront was an attempt to grapple with the realities of the energy transition off fossil fuels." Remember, this is the hottest year that we've seen, I think ever. Climate change, just for the record, is real and it is impacting the province of Ontario and this great country. "As fossil fuels are phased out in favour of clean alternatives, allowing Enbridge to pay off fossil fuel infrastructure by spreading costs over all ratepayers into the 2060s represents a significant financial risk to the public."

The Ontario Energy Board found that the government was moving in a direction which was fiscally irresponsible, that was not conforming to our environmental responsibilities and that was going to be very costly for the people, including many, many stranded assets. That's their job. Their job is to be forward-looking and to see what the land is like out there.

So, the government said "it is overriding the regulator in the interest of keeping housing costs down, but that position isn't supported by evidence," much like the legislation and policies of this government. "In fact, high-efficiency heat pumps are more affordable over the lifetime of the equipment than new gas hookups, meaning Ontario's decision to reverse the regulator's decision could actually make housing more expensive."

Given what I have just shared about the lay of the land around housing in Ontario, the fact that housing starts are down, that housing has never been more affordable, that this provincial government is actively getting in the way of permitting the development of 3,400 affordable housing units in north Waterloo, why would a government overrule

this decision when this is the context of the lived experience of Ontarians?

1620

The Minister of Energy was questioned at length about this policy decision, and it goes on to say that he bristled at questions asking if the government was taking control of the regulator, and he said that the OEB decision, which emerged after a year of hearings, thousands of pages of evidence and testimony from environmental advocates, industry representatives and utility experts alike, was simply "wrong."

Independence of the OEB is key.

Don't worry; more hot air is coming, more gas is coming. The minister said that they're now going to come out with a natural gas policy statement to provide further direction to the Ontario Energy Board. That's not really how it's supposed to work. The government does not control the independent regulator. The regulator provides information and data and evidence to the Minister of Energy, and that should inform policy—but not in this new Ontario, under this PC government.

They're going to bring in this policy, and then they're also going to bring in a new chair of the OEB. This is what the minister said: "I'll expect the appointee to help ensure the [OEB] conducts appropriate consultation before reaching any decisions, and to reinforce the government's priority"—essentially, he's looking for a new chair of the Ontario Energy Board who is like-minded. I raise this characterization, if you will, of "like-minded" because this is a new direction that we have not seen this government go in. The fact that the Premier is bragging about appointing like-minded judges is such a dangerous direction for this province.

Earlier this morning, I did have a chance to meet with the Ontario trial lawyers, and we had a really engaging conversation about the sad state of affairs of our court system in Ontario—the backlogs, not just for the Landlord and Tenant Board, but for victims of sexual assault who are not getting their day in court, and rapists are walking free because that 18-month threshold has not been met.

Ourselves here and my good friend from London North Centre introduced the HVAC—sorry; what was it called?

Mr. Terence Kernaghan: No more HVAC scams.

Ms. Catherine Fife: No more HVAC scams. Thankfully, it really prompted the government to move on that. White-collar crime in Ontario is out of control.

It's astounding to see the Premier of this province stand up in this House and pretend that he has a little gun in his hand and say everybody is getting shot up. It's not a comical situation at all.

The court system is so underfunded. In fact, in that last cycle—I think it was Q3—there was a reduction of 2% in the judicial system.

So when you meet with the Ontario trial lawyers and you talk about the characterization of judges, including this very strange civics lesson that we got from the Attorney General about judges becoming impartial when they're appointed—this is language that is really straying into a very dark space.

This morning, when we were talking about this, I have to say, one of the delegations said to me it's so dangerous that—and this is the quote: “In order for justice to be done, it can't just be done; it needs to be seen to be done.”

The confidence in our judicial system is so compromised right now, because people are waiting so long for their day in court. And it's an overused quote, but justice delayed is justice denied; it truly is.

I'm working with a young woman in my riding right now who waited two years for her day in court, and those two years were the most painful days of her young life.

The system that the Attorney General describes as top-of-the-class, first-class—there's a serious disconnect between that language. But the fact that now the Minister of Energy is also using this callout for like-minded people, chairs of committees—this morning we heard about an appointment to the LTB, about people who will do the government's bidding. This takes away from those first comments that I started with about the duty to serve the public.

There should be a very open and transparent judicial appointment process. It is key to having confidence in the judicial system, and right now, the comments by the Premier about having like-minded judges, and now the comments about the Minister of Energy finding someone who will fall in line with the government's directives, is language I actually haven't seen a lot in this place. I've seen a lot of things, and sometimes I'm surprised, but more and more, I'm not that surprised.

The Ontario Energy Board—there has been lots of criticism about this, as well. And this is about people's pockets, so let's say what's really going on here. This is what the Minister of Energy has said: that if the do-overs return the same result, the minister wouldn't rule out intervening again to ensure the province gets what it wants. “It's incumbent on the Ontario Energy Board to realize what our policy is as the government [goes] forward.”

This is a key piece, because the OEB has the public interest at heart. It's actually their mandate, Madam Speaker, and when the politicians interfere in that process, that undermines confidence in the energy sector as a whole, I would argue. If the government even hints at appointing a Ford-connected insider who's not going to act in the best interests of the people of Ontario, but instead acts in the interests of a multi-billion-dollar fossil fuel company, then we have a serious problem in Ontario.

That's what this legislation that the minister brought forward is all about. At the end of the day—and this is the key piece—who is it going to cost? It's going to cost ratepayers in Ontario more, because the OEB is being overturned, because of political interference to the tune of I think it's almost \$600.

This is Kent Elson, who's a lawyer representing the non-profit Environmental Defence, which intervened in Enbridge's rate application. He told Canada's National Observer that this “government's decision to name its legislation the Keeping Energy Costs Down Act is ‘Orwellian.’”

“It should be called the Keeping Enbridge Profits and Energy Bills High Act,” he said.

“The OEB decision would have cut capital costs covered by gas customers by approximately \$600 per customer,” he said. “Reversing the decision will certainly raise energy bills.”

Why is this government raising the energy costs of Ontarians? They're already hurting so much.

And so if you care about housing starts, if you care about the environment, if you care about being fiscally responsible, avoiding fitting a house with gas infrastructure and connecting it to the gas grid by switching to electric heat or cooling means only one system. Actually, we heard this at pre-budget consultation: Moving away from this government's plan would actually increase the supply of affordable housing, because it reduces that infrastructure pressure.

At the end of the day, this government now is actively creating legislation that's going to increase your gas bill. It makes no sense whatsoever. We fought it. Our energy critic spoke eloquently about it, and at the end of the day, what's concerning for us is that this is all too similar to the greenbelt scandal. The government is legislating against the public good in the service of a few private interests, namely Enbridge and housing developers.

How did we get to this place in this province? Honestly—amidst an acknowledgement by every member of provincial Parliament in this House that the housing crisis is real. It is hurting our economy, it is hurting our families and our communities, and it's having a devastating effect on the quality of life. So why bring in legislation which hurts Ontarians? This is the genuine question that I have.

1630

This legislation also sets a dangerous precedent. This is the first time any government of Ontario has brought through legislation and overruled a decision by the independent Ontario Energy Board. Please remember: The Ontario Energy Board's mandate is to keep energy costs down. And that's the problem. That's the problem when a government interferes and intervenes and actively works against the people that we're elected to serve.

I have to say, I'm very discouraged by this move, because not only is it going to negatively impact the housing sector, but it's going to also impact people's pockets. It's just really interesting, because Enbridge is going to be fine. Enbridge makes a lot of money; in fact, I think last year, their net profits were \$19.1 billion. So don't worry about Enbridge. Enbridge is going to be okay.

Mr. Terence Kernaghan: Doing okay.

Ms. Catherine Fife: Yes, they're doing okay. You know who's not? The people who are looking for housing, particularly affordable housing, and the people who are getting energy bills. And you're going to increase their energy bills. Why would this government go down this road, Madam Speaker?

So we question the decision-making. Honestly, the OEB's decision was based on research by experts. The evidence is clear that the government's direction around expanding natural gas was not in the best interests of Ontarians. And yet, now we have a piece of legislation, ironically called “keeping your energy bill down,” or something like that—

something ridiculous. I don't know who writes the titles of these bills.

Mr. Mike Harris: You don't like Working for Workers one, two, three and four?

Ms. Catherine Fife: No, because it left out sick days, minimum wage, working conditions, gig workers—yes. Thank you for the heckle. I appreciate that from the member from Kitchener—Conestoga. I had a drink of water. Thank you so much.

And then you know what? Even when we do come to this House and we propose some solutions, the government is not willing at all to even contemplate them. I'm thinking particularly of our oppo day motion from this week. We came to this House with our oppo day motion to remove the tolls for truckers on the 407. For us, this was a very creative solution; perhaps a stopgap for other highways or other infrastructure projects, but really, an immediate solution to address painful gridlock on the 407.

This would also address the productivity of Ontarians, because people spend too much time on the parking lot called the 401. And this would address the economic development call and potentially save \$8 billion by not having to build another highway directly parallel to the 407. And also, quite honestly, there would be significant environmental benefits from ensuring that we make better use of the 407. There was, of course, the forgiveness of the \$1 billion in non-compliance fees that were forgiven by this government. So there's definitely a need to sit down and have this conversation.

I don't know why they're so soft on tolls because, ironically, they brought forward a piece of legislation saying that they're going to take the tolls off roads where there are no tolls, but they refuse to take the tolls or even address or reduce the tolls where there is a toll, on the one highway in Ontario that has a toll, which is the 407 ETR.

Just to give you some sense as to how this would play out, the potential—and this is a report that I will quote in a second. This would move trucks to the 407 and “12,000 to 21,000 trucks a day off Highway 401, reducing daily traffic for passenger vehicle drivers” on that highway. Moving trucks to the 407 “will improve journey times for truckers by approx. 80 minutes”—time is money, Madam Speaker—“which would be less than half the length of time than the equivalent trip on Highway 401.”

Subsidizing the 407 will “cost \$6 billion less than constructing” another proposed highway. And that highway isn't even going to be built for another decade. People who are stuck in traffic and gridlock on the 401 right now, they cannot wait another decade for some kind of relief.

This report from Environmental Defence says this confirms—if they had even been willing to have a conversation, right? “Their findings confirm that the alternative approach of subsidizing the toll for trucks on the 407 would address the key aim of reducing congestion on the 401 while eliminating the risk of negative environmental impacts.”

Was this government willing to have this conversation with us? No, they were not. In fact, for some reason, the Minister of Transportation didn't even want to talk about

the 407. I know why they don't want to talk about the 407. They don't want to talk about the 407 because this was the worst deal in the history of the province, and our debate really revealed a lot of issues that are ongoing.

This goes back to contract law. For some reason, the 407 ETR contract with the province of Ontario heavily favours the 407, not the people of this province. Some of the highest tolls in the country—I think “the universe” may have been quoted the other day—but definitely the highest tolls, on the 407, in Ontario, than any other province in this great country.

Going back to that \$1 billion: Let's remember that during the pandemic, obviously, ridership was down on the 407, and the 407 ETR wanted some COVID-related relief. They got relief. They got \$1 billion worth of relief.

Mr. Terence Kernaghan: Comfort.

Ms. Catherine Fife: Yes. And they did—they did seek comfort.

According to documents obtained through the provincial freedom-of-information act, the government “didn't pursue ‘potential congestion penalty payments in the order of \$1 billion’ for 2020 and could decide not to do so again”—which they did.

This comes at a time when the government was planning to build a parallel highway to the 407. It's really about priorities.

Even if you go back to the pocket issue, this government is actively choosing to provide relief to the 407 ETR and not to the people of this province, who, in better times, are back on the 407, paying the highest tolls in the country.

Let's remember that the 407 ETR received that \$1 billion in relief even in the year when they made \$147.1 million worth of profit. So, yes, they still posted a profit, and yet they still received very, very generous—I would say \$1 billion is very generous. This is a very profitable highway. When you're charging the kind of tolls that they are, of course they're going to generate a lot of money.

What's really important to think about, when a government is making choices or setting priorities—this is what actually happened. The highway, during this time, had the option of reducing tolls to encourage more drivers to use the highway, possibly preventing the congestion clause from being triggered, but they opted not to do so. Do you know why they opted not to do so? Because they were like, “It's okay. This PC government will take care of us.” They knew where the interests and the priorities of this government fell. It fell with the 407, not with the people who pay the highest tolls.

It goes on to say in the contract—“407 ETR is required to use commercially reasonable efforts to minimize the effect and duration of the force majeure,” ministry officials noted in their April 3 memo. “This could include, amongst other things, reducing tolls to encourage traffic.” It's right there in the contract. The government has never even tried to pressure or push the 407 corporation to meet their contractual obligations. This meant that the 407 ETR was failing to meet its contractual obligations—I just said that.

CEO Sacristan explained to the ministry and wrote a letter, and in that letter they quoted—“407 ETR has

initiated discussions with ministry staff and is seeking comfort that the government will exclude the pandemic period from any congestion penalty payment calculations. Corporate reporting requirements to shareholders, investors, debt holders and public auditing and disclosure requirements are driving the urgency of this matter....”

And the government met them at that urgent place. They met them in that moment in time. Meanwhile, minimum wage workers are actively having the government remove money from their pockets, but the pockets of the shareholders, they're fine; they're doing okay.

1640

The Ministry of Transportation, ironically, does not make its traffic data public, despite the open-government legislation. The language that we hear around here around “the historic investments” and “this never happened in the history of the province of Ontario”—I have never heard a government use the word “historic” to such historic measures. I mean, it's quite something. This is a very clear example of a government showing us who they really are, right? At the end of the day, there were a few ministry staff who really tried to push back a little bit, but not on the political side, I have to say. They said, and this is the quote from one of the FOI documents, “We believe that the congestion relief mechanisms have been rendered inoperative by the lack of congestion.” And then: “Mindful that the 407 managers could reduce tolls to encourage higher traffic levels and avoid billion-dollar penalties, however, the assistant deputy minister, operations division”—at the time, Eric Doidge—“at the Ontario Ministry of Transportation, took issue with the company's characterization of traffic levels.”

There were people, I'm sure, who were advising the Minister of Transportation at the time that we didn't have to be so compliant with their request to seek comfort. That is not the job of the government, to comfort corporations. It is the job to put the interests of the people of this great province ahead of those corporations. And the ministry disagreed “with the 407 ETR's statements regarding the existence or non-existence of congestion in the” GTA. The only reason that we know some of this stuff is really through FOIs—and several people, though, who have been following this debacle of the 407, beginning with the worst deal in the history of Ontario by selling it after we'd already paid for it.

“The government could have pressed them to drop the tolls” after viewing these documents. “They don't seem to have put any pressure on the operator. They lost that opportunity.” So this government chose the interests of this corporation over the interests of the people that we serve. I have to say, we continue to really just be the people that paid for the original highway and pay the highest tolls. They continue to pay the highest price for a really messy policy decision.

I'm just going to move on a little bit, because the government is not indicating at all that they're even interested in alleviating congestion on the 401 with a creative option, even though it's well within their rights, particularly on the provincially owned 407. There's literally nothing stopping

this government from removing tolls on that part, but they do have a piece of legislation that says “get it done”—is it just “get it done”?

Mr. Terence Kernaghan: Yes, I think so.

Ms. Catherine Fife: Get it done. I would just say, do something to alleviate some of the pressure.

Mr. Terence Kernaghan: Do anything.

Ms. Catherine Fife: Do anything. Get it done properly. Do it right the first time. There's all sorts of things, all sorts of titles.

Moving on to health care—let me just take a look. I want to say, I just want to do a special little shout-out on the health care file to the good people of Minden, who are still fighting for some financial transparency in how their emergency rooms in their hospital were closed. They continue to share information with us. They've done their financial responsibility, their fiscal due diligence. It really is too bad that the Ministry of Health did not do that, quite honestly. This is an emergency room which was a game-changer for that community, as they all are. You will know that we've had record emergency room closures across the province like we've never seen in Ontario. Health care professionals from across all sectors have said that this is the worst health care crisis they have ever seen in Ontario. That is not a record to be proud of.

Looking at where the funding is going right now and following the FAO report from earlier today, the impact of the unconstitutional Bill 124 which this government brought in, which is wage restraint legislation that limited increases to 1%—while you're taking care of corporations, 1% for health care workers, the mass migration of talent from this province. It keeps me up at night, quite honestly. How are we going to rebuild the health care sector when such deep disrespect was shown to them—and illegal—Madam Speaker? Bill 124 was deemed illegal. This government fought it two times in the court system. It's ironic that they finally got their day in court. It did take, I think, almost three years, though.

It does lead me to believe, watching how Minden was treated, how various emergency rooms across this province are experiencing such stress on basic services, access to family physicians—we heard at pre-budget consultations one doctor in a rural community who is 76 years old who said he would love to retire. The pressure for him as the only doctor in that community is profound, right? Where is the strategy for this government to attract doctors and medical professionals here?

The Ontario Medical Association has some good suggestions. It's not like talented, knowledgeable people haven't stepped forward and said, “Listen, this would be a really good idea.” It's just that there's no willingness, no goodwill to actually entertain some solutions. I think, really, when we're seeing some of the privatization—which, of course, the parliamentary assistant said would never happen. This is not going to be privatization, she said, but here we have people paying for basic access to primary caregivers in Ontario to the tune of \$4,900 a year.

I will say that we are going into a very dark place, though, with the recent decision for a pay-for-plasma

centre coming to Hamilton. Our members from Hamilton asked this question earlier this morning, receiving a dodgy answer. When I say “dodgy,” I mean just not even meeting the question. I know it’s not called answer period, but it would be really good when we got some information. Instead, the Attorney General keeps coming back asking us questions. I feel like this place has become a little bit of a theatre of the absurd some days, or a Monty Python film.

But this is what’s happening right now in Hamilton: A private company from Spain plans to open a centre in Hamilton that will pay for plasma donations. I’m going to tell you why this is so concerning—and there is an organization called BloodWatch.org that suggests the plasma collection centre will be located on Barton Street in Hamilton. Listen, if you know Hamilton, you will know this is an area of the city which is really hurting, I mean seriously hurting, and has been for a long time. It is an area where, historically, there has been higher unemployment and lower incomes than the city’s average.

Then Dr. Kerry Beal, who’s the lead physician at the Shelter Health Network, an excellent organization doing amazing work on a shoestring budget, said, “Isn’t that going to be a great location? They’re targeting vulnerable people.” Imagine you are looking at paying a higher energy bill, paying higher rent because there’s no more rent control, sky-high grocery costs, and then this place opens up in your neighbourhood. Now, we don’t know the full price point, but they’re suggesting between \$75 and \$100 for a plasma donation.

I have to say, BC has ruled this out. Even the Liberals, in 2014, when this was first suggested, stopped it; they blocked it under a significant amount of pressure. I keep thinking about these government advertisements and these commercials that we’re paying \$25 million for—that’s a low ball on that part. But if the government is concerned about blood donations, which are down post-pandemic, or plasma donations, why not use some of that money to advertise how great this is for you? It’s a good thing for people to do, if they’re able to do so. But what does this government say? We got no answer this morning from the Minister of Health on this issue.

1650

This needs to be shut down. It needs to be shut down now. It is a predatory practice. Privatizing the sale of bodily fluids like blood and plasma is a dangerous precedent to be setting. I have to say that you will see very vulnerable people coming to this place to earn \$75 or \$100 for their plasma, instead of a proactive, healthy policy in place, which should be supported by the government of the day.

Plasma and blood are obviously needed in the health care system, but selling it from a company from Spain is a very dangerous direction to go in. It makes me wonder, what else is going to be for sale in the province of Ontario? Is everything going to be for sale?

Interjection: Organs?

Ms. Catherine Fife: Organs? It is such a dangerous precedent to be focused on.

The Shelter Health Network: We share the concerns of this organization that “worries that the vulnerable population they care for will use the pay-for-plasma centres as a source of income because they desperately need money.” This is really where we are in Ontario right now. I would have loved to have heard a very clear answer from the Minister of Health this morning, saying, “We’re going to shut this down. This is wrong. Not everything should be for sale.”

One of the last issues I want to talk about—I already addressed the justice issue. I should mention this, because it’s very politically—the timing of this particular motion, the upcoming budget bill, we’re going to be watching the justice file very closely. Right now, there are “53,000 unresolved cases ... as of March 2023,” at the Landlord and Tenant Board, “impacting at least one million Ontarians.” This is a direct quote from Tribunal Watch Ontario.

Even the folks that are in prison right now, the latest stat was 63% of them are on remand. So these are people who may be innocent but they can’t afford bail, and they have been there for months or years. This is impacting families, impacting the economy. For some reason, the Attorney General doesn’t see that this is an urgent issue, and we’re just going to keep putting a lot of pressure on that.

But the other story that is around community and children’s services: Now, we all know that the autism wait-list right now is a disgrace. It is a point of shame that I think that this government will never be able to get away from. That system is so broken, and families tell me that they are breaking because of it. But our critic from Kiiwetinoong raised the issue of a recent story by Global News that just broke, and it’s called “Profiting Off Kids: Indigenous Kids Allegedly Called ‘Cash Cows’ of Ontario’s Child-Welfare System.”

Any government of any stripe anywhere should be judged on how they treat their most vulnerable. These children are some of the most vulnerable in this country and in this province. This story is called, “The Business of Indigenous Kids in Care.” It reads, “At a group home in eastern Ontario, the owner allegedly called First Nations kids from northern Ontario his ‘bread and butter.’

“Behind the doors of other privately run group homes”—which are a scourge in this province, and the oversight on these homes is almost non-existent—“former workers say that staff and management referred to Indigenous youth sent there for help as the company’s ‘cash cows,’ ‘money-makers,’ or even ‘paycheques.’” Imagine referring to Indigenous children in that manner.

“A year-long Global News investigation has revealed how some private group homes allegedly prey on the vulnerability of Indigenous youth from remote First Nations in order to generate profit.” This sounds accurate, because if it was a not-for-profit, profit wouldn’t be driving the chasing of the money, right?

“These are lives. They’re not a commodity’: Indigenous kids in care” are not a commodity. This needs to be clearly stated, and the minister responsible—I mean, I like the minister. I saw no acknowledgement that this is

actually happening in Ontario, but this story goes on to say, “The result, according to some workers, child welfare experts and youths, are horrendous experiences some liken to the abuse that took place during ... residential schools....

“Allegations of kids being violently restrained. Indigenous youths allegedly punished for speaking their languages. A vulnerable child asking visiting Indigenous social workers if they were there to rescue him.

“This ... investigation, based on leaked and other internal government documents obtained under freedom of information laws, government contract data, and interviews with more than 100 former group home workers, youths and children’s aid employees, reveals: ...

“—These companies allegedly charge resource-starved Indigenous children’s aid societies in the north higher daily fees to care for their kids compared with what they charge non-Indigenous agencies....

“—These group homes are often compared to a ‘prison’ where staff frequently use physical force to restrain children, former workers and youths said.”

And this is the last quote from this article: “‘People need to know that Indigenous youth are being monetized by the child-welfare system and that no cultural considerations are being made,’ said a former worker of multiple group homes in the Ottawa area....

“‘The average person would be quite shocked and frankly horrified,’” and we should be. We should be, Madam Speaker. This is not the Ontario of promise. These are intentional financial decisions that the government is making. The lack of oversight on all of these files and the accountability and needed transparency on these files are incredibly concerning for not only myself as the finance and Treasury Board critic—you certainly give me a lot of material to work with—but our entire caucus.

So we’re committed to showing up for the people of this province, for bringing the voices of the people who are not going to your events, who are not buying tickets to your stakeholder relations, not attending your mental health mixers—we are focused on bringing the real voices of Ontarians to this place, as we’ve taken an oath to do as legislators.

Madam Speaker, this government could do so much better for the people of this province and we’re going to hold you to account in that regard.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Further debate? Further debate?

Seeing none, Mr. Jones has moved concurrence in supply for the Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carries?

Interjection: On division.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Carried on division.

Orders of the day?

Mr. Trevor Jones: Government order number 43.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): I recognize the deputy House leader.

Mr. Trevor Jones: I move concurrence in supply for the Ministry of Colleges and Universities.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): The deputy House leader has moved government order number 43.

Further debate? Further debate?

Seeing none, Mr. Jones has moved concurrence in supply for the Ministry of Colleges and Universities. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry?

Interjection: On division.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Carried on division.

Orders of the day?

Mr. Trevor Jones: Government order number 44.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): I recognize the deputy House leader.

Mr. Trevor Jones: I move concurrence in supply for the Ministry of Education, including supplementaries.

1700

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Further debate? Further debate? Seeing none, Mr. Jones has moved concurrence in supply for the Ministry of Education, including supplementaries. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry?

Interjection: On division.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Carried on division.

Orders of the day? I recognize the deputy House leader.

Mr. Trevor Jones: Government order number 45.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): The deputy House leader.

Mr. Trevor Jones: I move concurrence in supply for the Ministry of Health.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): The deputy House leader has moved government order number 45. Further debate? Further debate? Seeing none, the deputy House leader has moved concurrence in supply for the Ministry of Health. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry?

Interjection: On division.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Carried on division.

Orders of the day? I recognize the deputy House leader.

Mr. Trevor Jones: We’ll do this a few more times to get really good at it.

Government order number 46.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): I recognize the deputy House leader.

Mr. Trevor Jones: Speaker, I move concurrence in supply for the Ministry of Long-Term Care.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): The deputy House leader has moved government order number 46. Further debate? Further debate? Seeing none, Mr. Jones has moved concurrence in supply for the Ministry of Long-Term Care. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry?

Interjection: On division.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Carried on division.

Orders of the day?

Mr. Trevor Jones: Government order number 47.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): I recognize the deputy House leader.

Mr. Trevor Jones: I move concurrence in supply for the Ministry for Seniors and Accessibility.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): The deputy House leader has moved government order number 47. Further debate? Further debate? Seeing none, Mr. Jones has moved concurrence in supply for the Ministry for Seniors and Accessibility. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry?

Interjection: On division.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Carried on division.

Orders of the day? I recognize the deputy House leader.

Mr. Trevor Jones: Government order number 48.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): I recognize the deputy House leader.

Mr. Trevor Jones: I move concurrence in supply for the Ministry of the Attorney General.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): The deputy House leader has moved government order number 48. Further debate? Further debate? Seeing none, Mr. Jones has moved concurrence in supply for the Ministry of the Attorney General.

Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry?

Interjection: On division.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Carried on division.

Orders of the day?

Mr. Trevor Jones: Government order number 49.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): I recognize the deputy House leader.

Mr. Trevor Jones: I move concurrence in supply for the Ministry of Francophone Affairs.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): The deputy House leader has moved government order number 49. Further debate? Further debate? Seeing none, Mr. Jones has moved concurrence in supply for the Ministry of Francophone Affairs. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry?

Interjection: On division.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Carried on division.

Orders of the day?

Mr. Trevor Jones: Government order number 50.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): I recognize the deputy House leader.

Mr. Trevor Jones: Speaker, I move concurrence in supply for the Ministry of Indigenous Affairs.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): The deputy House leader has moved government motion order number 50. Further debate? Further debate? Seeing none, Mr. Jones has moved concurrence in supply for the Ministry of Indigenous Affairs. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry?

Interjection: On division.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Carried on division.

Orders of the day?

Mr. Trevor Jones: Government order number 51.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): I recognize the deputy House leader.

Mr. Trevor Jones: I move concurrence in supply for the Ministry of Public and Business Service Delivery.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): The deputy House leader has moved government order number 51. Further debate? Further debate? Further debate? Seeing none, Mr. Jones has moved concurrence in supply for the Ministry of Public and Business Service Delivery. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry?

Interjection: On division.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Carried on division.

Orders of the day?

Mr. Trevor Jones: Government order number 52.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): I recognize the deputy House leader.

Mr. Trevor Jones: I move concurrence in supply for the Ministry of the Solicitor General.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): The deputy House leader has moved government order number 52. Further debate? Further debate? Further debate? Seeing none, Mr. Jones has moved concurrence in supply for the Ministry of the Solicitor General. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry?

Interjection: On division.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Carried on division.

Orders of the day?

Mr. Trevor Jones: Government order number 53.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): I recognize the deputy House leader.

Mr. Trevor Jones: I move concurrence in supply for the Ministry of Citizenship and Multiculturalism.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): The deputy House leader has moved government order number 53. Further debate? Further debate? Further debate? Mr. Jones has moved concurrence in supply for the Ministry of Citizenship and Multiculturalism. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry?

Interjection: On division.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Carried on division.

Orders of the day?

Mr. Trevor Jones: Government order 54.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): I recognize the deputy House leader.

Mr. Trevor Jones: I move concurrence in supply for the Ministry of Infrastructure.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): The deputy House leader has moved government order number 54. Further debate? Further debate? Further debate? Mr. Jones has moved concurrence in supply for the Ministry of Infrastructure. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry?

Interjection: On division.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Carried on division.

Orders of the day?

Mr. Trevor Jones: Government order number 55.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): I recognize the deputy House leader.

Mr. Trevor Jones: I move concurrence in supply for the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): The deputy House leader has moved government order number 55. Further debate? Further debate? Further debate? Mr. Jones has moved concurrence in supply for the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry?

Interjection: On division.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Carried on division.

Orders of the day?

Mr. Trevor Jones: Government order number 56.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): I recognize the deputy House leader.

Mr. Trevor Jones: I move concurrence in supply for the Ministry of Tourism, Culture and Sport.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): The deputy House leader has moved government order number 56. Further debate? Further debate? Further debate? Mr. Jones has moved concurrence in supply for the Ministry of Tourism, Culture and Sport. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry?

Interjection: On division.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Carried on division.

Orders of the day?

Mr. Trevor Jones: Government order number 57.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): I recognize the deputy House leader.

Mr. Trevor Jones: I move concurrence in supply for the Ministry of Transportation, including supplementaries.
1710

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): The deputy House leader has moved government order number 57. Further debate? Further debate? Further debate? Mr. Jones has moved concurrence in supply for the Ministry of Transportation, including supplementaries. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry?

Interjection: On division.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Carried on division.

Orders of the day?

Mr. Trevor Jones: Government order number 58.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): I recognize the deputy House leader.

Mr. Trevor Jones: I move concurrence in supply for the Ministry of Economic Development, Job Creation and Trade.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Further debate? Further debate?

Interjection.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Are you standing for debate? Oh.

I recognize the Minister of Economic Development.

Hon. Victor Fedeli: Thank you, Speaker. Do you think I was going to let an opportunity go to waste to talk about the great things that are happening in Ontario thanks to Premier Ford and the team that is bringing jobs and prosperity right across all of Ontario?

We're reminded, of course, of some years ago, under the previous Liberal government, when we lost 300,000 jobs. I recall the day when the former chair of what was then called Fiat Chrysler was sitting on a stage in Windsor with the former Premier, Kathleen Wynne—don't forget auto companies were leaving Ontario at the time—and she was musing with Chrysler's chair, "Are you going to be expanding in Ontario?" He looked at her with this shocked look on his face and said—I'm paraphrasing: "You have made Ontario the most expensive jurisdiction in North America in which to do business." And she pushed a little further, and he replied one more time, "You've got to lower the cost of doing business in Ontario."

The very first thing Premier Ford said to our team when we got elected was, "You heard loud and clear the problem in Ontario: 300,000 manufacturing jobs have left us. We've got to lower the cost of doing business in Ontario." And we began immediately by reducing the cost of WSIB, workers' compensation. Think about it: We charged employers a fee. We had charged so much that that fund was so overstuffed with cash, it was far beyond any financial realms. It was so far beyond any moral requirements that we reduced that fee by 50%. That is a \$2.5-billion reduction in the cost of doing business in Ontario overnight, and that's permanent reduction. The benefits have not changed, but the premiums have been lowered by 50%.

The next thing we did was bring in what's called an accelerated capital cost allowance. That means that businesses can now write off the cost of their brand new equipment in the same year. That's a billion-dollar savings to the businesses.

Then we reduced industrial and commercial hydro rates by 15%. That's a billion three in savings.

The Liberals had a tax increase plan for January 1: \$465 million in taxes that were to go up on January 1. We cancelled that tax increase and every other tax increase since the day we were elected. That's \$465 million, year after year after year, of savings.

Then we lowered the provincial share of your local property taxes by \$450 million annually.

Then the red tape reductions began. Think about this: There are a couple of simple red tape reductions. General Motors, for instance, told us at the CAMI plant, they have to go through 120 pages of red tape. We reduced it to 12 for them. That is a massive savings of money and time that they can put in to doing great things like designing the BrightDrop electric vehicle that comes off the assembly line in General Motors.

We put red tape reductions that today amount to almost a billion dollars a year. Add all these things together and many more, and it is an \$8-billion annual savings to the cost of doing business in Ontario. We pulled on every lever that we had at our hand to lower the cost of doing

business, and the business community did exactly what we expected they would do. We lowered the cost, we lowered taxes, we lowered all of the red tape, we got out of their way and let them do what they do best, and what do they do? They hired 700,000 new employees since we were elected.

You can see the signs of this success all over Ontario. Here we are in Toronto. You look up in any direction in the city of Toronto and you will see cranes building this city. In fact, today, there are 240 cranes in the city of Toronto at work. Now, Speaker, that is an all-time record. There is no other city in North America that has ever had more than 60 cranes at the same time. There are 240.

This is an interesting list that I must read. There are more cranes operating in Toronto today than every other city on the crane list. That includes Seattle, LA, Denver, Boston, Washington, Portland, Honolulu, San Francisco, Chicago, Las Vegas, New York and Phoenix. We have more cranes operating in Toronto today than all those cities combined.

That's the might. That's the power. That's what happens when you reduce taxes, lower the cost of doing business. They put people to work. They create jobs. Families earn incomes. This is what's happening in the city of Toronto. This is what's happening all across Ontario.

No better example than in the auto sector, where we now have landed \$28 billion of new EV auto business in the province of Ontario in the last three years. That's a remarkable statistic, and it is in conjunction with the \$3 billion that we've landed in the life sciences business and the tens of billions of dollars we've landed in the tech sector. It is a remarkable picture that you see in Ontario.

You've heard me in this Legislature—I love this statistic. I can say this statistic 10 times a day in this Legislature. There were more manufacturing jobs created in Ontario last year than in all 50 US states combined. That's what's happening. That's the picture of Ontario that people need to see.

You think back to that day when Sergio Marchionne was sitting on the stage telling Premier Wynne that Ontario is expensive. Reuters announced that there would be \$300 billion spent in the EV sector, and zero of it was coming to Canada, zero of it was coming to Ontario. We put that \$8 billion of savings, that power of that low tax, in front of the business community, and they did everything they said they would do. Last year, the business community hired another 180,000 people. Ninety-three per cent of those were full-time jobs. This is what's happening.

What you hear across the aisle and what you see, the Liberal policies of high tax, carbon tax—tax, tax, tax—that is exactly the opposite of what we're doing here in Ontario. We're lowering the costs. We're putting the conditions for businesses to want to be here and create jobs, and that is exactly what we see happening in the province of Ontario.

So, Speaker, there's a very different Ontario happening today: one of job creation, one of economic development. We've had, as trade minister, the privilege of travelling far

and wide last year, and we heard two messages—very consistent, unrehearsed, un-asked-for messages. We've heard that in this world, this post-COVID world—lots of trauma, lots of uncertainty. We saw Russia's invasion of Ukraine creating more uncertainty, more disruptions. We see China disrupting the supply chain. Now, this was all before the war in Israel. But we see this sense of uncertainty around the world, and they all say—but they can look across the ocean. They can look across and see this beacon of hope that is Ontario. They know that they can come here, and they find certainty, stability, dependability, reliability, almost boring, in a sense—in a good way. That's what they see in Ontario. They know what they're going to get, and they understand that we're open for business.

1720

Then the other thing they tell us is that Ontario is safe. It's safe for their executives. It's safe for their employees. It's safe for the families to be in. This is the vision around the world that is Ontario today. It's a vision that was not Ontario only five years ago, before we were elected.

So, Speaker, I would say to you that the state of Ontario's economy is very solid. We have great projections for this year, all because we've lowered the cost of doing business by \$8 billion.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Further debate? Further debate? Seeing none, Mr. Jones has moved concurrence in supply for the Ministry of Economic Development, Job Creation and Trade. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry?

Interjection: On division.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Carried on division.

Orders of the day? I recognize the deputy House leader.

Mr. Trevor Jones: Government order number 59.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): I recognize the deputy House leader.

Mr. Trevor Jones: I move concurrence in supply for the Ministry of Finance.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Further debate? Further debate? Seeing none, Mr. Jones has moved concurrence in supply for the Ministry of Finance. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry?

Interjection: On division.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Carried on division.

Orders of the day? Deputy House leader.

Mr. Trevor Jones: Government order number 60, please.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): I recognize the deputy House leader.

Mr. Trevor Jones: I move concurrence in supply for the Ministry of Labour, Immigration, Training and Skills Development.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Further debate? Further debate? Mr. Jones has moved concurrence in supply for the Ministry of Labour, Immigration, Training and Skills Development. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry?

Interjection: On division.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Carried on division.

Orders of the day? Deputy House leader.

Mr. Trevor Jones: Government order number 61.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): I recognize deputy House leader.

Mr. Trevor Jones: I move concurrence in supply for Cabinet Office, please.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Further debate? Further debate? Mr. Jones has moved concurrence in supply for Cabinet Office. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry?

Interjection: On division.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Carried on division.

Orders of the day? Deputy House leader.

Mr. Trevor Jones: Government order number 62, please.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): I recognize the deputy House leader.

Mr. Trevor Jones: I move concurrence in supply for the Office of the Premier.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Further debate? Further debate? Seeing none, Mr. Jones has moved concurrence in supply for Office of the Premier. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry?

Interjection: On division

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Carried on division.

Orders of the day? Deputy House leader.

Mr. Trevor Jones: Government order number 63.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): I recognize the deputy House leader.

Mr. Trevor Jones: I move concurrence in supply for the Treasury Board Secretariat, including supplementaries.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Further debate? Further debate? Seeing none, Mr. Jones has moved concurrence in supply for the Treasury Board Secretariat, including supplementaries. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry?

Interjection: On division.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Carried on division.

Orders of the day? Deputy House leader.

Mr. Trevor Jones: Government order number 64, please.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): I recognize the deputy House leader.

Mr. Trevor Jones: I move concurrence in supply for the Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): The deputy House leader has moved government order number 64. Further debate? Further debate? Seeing none, Mr. Jones has moved concurrence in supply for the Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs.

Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry?

Interjection: On division.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Carried on division.

Orders of the day?

Mr. Trevor Jones: Government order number 65.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): I recognize the deputy House leader.

Mr. Trevor Jones: I move concurrence in supply for the Ministry of Energy.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): The deputy House leader has moved government order number 65. Further debate? Further debate? Mr. Jones has moved concurrence in supply for the Ministry of Energy. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry?

Interjection: On division.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Carried on division.

Orders of the day? Deputy House leader.

Mr. Trevor Jones: Government order number 66.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): I recognize the deputy House leader.

Mr. Trevor Jones: I move concurrence in supply for the Ministry of the Environment, Conservation and Parks.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): The deputy House leader has moved government order number 66. Further debate? Further debate? Seeing none, Mr. Jones has moved concurrence in supply for the Ministry of the Environment, Conservation and Parks. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry?

Interjection: On division.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Carried on division.

Orders of the day? Deputy House leader.

Mr. Trevor Jones: Government order number 67.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): I recognize the deputy House leader.

Mr. Trevor Jones: I move concurrence in supply for the Ministry of Mines.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): The deputy House leader has moved government order number 67. Further debate? Further debate? Mr. Jones has moved concurrence in supply for the Ministry of Mines. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry?

Interjection: On division.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Carried on division.

Orders of the day? Deputy House leader.

Mr. Trevor Jones: Government order number 68.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): I recognize the deputy House leader.

Mr. Trevor Jones: I move concurrence in supply for the Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): The deputy House leader has moved government order number 68. Further debate? Further debate? Mr. Jones has moved concurrence in supply for the Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry?

Interjection: On division.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Carried on division.

Orders of the day? Deputy House leader.

Mr. Trevor Jones: Government order number 69.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): I recognize the deputy House leader.

Mr. Trevor Jones: I move concurrence in supply for the Ministry of Northern Development.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): The deputy House leader has moved government order number 69. Further debate? Further debate? Seeing none, Mr. Jones has moved concurrence in supply for the Ministry of Northern Development. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry?

Interjection: On division.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Carried on division.

Orders of the day? Deputy House leader.

Mr. Trevor Jones: Government order number 71.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): I recognize the deputy House leader.

Mr. Trevor Jones: I move concurrence in supply for the Office of the Lieutenant Governor.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): The deputy House leader has moved government order number 71. Further debate? Further debate? Mr. Jones has moved concurrence in supply for the Office of the Lieutenant Governor. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry?

Interjection: On division.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Carried on division.

Motions agreed to.

ROYAL ASSENT
SANCTION ROYALE

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): I beg to inform the House that in the name of His Majesty the King, Her Honour the Lieutenant Governor has been pleased to assent to certain bills in her office.

1730

The Clerk-at-the-Table (Ms. Meghan Stenson): The following are the titles of the bills to which Her Honour did assent:

An Act to amend the Ontario Underground Infrastructure Notification System Act, 2012 / Loi modifiant la Loi de 2012 sur un système d'information sur les infrastructures souterraines en Ontario.

An Act to amend various Acts in relation to the courts and other justice matters / Loi modifiant diverses lois en ce qui concerne les tribunaux et d'autres questions relatives à la justice.

GET IT DONE ACT, 2024

LOI DE 2024 POUR PASSER À L'ACTION

Resuming the debate adjourned on March 5, 2024, on the motion for second reading of the following bill:

Bill 162, An Act to enact the Protecting Against Carbon Taxes Act, 2024 and amend various Acts / Projet de loi 162, Loi édictant la Loi de 2024 sur la protection contre les taxes sur le carbone et modifiant diverses lois.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): I recognize the deputy House leader.

Mr. Trevor Jones: It's always a pleasure to stand in this chamber to represent the great people of Chatham-Kent-Leamington. I'd like to thank all members who have given speeches for their contributions to second reading debate on Bill 162.

With that, Speaker, I move that the question now be put.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Mr. Jones has moved that the question be now put. I am satisfied that there has been sufficient debate to allow this question to be put to the House. There has been over nine hours of debate.

Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? I hear a no.

All those in favour of the motion, please say "aye."

Those opposed, please say "nay."

In my opinion, the ayes have it.

A recorded vote being required, it will be deferred until the next instance of deferred votes.

Vote deferred.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Orders of the day?

Mr. Trevor Jones: Point of order, Speaker.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Point of order: I recognize the deputy House leader.

Mr. Trevor Jones: Speaker, if you seek it, you will find unanimous consent to see the clock at 6.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): The deputy House leader is seeking unanimous consent to see the clock at 6. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Thank you.

We'll now move on to private members' public business.

Report continues in volume B.

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO
ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

Lieutenant Governor / Lieutenant-gouverneure: Hon. / L'hon. Edith Dumont, OOnt

Speaker / Président de l'Assemblée législative: Hon. / L'hon. Ted Arnott

Clerk / Greffier: Trevor Day

Deputy Clerk / Sous-Greffière: Valerie Quioc Lim

Clerks-at-the-Table / Greffiers parlementaires: Julia Douglas, Meghan Stenson,

Christopher Tyrell, Wai Lam (William) Wong

Sergeant-at-Arms / Sergent d'armes: Tim McGough

| Member and Party / Député(e) et parti | Constituency / Circonscription | Other responsibilities / Autres responsabilités |
|--|--|---|
| Anand, Deepak (PC) | Mississauga—Malton | |
| Andrew, Jill (NDP) | Toronto—St. Paul's | |
| Armstrong, Teresa J. (NDP) | London—Fanshawe | |
| Arnott, Hon. / L'hon. Ted (PC) | Wellington—Halton Hills | Speaker / Président de l'Assemblée législative |
| Babikian, Aris (PC) | Scarborough—Agincourt | |
| Bailey, Robert (PC) | Sarnia—Lambton | |
| Barnes, Patrice (PC) | Ajax | Second Deputy Chair of the Committee of the Whole House / Deuxième Vice-Présidente du Comité plénier de l'Assemblée législative |
| Begum, Doly (NDP) | Scarborough Southwest / Scarborough-Sud-Ouest | Deputy Leader, Official Opposition / Chef adjointe de l'opposition officielle |
| Bell, Jessica (NDP) | University—Rosedale | |
| Bethlenfalvy, Hon. / L'hon. Peter (PC) | Pickering—Uxbridge | Minister of Finance / Ministre des Finances |
| Blais, Stephen (LIB) | Orléans | |
| Bouma, Will (PC) | Brantford—Brant | |
| Bourgouin, Guy (NDP) | Mushkegowuk—James Bay / Mushkegowuk—Baie James | |
| Bowman, Stephanie (LIB) | Don Valley West / Don Valley-Ouest | |
| Brady, Bobbi Ann (IND) | Haldimand—Norfolk | |
| Bresee, Ric (PC) | Hastings—Lennox and Addington | |
| Burch, Jeff (NDP) | Niagara Centre / Niagara-Centre | |
| Byers, Rick (PC) | Bruce—Grey—Owen Sound | |
| Calandra, Hon. / L'hon. Paul (PC) | Markham—Stouffville | Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing / Ministre des Affaires municipales et du Logement Government House Leader / Leader parlementaire du gouvernement Minister of Legislative Affairs / Ministre des Affaires législatives |
| Cho, Hon. / L'hon. Raymond Sung Joon (PC) | Scarborough North / Scarborough- Nord | Minister for Seniors and Accessibility / Ministre des Services aux aînés et de l'Accessibilité |
| Cho, Hon. / L'hon. Stan (PC) | Willowdale | Minister of Long-Term Care / Ministre des Soins de longue durée |
| Clancy, Aislinn (GRN) | Kitchener Centre / Kitchener-Centre | |
| Clark, Steve (PC) | Leeds—Grenville—Thousand Islands and Rideau Lakes / Leeds— Grenville—Thousand Islands et Rideau Lakes | |
| Coe, Lorne (PC) | Whitby | |
| Collard, Lucille (LIB) | Ottawa—Vanier | Third Deputy Chair of the Committee of the Whole House / Troisième Vice-Présidente du Comité plénier de l'Assemblée législative |
| Crawford, Stephen (PC) | Oakville | |
| Cuzzetto, Rudy (PC) | Mississauga—Lakeshore | |
| Dixon, Jess (PC) | Kitchener South—Hespeler / Kitchener-Sud—Hespeler | |
| Dowie, Andrew (PC) | Windsor—Tecumseh | |
| Downey, Hon. / L'hon. Doug (PC) | Barrie—Springwater—Oro-Medonte | Attorney General / Procureur général |
| Dunlop, Hon. / L'hon. Jill (PC) | Simcoe North / Simcoe-Nord | Minister of Colleges and Universities / Ministre des Collèges et Universités |
| Fedeli, Hon. / L'hon. Victor (PC) | Nipissing | Chair of Cabinet / Président du Conseil des ministres Minister of Economic Development, Job Creation and Trade / Ministre du Développement économique, de la Création d'emplois et du Commerce |
| Fife, Catherine (NDP) | Waterloo | |

| Member and Party / Député(e) et parti | Constituency / Circonscription | Other responsibilities / Autres responsabilités |
|--|--|--|
| Flack, Hon. / L'hon. Rob (PC) | Elgin—Middlesex—London | Associate Minister of Housing / Ministre associé du Logement |
| Ford, Hon. / L'hon. Doug (PC) | Etobicoke North / Etobicoke-Nord | Leader, Progressive Conservative Party of Ontario / Chef du Parti progressiste-conservateur de l'Ontario |
| | | Premier / Premier ministre |
| | | Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs / Ministre des Affaires intergouvernementales |
| Ford, Hon. / L'hon. Michael D. (PC) | York South—Weston / York-Sud—Weston | Minister of Citizenship and Multiculturalism / Ministre des Affaires civiques et du Multiculturalisme |
| Fraser, John (LIB) | Ottawa South / Ottawa-Sud | |
| French, Jennifer K. (NDP) | Oshawa | |
| Gallagher Murphy, Dawn (PC) | Newmarket—Aurora | |
| Gates, Wayne (NDP) | Niagara Falls | |
| Gélinas, France (NDP) | Nickel Belt | |
| Ghamari, Goldie (PC) | Carleton | |
| Glover, Chris (NDP) | Spadina—Fort York | |
| Gretzky, Lisa (NDP) | Windsor West / Windsor-Ouest | |
| Grewal, Hardeep Singh (PC) | Brampton East / Brampton-Est | |
| Hardeman, Ernie (PC) | Oxford | |
| Harden, Joel (NDP) | Ottawa Centre / Ottawa-Centre | |
| Harris, Mike (PC) | Kitchener—Conestoga | |
| Hazell, Andrea (LIB) | Scarborough—Guildwood | |
| Hogarth, Christine (PC) | Etobicoke—Lakeshore | |
| Holland, Kevin (PC) | Thunder Bay—Atikokan | |
| Hsu, Ted (LIB) | Kingston and the Islands / Kingston et les Îles | |
| Jama, Sarah (IND) | Hamilton Centre / Hamilton-Centre | |
| Jones, Hon. / L'hon. Sylvia (PC) | Dufferin—Caledon | Minister of Health / Ministre de la Santé |
| | | Deputy Premier / Vice-première ministre |
| Jones, Trevor (PC) | Chatham-Kent—Leamington | Deputy Government House Leader / Leader parlementaire adjoint du gouvernement |
| Jordan, John (PC) | Lanark—Frontenac—Kingston | |
| Kanapathi, Logan (PC) | Markham—Thornhill | |
| Karpoche, Bhutla (NDP) | Parkdale—High Park | First Deputy Chair of the Committee of the Whole House / Première Vice-Présidente du Comité plénier de l'Assemblée législative |
| Ke, Vincent (IND) | Don Valley North / Don Valley-Nord | |
| Kernaghan, Terence (NDP) | London North Centre / London-Centre-Nord | Deputy Opposition House Leader / Leader parlementaire adjoint de l'opposition officielle |
| Kerzner, Hon. / L'hon. Michael S. (PC) | York Centre / York-Centre | Solicitor General / Solliciteur général |
| Khanjin, Hon. / L'hon. Andrea (PC) | Barrie—Innisfil | Minister of the Environment, Conservation and Parks / Ministre de l'Environnement, de la Protection de la nature et des Parcs |
| | | Deputy Government House Leader / Leader parlementaire adjointe du gouvernement |
| Kusendova-Bashta, Natalia (PC) | Mississauga Centre / Mississauga-Centre | |
| Leardi, Anthony (PC) | Essex | |
| Lecce, Hon. / L'hon. Stephen (PC) | King—Vaughan | Minister of Education / Ministre de l'Éducation |
| Lumsden, Hon. / L'hon. Neil (PC) | Hamilton East—Stoney Creek / Hamilton-Est—Stoney Creek | Minister of Tourism, Culture and Sport / Ministre du Tourisme, de la Culture et du Sport |
| MacLeod, Lisa (PC) | Nepean | |
| Mamakwa, Sol (NDP) | Kiiwetinoong | Deputy Leader, Official Opposition / Chef adjoint de l'opposition officielle |
| Mantha, Michael (IND) | Algoma—Manitoulin | |
| Martin, Robin (PC) | Eglinton—Lawrence | |
| McCarthy, Hon. / L'hon. Todd J. (PC) | Durham | Minister of Public and Business Service Delivery / Ministre des Services au public et aux entreprises |
| McCrimmon, Karen (LIB) | Kanata—Carleton | |
| McGregor, Graham (PC) | Brampton North / Brampton-Nord | |
| McMahon, Mary-Margaret (LIB) | Beaches—East York | |
| Mulroney, Hon. / L'hon. Caroline (PC) | York—Simcoe | President of the Treasury Board / Présidente du Conseil du Trésor |
| | | Minister of Francophone Affairs / Ministre des Affaires francophones |
| Oosterhoff, Sam (PC) | Niagara West / Niagara-Ouest | |
| Pang, Billy (PC) | Markham—Unionville | |

| Member and Party / Député(e) et parti | Constituency / Circonscription | Other responsibilities / Autres responsabilités |
|--|---|---|
| Parsa, Hon. / L'hon. Michael (PC) | Aurora—Oak Ridges—Richmond Hill | Minister of Children, Community and Social Services / Ministre des Services à l'enfance et des Services sociaux et communautaires |
| Pasma, Chandra (NDP) | Ottawa West—Nepean / Ottawa-Ouest—Nepean | |
| Piccini, Hon. / L'hon. David (PC) | Northumberland—Peterborough South / Northumberland—Peterborough-Sud | Minister of Labour, Immigration, Training and Skills Development / Ministre du Travail, de l'Immigration, de la Formation et du Développement des compétences |
| Pierre, Natalie (PC) | Burlington | |
| Pirie, Hon. / L'hon. George (PC) | Timmins | Minister of Mines / Ministre des Mines |
| Quinn, Nolan (PC) | Stormont—Dundas—South Glengarry | |
| Rae, Matthew (PC) | Perth—Wellington | |
| Rakocevic, Tom (NDP) | Humber River—Black Creek | |
| Rasheed, Kaleed (IND) | Mississauga East—Cooksville / Mississauga-Est—Cooksville | |
| Rickford, Hon. / L'hon. Greg (PC) | Kenora—Rainy River | Minister of Northern Development / Ministre du Développement du Nord Minister of Indigenous Affairs / Ministre des Affaires autochtones |
| Riddell, Brian (PC) | Cambridge | |
| Romano, Ross (PC) | Sault Ste. Marie | |
| Sabawy, Sheref (PC) | Mississauga—Erin Mills | |
| Sandhu, Amarjot (PC) | Brampton West / Brampton-Ouest | |
| Sarkaria, Hon. / L'hon. Prabmeet Singh (PC) | Brampton South / Brampton-Sud | Minister of Transportation / Ministre des Transports |
| Sarrazin, Stéphane (PC) | Glengarry—Prescott—Russell | |
| Sattler, Peggy (NDP) | London West / London-Ouest | |
| Saunderson, Brian (PC) | Simcoe—Grey | |
| Schreiner, Mike (GRN) | Guelph | |
| Scott, Laurie (PC) | Haliburton—Kawartha Lakes—Brock | |
| Shamji, Adil (LIB) | Don Valley East / Don Valley-Est | |
| Shaw, Sandy (NDP) | Hamilton West—Ancaster—Dundas / Hamilton-Ouest—Ancaster—Dundas | |
| Skelly, Donna (PC) | Flamborough—Glanbrook | Deputy Speaker / Vice-Présidente Chair of the Committee of the Whole House / Présidente du Comité plénier de l'Assemblée législative |
| Smith, Dave (PC) | Peterborough—Kawartha | |
| Smith, David (PC) | Scarborough Centre / Scarborough-Centre | |
| Smith, Hon. / L'hon. Graydon (PC) | Parry Sound—Muskoka | Minister of Natural Resources and Forestry / Ministre des Richesses naturelles et des Forêts |
| Smith, Laura (PC) | Thornhill | |
| Smith, Hon. / L'hon. Todd (PC) | Bay of Quinte / Baie de Quinte | Minister of Energy / Ministre de l'Énergie |
| Stevens, Jennifer (Jennie) (NDP) | St. Catharines | |
| Stiles, Marit (NDP) | Davenport | Leader, Official Opposition / Chef de l'opposition officielle Leader, New Democratic Party of Ontario / Chef du Nouveau Parti démocratique de l'Ontario |
| Surma, Hon. / L'hon. Kinga (PC) | Etobicoke Centre / Etobicoke-Centre | Minister of Infrastructure / Ministre de l'Infrastructure |
| Tabuns, Peter (NDP) | Toronto—Danforth | |
| Tangri, Hon. / L'hon. Nina (PC) | Mississauga—Streetsville | Associate Minister of Small Business / Ministre associée déléguée aux Petites Entreprises |
| Taylor, Monique (NDP) | Hamilton Mountain / Hamilton-Mountain | |
| Thanigasalam, Hon. / L'hon Vijay (PC) | Scarborough—Rouge Park | Associate Minister of Transportation / Ministre associé des Transports |
| Thompson, Hon. / L'hon. Lisa M. (PC) | Huron—Bruce | Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs / Ministre de l'Agriculture, de l'Alimentation et des Affaires rurales |
| Tibollo, Hon. / L'hon. Michael A. (PC) | Vaughan—Woodbridge | Associate Minister of Mental Health and Addictions / Ministre associé délégué au dossier de la Santé mentale et de la Lutte contre les dépendances |
| Triantafilopoulos, Effie J. (PC) | Oakville North—Burlington / Oakville-Nord—Burlington | |
| Vanthof, John (NDP) | Timiskaming—Cochrane | Opposition House Leader / Leader parlementaire de l'opposition officielle |

| Member and Party / Député(e) et parti | Constituency / Circonscription | Other responsibilities / Autres responsabilités |
|--|--|--|
| Vaugois, Lise (NDP) | Thunder Bay—Superior North / Thunder Bay—Supérieur-Nord | |
| Wai, Daisy (PC) | Richmond Hill | |
| West, Jamie (NDP) | Sudbury | |
| Williams, Hon. / L'hon. Charmaine A. (PC) | Brampton Centre / Brampton-Centre | Associate Minister of Women's Social and Economic Opportunity / Ministre associée des Perspectives sociales et économiques pour les femmes |
| Wong-Tam, Kristyn (NDP) | Toronto Centre / Toronto-Centre | |
| Yakabuski, John (PC) | Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke | |
| Vacant | Lambton—Kent—Middlesex | |
| Vacant | Milton | |