

Legislative
Assembly
of Ontario



Assemblée
législative
de l'Ontario

**Official Report
of Debates
(Hansard)**

No. 5

**Journal
des débats
(Hansard)**

N^o 5

3rd Session
41st Parliament

Monday
26 March 2018

3^e session
41^e législature

Lundi
26 mars 2018

Speaker: Honourable Dave Levac
Clerk: Todd Decker

Président : L'honorable Dave Levac
Greffier : Todd Decker

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Hansard Reporting and Interpretation Services
Room 500, West Wing, Legislative Building
111 Wellesley Street West, Queen's Park
Toronto ON M7A 1A2
Telephone 416-325-7400; fax 416-325-7430
Published by the Legislative Assembly of Ontario



ISSN 1180-2987

Service du Journal des débats et d'interprétation
Salle 500, aile ouest, Édifice du Parlement
111, rue Wellesley ouest, Queen's Park
Toronto ON M7A 1A2
Téléphone, 416-325-7400; télécopieur, 416-325-7430
Publié par l'Assemblée législative de l'Ontario

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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

Monday 26 March 2018

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

Lundi 26 mars 2018

The House met at 1030.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Good morning. Please join me in prayer.

Prayers.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

Mr. Ernie Hardeman: I'm pleased to rise today to introduce Ernie Hardeman. He is with us in the members' west gallery. Ernie is here visiting and to have lunch with his dad. Thank you very much for coming to Queen's Park, Ernie.

Hon. Tracy MacCharles: Good morning, Speaker. I have a few introductions. First, from Durham College, the honourable Paul H. Macklin, and President Don Lovisa. Welcome for Colleges Ontario Day. It's great to have you here.

Second, I want to introduce Deanna Allain. She's a passionate advocate for accessibility. She's here today with her service dog in training. His name is Carlin. I think Deanna is a very inspiring person and a future politician. Welcome to Queen's Park. Thanks for being here.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Mr. Speaker, not to be introduced because he needs no introduction is Fred, a good friend from Northern College, here celebrating with other colleges and lobbying us all for the wonderful work that we need to keep on doing for colleges.

Hon. Bob Chiarelli: Joining us all the way from Ottawa today are two distinguished guests from Algonquin College. Please welcome President Cheryl Jensen and the chair of the board of governors, Peter Nadeau. Welcome to Queen's Park.

Mr. Lorne Coe: I'm pleased to introduce the president of Durham College, Don Lovisa, and Chris Whitaker, the president of Humber College. Welcome to Queen's Park.

Hon. Bill Mauro: I'm pleased to introduce today, from Confederation College, President Jim Madder, as well as George Patterson, who is the chair of the board of governors of Confederation College, and also Judith Morris, president and CEO of Lambton College, and Brian Fairley, the chair of the board of Lambton College.

Mrs. Gila Martow: I'm very pleased to welcome the parents of page captain Taylor Freeman, Penny and Les Freeman. They're here today in the gallery.

I also want to give a big Legislature welcome to the Diller teens from CIJA, the Centre for Israel and Jewish Affairs. Welcome to Queen's Park.

Ms. Ann Hoggarth: Today I would like to welcome two representatives of Georgian College, in my riding of Barrie. Board chairman Jim Bertram and President

MaryLynn West-Moynes are here for colleges day. Welcome.

Mr. Todd Smith: I'd like to welcome the president of Loyalist College in Belleville, Ann Marie Vaughan, to the Legislature today. Welcome, Ann Marie.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I'd like to welcome two constituents of mine, Sylvia and Bill Dixon, to the Legislature today. Their grandson, Luke, is a page during this session. Welcome to them.

I'd also like to welcome Benny D'Avella and Eric Forgione, the grandfather and younger brother of Andrew Forgione, who works in my office. It's their first time at Queen's Park. Welcome to them both.

Mr. Granville Anderson: I'd like to welcome constituents of mine here today from Durham College, including college president Don Lovisa, Paul Macklin and Peter Garrett. Welcome.

Hon. Glenn Thibeault: When I came into the Legislature this morning, I saw the president of Collège Boréal, Daniel Giroux, here today. Welcome to Queen's Park.

Hon. Mitzie Hunter: I have two very important introductions. First, it is my pleasure to welcome the presidents, board chairs, students and staff from colleges across the province who are at Queen's Park today for college day. This evening they will be hosting a reception in rooms 228 and 230, where college students will provide hospitality, culinary delights and great entertainment. Please welcome them to Queen's Park.

I'd like to especially welcome Linda Franklin, who is the president of Colleges Ontario, and, of course, Ann Buller, the president of Centennial College in my riding of Scarborough-Guildwood.

And—Mr. Speaker, I'm almost finished—I would also like to welcome our grade 10 students from West Hill Collegiate Institute, who are here today with their teacher, Ms. Ashby.

Mr. Ted McMeekin: I'd like to introduce Bill Best, the president of Cambrian College, and Ron McKerlie, the president of my alma mater, Mohawk College, who are here with us today.

Ms. Sophie Kiwala: I would like to extend a very warm Limestone welcome to Mayor Bryan Paterson from Kingston and the Islands; Lynn Carlotto, the president and CEO of the K-Rock Centre; Bhavana Varma, the executive director from the United Way; and her executive assistant, Kim Hockey.

And a very, very warm welcome to Glenn Vollebregt from St. Lawrence College, all of his staff and his students.

I extend a warm welcome to everyone, as well, at the reception this evening for youth homelessness day here at Queen's Park in our dining room this evening.

Hon. Laura Albanese: On behalf of Mario Sergio, MPP for York West, I would like to welcome the family of page captain Justin Abraham: parents Marlene and Fazeed Abraham, sister Hailey Abraham, grandparents Shiroom and Azad Abraham-Domon, and cousin Shazad Abraham-Domon. They will be in the public gallery this morning. Welcome to Queen's Park.

Mr. Lou Rinaldi: I, too, would like to extend a welcome to Ann Marie Vaughan, president of Loyalist College, and Paul Macklin from the great riding of Northumberland—Quinte West.

1040

Ms. Peggy Sattler: I'd like to extend a very warm welcome to Cheryl and Robert Davies, parents of page Rhys Davies from London West, who have joined us this morning in the members' gallery. Welcome.

Hon. Michael Coteau: On behalf of the member from Willowdale and myself, I'd like to welcome to the Legislature David Agnew, president of Seneca College, which is situated in both of our ridings but services all of Ontario. Thank you so much for being here.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): In the Speaker's gallery today are some guests of mine—one is not a guest; the other two are guests of mine. This gentleman had a distinguished and long career in corrections, and we went to high school at the same time—he's a little older; I'm not—a very distinguished career in corrections: Mr. Frank Stanley. Thank you for joining us, Frank.

A dear friend of mine and, more importantly, a dear friend of my wife—who will be introduced properly in a moment—is Wendy McIntosh. Wendy, thank you for joining us.

And of course, my rock, my inspiration—my wife, Rosemarie.

Applause.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you all very much. That got me brownie points like you won't believe.

ROGER ANDERSON

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Whitby—Oshawa, on a point of order.

Mr. Lorne Coe: I seek unanimous consent for a moment of silence for the passing of Roger Anderson, the chief executive officer for the region of Durham and the region's chair of Durham regional council.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member for Whitby—Oshawa is seeking unanimous consent for a moment's silence. Do we agree? Agreed.

I would invite all of us to rise to pay a moment of silence and respect—everyone. Thank you.

The House observed a moment's silence.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): God rest his soul.

ORAL QUESTIONS

GOVERNMENT ACCOUNTING PRACTICES

Mr. Victor Fedeli: Good morning, Speaker. My question is for the Premier.

Once again, the Auditor General is blasting the Liberals' accounting, this time for their unfair hydro scheme. The auditor said she thinks the "accounting is bogus." She highlights the fact that the financial and accounting structure was designed to avoid reporting the unfair hydro scheme's costs. She claims it was "allowing the government to falsely claim" their budget numbers. These numbers can't be trusted. This government can't be trusted.

Mr. Speaker, if the Auditor General can't trust this government, then how can anyone in Ontario do that?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Families in this province asked for real and immediate relief on their electricity bills, and that's what we delivered. Our plan has been approved by some of Canada's top accounting firms, including Ernst and Young, KPMG and Deloitte. All of those organizations have looked at what we did, have reviewed it and have approved it.

In fact, the same accounting process used by Toronto hydro is used as well in Alberta, New England, New York, Minnesota and Texas.

We're very confident that what we have done to deliver real relief to families on their electricity bills is appropriate, and people are seeing that relief right now.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Victor Fedeli: Back to the Premier: While she says one thing, the Auditor General has the sole authority to audit the province's books. This government has fought her time and time again. They have attacked the auditor's credibility, they have attacked her expertise and they have attacked her character. This has gone too far.

If the Auditor General says we can't trust this government's numbers, it's clear that Ontario can't trust this government's numbers.

Will this government show an ounce of integrity, an ounce of accountability, and own up to these questionable numbers?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Minister of Energy.

Hon. Glenn Thibeault: I'm pleased to rise and respond to the question. We made a policy choice to ensure that we continue to have a clean, reliable and affordable electricity system for ratepayers of today and ratepayers of tomorrow. The fair hydro plan keeps the cost of borrowing within the rate base, not the tax base, because that's the logical thing to do. Electricity financing should remain within the electricity system, not the tax base.

Officials from the Treasury Board, finance, OPG, the IESO, the Ontario Financing Authority, along with external advisers that include Ernst and Young, KPMG and Deloitte, worked on the accounting related to the fair hydro plan. They, along with the Office of the Provincial

Controller, ensured that this plan was in accordance with public sector accounting.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Final supplementary.

Mr. Victor Fedeli: Back to the Premier: It has been reported that the Auditor General has uncovered very troubling behaviour at the IESO. It seems there is a culture of untrustworthiness and a lack of integrity. The auditor's concerns "included incorrect accounting, deceptive and obstructive behaviour by the IESO's board and management, and poor financial controls." It's so bad that the Auditor General warned that if improper accounting wasn't fixed, she may issue an adverse opinion on Ontario's books. Now, Speaker, that would be a first in Canadian history for any government's financial statements.

Will this government be the first in Canadian history to have their numbers rejected by an Auditor General?

Hon. Glenn Thibeault: When talking about the AG and our system operator, our system operator, the IESO, has assured the Ministry of Energy that they have made every effort to be forthright and fully responsive to the Auditor General's requests for information. For example, the IESO has accommodated the auditor's requests by making accommodations to extend the duration of the Auditor General's staff on the IESO premises from the initial two weeks requested to seven weeks.

During this time, the IESO received and responded to over 200 information requests from the Auditor General's staff. The IESO accommodated every meeting request. About 40 meetings took place between the IESO and the auditor's staff. The IESO accommodated the AG's request to meet with their board and audit committee. Throughout their audit, the Auditor General's staff had direct access to the IESO's staff.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): After the first round, you've indicated to me that you're willing to look at last week's activities: We will be closing in on warnings. We will see another round.

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Would you like us to go to warnings?

Mr. Steve Clark: No, I'm good.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Most people would stop.

New question.

JOB CREATION

Mr. Victor Fedeli: My question is for the Premier. With the budget just days away, people want a better path forward for Ontario. Only Doug Ford and the Ontario PC Party will bring jobs—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Stop the clock.

Start the clock. Finish, please.

Mr. Victor Fedeli: Only Doug Ford and the Ontario PC Party will bring jobs back to the province of Ontario.

An important step to make Ontario open for business is to scrap the carbon-tax cash grab. The PC Party will stop sending families' hard-earned money to California. The Auditor General has confirmed that this government is doing exactly that.

Will the Premier axe the tax? Will she scrap the carbon tax and bring jobs back to the province of Ontario?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: This question is from a party and a member who have decided to turn their backs on climate change, not recognizing the single greatest threat to humanity.

1050

But let's talk about jobs. Let's talk about what is actually happening in Ontario, Mr. Speaker, because we're seeing economic growth that is in one of the leading jurisdictions in the country. We're outstripping the growth of the G7 countries, the United States. On jobs, there have been 810,000 net new jobs created in this province since the recession and over 400,000 jobs created since I became the Premier. The reality is that there are jobs being created in Ontario. Our unemployment rate has dropped to 5.5% and has been below the national average for 34 months.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Victor Fedeli: Back to the Premier: Nobody believes this government's spin. When the Premier slipped up a few weeks ago, she admitted that her carbon tax was used to line the government's pockets, not reduce emissions. She claims scrapping the carbon tax would impact the public service. Why would money that she claims to be solely dedicated to the environment affect the public service? Her carbon tax has nothing to do with reducing emissions; it's all about grabbing cash. Well, the party with the taxpayers' money is over.

Mr. Speaker, will the Premier admit that her carbon tax has nothing to do with the environment but has everything to do with taking more money out of taxpayers' pockets?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Mr. Speaker, we are on track to meet our pollution reduction targets, and I know that the Minister of the Environment will want to speak to that in the final supplementary.

In terms of the go-forward in this province—and the member opposite acknowledged that we're bringing the budget in in a couple of days. We know that, across this province, we've balanced this budget this year. We know, however, that having done that and having seen economic growth and those jobs that I said had been created, those 400,000 jobs since I've been the Premier, the low unemployment rate, even with all of that, not everyone is feeling that benefit. Not everyone is feeling that evenly. That is why we are making a very conscious and deliberate decision to invest in people: invest in their mental health, invest in their education and invest in their health care. I understand that's not what the party opposite wants to do, but we believe that that is what people are asking for—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Be seated, please. Thank you. Final supplementary

Mr. Victor Fedeli: Back to the Premier: Scrapping the carbon tax cash grab is just one step for job creation in the province of Ontario. We have lost more than 300,000 good-paying manufacturing jobs because of this government and their policies. When we talk to company owners, large or small, one top issue is the stifling bureaucracy, red tape and regulations.

We need to let business grow and bring jobs back to Ontario. We need companies to know that Ontario is open for business again. Mr. Speaker, will the Liberals scrap the red tape they have wrapped all around Ontario's businesses?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Minister of Economic Development and Growth.

Hon. Steven Del Duca: I thank the member for the question. I've said on many occasions in this Legislature that over the last decade, since the depths of the recession that engulfed Ontario and most of the world, we have created more than 800,000 jobs in this province. That is in part because our government made the decision to invest in our people, to invest in infrastructure and to make sure that we kept focus on the importance of supporting families in need at all times, Speaker.

Specifically, the leader asked a question regarding reducing red tape. I should note that the 2017 Burden Reduction Report specifically showed Ontario surpassing the target that had been set regarding burden reduction by 50% and two years ahead of schedule. This report also found an estimated savings of over \$150 million and 5.4 million hours to business. We removed 80,000 regulatory burdens, Speaker.

There is more to this story, but I would just say to the member opposite that it's important to focus on the facts and not to dispel myths to the people of Ontario.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): After the second round, I made a decision. We're going to go to warnings. We're in warnings.

Carry on. The member from Algoma-Manitoulin.

DENTAL CARE

Mr. Michael Mantha: Mr. Speaker, my question is to the Premier. Poon-Li Outinen is 12 years old. She and her older brother each need to have a few teeth removed to make room for new ones that are coming in, but their mom, Pamela, can't afford it. This is necessary dental care but right now, after 15 years of Liberal government in Ontario, Pam's family will just have to go without it.

The Premier talks a lot about governments that care, so why hasn't hers cared for Poon-Li and her brother?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I know the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care is going to want to speak to this, but as I said last week, I think it's great that the third party has now begun to talk about dental care. In fact, we have for some time been making it easier for children to get the dental care that they need.

I'm not suggesting that it's perfect. There is more that has to be done; we recognize that. The issues of pharmacare and dental care really are gaps in our health care system, things that were not put in place in the 1960s when medicare was established, but we have been working for some time. We've made it easier for kids to get dental care through our expanded Healthy Smiles program—

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): All right. The member from Renfrew-Nipissing-Pembroke is warned.

Finish your answer, please.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: What Healthy Smiles does is that it provides free preventative routine and emergency dental services for children and youth from low-income households from across the province.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary.

Mr. Michael Mantha: Again to the Premier: These kids are enrolled in the Healthy Smiles program, but this is necessary dental care, care that their dentist recommends be done right away, and it isn't covered. There are millions of other families in the same situation as Pamela's is in right now. It must be heartbreaking for parents to know their kids are going without the care they need.

Over the last 15 years, the Liberal government sat at the cabinet table and chose their priorities. They cut billions in taxes for the most profitable corporations, but left people like Pam and her family unable to go to the dentist. Why has the Premier left everyday Ontario families to fend for themselves when it comes to dental care?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Minister of Health and Long-Term Care.

Hon. Helena Jaczek: I would say to the member opposite that this government certainly cares about our children, and we care deeply about oral health in general. That's precisely why we instituted the Healthy Smiles program. We brought together a number of disparate programs across the province and put them, through our Healthy Smiles program, into effect across the province.

We look to our LHINs and to our public health units to do the kind of analysis as to where more is needed, and we are responding to that. I had the opportunity to review the report of the chief medical officer of health for the city of Hamilton, Dr. Elizabeth Richardson. She shows quite clearly that there are health inequities across the greater Hamilton area. This is very useful as we plan our programs.

We will continue to look very seriously at this issue. I'm sure the member will be looking forward to our budget on Wednesday.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Final supplementary.

Mr. Michael Mantha: Again to the Premier: Again, they are not covered under the Healthy Smiles program.

Universal health care is a Canadian value, but decades of cuts and budget freezes by consecutive Conservative and Liberal governments have meant that instead of improvements to the system, like dental care and universal pharmacare, Ontario family services have seen erosion.

Pamela's kids need to have a few teeth pulled. Pamela should be able to count on her government to help her. That's a government that cares—

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Stop the clock. The Minister of Municipal Affairs is warned.

Finish, please.

Mr. Michael Mantha: Why didn't the Premier build that government when she had the chance?

Hon. Helena Jaczek: We continue to provide services across this province. As we reaffirmed in the throne speech, our government will continue to make the kinds of investments that ensure more people without a drug or dental benefits plan will have access not only to more affordable prescription drugs, but also to dental care. That announcement obviously will be part of our budget.

In the meantime, we do rely on the expertise of public health professionals and of our local health integration networks to assess the overall health of our communities. There's no one-size-fits-all to these issues, and we are committed to looking at evidence-based solutions for our vulnerable population. We will continue to do this. We've been doing it very successfully over the last 15 years.

DENTAL CARE

Ms. Peggy Sattler: My question is to the Premier. The London Brewing Co-operative is a business in my community. The owners have always wanted to provide dental coverage for their workers. They've investigated group plans, but the cost has simply been too prohibitive.
1100

The London Brewing Co-operative is a good employer. The owners give back to their community, and they want to do the right thing by the people who count on them. Why hasn't the Premier helped the London Brewing Co-operative offer their workers dental coverage over her 15 years in office?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: As we have said a number of times, we recognize that there is a need for more dental care in this province, period. There is more need for dental care in this province. I would suggest there's more need for dental care across the country, because when medicare was instituted in the 1960s, it did not include pharmacare and it did not include dental care.

It has fallen to provincial governments to put in place supports, which we have been doing. We recognize that there is more that needs to be done. We have implemented the Healthy Smiles program. There are hundreds of thousands of children across the province who get that support, but we recognize that there is more that we have to do.

I understand that the third party has recently discovered this is an issue, because if we look at their platforms and when I sat down with their leader, Andrea Horwath, when I became the Premier, there was no mention of this. There was no hint that this was an issue that they saw was a problem.

We've been working on it. We'll continue to work on it.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary.

Ms. Peggy Sattler: One of the owners, Aaron, said that the NDP plan, Dental Care for Everyone, would mean that they could finally offer employee dental coverage and really compete for the best talent out there. Dental coverage for their employees will help them grow their business and put more money in the pockets of their workers.

In its 15 years in office, why hasn't this Liberal government made it easier for employers to offer dental benefits to their staff?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: As I said in my last answer, we recognize that there's more that we need to do. I think that the NDP is now, at this point, chiming in to the conversation and they have brought some ideas forward. I think what they're bringing forward are interesting ideas, and we need to look at how we can provide more support.

The fact is, we have been working on this. We have implemented the Healthy Smiles program. We have grown that program. But I will be the first to say that there is more that we need to do, and that is in the context of understanding that there are needs. It goes back to a question that the Conservatives asked earlier, and that is, what are our plans in the budget?

We have been very clear. We recognize that there are more supports that are needed so that people can care for themselves and care for their families, whether that's in the area of mental health or health care in general or education. We are putting those supports in place, as we have done for a number of years.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Final supplementary.

Ms. Peggy Sattler: Last week, this Premier made one desperate announcement after another. People know that the current health care crisis is because this Liberal government—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Stop the clock. The Minister of Economic Development is warned.

Finish, please.

Ms. Peggy Sattler: People know that the current health care crisis is because this Liberal government has been cutting health care spending for years. What the Liberals are now offering is too little, too late. The problems today are big because they have been ignored by this Liberal government for the last 15 years.

After a decade and a half, why are families like Pamela's unable to get the dental care their kids need? Why are businesses like the London Brewing Co-operative unable to offer their employees dental benefits even though they want to? Why is it now, just 72 days before the election, that the Premier is making these promises when she has had 15 years to deliver?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I am happy to talk about the past, if that's what the NDP wants to talk about, because for many years, we have been implementing supports in this province, making changes. Whether it's full-day kindergarten, whether it is advocating for retirement security enhancements, which are now in place across the

country, or whether it's free tuition, we have been working to put supports in place to respond to the people of Ontario.

In terms of what was happening last week, we're in the run-up to a budget. Every year when there is a budget, we work to make sure that people in the province know what it is we are about and what we are putting on the table. What we are saying is that there's a need for more money for mental health supports. There is a need for more money for hospitals. There's a need for more money for special education. What I hear from the third party is that they're going to vote against—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Stop the clock. Be seated, please. Thank you.

New question.

EXECUTIVE COMPENSATION

Mr. Todd Smith: My question this morning is for the Premier. Last week, the list of Ontario's richest political insiders was released. They call it the sunshine list. But for the hard-working people of Ontario, there's not a whole lot sunny about it. The people of Ontario are struggling to pay the bills and put food on the table.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Finish, please.

Mr. Todd Smith: Liberal insiders are continually getting richer, and that's what we learned from last week's release of the sunshine list.

It's getting hard for people in Ontario to understand. Just look at the CEO of Ontario Power Generation. He got a raise of \$400,000 this year. His salary is now \$1.5 million. Don't forget, the former head of IESO was the fifth-highest individual on the list and worked for four months.

When an everyday person in Ontario can't pay their bills, why are the Premier's friends getting \$400,000—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Premier?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: President of the Treasury Board.

Hon. Eleanor McMahon: I want to thank the member opposite for his question, because it allows me to do a couple of things, Speaker. First of all, I want to recognize that certainly on this side of the House, we know that \$100,000 is a lot of money and the people of Ontario have a right to know how those dollars are being invested. I'm going to get to that in a moment.

I want to explain and just outline that our decision to release these salaries is in keeping with our openness and transparency on this side of the House. We are being saluted internationally for our open government, and that is why we're making and have made the 2017 public sector salary disclosure public, as well as every disclosure dating back to 1996, starting this year, available online and accessible in downloadable formats.

Again, we're keeping that \$100,000 threshold and we're not going to change it, even though in today's

dollars, it would be \$151,000. Again, we know that's a lot of money to the people of Ontario. We're proud of our public servants and the quality of service they deliver to Ontarians, because that is exactly what Ontarians are asking for and we're delivering on that.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Todd Smith: We're talking about six-figure raises here on the sunshine list: \$400,000. That's acceptable to Premier Wynne and this Liberal government.

Mr. Speaker, did you know that there's also a secret list of Hydro One millionaires out there? They've had their names hidden from the sunshine list this year. They sit around the boardroom table at Hydro One and give themselves raises. At the same time, they're always asking to increase the hydro rates for the hard-working people of Ontario.

The Premier doesn't seem to think the people of Ontario deserve to know how much these people are making, but voters need more transparency, not less. They're getting less from this government.

Why does the Premier continue to hide the salaries of the people at Hydro One and their millionaires' club working there?

Hon. Eleanor McMahon: The Minister of Energy.

Hon. Glenn Thibeault: The first thing I should let the opposition know is that this is a publicly traded company, meaning that the list of Hydro One's executive compensation can be found online. You'd think a party that has a leader that's a self-proclaimed, so-called businessman should know that very well.

On top of that, it's absurd that the member opposite is trying to criticize employees on the sunshine list, because it came to light that during the Ford administration's term running the city of Toronto, the number of staff on the sunshine list doubled. This is contrary to what the Conservative leader Doug Ford said in the past. In 2010, the city of Toronto had over 5,400 employees on that list. In 2014, after leader Doug Ford had served on the budget committee, that list doubled to over 11,000.

Let's not forget that Conservative candidate Rod Phillips was on that list, Christine Elliott is on that list, and 24 hours later he was canvassing with—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you.

New question.

1110

DENTAL CARE

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: My question is to the Premier. A single mom contacted my office because her two-year-old son fell and hit his mouth. He now has a painful abscess and needs his front teeth extracted. His mom is on social assistance. Her dentist contacted the Healthy Smiles program, and they have agreed to pay for the extractions, but not for the \$395 anaesthetic fee. Apparently, this two-year-old boy is supposed to sit still while his four incredibly painful and infected teeth are pulled without anaesthetic.

Why is the Premier leaving so many people, including children, without the dental care that they need?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Well, Mr. Speaker, I don't know the details of this situation but I certainly hope that you would share them with the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care—and, in fact, could have shared them with the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care beforehand, so we could have looked into it—because that sounds like a situation that absolutely needs to be dealt with. I can't imagine that in 2018 there is any health practitioner that would do that, but if you would share those details with the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care, then we will certainly look into it.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: Children should never have to endure painful teeth extractions without anaesthetic. Parents shouldn't have to take on credit card debt to get the dental care that their family needs. No one in Ontario should live in pain because they can't afford to go to a dentist.

The NDP has a plan for every Ontarian to access dental benefits, either through work or on their health card. Why doesn't the Premier?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Again, I will say to the third party that it is great that at this point, for the first time, the NDP is starting to talk about dental care. We understand that there's more that needs to be done, Mr. Speaker. We have been looking for ways, by working with the local health providers, with the public health providers. The Healthy Smiles program has been expanded.

But we recognize that there's more that needs to be done, so we welcome the interest from the third party. We are working to find more ways to expand the accessibility of dental care across the province, Mr. Speaker. This is a gap. It is absolutely a gap, as pharmacare was a gap when medicare was introduced in the 1960s. It needs to be dealt with and we are working on both fronts, both on pharmacare and to find ways to expand support for dental care across the province.

HOSPITAL FUNDING

Ms. Sophie Kiwala: My question is for the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care. Providing all Ontarians with timely access to the care they need, whether at home, in the community or in one of our outstanding hospitals, is of the utmost importance to our government, but also to me as the member for Kingston and the Islands.

We are fortunate in Ontario to have outstanding hospitals across this province. Our government has increased investments in health care each and every year, allowing us to treat more patients, provide better care and reduce wait times to some of the shortest in the country. Last year, we invested over \$500 million in funding in our Ontario hospitals, which is a 3.2% overall increase to the hospital sector. This is on top of our 2016 investment of nearly half a billion dollars in our hospitals. We're also

investing more than \$19 billion over the next 10 years to improve and expand hospitals.

Mr. Speaker, could the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care please tell this House of the incredible new investments being made in our hospitals this year?

Hon. Helena Jaczek: Thank you to the member from Kingston and the Islands for the question. Our government knows that everyone in Ontario deserves high-quality care when they need it and our skilled, dedicated health care professionals deserve the right resources to deliver it.

Last week, I was proud to stand with the Premier and the Minister of Finance at North York General Hospital to make a historic investment of an additional \$822 million in Ontario's publicly funded hospitals. This 4.6% overall increase will increase capacity, decrease wait times and improve access to care for families across Ontario. This funding will directly benefit people in Ontario. It will increase the number of essential services in hospitals, such as cardiac care, critical care, chemotherapy and treatment for stroke. It will decrease wait times for hip, knee, cataract, shoulder, cornea and spine surgery.

On this side of the House, we're investing where it matters. We're investing in the people of Ontario.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Ms. Sophie Kiwala: Thank you to the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care for her answer, and thank you for the continued support for the Kingston Health Sciences Centre, Brockville General Hospital and the new, state-of-the-art Providence Care Hospital in my riding of Kingston and the Islands.

On Friday, I was thrilled to announce that Kingston Health Sciences Centre will be receiving \$8.82 million, Providence Care will be receiving \$1.04 million and Brockville General will be receiving \$1.74 million for 2018-19 year. It was a tremendous moment in our community.

Not only is this government investing in the resources needed to deliver high-quality health care, but we're also making critical investments in capital to ensure the success of our hospitals for years to come, such as \$500 million for the Kingston Health Sciences Centre.

Could the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care please tell this House about the monumental capital announcement our government made last week to support—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you, Minister?

Hon. Helena Jaczek: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and to the member for her ongoing advocacy, not just for health care but in my previous portfolio. I know how much she cares for the vulnerable in her community.

We're making sure that our world-class hospitals have the resources they need to continue saving lives. In Ontario, we're fortunate enough to have SickKids hospital, one of the world's largest and most respected pediatric hospitals, that transforms the lives of hundreds of thousands of children and families across Ontario. On Friday, our government committed to supporting a new

patient care centre at SickKids, an investment of \$2.4 billion to transform the hospital into a 21st-century facility to continue providing leading-edge care for children. This will give more children and their families faster access to the best possible care.

We have a health care system here in Ontario that we are proud of. We'll continue to support our incredibly skilled and compassionate health care professionals to care for our loved ones.

EXECUTIVE COMPENSATION

Mr. Michael Harris: My question is over to the Minister of Transportation. I'm hoping that the minister can explain to hard-working Ontarians why, according to the sunshine list, the former Metrolinx CEO made \$100,000 more—yes, \$100,000 more—working only four months in 2017 than he did working the entire year in 2016. I'm wondering how that makes sense.

Hon. Kathryn McGarry: I apologize for my voice, and thank you for the question.

It would be inappropriate for me to comment on the earnings of an individual Metrolinx employee. However, Metrolinx has a vital role to play in our plan to deliver an integrated regional transit system right across the GTHA. We need to have the right leadership in place to make sure that we can deliver on time and on budget.

Bruce McCuaig left Metrolinx a far stronger and more mature organization than he inherited and did the necessary work to make sure that the massive transit build this side of the House is involved in is under way. Now our new CEO, Phil Verster, is overseeing the transformative build.

At the end of the day, commuters in our region will see critical improvements, like new rapid transit lines, four times the number of weekly GO trains and electrified service, which will improve commute times and bring clean, reliable service across the region.

It would be good if that member would vote for some of the investments contained in our budget.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Michael Harris: Well, Bruce McCuaig also left Metrolinx \$100,000 richer than he did in 2016, and he only worked four months. Neither the minister nor anyone at Metrolinx wants to answer, because they know they can't make sense of it either.

After being paid \$364,000 for an entire year's work in 2016, former Metrolinx CEO Bruce McCuaig walked away with \$486,000, plus another 12 grand in benefits, in April 2017—that's only four months into the fiscal year—for only four months' work. How do they add that up?

I'll give the minister one more chance: Will the minister please explain how the Metrolinx CEO got to walk away from four months of work pocketing \$100,000 more than his previous year's entire salary? The follow-up question to that is, did he resign of his own accord, or was he fired? Which one?

Hon. Kathryn McGarry: Our government continues to strengthen Ontario's efforts to become the most open,

transparent and digitally connected government in Canada. Proactively releasing information on public sector salaries is an important part of Ontario's open government commitment. We recognize that \$100,000 is a lot of money, and the people of Ontario have a right to know how their tax dollars are being spent. But it is inappropriate for me to comment on the earnings of one individual, a Metrolinx employee.

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I find it interesting to hear this commentary from this member of the Ontario Conservatives. Under the Ford administration at city hall, the sunshine list doubled. The PCs clearly have a double standard when it comes to criticizing employees on the sunshine list. That party should vote for the investments contained in our budget for all of our transit programs in Ontario.

DENTAL CARE

Mr. John Vanthof: My question is to the Premier. Delima Dubie is a senior living in Temiskaming Shores. Like two out of every three seniors in Ontario, she doesn't have dental coverage and can't afford the care she needs. Delima has several serious health issues, made much worse by infected teeth. She needs to have them extracted, but it will cost \$4,000—money she doesn't have.

Why has the Premier ignored Delima and 1.5 million seniors like her by failing to provide dental benefits to the people who built this province?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Minister of Health and Long-Term Care.

Hon. Helena Jaczek: I'm really pleased that the third party is now engaged in this very important issue of dental care and oral health care. In the throne speech, I'm sure the member does remember that our government has said specifically that we will be making investments to ensure more people without a drug or a dental-benefits plan will have more access to affordable prescription drugs and dental care.

Specifically, last week the Premier made a major announcement—something that's going to be in our budget—to help seniors in terms of their drug costs. So now we have eliminated the deductible and the co-pay for everyone over the age of 65, in addition to their access to prescription medications through our Ontario Drug Benefit plan.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. John Vanthof: Premier, in desperation, Delima wrote to you several years ago, pleading for you to act and help people like her. Your office answered with a letter, but nothing else. Without access to dental care, her health and quality of life have been hurt, while you and your Liberal government have failed to act.

All across Ontario, people like Delima are living in pain because they can't get dental care. They don't need pain medication; they need to get their teeth fixed. People are suffering, and for 15 years your government has done nothing to help these people.

The NDP has a plan to fix this problem and deliver dental care for everyone. Why doesn't the Premier?

Hon. Helena Jaczek: Just to expand a little bit on what we announced last week to make life more affordable for seniors, we know that what we're doing with our expansion of OHIP+ for seniors will make life more affordable for some 2.6 million seniors and their families.

As we've committed, we will work towards building a larger dental program for low-income adults that will provide peace of mind for these families and individuals and allow them to enjoy life and have a better quality of life.

It is interesting, Mr. Speaker, that until very, very recently—until last week—the NDP asked only one question about dental care in the whole of the last year.

5G TECHNOLOGIES

Ms. Ann Hoggarth: My question is to the Minister of Research, Innovation and Science.

Fifth-generation technologies and next-generation networks are advancing at an unprecedented pace. We have already seen them become the new global standard for wireless communications. They have allowed wireless communication speeds to become 100 times faster than current rates, and have advanced seamless communication between billions of connected devices. Such advancements have caught the attention of international technology companies, making nations eager to invest and advance these technologies in their own economies.

Minister, can you inform the Speaker and the members of the House how Ontario plans to remain competitive in the international 5G and next-generation digital economy?

Hon. Reza Moridi: I want to thank the member from Barrie for that question.

Last Monday in Ottawa, I was thrilled to be a part of the \$400-million investment and joint funding announcement for a 5G network. Ontario is partnering with Quebec and the federal government to accelerate the transition to 5G wireless technology in our country, Canada.

This province is investing \$67 million in ENCQOR through partnerships with multinational technology corporations. This game-changing initiative will build two high-speed 5G test beds in Ontario and give our companies access to these technologies. This will allow them to create transformative products and services to compete globally, improve communication services, advance our innovation economy and improve the day-to-day lives of Ontarians.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Ms. Ann Hoggarth: Thank you to the minister for that answer. It is always exciting to hear about Ontario's role in such beneficial and constructive investments. These investments not only advance 5G technologies but could lead to breakthroughs in fields like artificial intelligence, cyber security and other transformative technologies. We know that investments in these technologies will transform our economies as they will create new jobs and industries.

I understand that this investment aligns with Ontario's successful \$650-million Business Growth Initiative, which has helped the economy grow by promoting an innovation-based economy.

Could the minister please inform the House how these investments in fifth-generation technologies and next-generation networks will drive innovation and strengthen Ontario's economy?

Hon. Reza Moridi: Again, thank you to the member for that question. These new test beds will allow small and medium-sized business enterprises to test and develop 5G technologies ahead of the competition in order to stay ahead of the game. This will give Ontario businesses a first-to-market advantage in using these new technologies. Moreover, approximately 2,000 jobs will be secured in Ontario by SMEs accessing these technologies. The initiative is also expected to retain nearly 1,000 jobs in the first five years and a secure global research and development mandate for Ontario companies.

Mr. Speaker, I want to take a moment and thank our Ottawa caucus members from Ottawa Centre, Ottawa South, Ottawa–Vanier, Ottawa–Orléans and Ottawa West–Nepean for their advocacy for the city of Ottawa as well as for the innovation economy in our province of Ontario.

HORSE RACING INDUSTRY

Mr. Randy Pettapiece: My question is for the Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs. It's been many weeks since the Minister of Agriculture spilled the beans about Ajax Downs. Apparently, the government has hatched a secret plan to shut down the casino and move the slots to Pickering. The people of Ajax have rallied together against this backroom deal. Ajax council passed a motion calling on the government to do a full-some, fair, transparent third-party review. Yet the mayor of Ajax tells me that they haven't heard a peep from this government or the OLG—radio silence, Speaker.

Will the minister finally come clean and confirm his government's plan to kill 1,700 rural jobs?

Hon. Jeff Leal: I'm pleased to answer the question of the member from Perth–Wellington. Friday was a historic day in the province of Ontario. We had the opportunity to be in beautiful Flamboro Downs. A number of our colleagues were there for the announcement. On Friday, we announced that over the next 20 years, we will be providing \$105 million per year for a sustainable horse racing industry in the province of Ontario.

I just want to say that all the leaders of Ontario's horse racing industry were there, whether it was the thoroughbred industry, the standardbred industry or the quarter horse industry in the province of Ontario. They had one response on Friday's announcement: This is the greatest news for horse racing in Ontario in four decades.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Randy Pettapiece: Speaker, for the minister's reference, I was talking about Ajax and the Ajax quarter-horse racing business.

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Back to the Minister of Agriculture: The secret plan to shut down Casino Ajax has been botched from the start. The town of Ajax was blindsided when they learned the news in the Peterborough newspaper. They weren't consulted at all. Now the government wants to politicize the process by announcing that Casino Ajax will move to Pickering.

The town of Ajax doesn't want this to happen, the people of Ajax don't want this to happen, and the 1,700 workers losing their jobs certainly don't want this to happen. Minister, why are you doing it?

Hon. Jeff Leal: The Minister of Finance would be delighted to answer this question.

Hon. Charles Sousa: I want to reiterate the tremendous news that was provided on Friday to the horse racing industry, the breeders and all of the individuals involved with the industry, including Ajax Downs. We made a point of reaffirming our commitment to the industry to support horse racing and to provide support especially for those small tracks.

The member opposite is talking about the casino. He may want to talk to Rod Phillips. That candidate was the one who was the architect of modernizing the OLG, including some of those slots and those racetracks.

We are there to support Ajax Downs. We're going to support them, as we say, going forward. It has a fairness monitor. It has been open and transparent throughout the process. We are going to support the industry and the modernization of the casino business.

WORKERS' COMPENSATION

Ms. Cindy Forster: My question is to the Premier. While in Thunder Bay in January, the Premier promised to meet with local workers to talk about the many issues that injured workers routinely face, but she hasn't. Despite two attempts by the workers to set up a meeting, nothing has happened.

I can guess why. Maybe it's because the Liberals have once again promised big business a premium rate cut of 3%—that's after delivering a 6.2% rate cut last year—or maybe it's because her former chief of staff received \$440,000 last year for being the head of a non-profit agency.

The premium savings to the wealthiest continue to be borne by injured workers who routinely have their claims denied, so I ask the Premier, is this yet another Liberal promise made and broken?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Minister of Labour.

Hon. Kevin Daniel Flynn: Thank you to the member for that question.

Certainly, the workers and families in this province need to know that, should they suffer an injury on the job or even worse, they will be looked after by a workers' compensation system that allows them to collect, allows them to move on with their life and hopefully allows them to return to work.

I have met with a number of injured workers' groups and injured workers themselves around the province of Ontario over the past three or four years. Some of the advice that we've received on changes that we should be making to the Workers' Compensation Board is advice that I have heeded. Certainly, the Premier has supported that as well.

We have made those changes. I think if you look, Speaker, back at the last three or four years, the changes that have been made to the Workers' Compensation Board in order to protect the interests of workers are something this province should be proud of. Do we have further to go? We absolutely do. I'm in the process of looking at a number of initiatives.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Ms. Cindy Forster: The government certainly hasn't dealt with the deeming issue. Maybe the Premier hasn't bothered to follow up with injured workers whom she met at her election-style event in Thunder Bay because her own Liberal government continues to leave thousands of injured workers to fend for themselves after they have been misclassified through deeming as working in jobs that they never held for a wage that they never got.

New Democrats put forward amendments to Bill 148 that would have prevented injured workers from being wrongfully assessed at the new higher minimum-wage rates, but Liberals and Conservatives refused to support those amendments.

Why is the Premier refusing to meet with injured workers in Thunder Bay as she promised?

Hon. Kevin Daniel Flynn: As I noted in the previous answer, I have travelled to Thunder Bay myself. I have met with the injured workers' groups there right in the office of the member for Thunder Bay. He has facilitated those meetings. The injured workers themselves have come down to Toronto and have met in my office as well. On a six-month basis, we have injured workers come into the WSIB. I attend their meetings as well.

Three of the biggest asks that we've had from injured workers: One was full indexation for those who had a partial disability. We increased survivor benefits and took some steps to further disincent employers from hiding claims, which was happening in the past. We also listened to first responders. We passed legislation that allowed for presumptive WSIB coverage.

The changes that have taken place over the past three or four years have been based primarily on the advice that we've received from workers, and that's how it should be.

HORSE RACING INDUSTRY

Mr. Joe Dickson: To the Minister of Finance: This government, under the leadership of this Premier, has been working hard to develop a long-term funding solution for horse racing and the industry.

As you know, the Horse Racing Partnership Plan provided \$100 million a year for the industry. In the 2016 budget, this investment was extended until 2021 while

the government worked with industry to develop a long-term funding model.

The industry needs this funding stability to make important decisions around horse breeding and planning. On Friday, I was pleased to hear that our government, in co-operation with the industry, has developed a long-term funding plan in order to continue to support this important industry. Can the minister please explain the details of this new funding model?

Hon. Charles Sousa: I want to take the time to thank the member from Ajax for his dedication and his advocacy for the horse racing industry—a champion in Ajax. This member, like many members on this side of the House, has worked hard to ensure that the horse racing industry in Ontario remains a thriving industry.

That's why this government has worked together with the industry to develop a long-term funding commitment that will provide \$105 million a year for the next two decades. This agreement will provide the stability needed to strengthen and sustain horse racing and breeding in Ontario.

We know that this industry is an important part of this province's heritage and an important part of rural communities. The new agreement will build on the co-operation between industry partners—horse people, breeders, racetracks and more—which we know is essential to maximizing the success of the entire industry.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Joe Dickson: Back to the minister: I was so pleased to hear that the government has listened to the needs of the industry. Now racetracks across Ontario will be able to better plan for the future of this historically important industry.

I understand that long-term funding is essential for horse breeders, so they can have stability in their planning and, in turn, the racetracks are able to accommodate more capacity over the long term. I know that nearly two decades of stable funding is not the only measure this government is taking to ensure the stability of all racetracks, including Ajax Downs. There will also be programs available to smaller tracks to encourage innovation and expand their revenue sources.

Can the minister please explain the additional measures that the government is taking to ensure the success of small tracks in Ontario?

Hon. Charles Sousa: Thank you again to the member for Ajax. To further assist the industry, the Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs will extend their enhanced Horse Improvement Program, and they'll also introduce a new racetrack sustainability innovation plan to support regional tracks, to help them innovate, diversify and expand revenue sources to achieve long-term sustainability.

OLG will also provide additional funding to supplement racetracks that may be experiencing financial shortfalls, all with the intent of providing for security in breeding and in the cycle, especially in quarter horse racing, which is important in Ajax.

To strengthen transparency and accountability for all horse people, racetracks and the public, a newly formed

Ontario Racing board will be responsible for representing the interests of the entire industry. They will be responsible for providing three-year strategic plans and regular audited financial statements and reports. Their board will be equally represented by the racetracks and breeders, so that we can have a strong, proud and sustainable horse racing industry for many years to come.

WORKERS' COMPENSATION

Mr. Randy Hillier: My question is to the Minister of Labour. I was recently contacted by Jeff Wilkinson in my riding, who had suffered knee and back injuries while at work, for which he needed surgery. He made a claim with the WSIB, and was granted health care and loss-of-earnings benefits. When his four weeks of approved care were over, he was still suffering from his injuries, so he applied for an extension of coverage.

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Jeff was denied this extension. The WSIB claimed he was now suffering from a pre-existing condition. However, that same day, his employer was notified by the WSIB that their Second Injury and Enhancement Fund request had been rejected because—and get this—the WSIB stated “there is no pre-existing condition.”

Speaker, what medical and bureaucratic magic allows an injured worker to be both free from a pre-existing condition while simultaneously suffering from one?

Hon. Kevin Daniel Flynn: Thank you to the member for his enquiry on behalf of a constituent, Speaker.

Work continues on the WSIB. Over the years, there's been a partnership between the government and the workers' compensation system. As we have moved through that, as we listen to advice from business, labour and from injured workers themselves, we try to enhance the system; we try to make it work better. Over the years, we've made, I think, tremendous strides in that regard. More people are returning to work. More claims are being processed faster.

Obviously, in the House, I can't talk to an individual case. Were the member to give me some details on the case, perhaps at the end of question period today, I'd be happy to look into it. Had he done that previous to this, Speaker—I'd be happy to do that as well.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary.

Mr. Randy Hillier: Again to the minister: Yes, I did speak to the WSIB and their liaison officer. That's why we're here today and hearing more hocus-pocus, from the sounds of it.

Another employee in my riding filed a WSIB claim after suffering an injury on the job. She was rejected continued benefits because the injury was due to a pre-existing condition. The employer filed another SIEF claim with the WSIB citing that same pre-existing condition. The employer's claim was rejected on this basis: “No evidence to support a pre-existing condition.”

Speaker, it's clear these aren't isolated cases of bureaucratic hocus-pocus. This is a trend and a pattern that frustrates and circumvents the WSIB's mandate to

protect injured workers. Will the minister not only stop the WSIB from dodging employers and injured workers from their benefits but also tell us who are they lying to, the workers or the employers?

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Withdraw, please.

Mr. Randy Hillier: I withdraw.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Minister.

Hon. Kevin Daniel Flynn: Thank you, Speaker, and thank you again to the member for this question on behalf of a constituent.

In response to a previous question, I said that over the years we've made improvements to the system as a result of advice we received from injured workers. When we reinstated the full indexation of the benefits to full CPI for the first time in many years, that was a huge move forward. Those workers are starting to get a payment they weren't getting in the past.

We increased survivor benefits, and we took steps to make sure that employers were playing the game fairly as well when it came to abiding by the rules.

We've listened to the first responders in this province and passed legislation to allow for their coverage.

But when we did the reinstatement of the full indexation, what the member perhaps forgot to inform the House about is that both opposition parties voted against those advancements. So when the time has come to make a difference for injured workers in this province, both opposition parties have been missing in action.

ÉDUCATION EN FRANÇAIS

FRENCH-LANGUAGE EDUCATION

M^{me} France Gélinas: Ma question est pour la ministre de l'Éducation. Dans l'est de Toronto, on retrouve une grosse, grandissante et vigoureuse communauté francophone. Depuis une décennie, les parents membres de la coalition demandent une école secondaire francophone afin de préserver la langue française pour la prochaine génération.

Récemment, le Conseil scolaire Viamonde a démontré son intérêt pour acquérir une école du conseil scolaire de Toronto déclarée surplus. Les parents sont inquiets que le building ne sera pas équivalent aux écoles secondaires anglophones, qui ont un auditorium, une cafétéria, des espaces communs pour les étudiants ainsi qu'une cour pour les activités sportives.

Quels efforts allez-vous faire afin d'assurer que les installations mentionnées seront équivalentes dans la nouvelle école française de l'est de Toronto, comme elles le sont dans les écoles anglaises?

Hon. Indira Naidoo-Harris: Thank you to the member opposite for this very important question. Merci beaucoup. I really appreciate this question because, Speaker, I do want to point out that our government is absolutely committed to supporting students in French-language education with learning environments that provide the best conditions possible for developing French-language and cultural skills.

Speaker, I have been having many conversations with members of the French community and I'm pleased and proud to say that we have a very good working relationship, because we know that our French public education system is currently in a state of growth in many parts of the province and we're responding with historic levels of investment. Absolutely, in this instance, it's about boards working together.

But let me just tell you a little bit about what we have been doing to fund French-language school boards. We have been increasing annual funding by more than \$340 million, an increase of 25% since 2013.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you.

Hon. Indira Naidoo-Harris: I'm happy to say more.

VISITORS

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Bruce-Grey-Owen Sound on a point of order.

Mr. Bill Walker: I'd like to introduce MaryLynn West-Moynes, the president and CEO of Georgian College; David Agnew, Seneca president and CEO; and Janet Beed, chair of the board from Seneca College.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Leeds-Grenville on a point of order.

Mr. Steve Clark: Mr. Speaker, I want to introduce to you, and through you to members of the Legislative Assembly, a constituent from my riding of Leeds-Grenville, who is here with St. Lawrence College today. He also does great work on the St. Lawrence corridor commission. I'd like to welcome Michael Adamcryck to Queen's Park.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The time for question period is over. Therefore, this House stands recessed until 1 p.m. this afternoon.

The House recessed from 1146 to 1300.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I just want to report to the members that I scored 10 brownie points this morning with my introduction of my wife, so thank you very much for that standing ovation.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

MENTAL HEALTH AND ADDICTION SERVICES

Mr. Bill Walker: I rise today to recognize a new partnership that aims to improve how mental health and addiction services are accessed in my riding of Bruce-Grey-Owen Sound.

Last September, a number of local organizations, including the Canadian Mental Health Association Grey Bruce, G&B House, HopeGreyBruce Mental Health and Addictions Services and Grey Bruce Health Services, have joined to form the new Canadian Mental Health Association Grey Bruce.

Under the leadership of Claude Anderson, who has been named executive director of the CMHA Grey Bruce, community-based mental health and addictions should become more seamless at a critical time when my constituents are seeking better access to support programs.

The CMHA Grey Bruce provides a drop-in clinic and support programs for those with mental health needs, with locations in Owen Sound, Markdale, Hanover, Southampton, Kincardine and Walkerton.

HopeGreyBruce operates two addiction programs and eight community mental health programs that serve about 2,000 clients per year.

G&B House is a 15-bed residential treatment supportive housing program in Owen Sound that provides residential support to men who have serious chronic addiction problems.

Grey Bruce Health Services has in-patient and out-patient services for adult addictions and mental health, with only outpatient services to come under the umbrella of the new organization. GBHS will also be responsible for the urgent-response team and the primary care telemedicine program.

As we have the long-standing and growing unmet need in Grey-Bruce for mental health and addictions services, the group will continue to advocate for putting mental health and addictions on everyone's radar so we can erase the difference and accept that mental health is just as important as physical health and should be funded the same.

I welcome Mr. Anderson to the job and look forward to seeing a positive impact and improvement in how my constituents access the often complex mental health and addiction services.

LONDON ECONOMY

Ms. Peggy Sattler: Amidst troubling economic news for the London region, there are encouraging signs of hope because of the commitment and vision of London's outstanding civic entrepreneurs.

The 2016 census revealed that London has a lower employment rate than any other large Canadian city. With the collapse of the manufacturing sector and the loss of jobs that never came back, more Londoners than ever before are not participating in the labour market. Those who are are likely to be contract or part-time, and there are more Londoners on Ontario Works today than in the last 15 years.

To help spur jobs and opportunity, local civic entrepreneurs are stepping up with new and innovative ideas to drive inclusive social and economic change. For example, social investor Lina Bowden last month launched the Verge Capital breakthrough fund, the first regional investment fund of its kind in Ontario. The fund enables private investors to support social enterprises that benefit the community, such as affordable housing developments or environmental projects.

Earlier this month, Venture London was announced, a one-stop shop for entrepreneurs and the largest entrepre-

neur centre in southwestern Ontario. Led by civic entrepreneur Amir Farahi, Venture London is a collaboration between TechAlliance, the London Small Business Centre, the London Institute and Farhi Holdings.

Mr. Speaker, London's civic entrepreneurs are doing their part to foster growth and prosperity that is shared by all Londoners. We need a government equally committed to rebuilding an inclusive local economy.

HOMELESSNESS

Ms. Sophie Kiwala: I am thrilled to rise today to speak to an exciting event that is taking place this evening. We are joined by the United Way service providers and advocates from across the province who are here for Youth Homelessness Awareness Day.

Please note that the reception will take place this evening between 5 and 7 o'clock in the legislative dining room.

I'd like to acknowledge the tremendous efforts of Bhavana Varma, Kim Hockey and their team at the United Way Kingston, Frontenac, Lennox and Addington, and fellow United Way organizations from across the province.

It is heartbreaking to know that there are young people who are struggling to have their most basic needs met. We need to do everything we can to rectify the situation and ensure that every youth lives a fair and equitable life.

Mr. Speaker, I'm very proud that our government is investing \$50 million over six years through the Local Poverty Reduction Fund. Ontario is providing more than \$16 million to 46 projects in communities across Ontario. Almost \$3 million of the over \$16 million is supporting projected related to homelessness. Ontario is investing \$17 billion over four years to deliver more accessible and better care for individuals who experience mental illness or addiction at any stage in life, and this will also help.

We know that there is more work to be done. I would encourage everyone in this House—all members of all parties—to please join us for the celebration this evening.

EPILEPSY

Mr. Jeff Yurek: I rise today to acknowledge Purple Day. Founded in 2008, Purple Day was created by Cassidy Megan, who was motivated by her own struggles with epilepsy. Through increased awareness, Purple Day dispels myths surrounding epilepsy, reduces stigma, and empowers individuals living with epilepsy to take action in their communities.

There are approximately 50 million people around the world living with epilepsy, including roughly 90,000 people here in Ontario. There remains no cure for this complex neurological disorder; however, proper treatment and medication can help control seizures, resulting in people living their lives to the fullest. Advances in medical technologies give us hope for possible better treatments or perhaps a cure down the road.

I would encourage everyone to get involved and learn more about epilepsy and learn about this important cause:

spread awareness, educate yourself, educate others and help eliminate many misconceptions related to epilepsy. Together, we can make a difference in many, many lives.

I'd like to thank Epilepsy Ontario for the great work they do across Ontario to improve the lives of people living with epilepsy.

CLIMATE CHANGE

Mr. Peter Tabuns: This afternoon, I'll be introducing my bill Liability for Climate-Related Harms Act, 2018. Increasingly, the cost of climate damage will be a burden on our society and on individuals. This act will give Ontarians the legal means to seek compensation from the world's major polluters for their fair share of those costs. This follows the path of the tobacco liability legislation brought forward here in Ontario to recover compensation for health costs related to tobacco use.

The world's largest fossil fuel corporations have to start paying their fair share for the damage from their products and for the cost of protecting people from those damages. No one has calculated the cost of climate damage in Ontario to date, but as a sense of the scale, storm damage in Ontario in 2013 alone exceeded \$1 billion, between the summer flash flooding in July and the ice storm in December. The cost to protect us in the future is undetermined. To give a sense of scale, New York City, in its climate lawsuit, noted that it will be spending \$20 billion to protect that city from future climate damage, and is seeking commensurate compensation.

The damage from climate change and the cost to protect us from climate change will be huge. The people of this province need the companies that are putting out the product that's causing the problem to put in their fair share.

GUN CONTROL

Mr. Mike Colle: I'm sad to say that, earlier this month, we had another senseless shooting, which killed two people outside my local bowling alley on a Saturday night. This is a bowling alley that I go to and take my grandkids to. A lot of people go for pizza and bowling on a Saturday night. These innocent people were shot and killed on a Saturday night. It could have been anybody in the community.

I know that this past weekend we've seen in the United States that there was March for Our Lives, where young people stood up and spoke out about senseless killing in Florida. We have issues here in Ontario, in Canada. These are not from legitimate gun owners; these are criminals. These are thugs that have unlawful handguns. They're driving around and walking around our city with unlawful handguns.

What are you doing with a handgun in the city? If you're not a policeman, military person or licensed target shooter, what right do you have to have an unlawful handgun in the city? In Brantford, in Brampton and in

Toronto they're doing that because they flout the law. They get away with it, and that's why, every day, almost, there's some kind of gunplay, and they walk away. This has got to stop, Mr. Speaker.

1310

HOME CARE

Mr. Norm Miller: I rise to today to highlight serious issues plaguing home care in my riding, particularly in the district of Parry Sound.

Since the local care contract was renegotiated and the government awarded the deal to a new care provider, I've heard over and over again from constituents in desperate need of care. I've heard from people who are being sent home from the hospital with no supports in place. I've heard from individuals who are already accessing home care but who, since the change in providers, are now getting spotty, disorganized care, if they receive care at all.

I've also heard from individuals who are told there are no personal support workers available and who weren't even being offered the option of being put on a wait-list. Upon complaining, all these constituents are told by the care provider that there's a lack of PSWs in the area. However, I've also heard from PSWs who have taken jobs in other fields because of the lack of compensation for travel time, which makes continuing in their chosen profession impossible.

This is a clear case of the government thinking one model will work for the entire province. I would, however, point out that while a PSW in an urban area could spend the entire day treating patients within a few city blocks, a PSW in the north might have to travel three hours in a day to reach all their patients. As of now, those three hours are unpaid.

My constituents have made it clear to me that they are angry with this government's choice to contract a company that cannot provide services that were previously provided under another service provider and who seemingly do not have the staff for the job that they bid on.

BANGLADESHI HERITAGE MONTH

Mr. Lorenzo Berardinetti: I'm pleased to rise today and acknowledge that throughout the month of March, Ontario has been proudly celebrating Bangladeshi Heritage Month.

Back in 2016, I brought forward Bill 44, An Act to proclaim the month of March as Bangladeshi Heritage Month in Ontario. I'm happy to see that this province continues to recognize the numerous contributions made by our Bangladeshi community members and celebrate the last impacting they have made on this province.

Bangladeshi immigrants have been coming to Canada and proudly calling Ontario home since the early 1970s, and today, community estimates put their numbers at around 50,000. They are our friends, our neighbours, our

artists, our scientists, our doctors, our business owners and community leaders.

Their infusion of culture, of shared values and incredible work ethic have significantly strengthened my riding of Scarborough Southwest and truly made it a more unique and special community in which we live.

On top of that, this day also marks the celebration in the Bangladeshi calendar of Bangladesh Independence Day, so the timing of these remarks could not be more fitting.

Finally, I'd like to mention that on Wednesday the 28th, we'll be holding a flag-raising ceremony here at Queen's Park. I encourage all members to attend, and I look forward to celebrating with them and with members of the Bangladeshi community.

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

LIABILITY FOR CLIMATE-RELATED HARMS ACT, 2018

LOI DE 2018 SUR LA RESPONSABILITÉ À L'ÉGARD DES DOMMAGES LIÉS AU CLIMAT

Mr. Tabuns moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 21, An Act respecting civil liability for climate-related harms / Projet de loi 21, Loi concernant la responsabilité civile à l'égard des dommages liés au climat.

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

First reading agreed to.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member for a short statement.

Mr. Peter Tabuns: This bill enacts the Liability for Climate-Related Harms Act, 2018. It provides that a fossil fuel producer is strictly liable for climate-related harms that occur in Ontario if the producer is responsible for greenhouse gas emissions at a globally detectable level.

PROHIBITING DRIVING WITH UNLAWFUL HANDGUNS ACT, 2018

LOI DE 2018 SUR L'INTERDICTION DE LA CONDUITE AVEC DES ARMES DE POING ILLÉGALES DANS LE VÉHICULE

Mr. Colle moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 22, An Act to amend the Highway Traffic Act and the Civil Remedies Act, 2001 to promote public safety by prohibiting driving in a motor vehicle with an unlawfully possessed handgun / Projet de loi 22, Loi modifiant le Code de la route et la Loi de 2001 sur les recours civils afin de promouvoir la sécurité publique et d'interdire la

conduite sur la voie publique d'un véhicule automobile avec une arme de poing dont la possession est illégale.

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

First reading agreed to.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member for a short statement.

Mr. Mike Colle: This is based on a similar bill whereby we tried to deal with stunt driving and racing. We gave police officers the right to impound a car and take away the violator's driver's licence. In this case here, if a police officer stops a vehicle and there is an unlawfully possessed handgun in the vehicle, the officer would have the right to impound the car and also suspend the licence, to make our roads safer. Simply, that's what this bill is about.

PETITIONS

MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES

M^{me} France Gélinas: I'm proud to present this petition from the Ontario Association of Consultants, Counsellors, Psychometrists and Psychotherapists. It reads as follows:

"Whereas patients receiving psychotherapy treatment from a registered psychotherapist (RP) in private practice must pay HST on the fee charged;

"Whereas psychotherapy is a health service which, when provided within the scope of practice of members of any other regulated health profession (RHP), is HST exempt;

"Whereas the HST adds a financial barrier on top of the social and cultural stigma that can accompany mental illness;

"Whereas there is a federal government process that allows groups to request the removal of HST from services;

"Whereas there is confidence that the tax will eventually be removed by the federal government;

"Whereas political staff have advised that a delay of three years is to be expected;

"Whereas Ontario has in the past acted separately from the federal government to effectively remove the HST;"

They "petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"Removal of HST on psychotherapy be incorporated as a piece of the overall effort to make mental health care as accessible as possible to the citizens of Ontario."

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

CONSUMER PROTECTION

Mrs. Liz Sandals: I have a petition here that reads:

“Whereas an undisclosed number of Canadian consumers’ personal information was hacked in the recent Equifax breach; and

“Whereas impacted person(s’) credit ratings are affected by breaches of this nature, which has repercussions for impacted person(s’) day-to-day living; and

“Whereas breached data of this nature includes names, addresses and social insurance numbers; and

“Whereas the number of impacted person(s) cannot be confirmed; and

“Whereas there is no mandatory requirement for private sector entities in Ontario or other Canadian provinces to report a potential and/or actual privacy breach; and

“Whereas government must prevent future security breaches and access to critical consumer information; and

“Where government must enhance consumer protection in Ontario, which effectively builds consumer confidence;

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

“That the province of Ontario enact Bill 167, An Act to amend the Consumer Reporting Act, to mandate that consumer reporting agencies respond to consumer inquiry no later than two business days after receiving the inquiry; provide a copy of the person’s consumer report free of charge; and that a consumer may request that a consumer reporting agency place a notice of security free on the consumer’s file.”

Page Rhys is going to take it to you just as soon as I sign it.

HIGHWAY IMPROVEMENT

Mr. Bill Walker: “To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas in 2009 the Ministry of Transportation received environmental clearance for six lanes of the 401 between Tilbury to Elgin county;

“Whereas the 401 between Tilbury and London was already known as ‘carnage alley’ due to the high rate of collisions and fatalities there;

“Whereas current work being done on the 401 between Tilbury and Ridgetown will reduce the road to a single lane for up to three years thus making this stretch a serious safety concern;

“Whereas there have already been four deaths, nine serious injuries requiring hospitalization and over eight collisions this summer within the one-lane construction area;

“Whereas the government of the day pledged to invest \$13.5 billion in highway improvements and has sharply increased the fees for driver permits and licence renewal fees which are used for highway maintenance and improvements;

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

“To commit to upgrading the 401 from four to six lanes and install a median barrier from Tilbury to Elgin county.”

I support this petition, affix my name and send it with page Colin.

1320

SERVICES GOUVERNEMENTAUX

M^{me} France Gélinas: J’ai une pétition pour ouvrir un centre de ServiceOntario à Vallée Est, et j’aimerais remercier M^{me} Jacqueline Paiment de Hanmer dans mon comté.

« Attendu que le centre ServiceOntario privé de Vallée Est a soudainement fermé ses portes en janvier 2018; et

« Attendu que les habitants de Vallée Est ont droit à des heures ouvrables et temps d’attentes raisonnables; et

« Attendu que les habitants de Vallée Est ont droit à une gamme complète de services en français et en anglais; et

« Attendu que les habitants de Vallée Est paient les mêmes impôts provinciaux que les autres Ontariens et ont droit à des services égaux; »

Ils demandent à l’Assemblée législative que la ministre des Services gouvernementaux et des Services aux consommateurs dise à ServiceOntario « d’ouvrir immédiatement un centre ServiceOntario permanent, doté du personnel nécessaire, à Vallée Est. »

J’appuie cette pétition. Je la signe et je vais demander à Sophia de l’amener à la table des greffiers.

FISH AND WILDLIFE MANAGEMENT

Mr. Jeff Yurek: “To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas the government created a special-purpose account (SPA) in 1997;

“Whereas the SPA pools together all revenues from hunting and fishing licensing fees, fines and royalties. The funds in the SPA are legislated to be reinvested back into wildlife management to improve hunting and angling across the province;

“Whereas the government is refusing to release the details of the spending of the SPA;

“Whereas a recently obtained report showed SPA expenditures from 2011-12 revealed expenditures (i.e. \$69,000 spent to purchase and sell a house and \$55,000 devoted to a psychologist) that are unrelated to wildlife management;

“Whereas in the past the Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry has indicated that records for the SPA fund cannot be released as ‘they do not exist’;

“Whereas this is in direct contradiction to the Financial Administration Act that requires receipts and disbursement to be recorded for all special-purpose accounts;

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

“That in the name of accountability and transparency the Minister of Natural Resources and Forestry direct the Auditor General to conduct a value-for-money audit of the SPA fund.”

I agree with this petition and affix my signature.

PRIX DE L'ESSENCE

M^{me} France Gélinas: J'aimerais remercier M. Langdon de Val Caron dans mon comté.

« Alors que les automobilistes du nord de l'Ontario continuent d'être soumis à des fluctuations marquées dans le prix de l'essence; et

« Alors que la province pourrait éliminer les prix abusifs et opportunistes et offrir des prix justes, stables et prévisibles; et

« Alors que cinq provinces et de nombreux états américains ont déjà une réglementation des prix d'essence; et

« Considérant que les juridictions qui réglementent le prix de l'essence ont : moins de fluctuations des prix, moins d'écart de prix entre les communautés urbaines et rurales et des prix d'essence annualisés inférieurs; »

Ils demandent « à l'Assemblée législative de l'Ontario :

« D'accorder à la Commission de l'énergie de l'Ontario le mandat de surveiller le prix de l'essence partout en Ontario afin de réduire la volatilité des prix et les différences de prix régionales, tout en encourageant la concurrence. »

J'appuie cette pétition. Je vais la signer et je demande à Aidan de l'amener à la table des greffiers.

HOSPITAL FUNDING

M^{me} France Gélinas: I have this petition that comes from Jennifer Cayen from Val Therese in my riding. It reads as follows:

“Whereas providing high-quality, universal, public health care is crucial for a fair and thriving Ontario; and

“Whereas years of underfunding have resulted in cuts to registered nurses (RNs) and hurt patient care; and

“Whereas, in 2015 alone, Ontario lost more than 1.5 million hours of RN care due to cuts; and

“Whereas procedures are being off-loaded into private clinics not subject to hospital legislation; and

“Whereas funded services are being cut from hospitals and are not being provided in the community; and

“Whereas cutting skilled care means patients suffer more complications, readmissions and death;”

They “petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

“Implement a moratorium on RN cuts;

“Commit to restoring hospital base operating funding to at least cover the costs of inflation and population growth;

“Create a fully-funded multi-year health human resources plan to bring Ontario's ratio of registered nurses to population up to the national average;

“Ensure hospitals have enough resources to continue providing safe, quality and integrated care for clinical procedures and stop plans for moving such procedures into private, unaccountable clinics.”

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

WATER FLUORIDATION

Mr. Bob Delaney: I have a petition signed by a number of individuals in the Windsor area, which I'd like to read. It's addressed to the Ontario Legislative Assembly and entitled “Update Ontario Fluoridation Legislation.” It reads as follows:

“Whereas community water fluoridation is a safe, effective and scientifically proven means of preventing dental decay, and is a public health measure endorsed by more than 90 national and international health organizations; and

“Whereas recent experience in such Canadian cities as Dorval, Calgary and Windsor that have removed fluoride from drinking water has shown a dramatic increase in dental decay; and

“Whereas the continued use of fluoride in community drinking water is at risk in Ontario cities representing more than 10% of Ontario's population, including the region of Peel; and

“Whereas the Ontario Legislature has twice voted unanimously in favour of the benefits of community water fluoridation, and the Ontario Ministries of Health and Long-Term Care and Municipal Affairs and Housing urge support for amending the Health Protection and Promotion Act and other applicable legislation to ensure community water fluoridation is mandatory and to remove provisions allowing Ontario municipalities to cease drinking water fluoridation, or fail to start drinking water fluoridation, from the Ontario Municipal Act;

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

“That the Premier of Ontario direct the Ministries of Municipal Affairs and Housing and Health and Long-Term Care to introduce legislation amending the Health Protection and Promotion Act and make changes to other applicable legislation and regulations to make the fluoridation of municipal drinking water mandatory in all municipal water systems across the province of Ontario.”

Speaker, I am pleased to sign and support this petition and to send it down to the table.

LONG-TERM CARE

M^{me} France Gélinas: I would like to thank Lianne Burke from Hanmer in my riding.

“Whereas there continues to be a shortage of long-term-care beds in Ontario, resulting in the inappropriate use of acute care beds in Ontario's hospitals; and

“Residents who do need secure long-term care are often forced to move away from their communities, families and friends”;

They petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

“To lift the moratorium on long-term-care licences so that the inventory of long-term-care spaces can be brought to a level that will ease the burden placed on Ontario’s hospitals; and

“Ensure that licences are granted for the creation of long-term-care spaces not only in cities but in smaller communities where residents are being forced to abandon everything they’ve ever known.”

I support this petition and will affix my name to it and ask Justin to bring it to the Clerk.

HOSPITAL FUNDING

M^{me} France Gélinas: I have this petition that comes from all over the province. It reads as follows:

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas the Hospital for Sick Children (SickKids) is made up of a team of world-leading experts in child health, the current space isn’t optimal for providing world-class health care. Founded over 140 years ago, SickKids currently operates in outdated buildings in critical need of transformation. Essential patient care areas used to treat our most vulnerable population are overcrowded and underfunded, resulting in longer lengths of stay, increased chances of infection and a lack of privacy.”

They petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows: “to express their support for the SickKids redevelopment plan and call upon the government of Ontario to provide approval for the SickKids capital plan proposal.”

Further, they petition the assembly “to request that monies be allocated to provide SickKids with the requested financial resources to support their infrastructure plan to modernize their facilities to enable them to provide our children with the world-class health care they deserve.”

1330

ORDERS OF THE DAY

THRONE SPEECH DEBATE

Resuming the debate adjourned on March 22, 2018, on the motion for an address in reply to the speech of Her Honour the Lieutenant Governor at the opening of the session.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Further debate?

Ms. Peggy Sattler: I am pleased to rise today, on behalf of the people I represent in London West, to offer some comments on the throne speech that we heard in this place just a week ago today.

Since that time, over the last week, we have seen a desperate flurry, an outpouring, of announcements that followed that speech, with an endless list of funding

commitments. As I watch these announcements, I’m reminded of the infamous comments of John Snobelen. Some of you may remember John Snobelen, the MPP who, back in 1996, shortly after the PC government was elected, talked about creating a “useful crisis.” The reason he talked about creating a crisis was to justify the draconian cuts that were made by the Conservative government to public education in this province. He needed to create a crisis in order to justify the measures that were taken by that government to really gut public education in Ontario. By the time the Conservatives were finished with public education and government in Ontario in 2003, \$1.7 billion had been taken out of the education budget for students and schools and communities across this province.

This time, with this Liberal government and under the leadership of Kathleen Wynne, instead of seeing a crisis at the beginning of this government’s mandate, we have seen a crisis created throughout the government’s mandate. Now, in the final, dying days of that mandate, the Liberals are swooping in, claiming that they have the solution to fix this crisis that they themselves have single-handedly created. Not only are they swooping in to fix this crisis, but they expect to be thanked and congratulated for their commitment to doing something about this crisis that they have brought to our province.

It is, truly, this kind of manoeuvring, this kind of political game-playing that really makes people cynical about politicians and about politics, because people know—despite what the Liberals are now saying, with their determination and their commitment to make these investments into hospital funding, into home care, into mental health and addictions etc., all the things we heard in the throne speech. People know that the reason we have such problems—intractable, deep, systemic problems—in our systems is because of actions that this government has taken.

The Financial Accountability Officer certainly knows it when it comes to health care. We heard that in the report that he issued a couple of weeks ago, where he clearly outlined how a deliberate strategy of cutting health care dollars had underfunded hospitals in this province, to the point where we have crises across our province in communities from northern Ontario to eastern Ontario, to the GTA, to southwestern Ontario, where I live, and it is because of those actions that have been taken that we find ourselves in the mess that we are in today.

Speaker, the throne speech focused on hospital funding as one of the commitments that the Liberals were going to be delivering following that speech in this new session of the Legislature. Where I come from, in London West, we know something about hospital funding. We know that just since Premier Wynne took office, \$142 million has been removed from the budget of London Health Sciences Centre. London Health Sciences Centre has been forced to try to figure out how to absorb the significant loss of those dollars while still trying to serve the people in the community that I represent.

We have had some recent, very troubling cases that have resulted from this underfunding of hospital services in my community. I want to speak for a moment about a London West constituent whom we have talked about in this House on several occasions, Stuart Cline.

Stuart Cline was a constituent of mine who had gone on vacation with his family to Mexico. While he was in Mexico, he suffered a serious fall and experienced bleeding in the brain. The fall happened on a Wednesday. Several days later, by the Saturday, the doctors in the hospital in Mexico had stabilized Stuart Cline and had cleared him to travel. He had purchased travel insurance prior to his vacation, and his insurer was doing everything possible to try to get Mr. Cline back to a hospital in the community, in southwestern Ontario—in fact, anywhere in Ontario. The family just wanted Stuart Cline to come home.

The insurer was unable to locate a bed. The insurer had been working with the health ministry. They had contacted my office to try to get my help to get Stuart Cline home. But Saturday, the day he was stabilized, there were no beds. Saturday became Sunday, Sunday became Monday, Monday became Tuesday, which is when my office was notified, and it was only on the Thursday that Mr. Cline was finally relocated to St. Catharines, and that was no thanks to this Ministry of Health. That was because of the efforts of his family members.

Now, the Minister of Health would like to say that there were beds available, that there was just a glitch in terms of communication between the insurance company and the hospital in order to find that capacity to allow Stuart Cline to come back to Ontario. But, Speaker, this was not an isolated incident. Stuart Cline is one of many Ontarians whose stories have been shared in this Legislature. I'm just going to talk about a couple more of them.

Joe Glowacki: another constituent of mine from London West. He had a heart attack in Arizona in December 2017. He was stabilized and cleared for travel the very next day, but there was no hospital available for him to relocate to Ontario. Speaker, I can tell you, his insurer was highly motivated to get Mr. Glowacki back to Ontario. His insurer was paying \$20,000 a day in a US hospital and wanted nothing more than to get Mr. Glowacki back to this province, but there were simply no beds available. There was no capacity in the system to enable Mr. Glowacki to travel back to this province.

Bryan Sockett was a Toronto-area man who experienced pneumonia while travelling in the Dominican Republic. That was back in January. He also was cleared for travel. He had an insurance company that was working diligently to get him back to Ontario. But once again, the insurer was unable to find an available bed in this province, and Bryan Sockett tragically died in hospital in Florida. They were able to transfer him from the Dominican to Florida, but were unable to get him back to Ontario.

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David Ronald from Hamilton had fallen while travelling in Costa Rica back in February. Same story: His

insurer was trying very hard to locate a bed for him in his home community, or basically anywhere in the general vicinity, and was unable to get a bed for him to return to.

Larry Dann: another London man who waited eight days in a US hospital. This, again, happened in February. He was cleared for travel home, but was unable to return to Ontario because there was no capacity in any area hospital for him to return to.

Todd Hrabchak, an 83-year-old Toronto man: again, trapped in a hospital in Florida, unable to get back to Toronto to a hospital bed where he could be cared for.

This is a systemic issue. This is not just a miscommunication between the insurance company and the receiving hospital. There is no capacity in hospitals in this province, and this has been going on for a long time. This is not a new problem that has suddenly arisen in this province.

Another one of the implications of the lack of access to beds is that people are getting their so-called elective surgeries cancelled or postponed. These are surgeries that can be scheduled, but are often dealing with very, very serious medical conditions.

Chris Punter is a Londoner who was in need of cardiac bypass surgery. His surgery was cancelled four times because London Health Sciences Centre could not provide him with a bed to recover in after his surgery would be complete. The fourth time his surgery was cancelled he was actually in a hospital gown with the wires already on his body when he was told, "Sorry, we can't accommodate you. There are no recovery beds, so we'll have to reschedule."

Another equally concerning consequence of this chronic underfunding of our hospital system is the paramedics—the ambulances—who are lined up in hospital bays waiting to off-load their patients. In London, we saw some statistics reported in January that said that off-load delays for paramedics have more than doubled from 2015 to 2017. There were just over 5,000 off-load delays in 2015 and more than 10,000 off-load delays in 2017. There was a 45% jump in off-load delays in just one year, from 2016 to 2017. The deputy chief of Middlesex-London EMS says that that it's not unusual to find seven or eight ambulance crews stuck at each of our city's two emergency rooms. These are ambulances that are taken off the road, that are unavailable to respond to health care emergencies when they arise.

We know that incidents of code critical coverage, when there are only three available ambulances, and code zero coverage, when there are no ambulances, are becoming much more frequent in my community and, actually, in communities across the province. This, obviously, has a direct impact on patient care.

Last week, we saw the government have a big announcement about funding that was provided to SickKids, but we know that SickKids, every day for the last year, has had occupancy rates of over 100%. The hospital's average occupancy rate was 108%. What this means is that families in critical care are forced to share a room with as many as five other patients and their

families. Children who are undergoing bone marrow transplants don't have access to washrooms in their rooms because of the overcrowding that's happening in these facilities.

We heard in March, earlier this month, from CHEO, the Children's Hospital of Eastern Hospital. CHEO said they had to send away a dozen children so far—that's in the first two months of 2018—including four babies, critically ill infants and toddlers. These children are being sent far away from home, far away from their families, to access the care they need, in Montreal, in Toronto, in Kingston.

Speaker, this is absolutely unacceptable. This is an issue that has been highlighted over and over and over again by MPPs in this Legislature from across this province. Now, all of a sudden, the government has said, "This is a problem and we're going to fix it." They haven't said that this is a problem that they deliberately created through six years of continuous cuts to funding to hospital services.

Another issue that was highlighted in the throne speech was around mental health. Again, we saw a big announcement last week about what the Liberals are going to do to fix this crisis in mental health that they have created.

A crisis in mental health is something that my community is very familiar with. It is not a new issue. I will remind members that four years ago I shared the story of 18-year-old Jenepher Watt, a young woman in my community who went to access emergency mental health services at London Health Sciences Centre and was forced to sleep on the floor of the emergency room while waiting for psychiatric care. Just last year, I shared the story of Angela Jolly, a constituent in my riding who laid for a week on a stretcher in the hallway at London Health Sciences Centre waiting to access a psychiatric bed.

One of the other issues that we have been raising consistently over the last number of years is around wait times for hip and knee replacements. I'll call the government's attention to a story from December 2015, so two and a half years ago, when surgeons in my community took to the barricades to put the blame squarely on the health minister, saying that long wait times in London—actually, London has longer wait times for hip and knee replacements than any other area of the province. But they directly attributed this to shortfalls in funding from the Ministry of Health.

What was happening in my community—I was hearing from numerous constituents who were waiting two years or more to have their hip or knee replaced. As a result, people were falling, and they were at much higher risks of falls. They were experiencing terrible pain and suffering, having to rely more and more on painkillers to manage the pain. They were feeling increasingly isolated, as they were no longer able to participate in their regular community activities. Their mental health was suffering.

The consequences of this chronic underfunding of our health care system multiply in many different ways. It's not as if this government did not know about these

problems until the throne speech was announced last week.

We just heard about the government's increase in funding to hospitals, with the addition of new mental health beds in my community. But Speaker, we had heard back in October that 24 beds were going to be added to London Health Sciences Centre—no information, since then, as to when those beds will be open. There was a Post-it Note that was delivered to the Minister of Health, which she shared with me, about some new staffing that was going to be added to the London Health Sciences Centre, but no real communication from this government about what was happening to address our very serious mental health issues.

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I have to say, while the Liberals can try as they like to dress up what was in the throne speech and this flurry of announcements that followed, people aren't being taken in. People understand that the problems that the Liberals are now claiming to be so committed to addressing are problems that they themselves created; they are problems that they themselves could have taken action on many years before we got to this throne speech and this budget that we're expecting on Wednesday. They could have done that, but they chose not to. They chose to wait until the eleventh hour. We're 72 days before an election, and now this is when they say they're finally taking notice.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Hon. Chris Ballard: Thank you for the opportunity to speak for a couple of minutes on what I heard from the member from London West.

Speaker, I just want to relate a couple of things. Last spring I was at my local hospital, Southlake Regional Health Centre, a centre that I'm exceptionally proud of. It's a regional cancer care centre. It's a regional cardiac care centre. In fact, our cardiac care centre has doctors from the United States coming to Canada, coming to Ontario, coming to Newmarket, to learn new techniques to repair hearts in a very non-invasive way so that folks don't have to spend too much time in the hospital and can get back to their lives. I'm very proud of this hospital. Southlake couldn't do it without a real commitment from this government in health care.

What I've seen, year over year, month over month, is more and more investment in health care across the province. I could speak about the 40 new hospitals that have been built in this province. I could talk about increasing health care spending with every single budget this government has put in play. But I only need go to my local hospital and look at the \$5 million we committed last year, the \$8.3 million I was there this week to talk about, or, more importantly for my riding, the 12 adult mental health beds that we're going to be building at our hospital—and that's about renovating an about 8,000-square-foot centre to put these 12 beds into. These are the types of commitments that this province has been making year after year after year.

I look at organizations like the Fraser Institute, the Wait Time Alliance—I look to these third-party organiz-

ations to tell me how well we're doing in Ontario, and they tell us that Ontario has consistently ranked as having some of the shortest wait times for major surgeries in all of Canada.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Mr. Randy Hillier: It's a pleasure to comment on the member from London West's debate on the throne speech. I think she could have also added some things, such as that Ontario is the third-last province in this country for private sector growth. We lag behind everybody else. We have the second-highest debt per capita in the country. And—this is an interesting one—we have the lowest median household income growth in the country. Those are things that all could have been added to any of these debates on the throne speech.

This Premier and her government, who have doubled our debt on their pet projects and self-interest, would now like the public to believe a throne speech that promises long-needed investment in long-ignored needs for the people of Ontario. After 15 years of waste and neglect, I suggest this Premier should think of investing in something else—investing in a good clock, because their time is running out over there very quickly.

Speaker, that throne speech also reminded me of the comments from the Auditor General. I think they're very similar in public accounts. The Auditor General alleged that the fair hydro scheme's financial and accounting structure was designed to avoid reporting the cost of rate reductions on Ontario's public accounts, thus allowing the government to falsely claim it had a balanced budget at the end of last year. She estimated that Ontario's deficit would be understated by more than \$1.3 billion.

I think there are some very significant similarities between the throne speech and the public accounts comments from the Auditor General. False claims are heard and understood. We know what false claims are.

Invest in that clock. Your time is up real quick.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Ms. Jennifer K. French: I'm glad to be able to add a few thoughts to the always thoughtful remarks from my colleague from London West, on the throne speech and the government's kind of promise list of all of the ways they're going to make things right.

To the member's point, this is a government that is now offering solutions, and they know the solutions because they created the problems. When they've got 15 years of answering the phones from constituents and, hopefully, doing some work in the communities, they know what the issues are; they know where the challenges are. They know about our partner organizations that are doing the heavy lifting and don't have the government's support. They've just chosen to ignore it. Now, as the member from London West pointed out, 72 days out from an election, the government is suddenly saying, "Here, we've got an idea: You get a car, and you get a car, and you get a car"—and I should check under my seat to see if there's anything under there for me. No,

there's not. There's just disappointment from the past 15 years. But now they're super committed to fixing all of these problems when they haven't turned their attention to them before, which is disappointing.

I appreciate, of course, hearing the local perspective from the London area and hearing about the mental health challenges for individuals in my colleagues' ridings. I could also tell stories about folks in my riding; we all could. This is why this is so personal. And this is why it's not just about "too little, too late." It's that nobody believes them any more. There's no point in listening to the promises in the throne speech when they're not going to deliver. They had 15 years to deliver and they have chosen over and over not to. So here we are, Mr. Speaker; we'll be here again having the same conversation about "not enough."

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments.

Mrs. Liz Sandals: I wanted to follow along on those comments, because to hear the story over there, you'd think, "Oh, nothing has ever happened in health care." I was out canvassing with our new candidate Sly Castaldi on Saturday, and one of the things that people wanted to talk about was, in fact, health care—but it was actually recognizing things that we have done. For example, I think in the last throne speech we said, "We're going to introduce what we call OHIP+. It will be free pharmacare for everybody under 24." And then when we came around to the following budget, we put that money in the budget.

In fact, effective January 1 of this year, 2018, that program that we said we were going to deliver, we delivered, and what I heard from people in Guelph was how much they appreciated that. It might be students—because it's Guelph; there are lots of students. They appreciated it. They're under 24. But it was often homeowners who have grandchildren and who recognized that either their little grandchildren or their 18-, 19-, 20-year-old grandchildren were getting their drug needs totally covered by the Ontario government. And for those who might have been seniors, they're really happy that in this throne speech we said that we're going to extend that non-deductible, no-copay pharmacare program that we have for the under-24s or under-25s to the seniors, as well. They really liked that. So they actually do think that we deliver because we did deliver.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): That concludes our questions and comments. I return to the member for London West.

Ms. Peggy Sattler: I'd like to thank the Minister of the Environment and Climate Change, the member for Lanark-Frontenac-Lennox and Addington, the member for Oshawa, and the member for Guelph for their comments on my remarks.

I want to begin where the member from Guelph left off, and that is with reference to OHIP+.

1400

She says that she has talked to students. I've talked to students too, Speaker, and frankly, what students have

told me is that while they were students, they were actually covered by their college or their university. Some 70% of young people are attending a post-secondary institution, and prior to OHIP+, they were getting coverage from their institution plans. A number of students had access to their parents' group benefits.

What students have told me that their biggest concern is is what happens after they graduate, after they've aged out of their parents' plans. Now with OHIP+, they will have zero coverage when they turn 25. That is a big concern for young people who are looking at going into a very unstable, insecure labour market where there are few opportunities for full-time employment that provide group benefits so that they can get their medication needs covered.

That is the age—core working-age people in this province—that is really shut out from what the Liberals have committed to with their pharmacare plan. They are the people who really, really need a government that is going to be on their side, that recognizes the challenges they face and steps up to do something to address those challenges.

This government, from my perspective, has been very good at announcing and reannouncing things and not so good at follow-through.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Further debate?

Mrs. Cristina Martins: It gives me great pleasure to rise this afternoon to debate on the throne speech. I will be sharing my time with the member from Mississauga—Streetsville.

A couple of areas from the throne speech that really pull at my heartstrings and that I can speak about with great passion are our health care system and what we are doing to improve that. As we know, Ontario's health care system is something to be incredibly proud of, from health care planners to physicians to our front-line nurses and support workers. I'll take this opportunity to give a shout-out to my cousin's daughter Christina, who is a nurse and is enjoying being part of that front line providing services to the children that she sees.

We have built a system that is doing an incredible job of taking care of the people we love. About six weeks ago, a close friend of the family, my parents' friend, who is about 76, had to undergo heart surgery. This was not his first heart surgery. He actually had three major surgeries that same week. Fortunately, he is recovering well and is now at home after being at St. John's Rehab. Neither he nor his wife has enough words to say about the thankfulness and the gratitude they have for our health care system and the wonderful system we have in place today, and could not understand why they would read in the paper, see on the news or hear from the parties opposite about our health care system being in a shambles, because that is not at all what they have experienced.

We've increased our investments in the system, and we are making significant progress. We continue to reduce wait times for surgery, increase access to primary health care providers, and expand services for Ontarians

at home and in their communities. We have a system that has the best survival rates for prostate, breast, colorectal and lung cancer in Canada. That is why we continue to make health care a priority, including taking the first step towards universal pharmacare through OHIP+.

We are continuing to take action to help thousands of families with health care costs through OHIP+. Since January, when we introduced this program, over one million free prescriptions have been filled through OHIP+.

We made the biggest expansion to medicare in Ontario in a generation by providing drug coverage for over four million children and youth across this province, who now have access for free—no copayment, no deductible—to over 4,400 drugs. These drugs include antibiotics to treat infections; asthma inhalers; insulin; seizure medications; oral contraceptives; antidepressants; drugs to treat arthritis and epilepsy; and some drugs to treat cancer and rare diseases—all this once again, Mr. Speaker, at no cost, no copayment, to the families.

We heard stories from families all across the province who previously suffered with worrying about being able to afford their children's prescription medications. I've said here before in this House already when I introduced and made the announcement in my riding of Davenport on our plan to provide free medication to our children and youth through the OHIP+ program—I did that at one of the local elementary schools.

When I was making that announcement, after the announcement, the principal approached me and said, "Cristina, this is huge—huge." She had a wall full of EpiPens in her office, and she said that when those pens expire, she has to call the parents to say, "Mrs. Smith, Mr. Smith, your child's EpiPen has expired. We now need to have a new pen." Oftentimes she would hear from the other side, saying, "Miss, is it okay if we just hold off another month? I don't know that I can afford to have that EpiPen replaced right now."

Just imagine what this OHIP+ is doing for families now in my riding of Davenport and across Ontario. We want everyone in Ontario to feel this kind of freedom, to be able to not have to choose whether or not they were going to refill their child's prescription for an EpiPen because everybody in this province, no matter their age, deserves the chance to lead healthy and happy lives.

After announcing OHIP+ for our children and youth, my riding of Davenport, which is home to a large number of seniors—I had my seniors calling me up. "Cristina, we came to this country. We built this city, and we built this province. We've been here for so long, and we have so many medications we have to take. What about the seniors?" We know that the cost of health care can cause anxiety and stress, especially for people 65 and over who are living on fixed incomes and are often required to take multiple medications. We want the best care for our parents and our grandparents, which is why we've announced that we are expanding OHIP+ to make prescription drugs free for people 65 and over.

Beginning August 1, 2019, more than 4,400 prescription drugs will be available free of charge to everyone 65

and over—again, no deductible, no copayment, and this expansion will make life more affordable for 2.6 million seniors and their families and will result in prescription drugs being free for nearly one in two Ontarians. This makes us much closer to the goal of pharmacare for everyone in the province of Ontario.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): I recognize the member for Mississauga–Streetsville.

Mr. Bob Delaney: Thank you very much, Speaker. It's a pleasure to follow my colleague from Davenport, a new member who has brought some real passion and fire and has done a wonderful job representing her constituents.

In discussing health care, I think there was one point that's worth both underlining and emphasizing, and that is that 15 years ago, in 2003, Ontario had Canada's longest wait times. Today, we have Canada's shortest wait times. However imperfect the system may be, there is no doubt that what we've seen in the last 15 years in health care has been progress.

I also want to talk about a couple of other things. I was out chatting with some of the neighbours in Lisgar, Meadowvale and Streetsville over the last several days. A few of them have said, "Talk to us a little bit about the amount of money that Ontario borrowed." I said, "Okay, that's actually a fair question." I said, "Well, let's, first of all start, with an important metric."

During the last PC government, between 1995 and 2003, what was the effective rate of interest on debt as a ratio of Ontario's revenue? The answer is that it was between 14% and 15%. What is it today? It's 8.5%. What is Ontario's effective interest rate on its debt: 3.5%. So with that as a prelude, let's go into some of the trade-offs that Ontario faced.

In this fiscal year of 2017-18, the province of Ontario will, for the fourth time in the last 15 years, run a budget surplus. I live in Mississauga, which is part of Peel region. Every so often I see one of my political idols and mentors, former Ontario Premier Bill Davis, who takes a lot of interest in my career. Perhaps he's watching, and if so, hello, Premier Davis.

1410

Do you know how many budget surpluses Brampton Bill ran between 1971 and 1985? None. Zero. Let's just put that into perspective: In the golden years of the red Tories all of the budgets were in deficit; in the 15 years of Liberal government—four budget surpluses.

It would have been more had we not had a global recession that didn't start here but nonetheless left the province of Ontario having to stare into the abyss and say, "The society in which we are functioning has fundamentally changed. What are we going to do to cope with it?"

In so doing, Ontario set a nine-year path back to a balanced budget. Here's the important part: Ontario never once missed a deficit reduction target, not a single time. In fact, in one year, I think it was around 2013 or 2012, we actually in absolute terms spent less than the province had spent the year before. In part, that was be-

cause of economic recovery and more people coming off social assistance. But it was also the discipline that the province showed in managing public expenses. We got back exactly on schedule precisely as planned, after nine years, to a balanced budget.

Now it's time to move forward in the act of closing the books on a period that involved a recovery from a recession and opening up a new era. That's a good time to say, in closing the books and starting a new chapter, let's have a prorogation of the House. That's why there was a speech from the throne. From the speech from the throne, we're going to see a lot of those details fleshed out in Ontario's budget.

Despite coping with the recession—something that I do want to mention to our folks in Mississauga—support for municipalities since 2003 has nearly quadrupled and now stands at about \$4.2 billion a year—quadrupled. So Ontario actually did get something for its money.

In doing a lot of borrowing during the recession—because the only worse alternative would have been not to borrow the money—Ontario got a rebuilt electricity sector; it got a rebuilt road network; it got a rebuilt post-secondary system. It got a rebuilt elementary and secondary system, where a lot of our buildings in Mississauga and Brampton received money for capital repairs that had gone undone in the 15 years prior to that. People were saying, "Oh, my God, our school is falling apart." A lot of the principals would say, "The thing that worries me is two heavy snowstorms because I don't think my roof will take it." A lot of those schools were upgraded, and new schools were built.

Where we used to, in Mississauga, be subject to brownouts, and during the big blackout of 2003, which I will have to say for clarity was not the fault of the previous government—nonetheless, it showed the weaknesses in the system that they had inherited but not improved. Now those same set of circumstances would not cause a blackout.

A lot of that came with investing about \$150 billion into Ontario's infrastructure—a continuing investment, which, looking forward, is going to continue to see transit evolve, it will continue to see our roads get better and it will continue to see our investment in education, both primary and secondary.

Here are a couple of examples. Last week, recognizing now that we have a budget surplus, our local MPPs gathered at Trillium Health Partners at the Sherway Gardens site, to announce that as part of Ontario's plan this fiscal year to invest an additional \$822 million Ontario-wide, our hospitals—our Credit Valley hospital, our hospital on Queensway and our clinic at Sherway Gardens—would receive \$12.8 million in non-targeted funds. These are funds to use to meet rising day-to-day costs, growth funding, and also to fund additional procedures. They would receive an additional \$9.9 million in targeted funds, which includes wait time funding, priority programs and services, and post-construction operating plans. All of this means a better ability to increase emergency department volume, hire more nurses, support

more physiotherapy procedures, fund longer clinic times, and more MRI hours. It means more ability to meet next year's salaries; to buy the supplies that are used in our hospitals; to pay utility bills; and to ensure that our hospital staff have all the tools, the instruments and the supplies they need when they treat us when we go to Credit Valley or the Queensway site or to Sherway Gardens. Now, that's important.

Another thing that the province has invested money in during the recovery—and when interest rates are almost zero, and when labour is available, and when you've got an infrastructure deficit during a recession, why would you not spend the money? In larger economic terms, during a recession, when big business isn't spending money, and if government is not spending money, then what is there for individuals to earn or save, and who is there for small businesses to sell to? Particularly in a world where you've got cross-linked economies, you've got to have somebody who is spending, in order that somebody else can either earn or save. That's part of the reason that Ontario invested the money that it did when it did.

So what did it get us? It bought us the infrastructure and the resources that we are going to need tomorrow, but we paid yesterday's prices for them and financed them over their entire lifetime at interest rates of very close to zero. That's intelligent use of money. That's the way to do things during an economic recovery.

What was the upshot of that? Judging by metrics such as, "Has the number of people working come back to what it was before the recession?" and "Is your GDP back to what it was before the recession?" and so on, Ontario had completely recovered from the recession by the spring of 2011. It took the austerity-bound United States of America an extra three and a half years to recover from the recession.

Austerity is a policy that has never worked anywhere it has been tried, any time it has been tried. Over in Europe, where they kept pushing austerity on their nations, it took them even longer. The UK was in danger of being the first triple-dip recession in world economic history.

But in Ontario, we've now recovered. We've added a net 800,000 new jobs, most of those full-time jobs, most of those high-paying, high-skill, high-tech jobs. What it has meant is that from nothing in the mid-2000s, we now have a renewable and green energy industry here in the province of Ontario that is export-oriented, that hires our graduates and employs some 50,000 people. We didn't have that, going into the recession.

Ontario now rivals London as a financial centre. We didn't have that to the same degree, going into the recession. Ontario is now a financial services powerhouse. Ontario is a life sciences powerhouse. We were working on that prior to the recession, and that, too, took targeted investments, but now, when you talk about the life sciences—which employ some of the best of our university grads—you're talking about the area around MIT, Harvard and Cambridge on the east coast of the United

States; the area around Silicon Valley on the west coast of the United States; and Ontario.

Ontario is one of those big three. That's what you get for investing during a recession. You get something that not only pulls you out of the recession but it employs your best, it keeps your good ideas at home, and it means that people are going to find good, challenging careers—not just jobs; careers—right here at home. That was one of the differences that it made for Ontario during the recession.

It also meant that in our electricity sector—this isn't just something that powers the province. This is something that drives Ontario too, because it is not merely the thing that we use to power our machinery; it's an economic engine that produces benefits right here at home. When we spend money on our electricity sector, between 80 and 90 cents on the dollar stays in Ontario. It's good jobs; it's solid careers. They are high-paying jobs, and they're jobs with a future, and we have those here. We did renew our electricity sector. We did spend \$35 billion, mostly here in Ontario, renewing our power generation, and \$15 billion renewing our power transmission.

Let's talk a little bit about getting people around, in my last couple of minutes. Speaking about my home area, Lisgar, Meadowvale and Streetsville in the city of Mississauga, when I was elected there were five GO trains, each of which pulled eight cars. Today there are 10 trains in each direction, each of which pulls 12 cars. That's well more than double the GO train service in the last 15 years.

1420

There is a new bus repair depot in Streetsville where GO buses can start and finish their Mississauga run. It is located in Streetsville and it drives the employment of nearly 200 people. GO buses connect frequently to Toronto and other points during the day, with ample capacity for passenger demand. More importantly, you can use your Presto card on the bus, just like you do on the train, and it gets you home as fast as or faster than the train during off hours.

There was a new GO train station in Lisgar, the first new GO train station opened in 25 years. It was completed in 2007. It was completed seven weeks ahead of schedule and it was completed under budget. By the way, the same thing happened with phase 2 at Credit Valley: It was completed ahead of schedule and it was completed under budget.

All of our western Mississauga GO train stations have been upgraded. All of their platforms have been lengthened and there is now free WiFi in the stations.

The Presto card has replaced the cash fare. It used to be that you needed exact cash fare to get on the MiWay bus to connect with the GO train, where you needed to buy a two- or 10-ride pass or have a monthly pass. Then, if you were taking the TTC, you had to either use tokens or have exact cash fare for the TTC. Now you just need one card, one Presto card, and it works for everything.

That's part of the evolution of public transit. That's part of the modern system that Ontario is headed to in the

future. That's part of the reason that this is the throne speech for the 2020s and beyond and why I support it.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Mr. Jim McDonell: It is always a privilege to get up and reply to some of the—it's almost comedy hour if you listen to some of the words here.

We talk about OHIP+—and my daughter is a very good example of that: somebody who would have received benefits because she is over 25 and going back to university, but of course, with the new rules, she's over 25 and the insurance is replaced, so she doesn't get the benefits anymore.

I hear them trying to talk about the finances and the four surpluses they had. You have to remember they inherited those surpluses from the previous government. I know they did the best they could to make sure that first year appeared as a deficit because they spent billions of dollars—\$3 billion, actually, in the last week of March—just to make sure that that last PC government appeared as a deficit. But of course we know that year the auditor reported that it actually was a surplus.

We agree that when times are bad, like when the economy fell apart in 2008, there is a need to run deficits. But I don't see that happening today. On the one hand, they brag about how the economy is racing ahead, and on the other hand they talk about how all of a sudden \$8 billion in debt is required. I mean, you can't have it both ways. The finance minister said last year, "We've got a balanced budget," which of course the Auditor General is disputing, and they are trying to discredit her ability. But this is a false surplus. Everybody knows that. They sold off a number of assets to try to make it that way and it's still not going to make it. I guess we won't find that out until about September, when the books are finally closed and audited.

But this is not a government that shows any ability to manage funds. Highest subnational debt in the world: That's nothing to brag about, but that is something completely on these shoulders. Maybe Premier Davis ran some deficits, but you guys have more than doubled it in the last—and the NDP doubled it before that. So minor deficits were not a problem.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Ms. Jennifer K. French: I'm glad to add a couple of thoughts, because there are a few Liberal nuggets that came across from the other side that I am just dying to address.

To hear that we have the shortest wait times in Canada—I must not have been listening to the moment right before it. Shortest wait-list for what? I would love to tell you a little bit about the Central East LHIN, where we are in Oshawa. We actually have the dubious honour of having the longest wait times anywhere when it comes to long-term care. I don't think the member was talking about that, so I would like to know what he was talking about, because when it comes to long-term care, we actually have the longest waiting lists. There isn't even

the number of existing beds in our system to cover off the number on the wait-list.

I'd love to have a conversation about alternate level of care, or ALC, which is taking up our hospital space for folks in transition, in limbo. Are they even on waiting lists? They're just in limbo, so do they count? Are they on the waiting list? I'd love to put them somewhere. Lord knows they don't have anywhere to go, so let's put them on a waiting list, at the very least.

To hear about pre-recession—that's great to hear about all these great jobs, but I want to know where we are now. These solid jobs, or jobs for the future—those are folks, again, in limbo of a different kind. In precarious work situations, do they or don't they have benefits? Could they ever?

I'm really looking forward to standing on that side of the House as government when we provide the Ontario benefits plan that we have talked about, because that is actually going to make a real difference to folks—not just for the pharmacare, which is a massive deal, but also dental. When it comes to cost savings, what does it cost to go to a hospital time after time with dental pain, never getting the problem solved? What would it cost to actually solve it? Let's look at that. Let's actually talk about numbers and good use of money, and improving health; not just improving their arguments.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Ms. Ann Hoggarth: I've told this story before. One of the first phone calls I got when I was elected in Barrie was from a mother who was quite distressed because her 10-year-old child was being admitted to the hospital because he was in a mental crisis state. She was very upset to find out that there was only an adult area for him to go in. We worked very hard, and we have been able to add 10 youth mental health beds and over 3,000 outpatient services this past year.

Also, last week our government announced the largest investment in Canadian history in mental health and addiction services, a four-year investment of \$2.1 billion that will reframe the system to deliver more accessible and better-integrated care. A large part of this will go towards youth mental health concerns. The investment will make it easier to access services through a local school, a family doctor's office or a community-based organization.

In 2018-19, more than 12,000 more young people will be able to access community-based services such as therapy and counselling—a number that will grow to about 46,000 by 2021-22. Every secondary school in Ontario will have access to an additional mental health worker, with about 400 new positions being added within two years. The province will create at least 15 additional youth wellness hubs over four years to improve access to services, fill critical service gaps for youth aged 12 to 25, and improve transitions to adult services. Up to 350,000 more people with mild to moderate anxiety or depression across the province will have access to publicly funded, structured psychotherapy.

Unlike the party opposite, we are continuing to choose care over cuts.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Mr. Bill Walker: It's always a pleasure to provide a comment after my colleague from Mississauga–Streetsville. He referenced Premier Davis. Although he referenced minor deficits under Premier Davis—he did not triple the debt of our province during his tenure, and he built most of Ontario during those great times. He would probably not be pleased to hear the member say that they rebuilt the school system without saying that they actually closed 600 schools during their tenure.

Just this morning I met with a member from Colleges Ontario who was very, very concerned about the state of our college system, particularly the infrastructure and sustainability of those structures moving down the road.

The member talked about the energy system and how they rebuilt that system. What they didn't rebuild was a \$1.2-billion gas plant that we got nothing for. They promised to sell Hydro One to balance the budget, and yet they're coming with an \$8-billion deficit again this year, after the finance minister was standing and saying, "The year after and the year after that, we will balance the budget." Mr. Speaker, I'm a little concerned at times when he talks about that.

He talked about rebuilding roads, bridges and infrastructure. I can tell you that certainly in Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound, my municipalities are very concerned about where the structures are, what the life and longevity of those structures are, and the lack of funding to ensure that they can be replaced. In fact, in Chesley right now, I'm hopeful that the government is going to come up and help them, because one was wiped out by some flooding, and we need that to be fixed as quickly as possible.

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He didn't mention a whole lot about long-term care. His government promised to rebuild and redevelop 30,000 beds. If I'm kind, 30% of those have been redeveloped. In none of the budgets in my six years here have they talked one cent about new beds, and then, ironically, this year, 5,000 new beds are absolutely necessary. Where were they for the last 15 years of this government?

They've added \$8 billion in deficit. Just last year, they added \$25 billion. That's all debt that's going on, and that is a tax on our future generations. It's sad to say that they continue to go on that path.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): The member from Mississauga–Streetsville can reply.

Mr. Bob Delaney: I want to thank my colleagues from Stormont–Dundas–South Glengarry, Oshawa, Barrie and Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound for some of their thoughts and reactions.

Speaker, let me just start by saying that, right now, in Canadian households, the average ratio of debt to household incomes here in Canada is 161% and it's rising. In Ontario, our equivalent—what is called the net

debt-to-GDP ratio—is 38% and falling. The size of the Ontario economy has grown to nearly \$850 billion. Ontario is headed to be North America's second—after California—trillion-dollar economy.

The bottom line on that is, if this is a mortgage, this province can very easily afford the mortgage.

My colleague from Stormont–Dundas–South Glengarry mentioned the PC budget deficit in their last year—by the way, that was \$5.67 billion that they claimed wasn't there.

With regard to some of the comments of my colleague from Oshawa—good-quality jobs? Let's look at just one area in my home riding: Aerospace, a sector that scantily existed in northwest Mississauga, is now growing at 20% per year. I have one firm that came to the riding—just as the recession was getting going—with about 78 people and bought one location. They're now in four locations, and they are employing more than 800 people and growing at 20% per year. That's the kind of manufacturing that is coming back to Ontario—all good jobs, all full-time jobs, all high-paying jobs.

My colleague from Barrie mentioned some issues around developmental challenges. I want to mention Luso charities in Streetsville that serves adults and, of course, ErinoakKids, with three new state-of-the-art facilities in Mississauga.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Further debate?

Mr. Randy Pettapiece: I am pleased to rise to speak about the recent speech from the throne.

I certainly listened to the speech intently. It is a story that is, unfortunately, at odds with reality. Beneath the surface, I detected the strong and unmistakable whiff of desperation. My constituents are detecting it too. In my time this afternoon, I want to discuss a few of those reasons.

First, the government tries desperately to take credit for Ontario's economic growth. The speech went on about the recent growth rate, unemployment numbers and job creation, but their words were misleading, to say the least, because let me assure you that any positive trends we see in the economy today are in spite of, not because of, this government's disastrous policies.

I'm not alone in this assessment, Speaker. The Fraser Institute recently came out with an analysis titled *Debt and Decline—Ontario's Challenges in Three Snapshots*. Let me read a few quotes that might cause my colleagues on the other side to reconsider their optimism.

"Economic weakness has characterized Ontario's economy for much of the last decade, and the recent upturn in economic activity in 2017 should have helped Ontario climb out of its long string of operating deficits—nine since 2008-09." That's nine deficits since 2008, Speaker.

The report goes on: "Another large deficit will simply add to the chronic long-term economic and fiscal problems facing the province; problems which can be described simply as rising debt and economic decline."

Now, that's quite a contrast with the bubbly, optimistic language of the throne speech. Just going by the

throne speech, we could be forgiven for thinking that the Liberals had never promised to keep the budget balanced; that would be wrong, however.

There's a great line in the throne speech that says, "Our economy remains in transition." I would say this government appears to have transitioned away from this province to balance the books, to the tune of about \$8 billion, according to our finance minister.

Such a broken promise will have real and lasting consequences. As the Fraser Institute warns, "Ontario's debt will rise independently of any operating deficits given the planned increases in capital spending. Add to this mix the potential for a recession, uncertain export markets due to the NAFTA renegotiation, and the upward movement of interest rates, and you have a set of forces poised to harm the Ontarians across the province."

Another thing that struck me as odd about the throne speech was the timing. Normally, a government will prorogue Parliament to do a throne speech to set out new priorities for the upcoming session. The only problem is, there's not much of a session or of Parliament left to go; we're just over 10 weeks away from election day, in fact.

So why the disruption? Why the wasted time on a throne speech? I think we all know the answer, Speaker: It's an opportunity for the Liberals to brag about their supposed achievements and promise billions of dollars in new spending in a desperate bid to cling to power.

What was the throne speech, in fact? The throne speech was "nothing more than a Liberal campaign commercial." Don't take it from me, Speaker; these words came from one of our most experienced and fair-minded colleagues, the member for Wellington–Halton Hills. The member went on to say, "It's disgraceful that the Liberals have chosen to politicize the parliamentary tradition of the throne speech in this way." And I agree.

It's obvious the government is counting on people to have very short memories, but they don't forget. They know that a more accurate summary of this government's record would also include \$8 billion wasted on eHealth, \$1.1 billion spent on the gas plants scandal plus a criminal conviction of a former senior aide to the Premier, \$2 billion spent on smart meters, and a \$4.5-million salary for the CEO of Hydro One. Let's not forget the almost-\$54,000 spent on Canada Goose jackets.

That's their legacy: entitlements for their special friends and blatant disrespect for Ontario taxpayers.

And it gets worse, I'm sorry to say. Not only is this government desperately rushing billions in new spending out the door; their claim of a balanced budget also doesn't stand up to scrutiny. In order to achieve this phony balance, the Liberals have pulled every shady accounting trick in the book. The so-called fair hydro plan is a great example of their reckless approach, shifting billions upon billions of dollars in debt off the books for political purposes and burdening our kids and grandkids with this bill.

As the Auditor General wrote in her special report last October, "The government did not properly account for this debt impact from the electricity rate reduction in its

2017-18 budget and is not planning to account for it properly in its future consolidated financial statements. In essence, the government is making up its own accounting rules."

Just last week, the auditor appeared before the public accounts committee. She estimates that at the end of the year Ontario's deficit would be understated by more than \$1.3 billion, an amount that will continue growing.

She said, "We think this accounting is bogus." From such a well-qualified, non-partisan official, that's quite a devastating indictment. "We think this accounting is bogus," is what she said.

We also found out, according to a leaked Liberal cabinet document, that the government's plan isn't actually going to lower hydro rates in the long run. By their own projections, hydro rates are set to skyrocket in the years following the June election. So there we have it: a phony hydro plan used to justify a phony balanced budget. Only the Ontario Liberals could come up with such a shameless ploy.

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I would also like to discuss the cynical nature of this government's new spending promises. Speaker, the government has had 15 years to fix the pressing issues facing the people of Ontario: issues like unacceptably long wait times for basic medical procedures; the rise of so-called hallway medicine; ballooning wait-lists for long-term-care beds and the lack of a plan to meet future demand; the youth mental health crisis and the desperate need for investments in mental health services.

Families are being crushed under the weight of taxes and regulations, and small businesses are being forced to lay off workers and shutter their operations. The list goes on and on.

Fifteen years came and went, and they ignored these issues. Now, in the dwindling weeks before an election, the Liberals are cranking open the taps wider than ever before. The government is desperate to turn the page on their dismal record, but the people of Ontario won't forget what the Liberals have done to this province.

Let me share some real stories from constituents in Perth–Wellington who have suffered under this government's reckless and self-interested policies. Here is a message I received from Carol McKnight, whose grandson has been adversely impacted by the government's ill-conceived Bill 148:

"My grandson works in a grocery store in Guelph. He used to have three shifts of five hours each. They cut his hours to one shift, four hours!

"Perhaps you could bring it up in the Legislature and ask her"—meaning the Premier—"if she has done one of her many studies to see if people are making more or losing hours of work. My grandson certainly is!"

Maybe that's what the Premier calls fairness.

Here's a message from another constituent, Robert Hutson, about the government's so-called fair hydro plan:

"We all know that the reduction of our hydro rates by our Ontario government is nothing more than delaying

the huge pain we eventually will receive in a decade. This is our Premier's irresponsibility coming through again.

"This strategy is unbelievable and would not be acceptable in a responsibly managed private sector business."

On the issue of long-term-care beds in our community, I received this message from Brian and Sharyl Coe of Stratford:

"My wife and I are getting to the age that we will need a long-term-care bed in the near future."

He goes on: "Should we settle for overcrowding and poor care because of overworked staff?"

That's a good question, Speaker. Too bad the Liberals didn't seem interested in addressing it until now.

Those are just a few examples of people struggling under this government's terrible mismanagement. There are literally thousands of families who, each day, have to choose between heating their homes or eating a meal. Where is the relief for these families? When is help going to arrive for them?

Meanwhile, the Liberals and their insider friends are cashing in at taxpayers' expense. It's good timing—bad timing for the government, I guess—that we saw the release of the 2017 sunshine list last week. In there, we find that the CEO of Ontario Power Generation enjoyed a \$400,000 raise this year. That brings his salary to \$1.5 million a year.

Then we have the secret members of the Hydro One millionaires' club—whose salaries have conveniently been yanked from the list—stuffing their pockets with taxpayers' dollars while real families struggle to pay their bills. It's shameful.

I also want to mention the countless hours of debate and behind-the-scenes work that this government's prorogation and the throne speech negated. People watching at home may not be aware that when the government prorogues Parliament, all private members' business is wiped off the agenda. That includes order paper questions, motions and other important items to hold the government accountable.

More importantly, the government effectively killed all private members' bills that were introduced in the last session. In my case, that meant the demise of my firefighter safety bill, the Rea and Walter Act. That bill was named in honour of two North Perth fire service members, Ken Rea and Ray Walter, who died battling a fire in March 2011. That tragedy happened when the roof of the Listowel dollar store collapsed. The legislation would require that buildings with truss and lightweight construction display a decal that alerts firefighters ahead of time. It's a simple idea that could save lives.

Last spring, my bill was supported unanimously at second reading. That day, the galleries above you were filled with the Rea and Walter families, along with dozens of firefighters from Perth-Wellington.

Unfortunately, the Liberals let the bill languish in committee for months, and then with prorogation they killed it entirely. That's disappointing, Speaker. It's yet

more evidence that the Liberals' decision to prorogue wasn't about the public interest; it was about their own political self-interest. I will be reintroducing the Rea and Walter Act later this week. I urge the government to fast-track it through the committee and to a final vote in this place.

To conclude, Speaker, the people of this province deserve far better than the misleading campaign commercial that was the throne speech. They deserve an honest government that respects the taxpayer—

Mr. John Fraser: Speaker, a point of order.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Point of order, the member for Ottawa Centre.

Mr. John Fraser: I think the term that the member used was not appropriate.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): I'm going to ask the member to withdraw the unparliamentary remark.

Mr. Randy Pettapiece: I withdraw.

For far too long, the taxpayers have not been respected. Over the years, taxpayers have forked over billions more than necessary. For too long, taxpayers have paid billions for waste, mismanagement and politically motivated hydro policy.

But there is good news, Speaker: Taxpayers will have the final say on June 7. The people—not the powerful—will soon have the chance to take back their government. We will look forward to that.

There are issues in my riding concerning hospital beds and hospital shortages. They pertain to a lack of long-term-care beds in my riding. We now have people who should be in long-term care taking up hospital beds. That just amplifies the problem that we have at our hospitals. These people are staying in costly hospital rooms that should be devoted to people who actually need them, or want them, instead of long-term care.

You might remember, Speaker, that we had an issue in the riding concerning long-term care where a company decided that they wanted to move a number of beds to another development they had going in London. That was going to close down a long-term-care facility that had over 90 beds and that has been in our community for quite a long time. Besides getting rid of the beds, it would have hurt the people working there, where we would have people not being able to find the jobs that they love. Many of the staff that worked at Hillside nursing home had been there for years. They loved the jobs they had, and they faced a real problem, a real situation where they might lose their work plus losing the long-term-care beds in this facility.

Well, the people spoke out, Mr. Speaker. They spoke up. I brought in petitions with over 3,000 signatures on them. We had two public meetings which were jam-packed. In fact, the last public meeting that we had there, there wasn't enough room to get everybody into the facility to speak to officials from the long-term care. They spoke up. Their voices were heard and, fortunately, the then-minister made the decision that those long-term-care beds would stay in Perth county.

That's what we asked for. We had members of all of the councils there. They had one goal that they were

after, and that's that the beds would stay in Perth county. We certainly were grateful that the minister made that decision, but it took a lot of effort, and I was so thankful I had the support of the whole community in Perth county: all the councils, all the council members, the mayors— whoever got behind me and helped me out with helping to influence the minister's decision at that time.

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One of the other issues is that we have a number of long-term-care facilities that are smaller in nature, and they are going to have to fix up these places and modernize them. Well, it's going to be too expensive to do with some of the smaller places, and we may face the real problem that these are going to close because of the expense involved. That's something we're facing in the future, and by the year 2025, this work all has to be done.

Yet there are developers in the area who want to build, but because of red tape and other issues with this government—the time it takes to get approvals to do anything is just incredible—these projects are sitting there and not being done. We have the interest to work in the long-term-care business in the riding, and yet they face more paperwork than what they need to get it done. They have the land, everything is ready to go, and yet they run into roadblocks when they try to get the project by the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care.

I would ask the government to really take a look at what was in this throne speech and call it for what it is. It was just a document, because there is an election that's coming up in June. We know that they are having serious issues with that election and they are running scared, because I think the people in Ontario have had enough with 15 years of Liberal rule and are looking for a real change. Hopefully that will come on June 7.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Ms. Jennifer K. French: I'm glad to add a few remarks to follow those from the member from Perth–Wellington.

We're hearing a lot of the same response and reaction to this government's throne speech, which is that, as he put it, there's a whiff of desperation. It's sort of this last-ditch attempt, 72 days out from an election. This government is pulling out all the stops. We're proroguing the Legislature and having a throne speech to try to, as I believe he put it, cling to power. I thought it was interesting. I do believe this government is hoping, fingers crossed, that the folks in Ontario will have short memories, as he put it, and not remember much of the nonsense, shenanigans, mistakes and mismanagement.

But I would like to comment on some of the specifics, like about the prorogation and the aftermath of that. We've certainly heard, as the member had said, about members of this Legislature who lost their private member's bill that had passed. It just fell off the docket; it's just gone.

But I was actually almost next in line to be able to debate my upcoming private member's bill. I was on the list, and I had been patiently waiting my turn, as we do,

and then they decided to prorogue, so I actually don't get a chance, because it has all been redistributed. My bill didn't fall off; I fell off. I got shoved off, and it all gets to be redrawn, so I don't actually get a private member's bill before the next election. They're happy, because it was going to be a doozy. I'll still table it, but we just won't have a chance to beat them with it in debate, so I'm a little disappointed about that.

However, we're still going to make the magic happen when we form government, Speaker—something to look forward to.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Hon. Bill Mauro: I want to thank the member from Perth–Wellington for his comments. As is the tradition with a throne speech, he can cast about and reference and speak to a number of different issues. That is the tradition of this place, and that's fine.

He talked about long-term care a bit, and I thought I would mention a little bit about long-term care in my riding of Thunder Bay–Atikokan, because I can tell the member—I'm sure others in the Legislature have stories in their own ridings, too—of the really quite considerable investments that we have made in the ridings of Thunder Bay–Atikokan and Thunder Bay–Superior North when it comes to the provision of long-term care.

I would reference at least a couple of projects for the people in my riding that they may not be aware of, but that I would hope by now most of them are aware about, one being Sister Leila Greco. In Thunder Bay, we did not historically have very much, if any, of what you could refer to as “supportive housing.” We created, as part of a \$100-million long-term-care investment in the city of Thunder Bay, in my riding of Thunder Bay–Atikokan, a project called the CEISS project, the Centre of Excellence for Integrated Seniors' Services, a \$100-million investment. It's been up and running now, I would guess, for about five or six years.

Part of that is the Sister Leila Greco Centre. It has 132 supportive housing units in it. Before that investment, that level of supportive housing, if any, did not exist in the city of Thunder Bay. The 132 units—I think most of them are two-bedroom—accommodate probably 170 to 180 people. Many, if not all of those people, would be ALC and might have found their way into the hospital.

We've increased capacity in long-term care, as well, through our partnership with St. Joseph's Care Group. Probably another 50 to 100 to 150 beds are now in the community, on top of the Leila Greco project, that weren't there before.

There are still challenges in long-term care. All communities are experiencing it, not only in Ontario, but right across the country—right across the continent, I would say. There's more work to be done, but in our riding of Thunder Bay–Atikokan, when it comes to long-term care, we've moved the yardstick forward significantly.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Mr. Toby Barrett: The member for Perth–Wellington commented on the odd timing of this very recent pro rogation and the speech from the throne just last week, and indicated that, in that case, the latter appeared to be nothing more than a pre-election commercial—and a relatively lacklustre commercial for that matter.

In contrast—Speaker, you may recall—I certainly recall my first throne speech in this chamber. In keeping with protocol, and protocol was mentioned, the speech from the throne occurred several months after my first election, the 1995 election. We presented the speech from the throne. We laid out our plans. People in Ontario had probably eight or nine months to kick around the ideas in that speech from the throne.

Much of what was laid out in that speech from the throne culminated in the budget in the spring of 1996. That was a budget that people in Ontario hadn't seen for perhaps 10 years of significant tax increases from both parties—

Mr. Gilles Bisson: We never raised taxes once in government.

Mr. Toby Barrett: I have never voted for a tax increase in 22 years. I think the NDP raised taxes—I'm not sure—perhaps a dozen times. The Liberal government raised taxes perhaps a dozen times.

We came to realize, and people had eight or nine months to discuss, the impact of these high taxes. It was killing jobs. It was suffocating the economy and pretty well sucking money out of any other valuable expenditure on health or education.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Mr. Gilles Bisson: I want to talk about my two favourite things that were on the day of the throne speech. I think there were two things that were really good. The first one: I thought the trumpeters—

Mr. John Vanthof: That was my line.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: I know, but I mentioned it to you. I'm using it before you do.

I thought the trumpeters were amazing. I thought they played stellar, stellar music. I was very moved by it. I have to say, it was probably the highlight for me when it came to the throne speech.

Before I get plagiarized by someone else, I decided I was going to use—

Mr. John Vanthof: Don't tell this guy anything, Speaker. Don't tell this guy anything.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: I was using that the day of the throne speech.

The second highlight, I must say, was our Lieutenant Governor. I thought she did a very good job reading that throne speech. She has decorum. She read it very well. I thought that was just another stellar performance.

Those were my two highlights during the throne speech. I thought it was a bizarre one. I was sitting here, next to our leader, and actually I was talking to her about the trumpets the day of, and that's why I used that line.

1500

The other part that really surprised me was that the government went on for 25 minutes in the throne speech,

for 20 minutes of which they talked about the past. I thought that was a little bit strange. I understand that a government, being in power for a number of years, has to talk about their legacy and what they've done and why the last 15 years, in their view, are good things. But, really, it was a resuscitation of everything that we feared and don't like from this government over the last 15 years.

They talked about hydro. My God, what a record they have. They talked about a whole bunch of things that, quite frankly, have been a negative and a noose and a weight around the neck of the Premier.

Then there was a scant five minutes to talk about some pretty vague things that they may want to do, leading up to the election.

But I think, as was said by most of my colleagues, the government is trying to buy its way to the next election. I'm not convinced that that's going to work, and it will be quite interesting to see how the people, in June, respond to that.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): That concludes our questions and comments. We return to the member for Perth–Wellington for his reply.

Mr. Randy Pettapiece: To the member from Oshawa, the Minister of Municipal Affairs, the member from Haldimand–Norfolk and the member from Timmins–James Bay: I certainly do appreciate your comments on my speech concerning the throne speech.

I must say to the member from Timmins–James Bay that I also like music. Certainly, when you see them up there doing what they do, it's quite—I'm going to use the word “neat,” because I think it was.

I think we're looking at a matter of trust here, Speaker. Whenever you change the rules in the middle of something, it arouses suspicion with most people. We can see that when the accounting system was changed in order to fit in with their hydro business and what they were doing in order to shift dollars down the road—which, like I said, my children and grandchildren are going to be responsible for—it arouses suspicion. They think something is not quite right.

I think we've seen, from the Auditor General in some of her comments, that the accounting system is not used, as I understand it, across Canada—at least, the one they decided to use. It just puts these dollars off into the future. Yet the money that they were supposed to have used from the sale of Hydro One was supposed to come back and help with other projects, which we understand it hasn't done.

One thing in the throne speech that we must consider is that it should build up trust in a government. It should point down the road to where we're going. It did nothing; it did none of that. I think that's something that the people of Ontario are going to be quite cynical about as we go forward, and leading up to the next election.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Further debate?

Mr. John Vanthof: It is always an honour to stand in this House and represent the people of Timiskaming—

Cochrane and my caucus members, today discussing the throne speech.

You really realize how big an honour it is when you're sitting here and you hear trumpets. You know that it's not every day that a farm boy from Timiskaming is anywhere where the day starts with trumpets. They sounded good; they looked good. I believe the more formal it is—people talk about pomp and circumstance. When the event starts with trumpets, you just know it's going to be something good.

But trumpets aren't supposed to be the high point of the day; they really aren't. The trumpets are supposed to set us off on a roll. But sadly, Speaker, I've got to say that the trumpets were probably the high point of the throne speech, of the afternoon. The people lined up in the front were nice. The chairs were nice.

We've had a few throne speeches since I was elected in 2011. Actually, the public galleries were kind of empty. I can remember throne speeches, even in my short time here, where people actually came, because in the throne speeches of the past—although they were from this government, and we are opposed to most things that this government does—the place was full, because a throne speech was held at the start of a session and people were actually looking forward to what the government was going to do. There was the open-and-transparent throne speech, if you remember that one. That didn't work out that well—

Mr. Gilles Bisson: But the trumpets were nice.

Mr. John Vanthof: I believe that one was classical music. I don't know if there were trumpets that time.

People wanted to see what the government was going to propose because the government would have long enough to lay out what their agenda was and act on their agenda. In this case, regardless of our differing opinions, that's questionable, because this throne speech wasn't really to lay out the upcoming agenda; it was to lay out the government's upcoming election platform. Those are two totally different things. They really are.

This throne speech, in our opinion, was basically to change the channel. It wasn't even a big thing; it was to change the channel for weekly media.

Interjection.

Mr. John Vanthof: Yes, it was just to change the channel to change the media. It's very cynical in that way, because, actually, even this debate—we have to spend time debating this, but there's not going to come a recognizable change because of this debate. We're debating a throne speech at the end of a government's agenda, at the end of 15 years, when I think most Ontarians would agree that this government has run its course.

The only good ideas this government has are the ones that we put forward and they try to implement halfway, at this point. A good example of that: We proposed pharmacare for all and they came up with OHIP+, which in itself is not a bad thing, but it is not pharmacare for all. Under the government's current program, and now what they've announced for seniors—again, in itself not a

horrible program—but in that space, between 25 and 65, if you don't have a benefit plan through your work or you're self-employed or, as many of the people in my riding do, you have three part-time, precarious jobs, between 25 and 65 you're not covered at all. That isn't actually what we proposed.

They try to get the maximum mileage with the minimum investment. That is a choice. When the government on the opposing side—they are going to say, "Oh, yes, but there's much more to do." They have made choices over the last 15 years. Some of those choices are very bad choices.

I don't know if people have noticed, but I like to actually listen to the debate and comment on what other people talk about. One of the people speaking today was the member from Mississauga–Streetsville, a very learned member. He does his research, and I appreciate his opinion. He said that one of the things that the government has done was that they rebuilt the hydro system because it had fallen apart with the Tories, and the government had chosen to spend \$15 billion on the transmission system across Ontario. I'm not going to dispute that. Where they made a big mistake is that they decided to sell it for way less than what they invested in it.

I can tell you, Speaker—I don't know if you have a lot of time to watch TV. I don't, but my family sometimes does. My wife really likes home renovation shows where you buy a house and you invest \$50,000 or \$80,000 or \$100,000 in the house and then you sell the house for—

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Flip it.

Mr. John Vanthof: Yes, flip it for \$100,000 more than you actually bought it for. Do you know what? There is not going to be a Liberal Hydro One flip, because not only have they lost control of our hydro system—which is, in the long term, going to produce very bad outcomes for this province—they've also lost a whole whack of money doing it. They invested \$15 billion, and they sold it for—correct me if I'm wrong—under \$10 billion. So they have lost a third of their investment.

1510

They must know that when you privatize a transmission system like Hydro One, despite the rules and regulations of the Ontario Energy Board, in the long term it's the role of the private sector to make profit for their investors. We're not opposed to that. There's a big role for that in the province. But when it comes to essential services, and specifically—I'm from rural Ontario—specifically for essential services in rural Ontario, the private sector is not very good at providing them because, by themselves, they don't make money. The productivity of rural Ontario makes money for the province and drives the Ontario economy, but individually, they don't make money.

Running and maintaining hydro lines along the back roads of rural Ontario to the farms and to whatever businesses—whatever is out in rural Ontario—is not going to be a profit centre for Hydro One. As a result, the privatized Hydro One is not going to focus on the back

roads of rural Ontario and the hydro system in rural Ontario is going to deteriorate. There's going to be more blackouts; there's going to be more broken poles; it's going to take longer to fix that system. And do you know why? Because that's what a private company should be doing—they should be focusing on their profit centres.

That is why Hydro One should not be a private company. It should work for the public good. Where we totally differ with both these parties is that we believe—we've put forward a plan to regain the control of the transmission system in our province, and one of the big reasons is to make sure that people throughout the province actually have dependable service.

When people say, "Oh, no, no. That will never happen"—oh, yeah? I challenge anyone to go out to rural Ontario, try out the broadband and compare it to what it is downtown. It's provided privately. Just try it out.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Or natural gas.

Mr. John Vanthof: Yes. Well, natural gas is my next subject.

Some of my kids live in the city of Toronto, and they come home and I have pretty expensive high-speed Internet at home in northern Ontario. My kids call it "country high-speed," and they laugh and find something that's faster. You can't run a business on country high-speed. Even farms—people think, "Farmers, they just have pitchforks and old red tractors." Farmers need broadband high-speed as much as any other business. Now, with robotic milking—the member across was talking about a robotic milking farm. There are places in Ontario, because we don't have broadband, where farmers who are wanting to go robotic can't do it. Why? Because broadband in this province isn't an essential service. It's provided by the private sector. It doesn't make sense. I don't blame the private sector. It doesn't make money for them to provide it in certain parts of the province. That's why we fight so hard to make sure essential services are provided through the public sector so all Ontarians actually have equal opportunity.

You remember, Speaker—I think we're about the same age; perhaps you're a few years younger. Do you remember when the Internet first came out? I feel like a dinosaur now. One of the issues about the Internet is that it was going to be the great equalizer. Because of the Internet, we weren't going to have to live in the cities anymore. We could move out to the country and run our offices from the country, where houses were cheaper, where the air was cleaner. You know what, Speaker? That never happened, because we never actually got the same service.

Again—and I'm going to go back to hydro—another good example is natural gas. It doesn't make sense in some parts of the province to provide natural gas. It doesn't make sense for the company. It makes sense for the overall economy, and that's where the province needs to step in.

I've got a couple of minutes left. I'm going to talk about something that the Auditor General is bringing up and something going back to hydro: the fair hydro plan,

according to the Auditor General—and who am I to criticize the Auditor General—one of the worst government programs that's ever been put in. To make this program look better and make sure that the government didn't look like it was going into the red big time, the accounting practices used at IESO were changed specifically for this program.

I'm certainly not an accountant, so I'm going to try to explain it in farm-based language. The new accounting practices treat the debt incurred by the fair hydro plan as an asset, because the IESO will have the ability to collect from their customers that money to repay that debt. Under that thought process, the government doesn't have a debt or a deficit, because they can always increase taxes enough to wipe it out. But that doesn't actually portray what the books of the province are saying.

That's the fight that the Auditor General, in my opinion, is having with the government. The Auditor General just wants the books to be portrayed accurately so everyone can understand them. There is a difference between a clean set of books and a set of books that everyone can understand. They are using two sets of accounting. They are using two sets of accounting, and that is very confusing.

Also, for as long as IESO has been here and the province has been here, they have used public accounting standards. Lo and behold, now IESO decides to change the way they present the books—now.

In public accounts, I demanded of the chair of IESO if they could present the books the old way. The member from Lanark-Frontenac-Lennox and Addington was there. You've got to shorten that name down; I always forget it. We were both there, and repeatedly we asked, and finally they said, "Yes, we can present the books the way the Auditor General is asking," but they don't want to, because they're doing it the way KPMG said they should be. You know what? KPMG isn't the auditor of the province. I'm not sure that everybody feels so much more confident now that the big four auditing firms are in favour. Haven't we had other big problems in the province? Ornge Air: I'm sure those people were audited before it all went sideways. Weren't they audited, probably by one of the Big Four?

Mr. Randy Hillier: I think it was KPMG.

Mr. John Vanthof: Well, I'm not sure who it was, but I'm sure it was one of the Big Four.

I'm sure a lot of us don't feel all warm and fuzzy when the President of the Treasury Board says, "Oh, no, no, we're happy because all of the Big Four think this is a clean set of books." This is a travesty, and—

Mr. Randy Hillier: They didn't even do bank reconciliations.

Mr. John Vanthof: Oh, I forgot about that. My 80-cow dairy farm: At least I did bank reconciliations. IESO can't even seem to do that. So there are huge problems.

I'm going to switch gears a little bit because there are other problems that impact people in my riding. One of them—and I think it impacts people across the province; I know it does—is access to mental health services.

I've listened intently each time mental health services come up. It has almost become mental health services poker. The Conservatives promise this much; the government, after 15 years, promises this much—

Mr. Randy Hillier: Don't go off the rails, John.
1520

Mr. John Vanthof: No—and the fact is that, in places across the province, it's not how much; it's how it is done. It's not universally done across the province, and, as a result, there are parts of the province where there's not—and one of those parts is mine. In other parts, I've heard today, there is a new program. It's an open door. You walk through one door and you get directed where you should go. That's great. That certainly doesn't happen in my part of the world.

I have said this before and I'm going to say it again: Over the last couple of years, I have walked through four open doors, and they were the open doors of funeral homes, for funerals of children who could not get access to any kind of mental health services. That is in our province, in my riding, in 2017. That shouldn't be. That should never be. But the fact is that it's happening.

Arguing about who is going to spend the most money—we have put forward a bit of a different approach. We put forward that there should be a separate ministry responsible for mental health and addictions, a separate minister responsible for mental health and addictions, so that it doesn't get lost in the poker game, in the shuffle, because these people sometimes aren't able to speak for themselves, and their families try and sometimes can't make their voices heard. We all know the issues, but once the issue is an obituary in the newspaper, it's too late. That's one of the things that we have to fix.

After 15 years, when the Premier of the province says we have to rebuild the mental health system—well, we needed to step in before rebuilding was necessary. This government has been in power for 15 years. They can make all the promises they want for the next four. But if they take responsibility for some of the good things they have done, they should also take responsibility for the decisions they have made that have actually hurt Ontarians.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Mr. John Fraser: It's a pleasure to respond to the member from Timiskaming–Cochrane. I'm not going to say anything about trumpets, other than that I think they just signify the Lieutenant Governor being here, and I think it's tradition and respect. So I'm not sure that it's directed necessarily at the throne speech itself, but at the presence of the crown in the chamber. But I'm glad that my colleagues liked the trumpets. Maybe we can bring them in here on Monday mornings—maybe be serenaded by someone other than ourselves.

The member from Timiskaming–Cochrane talks about mental health. That's something that is important in all of our communities. I know that it's something I have worked on for a long time inside my community, around

suicide prevention. I do know that there is a project called the ECHO project that provides psychiatric support especially to remote and rural physicians, general practitioners who have a situation where they go, "How do I help this child? How do I help this young person?"

I know that typically, in government, the opposition's job is to tell us how badly we're doing, and that's good; that's fine. I think if you look at the last 15 years, if you look at things that changed people's lives—you look at a mental health investment of \$10.9 billion over the last 10 years; you look at the one we did last week—those are the things that we need to do. We need to make investments. Take a look at eliminating coal. Take a look at measuring wait times. Take a look at full-day learning. Take a look at investing in hospitals—a crane at every hospital in our city.

So there are lots of great things that have happened that have improved people's lives. I'm very proud of that record. I will, any day, debate it with my colleagues on the other side.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Mrs. Julia Munro: I'm pleased to be able take a couple of moments here to look at excerpts from the throne speech. There has been some comment about the musical accompaniment, and I just would want to add my voice to how it gave a really classy air to have the musicians here to get us started on that day.

I also want to talk about the manner in which a prorogation is the way in which the government can kick-start with the throne speech. The way to be able to go from the everyday debate that goes on with the bills that are before us—that comes to an end with the prorogation. The throne speech, then, is like a fresh piece of paper on which the government may put its designs.

Well, I appreciate the theory of all of that, but I was also interested in what we are talking about. What are the things that are in that throne speech and in other documents accompanying it that would give us insight? So I looked at some of the issues around the way in which the Liberals have spent their money at different times in the last year or so and found a number of things, thanks to the Auditor General.

Going back into our past on things like eHealth—do you recall eHealth? Remember that, and the way it dragged on for years? The closest I have to a number is that it cost us \$8 billion all by itself.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Ms. Jennifer K. French: I'm glad to weigh in on the remarks from my colleague from Timiskaming–Cochrane. This is my first term here at this Legislature, and I appreciate the traditions. I appreciate the ceremony. I appreciated the trumpets—we've all had a chance to talk about that.

It was interesting; I was struck by the fact that the member pointed out that the galleries were pretty empty that day. Comparing that to the first throne speech I witnessed, it was a full House, because it was an optimis-

tic time. It was a fresh start. That was clearly not what we saw. I think what we saw was that the empty galleries reflected the empty promises, and I think that's a fair assessment.

I also want to say when it comes to OHIP+—or “OHIP plus or minus,” as I'm going to rename it, or “OHIP more or less”; I don't know in what cutesy way I can word it—that it's only for the young or only for our seniors, and everybody in the middle is left out. I think that that speaks, really, to how this government operates: a little bit of this, a little bit of that. They promise everyone a little tiny bit but don't do anything the right way, don't do anything properly. To leave out the whole middle is a missed opportunity, and that's what I see when I sit across from this government: missed opportunity after missed opportunity. It's like their MO—oh, “missed opportunity.”

Laughter.

Ms. Jennifer K. French: But it's true. It's like, “Okay, how can we do a little bit of stuff without really committing to make the kind of change that's needed and that we've been hearing is asked for?”

I want to take the last couple of seconds here to speak about the northern and rural pieces. I can't claim to be from northern Ontario or rural Ontario; I live in Oshawa. But in the last four years, hearing from stakeholders and hearing from our members who do represent those communities—they are fighting for things like trains, roads, basic fundamental safety and Internet. It's like a divide, and north of that divide just doesn't exist. This government, again, missed an opportunity when it comes to Ontarians.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): We have time for one last question or comment.

Mrs. Liz Sandals: I do want to comment on the remarks by the member for Timiskaming–Cochrane. I agree the trumpets were wonderful, a truly awesome military fanfare. But I do want to talk about some of the places where, although the NDP and the Liberals have maybe similar concerns, we've taken rather different approaches to actually implementing things. For example, the NDP is a proponent of pharmacare for all. What they don't mention is that all people in their program would have access to 125 drugs. Speaker, there are 4,400 drugs on the provincial formulary.

1530

We have taken a different approach. We're going to do it properly, completely, for one segment of the population, which is people under 24, because those are the people in the province who are least able to pay for their own drugs. Three- or four-year-olds can't pay, themselves. We're going to make sure all 4,400 drugs are available to those kids and young people.

With seniors who are on fixed pensions, we're going to make sure that they have access to the 4,400 drugs, totally free.

We are working with those who can least afford the drugs for themselves, and it's all the drugs.

I mention another area where we've got a bit of a different approach from the NDP, which is on mental

health. We think it's important to get mental health workers where the people who need them are. That's why part of the budget is for 400 new mental health workers in schools across Ontario, so that there will be mental-health-worker access for every student in every high school in Ontario.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): We now return to the member for Timiskaming–Cochrane for his response.

Mr. John Vanthof: I'd like to thank the members who responded, and for actually listening to my speech and responding to it.

Specifically to the member from Ottawa South, I would be interested to see what the wait times are for psychiatrists, for someone with mental health challenges in different parts of the province. In some places it's a year, and if you have mental health issues, a year is often too late.

I'd like to commend the member from York–Simcoe for bringing up that a throne speech should be like a fresh piece of paper to put a design on. Then she finished with eHealth, and that's also one of the things that this government is responsible for.

The member from Oshawa: We find that she comes up with a lot of really good lines. Hers was that the empty galleries perhaps reflected the empty promises of this throne speech. I think that is very accurate. People weren't that excited about this throne speech, quite frankly, because they saw it for what it is: It's the government finance kickoff of the Liberal election campaign. That's what that throne speech is.

The member from Guelph: We have a totally different perspective for pharmacare, because we do believe that all Ontarians should have access to the most important prescription drugs and that no Ontarians should be forced to cut their pills in half because they can't afford drugs prescribed by their doctors.

Many Ontarians between 25 and 65 can't pay for those prescriptions, and we believe they should all be covered for the prescription drugs that could save their lives.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Further debate?

Mr. Lou Rinaldi: Speaker, I would let you know that I'll be sharing my time with the member from Eglinton–Lawrence and the member from Beaches–East York.

I, too, want to add a few minutes to this debate, because I think it's really, really important.

It seems, from the opposition side, that they'd rather talk, as you heard from a number of members, about trumpets, Speaker. Kudos to them, but that's what they wanted to talk about, not the things that the throne speech highlighted. I'll talk about that.

Then, I believe, one member talked about tradition, Speaker. I remember—I wasn't here; I was in the municipal sector—when the budget—where was it? Not here. So you want to talk about tradition? I believe it was held at a manufacturing plant north of Toronto somewhere—

Mr. Bob Delaney: Mississauga.

Mr. Lou Rinaldi: —or Mississauga. Thank you.

So we talk about tradition. Well, tradition is the fact that we laid out a plan; we delivered.

I'm a little bit all over the place here, Speaker, so bear with me.

I heard a little bit about access to Internet in rural Ontario. This government is the first government that invested any money to have some real Internet high speed—yes, we're not there; Ontario is a big province, Speaker. But I can tell you that this was the government that, together with the federal government of the day—the Conservative government of the day, I must say—contributed some \$110 million to the Eastern Ontario Wardens' Caucus when they formed EORN. Although it may not be the same as I would get in downtown Toronto, they are still there. Then there was an investment made in western Ontario. It's not complete, but we started from somewhere.

I just want to take a few minutes. It's almost a tradition that the opposition will stand up in this place and read letters that they get from their constituents. But I'm sure they only talk about the negative letters. I'm sure they don't talk about the positive stuff.

Mr. Randy Hillier: We never get them. I've never gotten a positive letter yet. Not one.

Mr. Lou Rinaldi: Pay attention.

About a week ago, Speaker, I opened my email account. I think it was two weeks ago today. These are not excerpts from the letter. I'll read it as it was sent to me:

"Dear Lou,

"I usually never write to local politicians, not because I don't care about politics, but because I am fortunate to live in a small community where, as a constituent, I have easy access to my MPP, mayor etc. So if I have a concern or comment it can be easily heard.

"However, a recent situation involving my extended family compelled me to write to you and praise some changes by our government that have helped their everyday lives.

"My daughter"—

Mr. Gilles Bisson: "Our government." Was that a political staffer?

Mr. Lou Rinaldi: Obviously, they don't like to hear positive things, Speaker. That's pretty obvious.

The woman goes on:

"My daughter and her common-law husband have been going through some 'rough times.' He has been laid off for many months, not able to find suitable employment to support his family, getting discouraged, having to live on social assistance, losing their housing situation. They have a three-year-old daughter full-time, and an eight-year-old daughter who lives with them part-time.

"My daughter's husband has finally found a full-time job, but they are still the 'working poor' as he is earning about \$20 an hour and has no benefits plan. My daughter works a couple of little jobs such as housecleaning for a relative and cat-sitting for a friend etc. Her schedule is complicated, as she has to look after their three-year-old and accommodate the schedule of her older daughter's

visits, which includes transporting her to and from school in another town and back to the other parent. So, limiting when it comes to a conventional job." So she's very limited. "Also, finding reasonable rental accommodation at a price they can afford has been very challenging, but at last they have done so, with the start-up costs coming from myself and my husband. I am giving this information as a background to relate to the following.

"Prescription medications—the three-year-old recently became very ill and my daughter took her to the emergency department at the hospital only to find out that she had contracted pneumonia. Very scary situation. The hospital was great, nurses, doctor et al. She was prescribed three different medications and thankfully all were covered due to recent legislation. My daughter did not have the added stress of trying to pay out of pocket for her daughter's medicine, which would have meant no money for groceries that week.

"Minimum wage increase—my daughter is not quite ready to seek a 'regular' job, but once her three-year-old starts school she knows that she will earn a minimum wage that is more in line with the actual cost of living and be able to help lift the family a little further up out of poverty.

"Those two sweeping legislations have filtered down to help this one family living in poverty by lifting barriers....

"Thank you.

"I am not sure what our province or riding will look like after June 7, but I want you to know that the work you and the Liberal Party have been doing is making a difference.

"Sincerely," from Cobourg.

Speaker, I just want to end with that it's these kinds of things that make me do—

Interjection.

1540

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): I'm going to ask the member for Timmins–James Bay to please refrain from heckling.

I apologize to the member for Northumberland–Quinte West.

Mr. Lou Rinaldi: Thank you, Speaker. I'm just going to repeat my last phrase, because, obviously, they're not interested in good news.

All I'm saying is, this is the kind of thing that makes me want to do what I do every day. It recharges me every day to come to this place and advocate for the people not only in Northumberland–Quinte West, Speaker, but indeed all of the province, especially the people in need.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): The member for Eglinton–Lawrence.

Mr. Mike Colle: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's good to see you in the chair again.

First of all, I want to welcome a couple of guests here from California. They're here from a cutting-edge battery storage company, Stem, in California. They're investing here in Ontario—they are, I think, with the Ontario teachers' pension fund—and they're also going to be creating jobs here in Ontario.

Sometimes we hear a lot of negative things about our relationships with the United States. But as you know, as Canadians of all parties, we really appreciate having good American neighbours, because whether it be in the high-tech field, in mining or lumber, or whatever it is, we need to work together with our American friends.

We appreciate your interest in Ontario.

I just want to follow up on my friend from Quinte West. As you know, he represents an incredible, beautiful tourist area and working area of Ontario.

Interjection: A great racetrack.

Mr. Mike Colle: Yes. If you want to see the school bus race every year, you know where to go. Go to Brighton, and you can see this incredible thing that brings in people from all over North America. Forget the Indy 500; you've got the Rinaldi 200 there in Quinte every year.

If this is not in your riding, it's very close: I think that in Cobourg, we're going to see the largest marijuana plant in North America, at the old Kraft—

Mr. Lou Rinaldi: Cobourg is in my riding.

Mr. Mike Colle: It's a very vibrant part of the province.

Whether it's rural Ontario, small-town Ontario, or whether it's the area I represent right in the middle of Toronto, we have many incredible, talented Ontarians. We have so many people who are giving back, either as workers, entrepreneurs or people who are into innovation. We are so fortunate that we have attracted so many of these people to come, live and work in Ontario. They will be there in Cobourg or wonderful Port Hope, which has one of the most beautiful main streets in Ontario. Year after year it gets recognized.

Mr. Lou Rinaldi: They just got an award today.

Mr. Mike Colle: They got another award today—Port Hope. In fact, there are a lot of Torontonians who have retired in Port Hope.

Mr. Lou Rinaldi: And Cobourg.

Mr. Mike Colle: And Cobourg too. In fact, Mr. Goldsmith, the architect, who lived in Toronto, is now in Port Hope.

I'm just trying to make the connection between those parts of Ontario and urban Ontario that I represent, and there are a lot of commonalities.

One of the basic commonalities is that in the province of Ontario, we believe in hard work, we believe in helping others, and we believe in investing in our public institutions and organizations, whether it be our schools—there was somebody here from Loyalist College, another example. I was talking to the people from Loyalist College and I was saying that one of the things we sometimes don't appreciate is that every time we have a college or university in our community, it is an economic stimulator for that community. You're investing in jobs. You're investing in entrepreneurship, because a lot of those students who come out of our colleges and universities go on and create incredible, cutting-edge, innovative jobs.

Therefore, it is an important thing that's in the throne speech about investing in these public institutions, that it doesn't happen automatically, but it is a methodical part of what we have been trying to do as a government: invest in our hospitals, invest in our colleges and invest in our communities big and small. As you know, there will never be quite enough to satisfy everyone, but as I tell people, "Just remember that we may not be perfect in Canada and Ontario, but we still have one of the best, safest and most productive places in the world to live and work in."

I know it's the job of the opposition to give their side of the story, but it's our job also, as members of the government, to try to remind people that, fortunately, we have some of the best hospitals in North America. Just down the street here, I've worked with Mount Sinai and with SickKids. I've just been doing some work with Sunnybrook hospital, where you have some of the best doctors and scientists in the world, who are doing cutting-edge interventions into health care. That is second to none.

Sometimes people will do the one-offs and say, "Well, I went to a hospital and I had to sit in emerg," which can happen. On the other hand, meanwhile, Sunnybrook, which a lot of the people in my riding use as their local hospital, receives high-risk trauma patients from all over Ontario. I'm sure in your own ridings you've probably heard of stories where they had to be airlifted down to Sunnybrook.

So you can imagine, if you're at Sunnybrook and you're a doctor there—and I know a number of the doctors there—the incredible pressure on them, the nurses and the support staff every day in surgery and the emergency wing. These are the things that go on 24/7.

A former student of mine is the head of pediatrics at St. Mike's hospital, down the street here. St. Mike's hospital is right in the middle of the downtown Toronto. If you sit in emergency and talk to the doctors, you would not believe the pressure they're under in terms of the people who come in with everything under the sun. There are incredible trauma patients they deal with. They deal with people with very complex issues. They deal with street people. Everybody is welcome and is serviced in our hospitals.

Whether it's St. Mike's, Sunnybrook or Mount Sinai, they are second to none. I, as a member of this government, will always support investments—

Interjections.

Mr. Mike Colle: I know the NDP doesn't like that. I don't know where they would put their money, but I'm for putting money into our hospitals, into our doctors and into our nurses. The NDP is against that, I'm sad to say.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): The member for Beaches–East York.

Mr. Arthur Potts: It gives me great delight to have an opportunity to reflect on the throne speech, which we heard earlier this week.

I've got to tell you, on a personal basis, sitting here and listening to the Lieutenant Governor talk about what

we have done in the term since I was first elected in 2014 made me extraordinarily proud to be a part of this government.

We saw her go through the history, the background, of what we have accomplished in these last four years, and very clearly we talked about, for instance, the Ontario registered retirement plan—the supports that we did. Had we not brought that forward when we did, as we had promised to do, we would not have gotten this new enhanced program federally for every retiring person in the country of Canada. We did that. We did that through the leadership.

I know that as a government we will be judged in the upcoming election on what we have accomplished and on the basis of—

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Come to order.

The member for Beaches–East York.

Mr. Arthur Potts: Thank you, sir. Thank you very much.

We will be judged on what we've accomplished, and I'm very proud of our accomplishments. We will be judged on the basis of what we plan to do next.

What we have done this term was clearly laid out in a budget platform in 2014 that members on the other side of the House didn't support, and we implemented those budget terms when we brought the same budget back. We've accomplished the things that we promised we would do, including balancing the budget. That is where we got to, which we promised to do when we inherited a \$12-billion deficit; we brought it down. Under this leadership of this Premier, we brought it down to a balanced budget and a small surplus this time. We're going to see that.

1550

And then what we'll see in the budget this week—tomorrow—will be a clear program forward of the things that we will want to see and of how we want to see this province develop. I know that from the consultations we've done across the province—SCOFEA went out and the people, the stakeholders we've been listening to—we've learned some very valuable lessons about those who have been left behind. So what you saw in the throne speech, very clearly, Speaker, was a delineation of where we stand, on this side of the House, to counter where I think they will be on the other side of House, and particularly under the new leadership of the official opposition. You know that this is going to be a program of cuts.

I've highlighted the top five cuts. The first cut, they say, will be to taxes. Now, they misrepresent what they're going to be cutting. They say they're going to take 25%, but we've done that math and at no time does it show that people will be getting a 25% cut. It's just 25% to one bracket. So they'll be cutting taxes first.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): I'm going to ask the member to withdraw his unparliamentary remark.

Mr. Arthur Potts: Sorry, Speaker. I withdraw.

Then they will be cutting revenues. It's very clear from that document and it's very clear from what we've heard from the current leader that they will be getting rid of the tax on carbon, which has been so effective in moving us towards a carbon-free community.

Interjection.

Mr. Arthur Potts: They did previously support it but it looks like they're going to be against it now. I will point out to the members of this House that when we brought in the tax on carbon, gasoline was 98 cents. We've gave a 4.3% increase as a carbon tax and we've invested over \$2 billion in proceeds already. We're investing it in carbon-reducing programs. And now the price of gasoline—look at it—is \$1.31, right? It's \$1.31. The increase in energy costs in the province had nothing to do with the carbon tax. It has to do with other factors—supply and demand—so I point that out. It's very important.

They will also be cutting spending, Speaker. We know that they're going to go after 4% of spending. They're going to be cutting, they say, the sex ed program. Finally, we know, the most unkind cut of all: They'll be cutting jobs, estimated at least at 40,000. Some are saying up to 75,000. We're right back to where the previous leader of the Progressive Conservative Party was in 2014: 100,000 cuts.

Speaker, we have chosen a very different path and it was very clearly laid out. We have a cradle-to-grave approach to treating the people of Ontario who need our support as effectively as possible—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Thank you very much. Pursuant to standing order 42(a), there has been 12 hours of debate on the motion for an address in reply to the speech from the throne. I am now required to put the question.

On March 20, 2018, Ms. Jaczek moved, seconded by Mr. Chan, that a humble address be presented to Her Honour the Lieutenant Governor as follows:

“To the Honourable Elizabeth Dowdeswell, Lieutenant Governor of Ontario:

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

Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry?

I heard a no.

All those in favour of the motion will please say “aye.”

All those opposed will please say “nay.”

In my opinion, the ayes have it.

Call in the members. This will be a 30-minute bell.

Interjection.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): I wish to inform the House that I've received a request for a deferral of this vote, addressed to the Speaker, pursuant to standing order 28(h), requesting that government order number 1 be deferred until deferred votes on Tuesday, March 27, signed by the chief government whip.

Vote deferred.

PAY TRANSPARENCY ACT, 2018
 LOI DE 2018
 SUR LA TRANSPARENCE SALARIALE

Mr. Flynn moved second reading of the following bill:

Bill 3, An Act respecting transparency of pay in employment/ Projet de loi 3, Loi portant sur la transparence salariale.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): I recognize the Minister of Labour to lead off.

Hon. Kevin Daniel Flynn: Let me start by saying I will be sharing my time with the Minister of the Status of Women.

I'm very happy to rise for second reading of the Pay Transparency Act, 2018. Our government has made very important strides in trying to support women and others who have experienced disadvantages traditionally in the workplace. What we have seen, in order to assist in that regard, is increases to the minimum wage. We have seen enhanced employment protections. We have seen investments in child care and education. That's just a few among the many initiatives that the government has taken very decisive action on.

What we're proposing today is some further measures, and I really hope the Pay Transparency Act that I'm speaking to today is going to be adopted unanimously by this House. Women's economic equality, I think most people in the province of Ontario would agree, should be a non-partisan issue. I'm confident and I'm really hopeful that both opposition parties will support the measures that we're going to put forward today.

The Women's Economic Empowerment Strategy was announced on March 6 of this year by the Premier; we were at a woman's empowerment summit that was held in the city of Toronto. There is a strategy behind this, Speaker. The strategy is a key part of the government's approach to building a strong and very inclusive economy.

What we are going to do is remove systemic barriers that to date have prevented women's full economic participation by promoting fairer workplaces, by changing perspectives about gender, promoting women's leadership, promoting access to jobs and promoting career advancement.

In the province of Ontario, as I speak today, women represent about 48% of the labour force and they represent more than half of our university and college graduates. Yet the reality we find in the province of Ontario today is that women continue to experience marked economic disadvantages in our province in business, in our workplaces and our society. For example, a lot of young women and young men are very, very surprised when I tell them that the gender wage gap in Ontario is still about, on average, 30%, and over the past 10 years has remained largely unchanged. What that means, very simply, and this surprises and alarms a lot of people, is that women earn 70 cents for every dollar that's earned by men in this province.

A lot of people would have thought those days were behind us. The sad reality is, they are not. Women who

are working are more likely to reduce their hours of work or to take part-time jobs to balance paid employment with unpaid caregiving responsibility, which still in our society today falls primarily on women.

When you add in other intersections, when you talk about racialized women, immigrant women, indigenous women and women with disabilities, they experience even greater disadvantages and larger wage gaps than the 30% I'm talking about. Our government understands that this is simply unacceptable. We are committed to developing the conditions and the supports that are needed for inclusive economic growth, which are going to help Ontarians, regardless of their gender, realize their full potential.

It's not only about social equality and fairness; it's also an economic one. Our government is seizing the opportunity to take action. Our proposed legislation that you have before you, if passed by this House, would help address gender and other biases in hiring and pay setting. It would assist those job applicants and employers to negotiate compensation based on the job requirements and an applicant's qualifications, not their gender. It would promote fair compensation practices by requiring prescribed employers to report on pay data and on the composition of their workforce. These changes are going to benefit all Ontarians—women and men, employees and employers alike.

The legislation, if passed, would prohibit Ontario employers from asking job applicants about their prior salary. That simply makes sense, Speaker.

1600

It requires employers to indicate a pay scale or an amount for all publicly advertised job vacancies. What it would do—and this comes to the fore in a lot of other legislation I deal with—is it prohibits employers from engaging in reprisals against workers simply for exercising their rights, in this case, for discussing their compensation with their employer or with other employees at the same firm. It requires prescribed employers to report to the government on pay gaps and workforce composition by gender and other characteristics of diversity.

We have consulted very broadly on this. We've talked to a number of employers, worker representatives, advocates, businesses and other stakeholders. If the bill is passed, we intend to continue with that consultation to make sure as these come into effect, that employers and employees and stakeholders feel a part of this process and we make sure that the implementation is done in a meaningful way, an effective way and is done in a very transparent way.

Speaker, in the past we have made progress towards gender equality by passing anti-discrimination legislation. We've got the Human Rights Code, we've got the Pay Equity Act and we've got equal pay for equal work provisions of the Employment Standards Act that are coming into effect April 1 of this year. We've also begun to remove barriers for women by taking actions such as investing in child care, full-day kindergarten and affordable housing and by addressing gender-based violence.

But we all know full well in this House, Speaker, that there's a lot more work to be done.

The Pay Transparency Act is a new tool in our tool kit that is going to help promote workplace equity. It's going to help shine a light on unwarranted pay inequities and various biases that may exist today in workplace practices, thereby helping employers to eliminate them. We are not saying, as a government, that we are introducing this act or this initiative and then the work is over—far from it. We know that the work towards achieving full gender equality must, and will, continue.

Just before International Women's Day this year, we launched *Then Now Next: Ontario's Strategy for Women's Economic Empowerment*. It's the first strategy of its kind in this country, so we can be proud of that here in Ontario. It's a landmark that everybody in this province should celebrate.

It's good for everyone when women do well, when their communities are safe, when our daughters, our moms, our sisters, our girlfriends and wives can have the same opportunities as everybody else in this province. We know that increasing women's economic participation is the right thing to do for the sake of equality, but it's also the right thing to do for the economy.

I would like to go a little further in explaining the benefits of closing the gender wage gap for the economy and for business in this province. Research shows very clearly that besides increasing women's economic security and creating more equitable workplaces, eliminating the wage gap would benefit the entire economy and individual businesses. A recent study suggests that if women were fully engaged in the economy, it would add \$60 billion to Ontario's annual GDP by 2026. That's right, Speaker: \$60 billion.

The Royal Bank of Canada in 2005 estimated that personal incomes in Canada would increase by about \$168 billion annually if women had the same labour force opportunities that men enjoy. That's \$168 billion, Speaker. TD Economics reported that raising women's participation in paid work by just 1% could add 115,000 workers to Canada's workforce.

Research has shown very clearly as well that those workplaces that establish gender equity are more likely to have a competitive advantage when it comes to attracting highly skilled workers. It reduces the cost of employee turnover and demonstrates better organizational and financial performance. I'm sure we're all in favour of that, Speaker. That's a good thing.

Then Now Next, the province's new strategy for women's economic empowerment, lays out a three-year plan to increase gender equity, to challenge biases and to eliminate barriers that women face at work, at home and in their community. What we propose to do, Speaker, in order to uncover those organizational pay gaps, is we have a strategy that is included in the introduction of the Pay Transparency Act before this House. What it would do is it would increase transparency in the hiring process and protect employees who discuss their pay from reprisals.

That's probably one of the clearest signs that the world is changing. It used to be considered bad form, or it used to be considered something you didn't do to talk about your own pay with anybody else within the company. It was something that employers certainly asked you not to do, and people felt there would be retribution if they did that. What we're saying is that doesn't work and that hasn't worked in the past. We wouldn't have a gender wage gap, Speaker, if that had been a good thing. So we're protecting employees who exercise their rights from reprisals. It's going to require prescribed employers to disclose aggregate pay gaps within their own organization based on gender.

What we would do by passing this bill is the province of Ontario would look at those other jurisdictions around the world that we view as having a progressive approach to this, where they've taken certain measures and those measures have worked. If you look at Australia, if you look at the UK, you look at Germany, you look at the US states of California and Massachusetts, what they've done is create conditions that bring more transparency to pay setting and hence encourage employers to tackle those unjustified pay discrepancies for women and for other groups.

The new empowerment strategy, Speaker, is building on a very strong foundation of action that we brought forward in Ontario. What it includes is increasing choice for parents by transforming our early years and child care system and helping the families of 100,000 more children under the age of four access licensed child care over the next five years. We've implemented full-day kindergarten, something people told us we couldn't do. We've expanded before- and after-school care. We're seeing more women move out of poverty by introducing a fair minimum wage as part of a very historic action to help workers. We're removing barriers to post-secondary education with the new OSAP.

Moving forward with this empowerment strategy makes good sense, but as I said, it's been a process getting here. Many individuals and groups have been supportive and have been a strong part of that process. I want to thank the members of the gender wage gap steering committee, the gender wage gap consultation working group, the participants in the Ministry of the Status of Women consultations, and the Women in Business Steering Committee. It's because of their hard work that we're well-informed to take the next steps on the road to gender equity in the workplace and beyond in Ontario.

Speaker, it's been 30 years since pay equity legislation was passed in this province. The Pay Equity Office plays a very important role in closing the gender wage gap. Various stakeholders, including women's advocacy groups, have told us they'd like to see this organization strengthened. That's why, as part of this new strategy, it will be strengthened.

Progress has taken time. It has taken too much time and a lot of hard work, and that makes the title of *Then Now Next* really such a fitting name for this strategy. It acknowledges, as I said, all the work that came before. It

acknowledges the action plan we're putting in place now, and it points to the work that remains.

But even quantifying the problem can seem daunting, and that's why we brought forward this pay transparency legislation to the House. We're the first province in this great country to do so. It's why we're going to require all publicly advertised job postings to include the expected pay or a pay range.

I think the most exciting part of that bill, Speaker, is that, if passed, it would require prescribed businesses to prepare some pay transparency information for us, to get this out in the open, to talk about it more freely. They would be asked to provide information about their own workforce composition and the differences in compensation with respect to gender and other prescribed characteristics. Basically, Speaker, we're going to shine a light on an issue that really should have been resolved a long time ago.

Knowing the stats is a huge step forward because this information is not being shared today. It's not known by employees or by the general public and sometimes not known by management. This bill, if passed, would prescribe employers to send their pay transparency to the province. They'll be asked to post that information online, so it will be very transparent. Men and women across the province of Ontario will have full access to that information.

1610

We're a major employer in the province of Ontario. The OPS, the Ontario public service, hires a lot of people, so our province's pay-transparency disclosure measures are going to begin right here at home. The exact reporting requirements for employers, such as what, how and when to report, will be determined with consultations with the various stakeholders themselves.

Before I sit down, I just want to ask for the support of the entire House for this piece of legislation. Our proposed legislation is in line with other leading jurisdictions in the world that have made more progress than we have. It's time for Ontario to lead, and certainly I think we have examples around the world of how we can accomplish that.

I will now pass it off to the Minister of the Status of Women.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): I recognize the minister of the status of women.

Hon. Harinder Malhi: I'm pleased to rise in the House as the Minister of the Status of Women for second reading of the Pay Transparency Act, 2018. I'd like to thank my colleague Minister Flynn for his continued hard work on closing the gender wage gap and on supporting women and others who have been disadvantaged in the workplace.

Before I go any further, I want to welcome some of our stakeholders from BPW who are here today. Thank you for being here for the debate.

Speaker, the Pay Transparency Act, 2018, if passed, is one more very important step toward breaking down barriers so that women can fully benefit from our econ-

omy. The gap in pay between men and women hasn't improved for more than a decade, and we must close that gap. The wage gap is even greater for racialized, newcomer and indigenous women and for women with disabilities, LGBTQ+ women and women in rural and remote communities. This cannot continue.

A year ago, the status of women was created as a full ministry, with a mandate to take a government-wide approach to supporting women, from eliminating violence and harassment to pressing for gender equality and empowerment of women and girls. We have been working hard to fulfill the mandate under the leadership of our Premier, Kathleen Wynne. Premier Wynne has been a strong leader for women and is committed to full gender equality for women and girls in Ontario. That's because we are committed to a province that cares about everyone equally and fairly.

When the Premier appointed me as the Minister of the Status of Women in January, I was both grateful and very determined to take this opportunity to work to make life better for women and girls across the province and to help break down the barriers that stand in the way of equality. This is why my ministry has launched two major new strategies over the past several weeks and helped introduce this pay transparency legislation.

Earlier this month, Ontario hosted the first women's empowerment summit. We heard from women who are defining their field, making history and building a stronger society. Along with the Premier and the Minister of Labour, we launched Then Now Next: Ontario's Strategy for Women's Economic Empowerment. It is the first whole-of-government approach to economic empowerment in Canada. The goal is to build a stronger and more inclusive economy by reducing the barriers and biases that prevent women's full participation.

Our government will be taking action in a number of areas:

- We're establishing an Ontario women's entrepreneurship association to increase women's access and opportunity and to scale up and extend ventures;

- We're implementing a plan to promote women in corporate leadership positions, including on public and private sector boards. To reinforce this plan, we will leverage government buying power to encourage gender equity when selecting vendors for government work;

- We're encouraging large firms that sign new government contracts to reach a target of 30% women on private sector boards;

- We're increasing annual funding for Investing in Women's Futures, a provincial program that aims to provide supports to women experiencing violence and promote women's economic independence;

- We're investing in opportunities for mentorship and networking for women who face higher barriers, including newcomer and racialized women. We'll also do more to support leadership amongst young women and continue to support indigenous women's leadership;

- Finally, we are working to bring more transparency and fairness to practices around hiring and pay, which

brings us now to the Pay Transparency Act, 2018, this historic legislation that is before the House today.

If passed, the legislation will bring increased transparency in hiring and it will offer protection for employees who discuss their pay.

Employers will also need to be transparent about their organizational pay gaps based on gender and other characteristics, and to report back to the government. This will give women the information they need to negotiate a fair wage. It will allow women's contributions at work to be valued equally to men's contributions.

A lack of information about pay is one of the biggest barriers preventing women from benefiting equally from the economy. Right now, they don't benefit in the same way and they don't have as many economic choices as men. That's because we know that women are more likely to reduce their hours to do unpaid work at home. They're streamed into lower-paying jobs, which are usually traditionally feminine jobs such as caregiving, and that work is often insecure.

Not enough women are reaching leadership positions. Women make up 45% of the people entering the workforce, but only 20% of vice-presidents and 15% of CEOs. These barriers stand in the way of women's economic empowerment. That's what our strategy Then Now Next intends to change.

In order to create change, it's important to have women equally represented in the workforce and in leadership at all levels. Consider the impact of women on leadership in politics. You don't have to go too far back to remember a time when the political arena in Ontario and Canada looked very different from what it does today. But today, as a woman and a woman of colour in cabinet, I represent the changing face of politics.

In January, when Premier Kathleen Wynne appointed me as the Minister of the Status of Women, two of my fellow women colleagues were also appointed as ministers. With these changes, our cabinet now stands at 45% women, a figure very close to parity. I believe that having more women in positions of influence—not just in government but in all areas of our lives—helps to bring about positive change.

You can see how this is playing out right now at the province level. Under the leadership of Premier Kathleen Wynne, our government has created a new stand-alone Ministry of the Status of Women.

We've introduced a job-protected leave of absence for workers who have experienced domestic or sexual violence.

We've rolled out more quality, affordable child care spaces, because affordable child care has been identified as one of the fundamental issues that needs to be addressed to close the gender wage gap.

We've also created affordable tuition for young women starting school and for older women who need to upgrade their skills to enter the workplace.

These changes are needed because a range of barriers has been preventing women from having the lives they want for themselves: barriers such as gender discrimina-

tion, gender streaming in occupations, racism, colonialism and poverty. For women, there is also the added barrier of escaping unsafe living situations for themselves and their families.

We know that in order to fully empower women economically, we need to work to remove any barriers that may prevent them from finding more meaningful paid work.

We have heard the stories of women who continue to live in dangerous situations because they can't find safety. We have heard survivors of sexual violence and harassment say #MeToo. We know that women are waiting days, weeks and months to receive counselling services, and we know that survivors struggle to navigate the legal system.

Everyone deserves to feel safe in their communities, workplaces, homes and schools. That's why our government has just launched It's Never Okay: Ontario's Gender-Based Violence Strategy. Through this strategy, we are building on our long-standing leadership and our commitment to ending gender-based violence. It's Never Okay: Ontario's Gender-Based Violence Strategy will stand on progress already made through the Domestic Violence Action Plan, the Action Plan to Stop Sexual Violence and Harassment, the Long-Term Strategy to End Violence Against Indigenous Women, and Ontario's Strategy to End Human Trafficking.

Speaker, you may remember It's Never Okay and the #WhoWillYouHelp campaign, which we launched in 2015 as a part of our action plan to stop sexual violence and harassment. The campaign started a conversation not just in Ontario but across the globe. We promised, with It's Never Okay, that our work was to be continued. Now, through the new Gender-Based Violence Strategy, this government will invest up to \$242 million to help build on these successful government investments so that survivors and their families get the help that they need.

1620

Last fall, we sat down with agencies and people with lived experiences with violence from right across Ontario. We heard from more than 200 agencies that provide services related to gender-based violence as well as more than 100 people with lived experiences. I want to thank those who shared their experiences and their stories with us. You helped build this strategy.

I would like to once again extend my thanks to the violence against women round table. The conversation, advice, expertise and knowledge from the violence against women round table has helped us ensure that this strategy is meaningful and significant to all survivors.

We know that there's more that we need to do to stop gender-based violence. We know that by intervening early and effectively, particularly with young people, we can begin to break the cycle of violence before it even begins. Through public education, the strategy will change attitudes and norms that drive gender-based violence.

We know that by taking these necessary steps, we are creating a safe space for survivors. It is in that safe space

that women will have the full opportunity to reach their economic potential, and they will have the same opportunity to benefit equally from the economy. It is time for economic empowerment for all women. It is time for equity, and it is time for fairness. This legislation, the Pay Transparency Act, 2018, if passed, will take us one step closer to achieving this goal.

The gender wage gap is real: Taken as yearly pay, women in Canada make just 74 cents on the dollar compared to men, and that gap has been stuck at about 30% for over 10 years, since 2007. This means that it takes most women on average 15 and a half months to earn what a man makes in one year. This gap is even worse for indigenous, immigrant and racialized women. Women are most likely to reduce their hours to do unpaid work at home, and they're streamed into those lower-paying jobs. Not enough women are reaching leadership positions.

By taking these steps, we're creating fairer workplaces by increasing transparency of pay and workforce composition, strengthening Ontario's Pay Equity Office and expanding and strengthening women's centres which provide low-barrier, wraparound and pre-employment services for marginalized and vulnerable women. We are creating fairer workplaces, changing perspectives about gender and promoting women's leadership, access to jobs and career advancement.

Women can be equally empowered in our economy. That is why the Pay Transparency Act is needed. If passed, it is a positive step forward. It is changing a system that will break down the barriers that women face in today's society.

By making this change, we are making a difference. There are so many women here today who are making a difference, too, in big and small ways, but that work is not valued in the same way.

I grew up in a home with people who understood the importance of being active in the community and the value of making life better for everyone. I've seen first-hand the incredible difference that that can make, whether that's by influencing decision-making, giving your time to help others, excelling in your field, being a positive role model for young women, or demanding equal pay for equal work.

Together, we will build a strong and equal future for ourselves and for all women and girls, a future where women can truly have an equal voice, equal pay and equal opportunities.

I encourage all members to vote in favour this bill.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Mr. Jim McDonell: We talk today on the need for more work on the file of gender equality. Of course, I think everybody in this House supports such an endeavour, but I think we want to be somewhat careful with some of the rules and regulations we put in place.

I have a family of two daughters, and they struggled to find work, because there's just no work out there. They are teachers. There is an abundance of teachers, and this

government saw fit to address that by making it a two-year course through teachers' college instead of a one-year course, which only, really, doubles the cost of education. That's simply all it did.

I think that there needs to be some more work around generating good jobs in the area. When you look at fields that used to be guaranteed jobs, with an example of engineering—my son graduated from Queen's University in civil engineering. After, he went out to work in Alberta, of course, as there was an abundance of jobs out there. He came back and he ran into some of his friends in Toronto who, two or three years after graduation, were in Toronto looking for jobs in their field. They were working as waitresses and different—basically, under-employed. One of his friends moved out west, and within three days she had a job in the engineering field.

When I graduated, Ontario was the place to work. We had almost the opposite problem: There were more jobs than there were people graduating. Right now, if you talk to the professional engineering group—this government talks about needing more engineers to fill the jobs, but they talk about the huge number of unemployed engineers they have in Ontario. It's a huge problem for them. There are graduates coming out with no place to work, and—I guess my time is running out—we see the same thing in the medical field.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Ms. Catherine Fife: It's a pleasure to join the debate on Bill 3, although it is so frustrating, I must tell you, to listen to the: "Now is the time. Now is the right time to invest in and accept the issues around the Pay Equity Commission."

You'll remember, Mr. Speaker, that the Pay Equity Commission had its funding cut in half in 1997 by the last Conservative government. It has been fine to leave that Pay Equity Commission at a deficit of 50% for 15 years—longer, actually. But now, 72 days before an election, all of a sudden this government is ready. They're ready to act. Meanwhile, communities across this province are fundraising to keep women safe in those communities because there are no shelter beds.

The Minister of Labour mentioned the importance of child care. As long as this government continues to focus on the corporate model of child care, you are running exactly in the opposite direction of making affordable child care a reality for working women in the province of Ontario. Twenty-eight percent of women in this province identify that they only work part-time because they can only find part-time care. How can you ever achieve economic equality when affordable, quality child care is so far out of reach?

Queer Ontario came out with a statement today based on Bill 3. This is what they say about the gender pay gap: "The gender pay gap in Ontario between women and men has stagnated at 30% over the past three (3) decades. Lesbian and bisexual women can be particularly impacted and trans women are even further challenged by

the gender binary in work settings. Greater enforcement of pay equity laws is required, along with a broader, more inclusive understanding of gender variance. The proposed 'transparency legislation' falls short as it only captures medium to large-size employers, whereas 95% of Ontario employers are small businesses, many of which employ women in low-wage positions without benefits."

After 15 years, you could do better.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Mrs. Liz Sandals: What's fascinating, of course, is that the NDP election platforms in 2011 and 2014 didn't mention pay equity at all. I would just say that perhaps this is the pot complaining about something that they weren't particularly interested in.

But it is quite fascinating and appalling that the gender wage gap in Ontario continues to be, on average, 30%. I think what that actually says is that the pay equity scheme brought in by the NDP hasn't worked exactly as planned. You actually need to do something a little bit different. What I find really interesting about this is the fact that with Bill 3, the Pay Transparency Act, we're actually going to require employers to post what they pay for different jobs so that people know when there's a gap in a particular business.

Coming out of the school board sector, where in fact there isn't a pay gap—it's very much clear that if you've got this many years of experience and you're doing this job, you get paid this salary; it's very black and white—it, to me, is shocking that we've still got a 30% pay gap, because that means that there are a lot of places where women and men aren't making the same salary or the same wage. What this legislation will do is it will expose that. The public will be able to see.

1630

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Mr. Norm Miller: I'm pleased to have the opportunity to speak to the speeches from the government, from the Minister of Labour and the Minister of the Status of Women, on Bill 3, An Act respecting transparency of pay in employment. This is a bill that we haven't had an opportunity to caucus yet, nor has our critic been briefed on it yet, so I'll look forward to hearing from our critic after the critic is further briefed. But it's the Pay Transparency Act, 2018, and it establishes requirements relating to the disclosure of information about the compensation of employees and prospective employees.

I heard the Minister of Labour talking about other bills that they've recently passed, including Bill 148, and talking about fairness. They love to talk about fairness all the time. I would just like to point out that, often, their bills have unintended consequences.

I just received news that the Foodland in South River is closing. That's the only food store in the village of South River. When I did business surveys in the summer-time when Bill 148 was proposed, I got responses back. This one's from South River: "Small-town impact is big

when you have to close early—lose business. People will travel elsewhere and not come back."

From neighbouring Burk's Falls, what we will have to do: "We'll have to raise prices. We'll have to cut employee hours. We'll have to lay off staff.... Shorten store hours in the off-season, forcing customers to shop out of town."

Unfortunately, that's the reality of what's happening: This Foodland is closing in South River. There is no food source—an anchor store for the community—and just a spiraling downward effect happens as a result of that.

It's not just Bill 148. It's high energy costs. It's unnecessary red tape. It's making it impossible to be in business and create jobs in this province. I hope this bill doesn't further make it worse.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): That concludes our questions and comments. The Minister of Labour may reply.

Hon. Kevin Daniel Flynn: Thank you to Minister Malhi, my colleague in the House, for her great remarks there, and to the members from Kitchener–Waterloo, Parry Sound–Muskoka and Stormont–Dundas–South Glengarry.

Mr. Arthur Potts: And Guelph.

Hon. Kevin Daniel Flynn: Oh, and the member from Guelph. I'm sorry about that.

We know society benefits when women are able to fully contribute to the economy as full members. Everybody has a role to play in our economy, and certainly women and girls must have the same equal opportunities that men and boys have had in the past.

Speaker, we know we need to move on this. I think it's apparent to all three parties in the House. It sounds like the NDP will be supportive. I'm not sure about the official opposition yet, but I hope that all parties will find some way to be able to move forward on this, because the work we've been able to accomplish so far with our tremendous partners began in the Premier's mandate letter that I got back in 2014. They asked that I work with the then-minister responsible for women's issues, Tracy MacCharles, to lead the development of a wage-gap strategy, something that was actually going to close the gap in the context of a 21st century economy.

It has been a complex task—some of the people who have helped us out are in the members' gallery today—but it's a crucial task, and it's one we're committed to ensuring that we continue on this journey and that we close that gender wage gap completely. What we did is that we also took a broader review of Ontario's system of employment and of labour standards, and we're developing the reforms that the member from Parry Sound–Muskoka was talking about.

Ontarians are very supportive of the reforms that have taken place under Bill 148. I know that the opposition party is intending to roll them back, if they have the opportunity to. The people of Ontario do not support that, Speaker. We know that people in this province—we know the economy is doing very, very well, but we know that everybody is not sharing in it. From it a gender

perspective, what this bill does is ensure that everybody in the province of Ontario has the opportunity to share in that prosperity.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Further debate?

Ms. Peggy Sattler: I am very pleased to rise today as the women's issues critic for the Ontario NDP caucus to offer some comments on Bill 3, the Pay Transparency Act.

Certainly, we know that the wage gap is not new. This has been a persistent feature of Ontario's labour market for well over 30 years. Thirty years ago is when we had the Pay Equity Act, but it was the existence of the wage gap that led to the introduction of that legislation.

We have seen, over those last 30 years and definitely in the 15 years that the Liberals have been in office, that Pay Equity Act has made virtually no difference in terms of narrowing that gap, closing that gap and making a difference for women in this province. This Liberal government has had 15 years in office to do something meaningful to try to close that gender pay gap, but it has waited until its dying days, the eleventh hour of its mandate, to introduce this legislation. If this actually was a priority for Kathleen Wynne and this Liberal government, they would have tackled it much earlier.

One year ago—or almost a year ago—on April 11, 2017, I did bring in a motion calling on the government to pass pay transparency legislation. So to some degree, I'm heartened that the government has moved forward with Bill 3.

Having said that, the content of the legislation matters. We have heard from people who have been working on this file for years that there are a lot of inadequacies in the legislation that we have before us today. In Bill 3, the requirements for the application of the legislation to the public service, then to employers with over 500 employees and then to employers with 250 employees—those requirements don't even match the obligations that Ontario employers currently have under the Pay Equity Act, which applies to all employers with 10 or more employees in this province. The requirements of Bill 3 don't come near to matching an employer's requirements under the Ontario Human Rights Code, which obligates every single employer in this province not to discriminate on the basis of gender.

So what we see here today is a half measure that is almost symbolic in nature, that is trying to placate those people who have been working on this issue for so long to try to really make a difference for women in this province.

We know that the gender wage gap is real and that action is needed to close it. As I said, we have a pay gap that has remained fairly constant at around 30% for four decades. Since the 1980s, the gap has nudged 6% smaller, but we are still stuck at that 30% that we just can't seem to get beyond. What this means, Speaker, when you think about what a 30% wage gap means: If a man were to retire today at age 65, a woman would have to keep on working until she was 79 years of age in order

to have the same income, the same kind of earnings on retirement as her male counterpart.

Another way to think about what the gender pay gap means, what this 30% gap means, is to think about Equal Pay Day. Equal Pay Day is coming up in Ontario on April 10. Equal Pay Day marks how long into the next year a woman has to work in order to earn the same kinds of wages that her male counterpart had earned in the prior year. In other words, women in Ontario have to work the full calendar year plus all of January, plus all of February, plus all of March, and the first week and a half of April in order to have comparable earnings to what a man in Ontario would have had.

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This has meant that when Ontario is measured against other jurisdictions, Ontario does not rate very highly in terms of its commitment to gender wage equality. There was a report from the Conference Board of Canada that marked Ontario with a C grade—a grade of C, toward the low end of the pack—in terms of its efforts to reduce gender wage inequality.

Ontario's annual sunshine list, which we just saw this week or last week, repeatedly, year after year, shows that maybe a quarter of the people on that list are women. Women are consistently underrepresented on the sunshine list, which, of course, only compares wages for those who earn over \$100,000. That actually isn't even scientific information. That's just from a scan of the list, because it's not actually reported by gender, but some interpretation of the sunshine list can be made based on the names of the people who are on the list.

This gender pay gap in Ontario has been recognized as a systemic issue. When you look at the efforts that have been made to address it, it is not related to individual women who aren't good negotiators in terms of negotiating a salary increase in their office. It's not related to the jobs that women want to get into or the careers that they are interested in pursuing. Nor does it relate to the practices of some employers. There is a systemic set of issues in the labour force that disadvantage women and have disadvantaged them for years. This is related both to the failure of provincial governments to implement strong pay equity laws and enforce those laws, and to provide the resources necessary to enforce those laws, and also the lack of accommodation for women's care responsibilities, among other things.

Speaker, the other thing to keep in mind about the gender wage gap is that it has to be looked at by which women are most disadvantaged. We know that for indigenous women, the gap is much, much greater than 30%. Indigenous women face a 57% wage gap. Women with disabilities face a 46% wage gap. Immigrant women face a 39% wage gap. Racialized women face a 32% wage gap. That is all calculated on the basis of Statistics Canada data and census data.

We also know that the wage gap persists regardless of level of education, regardless of occupation. There are 500 occupations that are tracked by Stats Canada in its Canadian income statistics data, and of those 500 occupations, women are paid less than men in 469 of them.

I mentioned education. We also know, looking at the earnings six months after graduation for post-secondary students, that university graduates who are women are paid less from their very, very first jobs, from the first time they enter the labour force after graduation, compared to their male classmates who graduate from the same program in the same year and who get jobs in the exact same field.

I do want to do a shout-out to OUSA, the Ontario Undergraduate Student Alliance. In 2015, three years ago, they launched a campaign to bring attention to the impact of the gender wage gap on post-secondary students in Ontario. They pointed out that female university graduates make an average of about \$300,000 less over the course of their career compared to male university graduates. Their campaign focused on what they called the “bachelorette degree,” to point out the absolute hypocrisy of granting degrees in our post-secondary institutions that are supposed to enable young people to enter careers in the occupations that they have dreamed of, and yet women are earning degrees that are valued much less or much lower in the labour market—what they called a “bachelorette degree.” That is absolutely unacceptable in this province and at this time.

I mentioned earlier the sunshine list. Certainly we know that the sunshine list does provide what some people have called a small window into equity and inequity in terms of pay for women and men. We saw that in 2016. An analysis that was done by the Toronto Star showed that women on the list earned an average of \$124,000, while men made \$130,000. There were twice as many men as women who were making more than \$162,000. In the 2017 list, there were only four women who were in the top 20 spots on the sunshine list, even as this Liberal government claimed that it was on track to close the wage gap.

I have to say, Speaker, that I was disappointed, quite frankly, in the response of the then-minister responsible for women’s issues when she was asked to comment on the 2017 sunshine list. She noted that it had been 30 years since Ontario passed the Pay Equity Act, and she said that she hoped that there would be a “trickle-down” effect as more women continued to advance within the government. I appreciate that the government has moved away from hoping that there would be a trickle-down effect to actually recognizing the need to introduce much stronger measures to try to close the gender wage gap.

I want to talk for a bit about the current legislative framework that is in place to address wage inequities and how the Pay Transparency Act will fit into the current protections. Right now in Canada there are basically four kinds of legal remedies that women can use if they are discriminated against on the basis of pay in the labour market.

First we have the Employment Standards Act, which really talks about equal pay for equal work. The Employment Standards Act requires employers to ensure that all employees are paid equally for what is essentially equal work. There were some changes made to the Employ-

ment Standards Act through Bill 148; hopefully those will strengthen the protections that used to be in place under the Employment Standards Act. But quite honestly, the Employment Standards Act protections were very narrow because, as I said, it was an apples-to-apples comparison of equal pay for equal work.

The other key protection is the Pay Equity Act, which I have already mentioned. We had pay equity legislation brought into this province in the 1980s, and that was really a step beyond the Employment Standards Act because it talked about equal pay for work of equal value, which, as you can imagine, Speaker, is significant because there are a lot of occupations where when you’re looking at equal pay for equal work, there are no men, or very few men, who are employed in those occupations. Therefore, equal-pay-for-equal-work principles don’t really offer the same kinds of protections for female workers.

The third legal protection that currently exists is the Ontario Human Rights Code. As I mentioned at the outset, the Ontario Human Rights Code applies to every employer in this province. It prohibits unequal treatment on the basis of employment and a number of other factors.

1650

Finally, there are charter protections. There is a charter guarantee of gender equality that also can contribute to protecting women from pay discrimination in the workplace.

Unfortunately, Speaker, as I have noted, none of these four legal protections have actually had the impact that we would want to see in terms of closing that gender wage gap, and that is related to a number of issues. I want to speak specifically about the Pay Equity Act and some of the limitations of the Pay Equity Act in addressing the gender wage gap.

The pay equity legislation required workforce analyses to determine proportional values and to establish comparator proxies where there were few or no men in the workplace. As I mentioned, the Pay Equity Act did have a modest impact. It reduced the gender wage gap by 6%. However, it did not have the widespread impact that one would hope. There’s also the problem that many workers are currently excluded from the Pay Equity Act, particularly those who are in very small workplaces—workplaces with under 10 employees—and also workplaces that are not unionized.

One of the biggest impediments, however, to the effectiveness of the Pay Equity Act was what the Conservatives did to the Pay Equity Commission when they were in office. We know that they gutted the funding that was available to the Pay Equity Commission to enforce the act. Previously, until the Conservatives took office, the Pay Equity Commission was allocated approximately \$6 million to do its work to enforce the act. Under the Conservatives, that amount, that allocation, was cut in half, to about \$3 million. Now, Speaker, over the last 15 years that the Liberals have been in office, what we have seen is basically flatlined resources

provided to the Pay Equity Commission. It has never recovered from that drastic cut that was implemented by the Conservative government.

The other thing that the Conservatives did which really had a negative impact on the effectiveness of the pay equity legislation was to eliminate the pay equity legal clinic. This was an essential and valuable tool to assist low-income and non-unionized women to enforce their rights. This gutting of the publicly funded pay equity legal clinic and cutting in half the resources that were available to the Pay Equity Commission really restricted the ability of the commission to enforce pay equity laws in this province.

We saw the Pay Equity Commission file its annual reports and we saw, year after year, reports showing the numbers of cases that were opened and also the length of time that was being taken to actually close a case. In 2010, the annual report said that it was taking three years for an investigation to be completed and resolved. In 2011, 88% of cases were taking up to three years for investigation and resolution. Similarly, year after year, the Pay Equity Commission is reporting that it takes years in order to follow up on a concern about pay equity or a lack of pay equity adherence in their place of employment.

Speaker, in addition to the fact that the Liberals didn't restore the funding to the Pay Equity Commission that was eliminated by the Conservatives, the other concern that has been highlighted by people around the effectiveness of the Pay Equity Act is the fact that the government itself was resisting adhering to its obligations under the act. We know that the government was going to court to try to resist its obligations to implement pay equity in the broader public sector. We heard that last year several MPPs, I am sure, met with the developmental services workers, who were here as part of an OPSEU delegation, who talked about the fight that they have been engaged in for decades to try to achieve the pay equity that they are legally entitled to under the act.

Not only has the government gone to the Pay Equity Hearings Tribunal to resist its own obligations, the government has refused to work with agencies that are publicly funded to make sure that those agencies can meet their pay equity obligations. This is a huge issue in the developmental services sector, which is a female-dominated sector. It is staffed by women who are often the most vulnerable and they are completely shut out of their rights to equal pay under the Pay Equity Act.

Certainly, the Pay Equity Act has been very limited in making inroads for women in this province. And so, again, I'm pleased to see that we have come to this point where we recognize that there is a need for another tool, that there is a need for additional legislative protections to help close that gender wage gap, because the current protections that we have in place have not been effective.

What we saw last year is that the Equal Pay Coalition came to Queen's Park. They had a media conference and were supported by many legal scholars, activists and advocates who have been working on this file for years.

They proposed pay transparency legislation as an effective tool to help really try to jump start what needs to happen in order to close that gender wage gap. When they came to Queen's Park, they brought with them legislation that was already drafted, and it was really strong legislation. One of the features of that legislation—which, sadly, we don't see in Bill 3 that is before us today—was a preamble that very clearly situated the right to equal pay as a—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Excuse me. The member for Stormont–Dundas–South Glengarry on a point of order?

Mr. Jim McDonell: I don't believe we have a quorum.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Do we have a quorum present?

The Clerk-at-the-Table (Ms. Valerie Quioc Lim): A quorum is not present, Speaker.

The Acting Speaker ordered the bells rung.

The Clerk-at-the-Table (Ms. Valerie Quioc Lim): A quorum is now present, Speaker.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): I return to the member for London West to continue her remarks.

Ms. Peggy Sattler: I was just talking about the Equal Pay Coalition's draft legislation that they brought to Queen's Park last year, pay transparency legislation. I was remarking on the fact that their draft legislation included a preamble that very clearly situated the need to close the gender wage gap as a response to a violation of human rights when that gender wage gap continues to persist. That is critically important, Speaker. A human right is non-negotiable. A human right belongs to every person in this province, in the world. That is what a human right is.

1700

You can't say that workers who work in firms with 250 employees and more, their human rights should be protected, but that workers who work in firms with less than 250 employees don't need their human rights, that it's not a concern.

Ms. Catherine Fife: It's not negotiable.

Ms. Peggy Sattler: Yes, it's not negotiable, and that is a very, very important part of the draft legislation that the Equal Pay Coalition brought forward. The existence of the gender wage gap has to be recognized as a violation of human rights, and on those grounds, we have an obligation to take strong measures to try to address this violation of human rights.

The other important aspect of the draft legislation that was brought here last year is that that legislation applied to all employers—private sector and public sector—who have at least 10 employees. The rationale for that is because that's how the Pay Equity Act is structured. The Pay Equity Act applies to every employer in this province who has at least 10 employees, so a pay transparency legislation should parallel what is currently in place with the Employment Equity Act.

Unfortunately, as I mentioned, the legislation that we have before us today does not do that. It does not follow

the current provisions of the Pay Equity Act, and it has a much more limited application.

The Equal Pay Coalition also provided some of the other jurisdictions that are already taking action on this. They encourage the Ontario government to look at those other jurisdictions and develop legislation that would reflect some of what's happening around the world.

In Quebec, there's a Pay Equity Act that includes an obligation for filing annual online public reports on pay equity compliance, which is a form of pay transparency. That act in Quebec has been in place since 2011, and it applies to all businesses with an average of 10 employees or more.

Iceland introduced pay transparency legislation which applies to businesses with an average of 25 employees or more.

In Denmark, there is now pay transparency legislation since 2014. It applies to companies with 35 employees or more.

In Belgium, in 2012, a new law was adopted to reduce the gender wage gap. It applied to firms with 50 employees or more.

In Australia, the legislation has been in place since 2012, pay transparency legislation that applies to all private sector employers with 100 employees or more.

Finally, Speaker, in the UK, pay transparency reports were required through legislation as of April 2017, and it applies to all employers with 250 employees or more.

There are lots of examples around the world of jurisdictions that are moving forward with pay transparency. They are requiring a much greater range of employers to comply with their legislation compared to what we see this Liberal government doing. In fact, what we understand the Liberal government intends to do was outlined in a press release because it's not actually in the bill. It's part of the regulations that will later accompany the bill, but we understand that the government's intent is that the Pay Transparency Act will begin with the public sector. Then, following an unspecified period of consultation with the private sector, the government intends to apply the legislation to employers with 500 employees or more. Then, after another unspecified period of consultation, there is the possibility that this legislation will apply to employers with 250 employees or more.

This is a problem, Speaker, when we see Ontario dragging its feet, lagging behind the actions that have been taken in other jurisdictions in the face of a wage gap that, as I said, has remained virtually unchanged for 30 years.

When the Equal Pay Coalition was here last year, I have to say there was a lot of support for the legislation that they introduced.

As I mentioned, I brought in a motion calling on the government to pass pay transparency legislation, expecting that the government would take up the draft that had already been written by the Equal Pay Coalition and move forward with it. Some of the people who responded to the initiative of the Equal Pay Coalition recognized the value of the pay transparency legislation

to require annual mandatory reporting by private and public sector employers as a means of finally reducing the gender wage gap.

We also know that some of the provisions of the Equal Pay Coalition's draft legislation have been incorporated into Bill 3 by the Liberal government, which is a positive thing. We know that protecting employees from reprisal if they disclose their salary is very important, to create that transparency in the workplace, to shine a light on what individual employees are earning, by gender or by other characteristics. Those reprisal protections are very important.

In fact, there was a study done by the Harvard Business Review that talked about the fact that there was a survey revealing that 41% of workers in the US were discouraged from talking about their pay, and a shocking 25% of workers feared retribution if they had a conversation or a discussion about what they were earning. So protecting workers from retribution if they disclose their salaries is really important, because it is a very real fear among workers.

The Harvard Business Review study was also quite interesting because they pointed out that employers, for years and years, have had access to data on compensation. HR managers across the country use these compensation surveys to try to decide what salary they're going to attach to positions in order to bring in the talent they're looking for. These compensation surveys have been very helpful to employers in determining the composition of their workplace and the salaries that they're going to have in place.

The article in the Harvard Business Review notes: "These surveys are rightly justified on the grounds that hiring firms want to offer competitive salaries. But the problem lies in the asymmetry between the information available to managers compared to workers. In a wide array of circumstances, economic studies have found that the entity with more and better information comes out ahead. The labour market is likely no different."

So it's important that workers have the same kind of access to data about what their co-workers are earning and what employees in different employment situations are earning, so that we can try to rectify that imbalance that has existed.

1710

We also know that many Canadians see the value of pay transparency legislation. There was another survey that was done in Canada, just in February of this year, by Maclean's magazine. They asked people to state their agreement with the following statement: "I would be comfortable with my salary being made public if it could reveal salary inequity." Nearly three quarters of Canadians, 73%—and 81% of the women who responded to the survey—agreed with that statement. So 73% of all respondents said that they would be comfortable with their salary being made public if it could reveal unfair discrepancies between men and women's wages.

This timidity by this government in worrying about what is going to happen if they apply this new legislation

to employers, who are already obligated under the Pay Equity Act, is really unfounded, because we know that there's a lot of support among working people in Canada and in this province for pay transparency legislation that applies to a broad range of workers.

I'm going to move now to Bill 3 and talk a little bit about the background to this bill. As we heard from the Minister of Labour, he was given a mandate to work with the minister responsible for women's issues to lead the development of a gender wage strategy. Now, I do want to comment for the moment on the process that led to the report of the gender wage gap steering committee and, eventually, to this legislation, which was just announced last week or earlier this month as part of the women's empowerment strategy.

We saw in this province, for the last two years, a focused effort to solicit the input of employers and workers across this province on changes to the Labour Relations Act and the Employment Standards Act. By comparison, when this government was looking at closing the gender wage gap, there was a glaring discrepancy between those two processes in terms of the resources that were allocated to the initiative and in terms of the kind of profile that the initiative got.

The gender wage gap steering committee, who did remarkable work, really valuable work in developing their recommendations, were basically working as volunteers compared to the two retired judges who led the Changing Workplaces Review and the process of coming up with Bill 148. But that is just an aside. I wanted to get that on the record, because I think it's worth reflecting on the kind of prioritization that this government gave to coming up with useful strategies to close the gender wage gap.

Looking specifically at this bill and the contents of the bill, what it does is it prohibits employers from asking job applicants about their compensation history, so what they may have earned in previous positions. The applicant can disclose to the employer that information, but the employer is prohibited from asking about that. Employers who publicly advertise jobs have to give information about the expected compensation or expected compensation range, and then employers must file pay transparency reports with the ministry for review. Actually, we're not sure which ministry, because the legislation currently does not identify which minister is responsible. That apparently will be addressed in regulation, along with a number of other missing pieces in this bill. But anyway, these pay transparency reports have to be submitted to the ministry. Then they must also be posted online, or in at least one visible place in each workplace. The ministry is also able to post the reports publicly in hard copy or online.

The bill establishes anti-reprisal provisions for employees who inquire about compensation, who disclose their compensation to their co-workers, who inquire about the pay transparency reports and who ask their employer to comply with the Pay Transparency Act, and also employees who disclose information about the employer's compliance or non-compliance with the act.

The bill also provides that employees can make official complaints directly to the Ontario Labour Relations Board or, if they have a complaint about their employer's compliance with the act, they can also deal with the matter through arbitration under a collective agreement, if there is a collective agreement in place.

The important part of this legislation, and any pay transparency legislation, is that it shifts the onus of proof from the employee to the employer. So really, it shines that light on whether employers are actually complying with their existing legal obligations under those pieces of legislation that I mentioned earlier: the Pay Equity Act, the Employment Standards Act, the Ontario Human Rights Code and also the charter. The Labour Relations Board can take on an arbitration process.

There are compliance officers who can conduct a compliance audit of an employer without need for a warrant. The act also mentions financial penalties for contravening the act. What those financial penalties are, we don't know. However, those penalties are to be paid to the Minister of Finance.

One of the big concerns with this legislation, as with so many pieces of Liberal legislation, is that far too much of the act is left to the regulations. The act states that the Lieutenant Governor in Council can make regulations about the content of the report, how often the reports are going to be required to be filed, who is going to be required to file them, whether employers can be exempted from filing reports, what kind of penalties are going to exist for not complying with the act, and which minister and ministry are going to be responsible for the administration of the act and other regulatory issues. There is a lot that is not spelled out in this act that we have heard from this government today and in press releases, but we will have to wait until we actually see the regulations to see how this act is going to work.

In response to this Bill 3, which was initially introduced as Bill 203, there have been a number of concerns identified. Specifically, the Equal Pay Coalition has pointed out that the reporting requirements that the Liberals have announced that they are intending to proceed with fall far short of other jurisdictions', the other countries that I mentioned, and that they don't match the legal obligations already in place under the Pay Equity Act and the Ontario Human Rights Code.

1720

The other issue that they pointed out is that civil service workers' pay structures are already transparent. As I said, those civil servants who earn over \$100,000 are named on the sunshine list; unionized employees have their salary structures or their pay rates already set out in publicly available collective agreements. So for the Liberals to say, "We're going to introduce this legislation and we're going to start with the OPS," really won't make that much of a difference, because we already know what the pay rates are for OPS employees. Those are already set out in collective agreements.

Some of the other concerns that have been identified: A lawyer, Inna Koldorf, says that companies are going to

find ways around the legislation by advertising broad ranges of salary. We don't know. It's going to be in the regs, what has to be reported, but currently the act does contemplate that there will be salary ranges included in this report. This lawyer, Inna Koldorf, says, "What glares at me right now is the fact that there's a permission to use ranges as opposed to just salary rates. And I think that's going to give employers a lot of flexibility when it comes to publicly advertising information."

There is the concern that a class of employers can be exempted from the act, which can refer to either employers with certain numbers of employees or to entire sectors of employers. That gives this government, or whoever is responsible for administering this act, quite a lot of flexibility if there were an interest in restricting the application of the act.

An interesting observation was made by AMAPCEO, the union that represents 14,000 professional public servants. They point out that the new legislation will prohibit employers from asking job candidates about their past compensation; however, the sunshine list reports the salaries, by name, of all public servants who are earning over \$100,000. Employers will be able to do a Google and potentially find out what a job candidate had been earning in their last position in the OPS. AMAPCEO has called on the government to remove the names of individual employees from the sunshine list, while still identifying job titles and salaries, to close this loophole and to provide privacy and personal safety and the same kinds of protections that now, under this act, will be available to other workers in Ontario: to be protected from being asked by their employer to disclose their past compensation.

In the time that I have left, I wanted to talk a little bit about some of the other concerns I have heard that are perhaps not specific to this bill but more general in nature.

We heard from the Minister of Labour and the minister responsible for women's issues about all of these different initiatives that this government has undertaken. What I have heard when I have talked to women across this province is that this government is not connecting the dots. We have a women's empowerment strategy—this is the centrepiece of that strategy—that doesn't mention violence against women, no mention of violence against women. We know that it is lack of economic opportunity in their workplaces that makes women vulnerable to becoming victims of violence.

Shortly before the women's empowerment strategy, we saw this government announce a new Gender-Based Violence Strategy. That strategy doesn't even mention sexual harassment at work. This is a time when the #MeToo movement is creating unprecedented demand for supports for women who have been sexually harassed at work, and when sexual harassment has been identified as a key barrier to women achieving empowerment.

We see a government that is taking credit for providing paid leave for survivors of domestic violence and sexual violence but, frankly, had to be pushed, resisting

every step of the way, into including that amendment in Bill 148.

I'm proud of the work that the NDP caucus did in this Legislature to put paid leave for domestic violence and sexual violence on the public agenda, to work with a coalition of advocates and labour leaders to try to push this government to include it in Bill 148, because if they had their way—we saw from first reading of Bill 148 that they had no intention of providing paid leave for domestic violence and sexual violence—no intention whatsoever. We saw that in the first reading of Bill 148, and we saw it in the second reading of Bill 148, after they had heard widespread input throughout the public input process on the first reading of Bill 148, when people were coming and telling this Liberal government that they needed to pass Peggy Sattler's bill on paid leave for domestic violence and sexual violence. Yet what did they do? They came back with unpaid leave for domestic violence and sexual violence, causing all of these advocates to have to come together one more time to finally get this government to agree to make that important change.

This is also the same government that, during the debate on Bill 148, refused to lift the server exemption from minimum wage requirements. There is extensive research to show that lower minimum wages have been shown to make servers more vulnerable to sexual violence and harassment.

I just wanted to talk a little bit about the research on servers, and the actions that are being implemented in other jurisdictions to acknowledge the risks that we are putting women, largely, who work as servers in the hospitality industry—the risks that we are exposing them to when we continue to allow a lower minimum wage.

There was a study published just last May that found that sexual harassment in the workplace "increases financial stress, largely by precipitating job change, and can significantly alter women's career attainment." The study found that women who reported having been sexually harassed at work were 6.5 times more likely to change jobs, compared to women who had not been harassed. Often when they changed jobs, when they moved employment, it wasn't into a job with a higher salary or more growth potential.

That confirms what I had been saying earlier about sexual harassment as a real barrier to enabling women to achieve empowerment, and also to help close the gender wage gap.

With regard to the liquor server exemption from minimum wage requirements, there is great research that has been done in BC that confirms that the liquor server wage exemption, which they also have in BC, has a very negative impact on women, who make up the majority of liquor servers in that province and in this province. It makes women more vulnerable to sexual harassment and sexualization of the workplace. If they don't play nice, they won't get paid; they won't get tipped.

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This research points out that this is unfair to the public. It shifts the burden of compensating these employees

onto customers because of the expectation that they will tip. It also effectively represents a wage subsidy for restaurant and bar owners and may incentivize employers, specifically restaurants, to start serving alcohol so that they can pay their employees at lower pay rates.

Women who work as servers and who do resist the harassment that they experience from customers risk losing a tip. Without minimum wage requirements that apply to all workers, effectively within licensed establishments we are normalizing sexualized behaviour and conveying to the people who work there, the women who work there, that this is just something they have to put up with if they want to earn a living.

We also know that there are a number of US jurisdictions that are taking action to level the playing field to recognize the vulnerability that we are creating for liquor servers when we allow a lower minimum wage. In New York, there are going to be public hearings on this issue. There's a ballot question that is in place in Washington, D.C. They're looking at getting this issue on the statewide ballot in Michigan. Seven US states—Alaska, California, Minnesota, Nevada, Oregon, Washington and Wisconsin—mandate that tipped workers be paid at least the same minimum wage as everyone else.

This government had the chance to equalize the minimum wage for liquor servers and chose not to. They did not agree to amend the legislation, to support the amendment that was brought forward by the NDP caucus to remove those exemptions from the minimum wage requirements of Bill 148.

This is also the same government that has refused to move forward on another one of my private member's bills that would make sexual violence and harassment training mandatory within Smart Serve certification, which would also go a long way to making workplaces safer for women in Ontario.

Speaker, I want to close with a return to the Equal Pay Coalition. I have to congratulate the organizations and the legal scholars who are part of the Equal Pay Coalition, who have worked for years to push the government to take action. They talk about the need for 12 steps that would really constitute a comprehensive strategy and an effective strategy to close the gender wage gap. They have called repeatedly on this government to take those 12 steps.

Step 1 is to treat closing the gap as a human rights priority. I talked about that earlier today. We have to recognize that women's rights to equal pay and employment opportunities are not something that we're going to do out of the goodness of our heart. Those are fundamental human rights that all women are entitled to achieve.

Step 2 is to raise awareness through annual Equal Pay Days and education. Certainly I appreciate that this government has moved forward with Equal Pay Days. I am concerned about the fact that we're marking Equal Pay Day in April, but at least we are calling attention to the size of the gap.

They've called for the development of a closing-the-gender-pay-gap plan by 2025.

They've called for pay transparency laws that are comparable to existing pay equity laws.

They've called for employment equity laws and policy.

They've called for increased access to collective bargaining, another step that would make an enormous difference for women.

They've called for increasing the minimum wage—something that we had been calling for, long before the Liberals—and affordable and accessible child care.

They've called for mainstreaming equity compliance into government laws and policy; in other words, taking an intersectional gender lens to everything that this government does.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Mr. John Fraser: It's a pleasure to respond to the member from London West. I listened to her comments, and I agree: It does shift the burden of proof onto the employer, which I think is a critical thing when you're looking at this kind of transparency legislation.

Of course, the regulatory issues—we get those in all pieces of legislation. There's a balance with regulation. Regulation is very helpful to be able to specifically identify those areas and get to those places where you want to get to. It also enables you to enhance legislation later on or adjust for something—an unintended consequence. So that balance between regulation and legislation, I think, is critical, and I think there is a balance there. I understand, when you look at that, you can say that there's some risk in doing that, but I think that risk is worthwhile because it enables you to be able to adjust in a way that's more effective and efficient later on through the regulation posting process.

Of course, this legislation will require all public job postings to include salary ranges and will bar employers from asking applicants about their compensation. It would also eventually require certain employers to record, report and post compensation data that includes gender and other diversity characteristics.

I heard the member discussing the minimum wage and the server's wage. Our oldest daughter was a server. One day, she was serving and somebody said something to her that was very inappropriate. She basically said, "That's not appropriate." She ended up getting fired—this is about 10 years ago. I know what you're saying about the minimum wage, that gap that's there. I'm not sure that that created that problem. I think that the problem that exists is the way that we treat each other and how we view our behaviour just between each other.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I think I'm over my time.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Mr. Jim McDonnell: I'm proud to rise in response to the third party on their leadoff.

I think there a couple of things I'm a little concerned about. I know that they talked about regulations put forth in our last government. But when a government has 15 years and they haven't changed anything, one would

have to think that it's agreeing with some of the policy that was put in place there.

After being stewards of this province for 15 years, we're seeing a government that, in the speech from the throne last week, is trying to change the message that this province has for them. I know the polling is showing that 81% of voters want anybody else but this government. So all of a sudden, we're looking at fairer pay. We're forgetting about how poorly run the province is. People are not going to forget that. We're looking at the manufacturing industry gone. Leland Industries is leaving and saying that the reason they're leaving is because they can no longer afford to operate a business in this province.

It's a horrendous record they have. Sure, there's a month left before we have an election, but you can't just change the page like that and expect people to forget the horrendous job that this government has done. I think people in my riding are just—they would like to have the election tomorrow to put an end to this government, because it's just painful to watch them go down and squirm.

But I think we have to look at trying to curtail—I mean, this is certainly well-needed legislation, rushed through. There has been no briefing to our party. We haven't seen the details. That's just the way they're running it. Everything is at the last minute here. I think that we're looking forward to seeing a briefing on just what's involved in this legislation.

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The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Mr. Percy Hatfield: Thank you, Speaker, and good afternoon to you. I am so proud to stand here this afternoon and comment on my friend from London West, who went for an hour without a written script because she knows her portfolios so well. She took us through all of the elements of the bill. She'll make a fine cabinet minister when we form government after June 7.

I must say, Speaker, that as a male I am so proud to be part of a caucus where we have more women than men. It's the first time in Canadian legislative history that a caucus has more women than men, and believe you me, we are so proud of that.

The member from London West brings such a sense of gravitas to these debates. She is so serious because she knows how serious these issues are. Nobody can knock her in any way, shape, or form for what she said this afternoon, because it all made sense to each and every one of us.

She has brought forth so many private member's bills that find their way into legislation eventually, after she stands up and defends them and gets the various lobby groups behind her. Then they force the government to take action. But it takes a lot of work, Speaker, and that's how dogged and determined she is to keep at it until she accomplishes what she has to do.

Early in April, I'm going to bring a couple of my granddaughters here with my daughter and my wife. We always say we want more clarity on issues. My youngest

granddaughter's name is Clarity. I'm going to bring a little Clarity to the debate later on in April, Speaker.

Thank you for your time this afternoon.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Mr. Bob Delaney: I did appreciate the comments from the member from London West. I sat here listening to her hour-long discussion, and I do commend her on the extensive research that she has done on it.

One would, however, be mistaken if you're assuming that the New Democratic Party had had this as a priority for a long time. Just as a matter of due diligence, some of our people thought, "I wonder if it was in either their 2011 or their 2014 election platform." Well, it turns out it wasn't. Nonetheless, again let's just say that she's done some work on it.

The suggestion has been—they kind of danced around the process of how this bill came together. The province began this process four years ago. In the course of doing the essential groundwork, the working group brought together representatives from equality advocacy groups, labour organizations, human resource professionals and businesses. They called the body the gender wage gap steering committee. They held extensive province-wide public consultations and developed a report that provided the government a range of options to consider. I was wondering, and I asked, in the course of the four years of doing that consultation, was the NDP involved in that? Did they make any presentations? No—just to put a little bit of perspective on it.

Now, in this case, Ontario took some immediate steps on a number of the steering committee's recommendations, and in the course of the last 12 months brought together another similar group to further discuss the report and to provide practical input on some of these specific initiatives and interests. That's the kind of comprehensive process that you really need when you're doing serious legislation like this.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): The member for London West can now respond.

Ms. Peggy Sattler: I would like to thank the members for Ottawa South, Stormont–Dundas–South Glengarry, Mississauga–Streetsville, and especially my by-election buddy, the member for Windsor–Tecumseh, for their comments on my speech.

I was outlining the 12 steps of the Equal Pay Coalition to close the gender wage gap, and I didn't get to the last two. The last two are to end violence and harassment of women, and to ensure decent work for women across the economic spectrum. I want to make sure I get all 12 steps on the record.

Speaker, throughout my comments I tried to remind people that this gender wage gap is not a new phenomenon. It has not, all of a sudden, been discovered by this Liberal government. It has been in existence for decades and decades. It has not been closed for almost 30 years, since the Pay Equity Act was first introduced. This Liberal government has been in a position to do something to address the gender wage gap. For 15 years they have

occupied those seats on the benches across the way, and yet they have chosen to do nothing until they're in their dying days of their final mandate. So certainly, if this actually was a priority for this Liberal government, they would have done something about this legislation earlier.

We need to listen to the advocates, the pay equity coalition and others, who are calling for meaningful action to actually achieve change and finally close that gender wage gap—eliminate that gender wage gap—by 2025.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Further debate?

Ms. Ann Hoggarth: It's a pleasure to rise in the House and speak in favour of the Pay Transparency Act. I agree with this. I appreciate all the comments. I've been sitting here listening. Most of the speakers stayed on track and talked about the bill. Some people preferred to gloat, over on the other side. I wasn't here, but I understand that there was a lot of gloating done before the last election. Some things happened that the gloaters didn't think would, so I would advise those people to stay on track the next time.

I'm going to be sharing my time with the minister—

Mr. Percy Hatfield: Oh, now you mention it. You just had a note.

Ms. Ann Hoggarth: No, I forgot to say it. I'm sharing my time with Minister Vernile.

Research shows that workplaces that establish gender equity are far more likely to have a competitive advantage in attracting highly skilled workers. It reduces the cost of employee turnover, and it demonstrates better organizational and financial performance. This is the right thing to do, not only for women in this province but for all Ontarians. I hope that the parties opposite will agree and support this landmark legislation.

Earlier, I heard someone talk about some other jurisdictions. Our proposed legislation is in line with other jurisdictions around the world. Currently, private and public employers in the United Kingdom with 250 or more employees must report their gender pay gap statistics. In Australia—down under—employers with more than 100 employees must provide gender wage statistics and answer questions on other workplace equality indicators. In Germany, companies with more than 500 employees must conduct regular equal pay audits and report them to the government.

In the United Kingdom, this reporting and disclosure measure is already having an effect in the public and the private sectors. Women from the BBC to Barclays are finally seeing, first-hand, how their salaries stack up against their male counterparts. This is starting many important conversations in the media and in other public spheres.

Besides increasing transparency, gender pay gap legislation has increased awareness, all across Europe, of the harmful effects of gender bias and pay discrimination. With more awareness and education out there, workers, managers, CEOs and business owners are better equipped to take practical action to tackle these issues.

Speaker, we know that women are increasingly the ones who are starting up businesses of their own. That is why Then Now Next will also create the Ontario Women's Entrepreneurship Association.

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I'm proud of Ontario's leadership on the issue of increasing the opportunities for women to serve on corporate boards. We were among the first Canadian jurisdictions to introduce comply-or-explain rules. Today, 11 jurisdictions, including Ontario, now have these rules. This means that companies listed on the Toronto Stock Exchange are now required to report publicly on their approach to increasing the number of women on boards and in executive officer positions. I have to say that having been involved with a group that sometimes would give women positions just because they were women—I do not agree with that, I can tell you right now. I believe that you have to have good candidates, whether they're male or female, but I do believe there are lots of very highly qualified and capable women candidates to be on these boards.

Our government is leading by example. We have set a government target of at least 40% female representation on the board of every provincial agency by the end of 2019. We've already taken the lead on this target by appointing a cabinet that is now 45% women, a figure very close to parity. You don't have to go too far back in your minds to remember a time when the political arena in Ontario and in Canada looked far different than it does today.

My hat's off to the third party for the work that they have done in order to have more female members than males.

I'm proud to be part of the changing face of politics and to be in a position to plant the seeds to help women succeed.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): I'm pleased to recognize the Minister of Tourism, Culture and Sport.

Hon. Daiene Vernile: I'm very pleased to add my voice this afternoon to the debate on Bill 3, the Pay Transparency Act. Speaker, when I began working in the early 1980s, I wished that we had had legislation like this. It certainly would have gone a long way to addressing the differences in what men and women do earn.

The gender wage gap still unfairly disadvantages women across Ontario. The gap is estimated to be about 12 to 29 cents. The gap is even higher for women who are racialized and for women who have disabilities.

Ontario is the first jurisdiction in Canada to introduce a comprehensive package of measures to increase transparency around pay and workforce composition for employers. This bill is going to require employers to post a salary rate or scale in all publicly posted job advertisements. It's going to ban employers from asking applicants about previous compensation benefits, and it protects all employees from being punished if they decide to talk about or ask about pay with co-workers or their employers. The measures are going to apply to all Ontario workplaces.

In addition to this, prescribed employers are going to be required to report every year to the government and to their own workforces on pay gaps and workforce composition by gender and other diversity characteristics. These reports are going to be made public. Annual reporting requirements are going to begin with employers with 500 or more workers, followed by employers that have 250 or more employees. Over time, the government is going to consider extending these mandatory reporting regulations to other workplaces.

This approach was, in part, informed by other progressive jurisdictions. You heard my colleague the MPP for Barrie talk about Australia, the United Kingdom and Germany. They've implemented very similar provisions; for example, larger employers in Australia, the UK and Germany have to report regularly to government on organizational gender pay gaps and other indicators of workplace gender equality.

We have proposed a very similar approach here in Ontario, plus we've put an emphasis on diversity by focusing on workforce composition by gender and other diversity characteristics. It's very important to note that this is a relatively new practice in almost all jurisdictions and Ontario is among the world leaders. We have the first legislation in North America to report these requirements and we're going to encourage all other jurisdictions to follow our example.

In the US, over 12 states and cities, including Massachusetts, Oregon, California and New York, have increased transparency to address biases in the hiring process by banning employers from asking job applicants about their salary history in interviews or on applications.

A California law recently came into force that requires employers to disclose a salary range to an applicant for a position, if requested. Ontario is now the first jurisdiction in Canada to do the same, but we're going one step further by making it mandatory that a salary range be discussed in a job advertisement.

Very effective pay transparency practices help workplaces build an environment of fairness and trust, and they create greater employer accountability over pay and promotion decisions. Studies have found that pay transparency is linked to increased employee engagement, productivity and job satisfaction.

Prior to serving as an elected representative, I spent over 30 years working as a news journalist. I'm of a certain generation where women were socialized not to fight for themselves. I worked for various broadcasters in Toronto, in Texas and then in Kitchener, and I always found it very difficult to ask for a raise. I often wondered what my male colleagues earned, and I never had the nerve to ask my boss about that. I believe that this bill is going to go a long way in helping us to address this issue.

Speaker, workers in Ontario have never had a stronger advocate than Kathleen Wynne. Under our Premier's leadership, workplaces are becoming fairer and safer. We always have to strive to be the best place to work in the world, here in Ontario, for everyone, regardless of a person's gender. I believe the Pay Transparency Act is one more step in that regard.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Thank you.
Second reading debate deemed adjourned.

APPOINTMENT OF TEMPORARY FINANCIAL ACCOUNTABILITY OFFICER

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Before we adjourn the House, I beg to inform the House that I have today laid upon the table order in council 612/2018, dated March 26, 2018, reappointing the Honourable J. David Wake as the temporary Financial Accountability Officer of Ontario, commencing March 26, 2018.

It being close to 6 of the clock, this House stands adjourned until tomorrow at 9 a.m.

The House adjourned at 1757.

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO
ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

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Dong, Han (LIB)	Trinity–Spadina	
Duguid, Brad (LIB)	Scarborough Centre / Scarborough-Centre	
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Flynn, Hon. / L'hon. Kevin Daniel (LIB)	Oakville	Minister of Labour / Ministre du Travail

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Gélinas, France (NDP)	Nickel Belt	
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Hardeman, Ernie (PC)	Oxford	
Harris, Michael (PC)	Kitchener–Conestoga	
Hatfield, Percy (NDP)	Windsor–Tecumseh	
Hillier, Randy (PC)	Lanark–Frontenac–Lennox and Addington	
Hoggarth, Ann (LIB)	Barrie	
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Leal, Hon. / L'hon. Jeff (LIB)	Peterborough	Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs / Ministre de l'Agriculture, de l'Alimentation et des Affaires rurales Minister Responsible for Small Business / Ministre responsable des Petites Entreprises
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MacLeod, Lisa (PC)	Nepean–Carleton	
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Mangat, Amrit (LIB)	Mississauga–Brampton South / Mississauga–Brampton-Sud	
Mantha, Michael (NDP)	Algoma–Manitoulin	
Martins, Cristina (LIB)	Davenport	
Martow, Gila (PC)	Thornhill	
Matthews, Deborah (LIB)	London North Centre / London- Centre-Nord	
Mauro, Hon. / L'hon. Bill (LIB)	Thunder Bay–Atikokan	Minister of Municipal Affairs / Ministre des Affaires municipales
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McGarry, Hon. / L'hon. Kathryn (LIB)	Cambridge	Minister of Transportation / Ministre des Transports
McMahon, Hon. / L'hon. Eleanor (LIB)	Burlington	Minister Responsible for Digital Government / Ministre responsable de l'Action pour un gouvernement numérique President of the Treasury Board / Présidente du Conseil du Trésor
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McNaughton, Monte (PC)	Lambton–Kent–Middlesex	
Milczyn, Hon. / L'hon. Peter Z. (LIB)	Etobicoke–Lakeshore	Minister of Housing / Ministre du Logement Minister Responsible for the Poverty Reduction Strategy / Ministre responsable de la Stratégie de réduction de la pauvreté
Miller, Norm (PC)	Parry Sound–Muskoka	

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Munro, Julia (PC)	York–Simcoe	
Naidoo-Harris, Hon. / L'hon. Indira (LIB)	Halton	Minister of Education / Ministre de l'Éducation Minister Responsible for Early Years and Child Care / Ministre responsable de la Petite enfance et de la Garde d'enfants
Naqvi, Hon. / L'hon. Yasir (LIB)	Ottawa Centre / Ottawa-Centre	Attorney General / Procureur général Government House Leader / Leader parlementaire du gouvernement
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Potts, Arthur (LIB)	Beaches–East York	
Qaadri, Shafiq (LIB)	Etobicoke North / Etobicoke-Nord	
Rinaldi, Lou (LIB)	Northumberland–Quinte West	
Romano, Ross (PC)	Sault Ste. Marie	
Sandals, Liz (LIB)	Guelph	
Sattler, Peggy (NDP)	London West / London-Ouest	
Scott, Laurie (PC)	Haliburton–Kawartha Lakes–Brock	
Sergio, Mario (LIB)	York West / York-Ouest	
Smith, Todd (PC)	Prince Edward–Hastings	
Sousa, Hon. / L'hon. Charles (LIB)	Mississauga South / Mississauga-Sud	Minister of Finance / Ministre des Finances
Tabuns, Peter (NDP)	Toronto–Danforth	
Takhar, Harinder S. (LIB)	Mississauga–Erindale	
Taylor, Monique (NDP)	Hamilton Mountain	
Thibeault, Hon. / L'hon. Glenn (LIB)	Sudbury	Minister of Energy / Ministre de l'Énergie
Thompson, Lisa M. (PC)	Huron–Bruce	
Vanthof, John (NDP)	Timiskaming–Cochrane	
Vernile, Hon. / L'hon. Daiene (LIB)	Kitchener Centre / Kitchener-Centre	Minister of Tourism, Culture and Sport / Ministre du Tourisme, de la Culture et du Sport
Walker, Bill (PC)	Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound	
Wilson, Jim (PC)	Simcoe–Grey	Opposition House Leader / Leader parlementaire de l'opposition officielle
Wong, Soo (LIB)	Scarborough–Agincourt	Deputy Speaker / Vice-présidente
Wynne, Hon. / L'hon. Kathleen O. (LIB)	Don Valley West / Don Valley-Ouest	Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs / Ministre des Affaires intergouvernementales Premier / Première ministre Leader, Liberal Party of Ontario / Chef du Parti libéral de l'Ontario
Yakabuski, John (PC)	Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke	
Yurek, Jeff (PC)	Elgin–Middlesex–London	
Zimmer, Hon. / L'hon. David (LIB)	Willowdale	Minister of Indigenous Relations and Reconciliation / Ministre des Relations avec les Autochtones et de la Réconciliation
Vacant	Bramalea–Gore–Malton	
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Vacant	Toronto Centre / Toronto-Centre	

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Standing Committee on Estimates / Comité permanent des budgets des dépenses

Chair / Président: Michael Mantha
Vice-Chair / Vice-présidente: Catherine Fife
Granville Anderson, James J. Bradley
Bob Delaney, Catherine Fife
Michael Harris, Monte Kwinter
Michael Mantha, Mario Sergio
Todd Smith
Committee Clerk / Greffière: Tonia Grannum

**Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs /
Comité permanent des finances et des affaires économiques**

Chair / Présidente: Ann Hoggarth
Vice-Chair / Vice-président: Han Dong
Yvan Baker, Toby Barrett
Mike Colle, Han Dong
Brad Duguid, Ann Hoggarth
Lisa MacLeod, Cristina Martins
John Vanthof
Committee Clerk / Greffier: Eric Rennie

**Standing Committee on General Government / Comité
permanent des affaires gouvernementales**

Chair / Président: Grant Crack
Vice-Chair / Vice-président: Arthur Potts
Yvan Baker, Grant Crack
Lisa Gretzky, Sophie Kiwala
Sam Oosterhoff, Arthur Potts
Lou Rinaldi, Lisa M. Thompson
Soo Wong
Committee Clerk / Greffier: Eric Rennie

**Standing Committee on Government Agencies / Comité
permanent des organismes gouvernementaux**

Chair / Présidente: Cristina Martins
Granville Anderson, Lorenzo Berardinetti
Brad Duguid, Wayne Gates
Sophie Kiwala, Cristina Martins
Sam Oosterhoff, Randy Pettapiece
Shafiq Qadri
Committee Clerk / Greffier: William Short

**Standing Committee on Justice Policy / Comité permanent de
la justice**

Chair / Président: Shafiq Qadri
Vice-Chair / Vice-président: Lorenzo Berardinetti
Lorenzo Berardinetti, Amrit Mangat
Jim McDonnell, Arthur Potts
Shafiq Qadri, Ross Romano
Liz Sandals, Monique Taylor
Soo Wong
Committee Clerk / Greffier: Christopher Tyrell

**Standing Committee on the Legislative Assembly / Comité
permanent de l'Assemblée législative**

Chair / Président: Monte McNaughton
Vice-Chair / Vice-présidente: Laurie Scott
Robert Bailey, James J. Bradley
Joe Dickson, Amrit Mangat
Michael Mantha, Deborah Matthews
Monte McNaughton, Laurie Scott
Soo Wong
Committee Clerk / Greffière: Valerie Quioc Lim

**Standing Committee on Public Accounts / Comité permanent
des comptes publics**

Chair / Président: Ernie Hardeman
Vice-Chair / Vice-présidente: Lisa MacLeod
Bob Delaney, Vic Dhillon
Han Dong, John Fraser
Ernie Hardeman, Percy Hatfield
Randy Hillier, Lisa MacLeod
Liz Sandals
Committee Clerk / Greffier: Katch Koch

**Standing Committee on Regulations and Private Bills / Comité
permanent des règlements et des projets de loi d'intérêt privé**

Chair / Président: Ted McMeekin
Vice-Chair / Vice-président: Lou Rinaldi
Granville Anderson, James J. Bradley
Grant Crack, Joe Dickson
Jennifer K. French, Jack MacLaren
Deborah Matthews, Ted McMeekin
Lou Rinaldi, Bill Walker
Committee Clerk / Greffier: Christopher Tyrell

**Standing Committee on Social Policy / Comité permanent de
la politique sociale**

Chair / Président: Peter Tabuns
Vice-Chair / Vice-présidente: Monique Taylor
Lorne Coe, Mike Colle
Vic Dhillon, John Fraser
Ann Hoggarth, Gila Martow
Ted McMeekin, Peter Tabuns
Monique Taylor
Committee Clerk / Greffière: Jocelyn McCauley