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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
OF ONTARIO

Thursday 22 November 2018

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE
DE L'ONTARIO

Jeudi 22 novembre 2018

The House met at 0900.

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

ORDERS OF THE DAY

ACCESS TO NATURAL GAS ACT, 2018
LOI DE 2018 SUR L'ACCÈS
AU GAZ NATUREL

Mr. Bethlenfalvy, on behalf of Mr. McNaughton, moved third reading of the following bill:

Bill 32, An Act to amend the Ontario Energy Board Act, 1998 / Projet de loi 32, Loi modifiant la Loi de 1998 sur la Commission de l'énergie de l'Ontario.

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

Hon. Peter Bethlenfalvy: Thank you, Speaker. I'll be splitting my time with the member for King–Vaughan this morning.

It gives me great pleasure and honour to rise this morning to begin third reading of Bill 32, the proposed Access to Natural Gas Act. As I just mentioned, I'll be sharing my time with Stephen Lecce, the member from King–Vaughan. Stephen is the parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Infrastructure and the Premier, as well as deputy government House leader.

I want to thank the Minister of Energy, Northern Development and Mines, Minister Greg Rickford, and his staff within that ministry for their assistance in developing this legislation, Bill 32.

In September, we introduced this legislation that, if passed, would allow government to develop a program to bring natural gas to more families and businesses throughout rural and northern Ontario. Our government ran on a mandate to provide the people of Ontario with much-needed energy relief, to put money back in their pockets and to open Ontario for business. The proposed bill would, if enacted, amend the Ontario Energy Board Act, 1998, to enable gas distributors to add a small charge to existing customers' natural gas bills to help cover the cost of expanding access.

Since first introducing this legislation, this bill has proceeded through second reading and the Standing Committee on General Government. Throughout each debate and meeting, we have been encouraged by the positive feedback we received from so many people. And it's no wonder people want relief. They want more money in their pockets, Madam Speaker. It's something we

pledged to do and it's something we are doing. We said that help is on its way, and help is now arriving.

As we have talked about, in too many parts of rural, remote and northern Ontario, families and businesses still do not have access to natural gas. In southwestern Ontario, where a number of my colleagues in this chamber hail from, an estimated 40% of households still do not have access to natural gas. We need to do something about that, and we are. This proposed legislation that we're here to see through today would enable the private sector to expand natural gas to up to 78 communities in the province of Ontario. That means nearly 35,000 new households in Ontario will be able to save up to \$2,500 per year in energy costs.

Our government understands that people are facing high energy bills—in fact, we heard that throughout last spring and summer—especially if they must depend on more costly electricity, oil or propane to heat their homes. Our government is here to make life easier and more affordable for the people of Ontario. Madam Speaker, Bill 32 would help achieve this goal. Families across Ontario need access. For some, it could very well mean the difference between heating and eating. That's not a choice that anyone in this province should ever have to make. And businesses need access to natural gas to improve their competitiveness.

For example, with natural gas our farmers have more opportunities to leverage modern technology to grow our food. A perfect example is in the booming greenhouse industry in southwestern Ontario. I had the pleasure of touring some of those hothouses in southwestern Ontario recently, and I've noted that Ontario's hothouse cucumbers, tomatoes and peppers are key exports for our agricultural sector. But without access to affordable natural gas, our greenhouse sector would not continue to grow.

Natural gas is also considered the cheapest fuel for grain-drying and animal welfare issues. This is why we're looking at the most effective way to allow more people to access natural gas. We feel the best way to do that is by partnering with the private sector. The time to do this is now.

Mr. Daryl Kramp: Right now; you're right.

Hon. Peter Bethlenfalvy: Right now—thank you, colleague.

As Will Bouma, from the great riding of Brantford–Brant, rightfully pointed out in the House last week, “Access to affordable energy is vital to the future prosperity of our province. Families depend on natural gas as a more affordable source of energy to heat their homes, power their tools and keep their businesses open.... Natural gas is bountiful in Ontario, yet many Ontarians, especially

in rural or remote parts of our province, do not have access to this commodity.”

Madam Speaker, Mr. Bouma asked the Minister of Infrastructure: What is the government’s plan to leverage the private sector to deliver natural gas to tens of thousands of Ontarians? Well, as you can see, it’s not just a plan. We have already taken definitive action and we will continue to work hard to make life easier and more affordable for the people of Ontario. By cancelling the cap-and-trade carbon tax, we have already acted to bring down natural gas prices by saving families on average \$80 per year and small businesses \$285 per year. Now we are taking the next step to ensure that the benefits of natural gas expansion are shared throughout the province.

We’re moving away from the previous government’s natural gas subsidy program. We have arrived at a critical decision point. We can go from a one-time grant program to a smart, sustainable one. It’s the difference between investing for now and investing for our future. This is part of our government’s plan to bring quality jobs back to Ontario and send a clear message that Ontario is open for business.

0910

As we know, the economic benefits of natural gas expansion could extend far beyond the borders of the communities that gain expanded access to natural gas. Madam Speaker, what is good for one Ontario community is good for all Ontario communities. When done right, investments in infrastructure can help to lower business costs and attract more businesses across Ontario, and that’s good for the province as a whole. Access to natural gas is a key part of supporting economic growth in all our communities. If passed, this legislation is going to have an impactful benefit right across the province.

Minister of Finance Vic Fedeli spoke to this when, on November 15, he released the 2018 Ontario Economic Outlook and Fiscal Review, outlining the government’s plan to help people make ends meet and get ahead while making government more efficient. He highlighted one of the ways we’re putting more money back in the pockets of Ontarians: bringing home heating bills down by removing the cap-and-trade carbon tax from natural gas bills.

He also spoke to how our government is looking to challenge a federally imposed carbon tax. Seniors, families and small businesses have expressed concerns over the federal tax. As the finance minister said, Ontario is proud to join a growing coalition of Canadian provinces opposed to the federal carbon tax framework, one that includes Saskatchewan, Manitoba and New Brunswick. The Premier has made it clear he intends to fight the carbon tax with every tool in his toolbox.

Madam Speaker, our government made two big commitments during the campaign. One was that Ontario was open for business, and the second was to lower energy bills for families, for businesses and for everyone across the province. I’m proud to say we are delivering on those promises.

I think it’s important to point out our proposed legislation is not a one-off approach, and it is not a tax. Rather, it

would create a sustainable path to have the private sector participate in natural gas expansion right across the whole province.

Now, Madam Speaker, I would like to take a moment to deviate a bit before my colleague takes over. When done right, investments in infrastructure can help lower business costs and attract more business to Ontario. By leveraging the private sector and finding sensible solutions to deliver on infrastructure, we are showing again that Ontario is open for business.

Bill 32, the proposed Access to Natural Gas Act, can help make businesses more competitive and life more affordable for families. If passed, this legislation will lay the critical groundwork needed for expansion. We’re already on third reading, Madam Speaker, which is excellent progress. I’m personally excited for this proposed legislation to move forward; I hope you are too. I promise we will continue to do that, including through this proposed legislation.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): I recognize the member for King–Vaughan.

Mr. Stephen Lecce: Let me thank the President of the Treasury Board for his leadership on this file and for helping to restore economic prosperity in the province of Ontario. We’re very grateful for your leadership, sir.

It is a great pleasure to rise today to speak about Bill 32, the proposed Access to Natural Gas Act, 2018, and I want to thank the Minister of Infrastructure, Minister McNaughton, for all of his work in moving this proposed legislation forward. I also want to thank the Minister of Energy, Minister Rickford, and his staff for their work in developing this legislation in conjunction with our office.

The government introduced legislation in the form of Bill 32, the Access to Natural Gas Act, to develop a new, more effective natural gas program. Madam Speaker, our government ran on a mandate to provide the people of Ontario with much-needed energy relief. We promised to put money back into the pockets of working people and open Ontario for business. Any charges for consumers, as we’ve noted, would be minimal compared to the savings families and businesses are already receiving from our government’s decision to remove the costly and ineffective cap-and-trade carbon tax from their natural gas bills.

We promised energy relief. We promised sensible solutions. In 15 years of Liberal mismanagement of this province, from rising energy costs and poor accessibility to affordable natural gas for many communities, to a burdensome carbon tax, they have shown contempt for the taxpayers of this province. We are going to change that.

I want to thank all of those people across Ontario who have written and phoned our offices and thanked us for introducing this legislation and for letting us know the importance of expanding natural gas in their communities.

I also want to thank many of you in this chamber who voiced your support or raised important considerations, including the Speaker herself, as we work through the details of this proposed legislation.

I want to cite a few examples, in a multi-partisan spirit this Thursday. I start with my colleague the member from

Cambridge, Belinda Karahalios, as she was reflecting during the second reading debate. She noted the importance of access to natural gas for those forced to heat their homes all day during the winter: the mothers and fathers who stay home with their kids, and seniors who don't go to work.

Michael Mantha, the member for Algoma–Manitoulin, mentioned the Ontario Mining Association—

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): I'm sorry to interrupt the member. This morning, we've been hearing a lot of names as opposed to ridings. I would encourage all members to refer to folks by their ridings or titles. I apologize for interrupting.

Mr. Stephen Lecce: Not at all, Madam Speaker.

The member from Algoma–Manitoulin mentioned that the Ontario Mining Association was very encouraged about the potential opportunities that natural gas expansion could bring to that important sector of our economy.

And who could forget the story that the member for Thunder Bay–Atikokan shared? She knows a woman who chops her own wood at 80 years old.

As many MPPs in this room know, something needs to change for these people and for their children. We believe this legislation is a step in the right direction to help every single one of those citizens I cited briefly, in order to save more of their hard-earned money.

As we've talked about, in too many parts of rural, remote and northern Ontario, families and businesses still do not have access to natural gas. No wonder, considering that the previous government showed such contempt for natural gas that they even entertained the possibility of getting rid of it altogether.

Our government understands that people are facing high energy bills, especially if they must depend on more expensive or costly electricity, oil or propane to heat their homes. There's no reason why communities in our province should have to resort to that. Access to natural gas is not just a question of convenience. For many, it's a choice between heating and eating, and as we enter the winter season, we should be reminded of how much people in Ontario depend on access to heating. The flexibility of natural gas is, therefore, also a key reason for investing in natural gas expansion.

According to an article posted earlier this week by Vancouver-based Natural Gas World, the flexibility of natural gas is "crucial ... because of its ability to seamlessly balance the increasingly variable grid demand, efficiently heat homes and businesses when the cold strikes, as well as to fuel many other parts of the economy, from industry to transport, and to do so without polluting the air and at low GHG emissions."

The article goes on to say, if I may continue, "Because of its versatility, natural gas is required to continue to seamlessly fuel our communities for the current planning horizon, and continued investments in its infrastructure are imperative, if energy security is still a priority for the policy-makers."

And it is for our government, because the proposed legislation we're seeing through today is also about finding the right, sensible methods to delivering natural gas to

the people. As you know, under the previous government, private sector companies were limited from participating in natural gas expansion, portions of which were instead managed by taxpayer-funded programs. That program would have only granted access to a few select communities, limiting expansion.

As a matter of fact, the previous Liberal government entertained outright hostility toward natural gas in this province. As you will recall, Speaker, and other members of this House from committee, where we cited the "secret memo" of years ago where the real agenda of the Liberal Party was to phase out natural gas as an affordable heating option for the people of Ontario. We know that not only is that incompatible with the economic needs of our province; it only speaks about the real agenda of the Liberals to make it more expensive for people to heat their homes: a punishment on those who want to have the great luxury of having a warm home in the winter; the luxury of driving their children to school; and the ironic luxury, just to be clear, of being able to get to work every morning. Madam Speaker, these are not luxuries; these are the necessities of life, and we stand with the people as they pursue their day-to-day aspirations in work and with their family.

0920

This program would have, as I mentioned, granted a few communities. In contrast, we've taken action to develop an innovative partnership of local communities and the private sector to expand natural gas to families and businesses throughout rural and northern Ontario. Instead of a one-time program, our government believes in a long-term, predictable, sustainable approach. The proposed natural gas expansion, if passed, would encourage more private sector distributors to partner with communities to develop projects with communities to access affordable and efficient natural gas. This in turn could deliver decades of benefits to potentially dozens of communities across Ontario, and—Madam Speaker, this is so important for all members—at no additional cost to taxpayers, while keeping existing natural gas costs low.

This government is a strong supporter of developing partnerships with the private sector. In fact, our disposition as a government is to support the private sector, to leverage the talent, the ingenuity, the human potential in the private sector to help with public aims. In this case, we believe that the synergy between the private and public sector is strong and it is for the benefit of taxpayers who want affordable access to this energy commodity.

This government is a strong supporter of that partnership. Our ability to strategically partner with the private sector is a differentiator that sets us apart. It helps us get the job done for the people of this province. The Minister of Infrastructure is a great leader, by example, in how he believes, principally, that the private sector should be part of the solution when it comes to energy expansion in the province, so long as the taxpayer or the ratepayer is better off.

We believe that a market solution, a private sector alternative, can keep more money in your pocket instead of always turning to taxpayer programs to develop and

deliver services for the government of Ontario. For some, this is quite a dramatic cultural change, and I get it. This is a new government. This is a new commitment, a new spirit of entrepreneurship—

Mr. Michael Parsa: Modern.

Mr. Stephen Lecce: —and modern government, a Progressive Conservative government that is determined to unleash the economic potential of this province.

For some, this change is opposed. I know that leveraging private talent is something, amongst the parties in this House, that will ideologically divide us, but we should be united when it comes to providing an energy source at a more affordable cost. This should not be a matter of ideological principle or divide. The bottom line, the metric, of our voting determination should be based on what is going to make life more affordable for the people. Conservatives in this House are determined to support this legislation because we believe it will bring affordable energy to the people.

While that change may be radical to some, for us it is just common sense. We are economically prudent and we respect the taxpayer of this province. Based on the feedback we have received so far, our approach is—

Interjection.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): The member will come to order.

Mr. Stephen Lecce: —largely supported. It's supported by the members across York region and by my neighbouring colleagues, who feel very strongly about this bill. Look, I pardon the enthusiasm of this House, but we're fired up to talk about natural gas this morning, Madam Speaker—

Interjection.

Mr. Stephen Lecce: —because we believe that it's about time that we have a government that is putting money back in the pockets of working people, and so I share the enthusiasm of my very honourable colleague.

Based on the feedback we've received—not just from legislators but from working people, from stakeholders, from small businesses, from the Ontario chamber, from organizations across Ontario, from members opposite—we believe our approach is largely supported. This includes some of the stakeholders I had the opportunity to meet with during our Standing Committee on General Government—in a former capacity, and I was joined by the whip—where members of this Legislature asked, I think, some very important, difficult questions to those stakeholders who deputized before us.

There are a few of them I'm going to quote, if I may, Madam Speaker, but one that came to mind was Michelle Eaton, the new vice-president of the Ontario Chamber of Commerce. She said something very interesting: “The ask for expansion has been something that we've heard year after year, loud and clear. So we welcome the introduction of the bill.”

Mr. Pat Jilesen, director of the Ontario Federation of Agriculture, was pleased to hear about our progress on the natural gas file. Allow me to quote him: “Ontario needs this smart investment for smart expansion.” And, “We

commend this government for its commitment, through Bill 32, to bring energy cost relief to rural Ontario...”

Anne Eadie, the mayor of the municipality of Kincardine, was pleased with the focus on rural Ontario. She said, “We want to have equal access to the more affordable benefits of natural gas for our residents, businesses, municipal buildings, schools etc.... We are very pleased that the Ontario government wants to support rural Ontario.”

Clearly, the benefits of Bill 32 will extend to various sectors of our economy.

Joe Vaccaro, the CEO of the Ontario Home Builders' Association, said, “The decision to extend natural gas services will support future housing supply and choice in rural and northern communities, while providing homeowners and businesses with an affordable and reliable heating option that will keep their everyday costs down.”

He continued: “Make no mistake: The government's approach to natural gas expansion is a clear sign that Ontario is open for business and that this government is looking to attract business investments across Ontario.”

Stephen Hamilton of the Ontario Home Builders' Association agreed. He stated, “The natural gas announcement ... signals that Ontario is open for business.”

In his comments, Mr. Ian Nokes, the research analyst of the Ontario Federation of Agriculture, focused on the benefits to those experiencing financial challenges. He said that “a lot of people retire or move to rural areas, are on fixed incomes, and we've heard that they struggle with electricity costs and heating costs. It's almost, I would say, vital and critical that we provide this abundant source of affordable fuel to these people.”

Mark Rodger, partner at the law firm of Borden Ladner Gervais, representing the municipalities of Kincardine, Huron and Elderslie, said, “Bill 32 inherently recognizes the unfairness and the adverse economic impact of having our part of southern Ontario having no access to” natural “gas. Our project will not succeed, in all likelihood—or proceed—without this legislation...”

“It's critical that this legislation happen.... When we've held public meetings over the years, the biggest question we get from the public is, ‘How fast can the natural gas start flowing?’”

George Gilvesy, chair of the Ontario Greenhouse Vegetable Growers—and I want to apologize to George in advance for no doubt bastardizing his name; he's a very decent man—had an opinion that is worth sharing in this Legislature. He said, “Anything the government can do to help us keep those costs in check is going to go to helping the consumer as far as the price of food.”

Kimberly Earls—I got that one right, Madam Speaker, in case you were concerned—representing the South Central Ontario Region Economic Development Corp., focused on the agricultural benefits. Ms. Earl said, “The expansion of the natural gas program has been something that is largely impacting our agricultural businesses and our farm communities in our area. Having the private distributors as a partner would also, we feel, facilitate job creation in the area and provide us with competitiveness both locally and abroad.”

She also said, “Having the investment in the natural gas expansion bill and having those dollars back in our business communities and our agricultural communities—our farmers and our manufacturing sector are hard working. I think 78% of our business community is small business enterprises, so certainly, every dollar that they’re able to invest in the growth of their business, in job creation is absolutely appreciated in the end.”

Now, I consider these to be ringing endorsements from a wide variety of stakeholders, representing a variety of sectors of our economy.

Our government made a commitment: We made a promise to put people first and to make life affordable, make it easier for families and businesses in this province, while sending a message, a clear message, as the minister enumerated, that Ontario is open for business.

0930

That is what we are doing by leveraging the private sector to enable more communities, more people, more small businesses to have access to, in this case, natural gas. I’m very proud that our government is looking at a no-cost solution for delivering a commodity that is vital to our communities in our province.

I also would like to talk about the wider range of economic benefits that this legislation will bring. A bill which will provide greater access to natural gas also allows for greenhouse development, which would create new jobs as well as provide relief to households that may be relying on other, more expensive heating sources.

I want to take a moment to talk a bit about the greenhouse industry. Pardon the pun, but the greenhouse industry is no small potato to Canada’s and Ontario’s economy.

Interjection.

Mr. Stephen Lecce: No, Madam Speaker? Okay. Just let the record say that I’m trying to bring levity to this House, but I failed.

According to Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada’s website, “The Canadian greenhouse vegetable sector is the largest and fastest-growing segment of Canadian horticulture.”

I’m very proud of this, because in the great riding of King–Vaughan, and particularly in the township of King—I share the Holland Marsh with the Attorney General of this province. It’s principally in her riding, but maybe 15% to 20% is in mine. We’re proud of our producers. We’re proud of those who grow in Ontario, the people who work hard—family farms, intergenerational farms. These are people who simply want to carry on that tradition, the proud tradition, of growing and producing the best food in the world in this country.

Greenhouse farming, as we know, produces products in self-contained, controlled environments with systems supplying heat, water and nutrients, and often using artificial lighting in addition to sunlight. It supplements it to nourish the plants. This method of farming requires investment in infrastructure and a strong understanding of the technology.

Canada’s greenhouse industry produces tomatoes, cucumbers, lettuce, peppers, green beans, eggplants, various

herbs and microgreen vegetables. Of these commodities, tomatoes, cucumbers and peppers are the main greenhouse vegetable crops grown in Canada. In 2016, Ontario continued to lead the greenhouse vegetable sector, representing 70% of the total harvested in Canada, followed by BC and Quebec with 20% and 6%, respectively. So we really lead in this respect.

Given that natural gas is cheaper than other energy sources, greenhouses with access to natural gas will significantly reduce operating costs. The same goes for other agricultural businesses.

This is so vitally important, Madam Speaker, because our government was elected on a promise to make Ontario open for business. That means finding the right, sensible solutions that will help our agri-food sector. That means supporting our rural communities and helping their economies in whatever way we can. This legislation, if passed, will help do that. It will help do that in parts of this province that need it so much.

Being open for business means being open for everyone. According to a 2016 article by Tyler Brooks in the Public Sector Digest, “Rural Ontario requires the expansion of natural gas infrastructure to provide affordable and reliable energy, which in turn, will drive economic development and expansion.”

The article states: “Having competitive energy will significantly reduce operating costs for heating barns, providing hot water for dairy operations, drying grain and running greenhouses and other facilities. Over 500,000 rural families and 30,000 farms and small business will have money to reinvest in local rural job creation. Hundreds of millions of dollars in new disposable income will be made available across rural Ontario,” helping those businesses to reinvest in their vibrant economy and community.

Let me repeat, Madam Speaker: “Hundreds of millions of dollars.”

The article continues: “Agriculture has a significant impact on the provincial economy, driving economic growth, providing jobs in food production and processing, and reinvests spin-off benefits to rural and local communities. Planned and strategic infrastructure investment from government will keep our communities and our industries thriving.”

So you can see, Madam Speaker, that expanding access to natural gas will have a domino effect in Ontario and beyond.

In southwestern Ontario, where a number of my colleagues, including the Minister of Infrastructure, hail from, an estimated 40% of households still do not have access to natural gas. That means approximately half a million dwellings do not have access to affordable natural gas. We need to do something about that, Madam Speaker, and I’m proud to confirm we are.

If 520,000 dwellings benefit from access to clean, safe, affordable natural gas, imagine how much those communities can reinvest in the local economies just by making that switch.

Of course, it’s not just Minister McNaughton’s riding that lacks access. Families across Ontario need access. For

some, it could very well mean the difference between heating and eating. That's not a choice anyone in Ontario should have to make. It should be something that brings this Legislature together, to help those lower-income and, increasingly, middle-income people who feel the pinch because of increasing taxes, increasing energy costs, increasing user fees, increasing federal Liberal taxation, and now a debilitating, job-killing carbon tax that, as we know, will raise the prices of natural gas, of home heating, of gasoline. That is an unacceptable proposition which this government, under the Premier's leadership, is going to oppose every step of the way.

Families across Ontario need access. For some it could mean, as we mentioned, the choice between heating and eating. I find it so shameful that in 2018, in one of the most prosperous industrialized economies in the world, in the best democratic society in the world, we have this choice among us, among so many people we all know. Some of them are our friends, some of them are our neighbours, but no doubt they are all our constituents.

Businesses need access to natural gas, just like those families, to improve their competitiveness. For example, with natural gas, our farmers would have more opportunities to leverage modern technology to grow our food. As I mentioned, a perfect example is the booming greenhouse industry in southwestern Ontario. Ontario's hothouse cucumbers, tomatoes and peppers are key exports for the agriculture sector. Without access to affordable natural gas, our greenhouse industry would not continue to grow.

Natural gas is also considered the cheapest fuel for grain-drying and animal welfare issues. Minister McNaughton had the chance to speak to local farmers in Fergus, Ontario. One individual told him that her neighbour, a poultry farmer, is saving \$40,000 per year just from switching to natural gas—\$40,000 in the pockets of that family and that farm. That is an incredible saving; wouldn't you agree, Madam Speaker? This is why we are looking at the most effective way to allow more people, like this poultry farmer in Fergus, to access natural gas, and we feel the best way to do that is through this legislation.

We heard from people across Ontario that natural gas is important in order to grow businesses, create jobs and compete. Unfortunately, these people have had to deal with 15 years of Liberal mismanagement. For many people, this meant unaddressed energy poverty, only exacerbated by the costly and ineffective cap-and-trade carbon tax. I've outlined many of the difficulties faced by the people of Ontario with energy costs. Instead of easing the burden, helping local economies and putting this province back on track, the previous Liberal government imposed extra costs, a tax on everything.

When we got elected, in our first 100 days, Madam Speaker, you will recall that we made a commitment to the people that we were going to scrap the cap-and-trade carbon tax. The Minister of the Environment, who is in this House, deserves a significant amount of credit for his leadership. The honourable member will remind me that it is both job-killing and punitive. Let the record say that,

because I don't think it has been said in this House before. We need to be aware that if not for the leadership of the Premier and this minister and this caucus, people in Ontario would continue to face those energy costs that were unachievable for so many of us.

To contrast the choices of the other parties, who call for higher energy costs, higher taxes, carbon taxation on workers and middle-class families, this is what we're doing. Let the contrast be clear. Let us reflect upon this in three and a half short years when the choice is before the people of this province, when we have a political party that is absolutely committed—the singular vehicle in this Legislature for affordability is housed by Conservatives who are acting decisively, immediately, in the first not even 100 days. I think it was 30 days that we took action, and the minister, leading by example, took action, to scrap the carbon tax, saving families, on average, \$80 per year and small businesses \$285 per year, by eliminating this tax. That's on natural gas alone, Madam Speaker.

We're taking the next step to ensure that the benefits of natural gas expansion are shared throughout the province, and we're moving away from the previous government's natural gas subsidy program, a band-aid solution. It's not what's going to help this province. We're dealing with the aftermath of energy poverty. This is something that has to be addressed with a sustainable, long-term solution. We've arrived at a critical decision point. We can go from a one-time grant program to a smart, sustainable one. It's the difference between investing for now and investing for our future.

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Having access to natural gas makes life affordable. It puts more money in the people's pockets, where it belongs. And lowering the cost of living gives people more money to reinvest in our economies.

Expanding natural gas would also make Ontario communities more attractive for job creation and new business. Madam Speaker, I've mentioned this before in the Legislature, but we have to be informed by what our trading partners are doing around us. We do not live in isolation. We're not an island in and of ourselves. We are an interconnected economy, with a harmonized economy with the United States, with a trading relationship that moves businesses outbound if we do not create a competitive advantage for our small business and medium-sized enterprise in this province.

So when you have provinces and states that have lower labour costs, lower energy costs, lower taxes, a much lower corporate tax rate, a GDP level that is much more in line with market norms, when you have every single economic indicator suggesting that it is better to invest, more economical to invest in another jurisdiction, we must accept that industry and jobs will flow outbound unless we do something about it. The open-for-business mantra is much more than a sign; it is a signal to industry, domestic and international, that we are providing them with an incentive—we're incenting the marketplace—to invest in this province with competitive energy, a competitive tax regime, and also a regulatory regime that doesn't punish

them and delay and impede progress, taking 10 years to get investment from inception to completion. We want to move the yardstick forward and expedite the delivery of jobs in this province.

Expanding natural gas, as I mentioned, will make it more attractive to invest in those jobs, to create those jobs. It's part of our government's plan to bring quality jobs, better jobs for the people to this province. We know the economic benefits of natural gas expansion could extend far beyond the borders of the communities that gain access to natural gas. Keep in mind that rural Ontario is a significant driver of our economy. In fact, it contributes \$106 billion to this province's GDP. It supports more than 1.2 million jobs. The data from Statistics Canada is based mainly on wages and salaries.

Further to the point, the agri-food industry—everything involved in bringing people food, from the farm to the plate—employs about one in eight Ontario workers. Ontario has almost 50,000 farms producing more than 200 commodities. So you can see how critical it is to help to lower costs for this sector at large.

And of course, just as important is northern Ontario and its transportation and mining industries. For example, establishing more natural gas fuelling stations could enable regional bus fleets, commercial trucking, tractor-trailers and long-haul trucking fleets to switch from diesel to cheaper, more affordable compressed natural gas.

As you know, Madam Speaker, transit projects across the province are a big priority for our government. It is this Premier who is determined to get projects done. It is this parliamentary assistant in transportation from Etobicoke Centre working to get things done for the people: Get projects done; get shovels in the ground and help reduce the gridlock that has a massive cost, not just to the productivity of our economy, the competitiveness of our economy, but to families who can't get to work, for businesses that can't get their product to market. So we have to be determined to do this and we are; we are, Madam Speaker.

Our current infrastructure agreement with the federal government provides around \$11.8 billion in infrastructure investment across the province through the bilateral agreement that was signed, including \$8.3 billion for public transit. So expanding access to natural gas could help support our focus on transit projects as we deliver on our promise to get Ontario moving. Giving communities, businesses and households the freedom to choose more affordable access to energy, we know, will give more freedom to invest in their local economies.

With regard to the mining sector, I mentioned this—the member opposite proudly hailing from northern Ontario mentioned the importance of the mining sector. We know that mineral production in Ontario represents and supports about 26,000 direct jobs and 50,000 indirect jobs associated with mining, manufacturing and processing. Mining is the second-largest private sector employer of Indigenous peoples in this province—in this country; 25% of mining jobs in Canada are in Ontario. What is good for one Ontario community is good for all Ontario communities. When done right, investments in infrastructure can

help to lower business costs and attract more businesses across Ontario, and that's good for the province as a whole. That's good for the people of this province. Access to natural gas is a key part of supporting economic growth in all of our communities and it is an important focus for our government. If passed, this legislation is going to have a lasting impact across the province.

As mentioned, the Minister of Finance set out a concrete outline of our government's plan to help people make ends meet and get this province back on track. The benefits of scrapping the provincial cap-and-trade carbon tax cannot be understated. We're also working hard and using every tool in our toolbox to make sure that the federal Liberals do not impose a carbon tax and that it does not become another burden on the taxpayer. Seniors, families and small businesses have expressed concern over the federal Liberal tax.

I think it's important to point out that the proposed legislation is not a one-off approach. It is not a tax. Rather, it would create a sustainable path to have the private sector participate in rural gas expansion across our province. This way, we can ensure the proper delivery of natural gas access today and for years to come. We're creating sensible, effective models for providing people with that energy relief.

We know about the benefits that infrastructure enables and the challenges of balancing infrastructure investments with other priorities. We want to continue to work with the private sector in order to provide vital infrastructure. For example, Minister McNaughton recently visited construction sites for the Groves Memorial Community Hospital near Fergus and the West Park Healthcare Centre in Toronto. I think the member from Etobicoke Centre was at that event as well.

Mr. Paul Calandra: So busy, that member.

Mr. Stephen Lecce: Just so busy, that member, I've got to say.

With both these hospital projects, Madam Speaker, we have used the public-private partnership approach, or P3 model, an approach which I strongly support. Our agency, Infrastructure Ontario, has demonstrated the value of partnering with the private sector to get these projects done while protecting taxpayers from the added costs that are common in these large and complex projects. The government is a strong supporter of that model. Having the flexibility to use both the P3 model and the more traditional approaches to deliver infrastructure, such as hospitals or roads and transit, is, we know, critical. It's simply about using the right tool for the right job.

Working strategically with the private sector on these types of projects will stimulate growth and prosperity across our province, and also create and support good jobs in all sectors of the economy, including manufacturing, construction and those within the high-tech industries. This approach not only demonstrates the importance of infrastructure, but provides stability for large projects that support our communities. That's why we're looking for opportunities to engage the private sector, to leverage the private sector even more, much as we're doing to expand natural gas to more communities.

It demonstrates that our approach goes well beyond just natural gas. It includes getting our highways, our roads and our bridges back into working shape for families, workers and businesses who use them every day; making our hospitals state-of-the-art, as we see in the Mackenzie Vaughan Hospital in Vaughan, the first smart hospital in this province being built and supported and funded by our government, operationalizing that funding by our government—we're very proud of that; the Deputy Premier supported that announcement just weeks ago—and modernizing our schools to be safe and effective places for learning.

Our government also recognizes that whether you live in our province's biggest cities or in our smallest towns or hamlets, investing in infrastructure both grows the economy and protects critical assets. We believe that delivering vital infrastructure is important. It's part of the mandate of this government. We also believe that ensuring that we can bring prices down for consumers and businesses is at the very core of what this government is here for. Infrastructure is so much more than bricks and mortar, a pipeline, a road, or a bridge. It enhances community. It helps build businesses. It helps support families.

We recognize that if we can provide better access to natural gas and not have to impose additional costs to the taxpayer, that is a win-win. It is good for industry, which wants a cheaper alternative to the other, more conventional methods of power, the more expensive methods of powering their products and machinery. It's also good for consumers, who in many cases don't even have that choice.

This government is being economically prudent, ensuring taxpayers' dollars are wisely spent and wisely invested, but at the same time we're moving ahead systematically with many critical infrastructure projects that make sense and that are vital to the communities of this province. We're working with IO, Infrastructure Ontario, to develop a robust pipeline of approved projects that will reflect our government's priorities and commitment to investing in important public infrastructure. More information about this pipeline will be announced in the coming months.

We know that investing in infrastructure has a direct and indirect impact and benefit to this economy, and this benefits the people. Ultimately, Madam Speaker, isn't that the point: for government to make life better for the people, to put more money in the pockets of workers, to provide energy relief to families, to provide them with the vital services that they need every single day?

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To realize many of these benefits, it's important to ensure we invest in the right infrastructure at the right time and in the right place. When done right, investing in infrastructure can help lower business costs and attract more business to this province.

We saw earlier this month, when the Minister of Finance tabled the 2018 economic outlook and fiscal review, quite the contrast with the federal economic update, which has now seen a \$2-billion increase in the deficit because of reckless Liberal spending. But our government, as a

healthy contrast, is committed to expanding natural gas and broadband networks while living within our means, with a credible plan to return to balance while also returning tax dollars to the people of this province.

Expanding natural gas and broadband would help promote job creation and economic competitiveness across the province. The province will release a broadband and cellular strategy in early 2019, outlining an action plan to expand broadband digital services and cellular services in unserved areas. We believe that broadband, in conjunction with natural gas, will truly help unleash the true economic potential, as I said earlier, in rural and remote parts of this province that are impeded both by expensive energy and not having access to reliable high-speed Internet.

The Minister of Energy takes this very seriously. I was with him, along with our entire caucus, at AMO, where we met with dozens and dozens—in infrastructure's case, the minister and I met with over 100 delegations, and the message was clear: Get broadband funding delivered, help expand this modern mechanism that will help businesses, farmers and individuals, self-employed people, get their products to market and ultimately create better jobs in the province of Ontario.

While we're at it, it was great to see the finance minister, in that update, talk about cutting red tape. As the minister said, we need to create an environment where anyone can start to grow a business and help to create a job. Under the Making Ontario Open for Business Act, our government is looking at the next steps. The Minister of Finance said that Ontario is currently burdened with approximately 331 statutes and more than 380,000 regulatory requirements. In comparison, in New Democratic British Columbia, it's less than half of that. What is going on in the province when we have more regulations than the state of California? There is something wrong. It was a government out of touch, the former government, out of touch with the everyday concerns and challenges facing business in this province in a globalized economy.

Our government has committed to further reduce red tape for business by 25 points by 2022. He spoke about how prosperity must reach every corner of our province, including communities in rural, remote and northern Ontario. I have to tell you, that is music to my ears. In my riding, particularly in the community of King, at the centre-northern part of York region, we still have a very robust agricultural sector, as I mentioned—many dairy producers, a horticultural sector and, as I noted, the Holland Marsh. Businesses in these communities need natural gas and broadband to effectively compete. This legislation, if passed, helps rural and agricultural communities and provides support for our booming greenhouse industry right across Ontario.

Earlier this month, I had the opportunity to meet with members of the Holland Marsh Growers' Association, as well as my colleague the Attorney General, the MPP for York-Simcoe, and the Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs. It was fascinating to hear from them on how we can better position them to compete.

Quinton Woods, the Gwillimdale Farms sales operating manager and the chair of the Holland Marsh Growers'

Association, whom we met with in his capacity as chair, said that it's negatively affecting the way they can operate when it comes to not having the right technology and affordable energy products.

Other issues brought up in that meeting included a lack of infrastructure, such as high-speed Internet, soaring energy rates, and access to electricity and natural gas. Quoted in *barrietoday.com*, Mr. Woods said, "Our biggest competition ... is Quebec." They have "cheaper electricity, tax rates. We're falling behind in competition to them," he said, adding customers sometimes ask Ontario farmers to price-match Quebec growers, which cuts into their profit margins."

When you hear stories like that directly from the source, something that I think we can all agree on is that we have to do better to help these businesses compete, particularly the family farms of this country. As I think we can all agree, small businesses are the engine of our economy. Over eight in 10 jobs in this country depend on their success. Someone who would know that well is the parliamentary assistant for the Minister of Economic Development and Trade, who is a champion of small business, who has been listening to small business in every region of this province and consulting with them on how we can truly make Ontario open for business.

As I've said before, we should be united in the defence of these industries because people in our communities—in our villages, in our towns, in our cities—depend on their success. We, this government, this party and this Premier are determined to stand up for these communities every step of the way to enable their success.

I also want to add Minister McNaughton's point about the province's stance against a carbon tax. He's mentioned this before in this House, in the last reading of this bill. In addition to our removal of Ontario's carbon tax from natural gas bills, I am proud that this government is actively exploring a full suite of transparency measures that will ensure every single person in Ontario is informed of how much they're paying in the federal carbon tax every time they pay a home heating bill or every time they fill up their car. Just like we did when we removed the Ontario carbon tax from natural gas, we know we're going in the right direction on natural gas expansion as well.

All of the extensive feedback underlines loud and clear what this government needs to do. Our government made a promise to provide the people of this province with relief for their energy costs and to provide energy which is affordable, accessible and can benefit everyone in the province. Since day one, we've been working to help keep that promise, to ensure we deliver on our word. From addressing governance at Hydro One, to terminating unnecessary renewable energy contracts, to listening to what people told us was wrong with Ontario's electricity system, we have taken immediate action to correct these very issues. In the end, the process has to make sense for the people of the province. It has to make sense for municipalities, for First Nations, for communities, for businesses and for other stakeholders and people in the region.

I personally felt immensely proud when, earlier this month, the Premier unveiled a sign in Sarnia that declared

that Ontario is "Open for Business." At the unveiling, the Premier announced how Ontario's government is working to make the province open for business, to grow the economy and to create better jobs. He said, "Ontario is open for business and we want everyone to know it. Signs that say 'Ontario is open for business' will soon go up at border crossings across the province."

The sign, one of a series that will be unveiled near land border crossings throughout the province, will send a clear message to the world, matched by our actions, that Ontario is a business-friendly province that can again be the economic engine of our Confederation.

Speaking near the Blue Water Bridge, one of Canada's busiest border crossings—billions of dollars of trade go across this corridor every week—the Premier said, "Businesses tell us that job growth starts with cutting the burdensome, job-killing red tape that drives investment and jobs out of Ontario. If you're prepared to work, then we believe you deserve a shot at a job."

If you haven't had a chance yet to see the sign, I recommend driving by Blue Water Bridge, Madam Speaker. It is the second-busiest commercial crossing between Canada and the United States, seeing over 4.6 million crossings in 2017 alone.

The bottom line is, we want this province to thrive, to remain competitive and to create good jobs. We want all families to get ahead. In Bill 32, the proposed Access to Natural Gas Act, we're taking another significant step forward in our commitment to the people. We are a government for the people. We are committed to making life affordable for families, for businesses, for seniors and for students, and to sending a message that this province remains open for business. That includes enabling private sector participation in natural gas in this province. This government, our government, will be responsible and pragmatic as we deliver on this mandate.

Allowing private capital to build new natural gas networks could reduce gas bills over time for the people of this province, and gas would get to more communities faster. As we've already committed to, we will take into consideration the needs and interests of communities, and projects that were approved under the previous program, as we move forward with the design of the new natural gas expansion. We'll continue to work with communities to find out what their priorities are and to get this right. For people in remote parts of this province, rural parts of this province, for our agricultural sector, for our industries in Ontario that in part rely on natural gas, we know there's more to do in this respect, Madam Speaker.

We keep hearing over and over that the cost of living is too high, that it is too difficult for families, and businesses that rely on natural gas to do their business, and we're losing our competitive advantage in this province as a result. While 3.5 million homes and about 130,000 businesses across the province have access to natural gas, there are many, many in Ontario that don't, and many of them are in rural, remote and First Nations communities in this province.

We want access to natural gas to save money, yes, to grow businesses, to create jobs, but also to compete in a

global economy. The proposed program will help families switch off costly electricity, propane and oil, and access this affordable fuel that they deserve. We already know that there is an abundant supply of natural gas available; that's one of the reasons it's so affordable.

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As mentioned during second reading, according to Union Gas, "New, massive deposits of natural gas in North America accessed through advanced technology have translated into record-low gas prices.

"Natural gas is more affordable now than it was a decade ago and experts agree that natural gas will continue to be competitively priced well into the" future.

We believe that this legislation, should it pass, along with our broader economic reforms, will stimulate growth, will ensure prosperity in Ontario and create good, value-added jobs for the next generation.

Bill 32, the Access to Natural Gas Act, proposes that the government will work with the Ontario Energy Board to develop programs, specific criteria and regulation to enable the program. More details of the timing will become available as that work proceeds.

If the proposed legislation is passed, the government will work with the Ontario Energy Board to develop program criteria and regulation to enable the implementation of this program. The exact details, including which customers will be eligible to receive support, would be set out transparently in those regulations.

With it now being late November, it's getting colder, and, by the end of the month and the month after, colder still. Those of us lucky enough to go home to a heated home with an affordable energy source know the comfort of cozying up in the winter. But those who can't afford to heat their home or who struggle to pay their bills due to unnecessarily high energy prices know the bitter hardship.

We have an opportunity to work to change that by developing an affordable energy system that accesses more people in this province. By making a small investment today, we know it will have a long-lasting impact in communities across our province. I know that there are thousands of people in Ontario anxiously awaiting the debate of this legislation and, if we're successful in passing this legislation, for us to be able to expand natural gas to their community.

It's going to make the quality of life better for business and families, for those living in rural and remote parts of this province, and for Indigenous communities. This is going to be a new lease on life for many people and make life more affordable—as I said before, a savings of up to \$2,500 per year. The money could be spent at local stores, to help their families, for retirement, or to help their kids go to school. It's going to grow our economy. It's going to create good jobs in this province. I know that there are almost 80 communities and 33,000 people who are going to be very much better off together if this bill passes.

We believe that taxpayers' money should be spent prudently and managed properly. This government will always listen. We will always respect the will of the people. We have been entrusted with government to

respect their tax dollars, to recognize that every dollar the government spends belongs to the people. Our government will be working harder, smarter and more efficiently, to make life better. I promise that we will be doing that, including through this proposed legislation.

I'm thrilled to be here today to help move this proposed legislation forward on behalf of the very able Minister of Infrastructure and the Minister of Energy. We need, as a government and as a Parliament, to put more money back into the pockets of working people in this province and, Madam Speaker, I could confirm to you today that if this bill passes, we will do just that.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Questions and comments?

M. Guy Bourgouin: Je peux vous dire ce matin, c'est intéressant qu'on parle du Bill 32 puis de l'accès au gaz naturel, puis aussi d'entendre le gouvernement dire : « C'est innovateur. On va faire des choses différentes. »

On n'a rien qu'à regarder ce qu'ils ont fait quand ils étaient au pouvoir le dernier coup, avant les libéraux, quand ils ont pavé le chemin pour vendre Ontario Hydro, ce que les libéraux ont continué, puis on a vu toutes nos primes augmenter, puis on paye des prix exorbitants. Puis là, aujourd'hui, ce matin, ils disent : « Hé! c'est innovateur. » Toute une innovation : on prend un programme rouge, on le peinture en bleu, puis on dit que c'est innovateur. Tu sais ce que je veux dire?

Ce qui fait que là, aujourd'hui, on se fait dire qu'il va y avoir de l'expansion. Je peux vous dire que l'expansion ne sera pas dans le nord de l'Ontario. La seule affaire qu'on va avoir, c'est la même affaire qui est arrivée aux « bills » d'hydro : nos « bills » vont augmenter. C'est nous autres qui allons payer encore.

On n'a rien qu'à prendre, par exemple—j'ai parlé à un de mes commettants, M. Potvin. M. Potvin, il reste à Lac Ste.-Thérèse, à Hearst. Il travaille pour la ville de Hearst. Il a demandé d'avoir l'extension à sa demeure. Puis la compagnie de gaz a refusé et a dit : « Bien, premièrement, il n'y a pas d'industrie qui se rend là. » Mais M. Potvin, en réponse à la compagnie, a dit : « Non, il y en a deux. Il y a Rheault Distillery et puis Villeneuve Construction. » Ça aurait amené l'accès au gaz naturel à 109 domiciles. De dire aujourd'hui que le nord de l'Ontario va avoir beaucoup d'expansion—aucune mention de Premières Nations, à part de ça, aucune mention dans le projet de loi. C'est pour ça que je vais voter contre, madame la Présidente.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): I recognize the member for Peterborough—Kawartha.

Mr. Dave Smith: It's interesting that the member opposite talked about the cost of hydro going up as a result of privatization of hydro when, really, the cost of hydro went up the biggest amount because of the Green Energy Act. It was only 10% of electricity being generated by green energy, but it made up 33% of those costs. So I'm not sure exactly where he has come up with what he's talking about.

The reality is, the expansion of natural gas is going to be something that's going to be good for this entire

province. I live in a rural area. I grew up in Prince Edward county—Wellington, actually. Some 750 people lived in my community when I grew up there. When I moved to Peterborough to go to university, there were actually more people in my residence than there were in my town. Knowing what it's like to live in that rural area—it's something that I grew up with. It's a big farming area in Prince Edward county, as well. Now that I'm in Peterborough, I'm lucky enough that I have a mix: I have urban and rural.

I'd like to touch on something that the member from King—Vaughan said. Over 30,000 farms in rural parts of this province are going to see the benefit of natural gas. I met with the Ontario Federation of Agriculture, and that was one of the things that they were clamouring for. Access to natural gas would open up so many more markets for them.

We've just recently seen, with the USMCA changes—it's not making the agri-food business in Ontario that much easier, but access to natural gas is one of the ways that we can. It will give that competitive advantage to our farmers. It will allow them to access things, like drying their grain in a much more efficient way, a much less costly way. All of that is going to be reflected in the cost of food for everybody in this province.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Further debate?

Mr. Jamie West: We seem to be having the same debate every time we discuss this. The President of the Treasury Board, the member from Pickering—Uxbridge, talked about being encouraged by positive feedback. The member from King—Vaughan echoed this. The member opposite just recently said the same thing, how it's good for rural and remote communities. The problem, and the thing we keep saying on this side, is that it doesn't specifically say that this is only to be used for rural and remote northern Ontario communities. What we are saying is, put it in writing.

The member from Mushkegowuk—James Bay made a joke and reminded me of the good sense of humour that people, especially the francophone people, in northern Ontario have. One of the expressions they have is, "That carrot is plastic"—it looks good, but it's plastic.

One of the phrases we heard was that up to 78 communities will have natural gas, and over 30,000 farms—it sounds like the government has a plan. That indicates a plan to me, so why not share the plan with the people of Ontario? The government for the people—share it with the people of Ontario. Let them know what the costs are going to be, because the costs are going to be borne by the ratepayers. Give them an idea of what they're getting into.

We had a good conversation. The government talks about listening. At committee, the 18 amendments were brought forward. They discussed them for three and a half hours. The 18 amendments were rejected. This can't be a perfect bill, especially if it's a rural, remote bill towards natural gas and it doesn't say that anywhere.

The member opposite talked about it not being small potatoes and made the potato pun. It reminded me of another expression when it comes to vegetation. It's about

mushrooms. Politely, what it says is: Sometimes you're treated like a mushroom; you're kept in the dark and you're covered with manure. That's what it feels like.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Further debate?

Mr. Daryl Kramp: Sometimes in this Legislature, we've seen occasions where there has been a definitive lack of common sense on some of the actions and reactions that we see in the House, and yet there are some things that just are almost de facto a matter of fact.

We have a situation in Canada where we are absolutely energy-rich in potential. There are some people who suggest that natural gas is not necessarily a real asset. Well, maybe I'll just try to put it into perspective. We have over 1,100 trillion cubic feet of natural gas availability in this country—literally a world leader, good enough that if every bit of energy that we used in this country was powered by natural gas, we would have enough time that none of the members here or even their children or grandchildren or grandchildren beyond that would ever run out. We have enough fuel, if we were exclusively using natural gas, to provide over 300 years of energy. For us not to take advantage of a product like this is literally the next thing to insanity.

This government realizes that. We are focusing on that. We will do exactly what we said we would do: We will deliver more services to rural, to remote and to Indigenous communities. Quite frankly, that is why the people put us here: to do that.

I could speak at great length, Madam Speaker, on the success I have seen already in rural communities, and I'm looking very, very much forward to seeing this government not only put its plans in place but put action into place, which will happen shortly.

Third reading debate deemed adjourned.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Seeing the time on the clock, this House stands recessed until 10:30.

The House recessed from 1012 to 1030.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): I would like to introduce some special guests we have with us today in the Speaker's gallery: Mr. Gregoire Bostajian, the honorary consul of Lebanon in Toronto. He's accompanied by his wife, Desiree, and by leaders from the Lebanese community. They are here to celebrate Lebanon's independence day with a flag-raising ceremony that will be held on the lawn after question period. Please join me in warmly welcoming our guests to the Legislature.

Also in the Speaker's gallery is natural resources and forestry ADM Rosalyn Lawrence and her executive assistant, Samantha Wilson.

Rosalyn Lawrence will be retiring tomorrow after working in the Ontario Public Service for 32 years. She began her OPS career in the Ministry of Skills Development, later moving to the Cabinet Office, the Ministry of

Community and Social Services and the Ministry of the Environment and Energy, where she eventually became assistant deputy minister. In 2008, she moved to natural resources and forestry as an assistant deputy minister in the natural resource management division, now known as the policy division, that she has been privileged to lead ever since.

Thank you, Rosalyn, for your service over the years. Happy retirement, and welcome to Queen's Park.

Also in the Speaker's gallery, we have Louie Violo, Brian Scheele, Robert Sloan and Cameron Hann, here from the Ontario Electrical League. Welcome to Queen's Park.

And we have a good friend of mine, Dave Adsett from the Wellington Advertiser, here with the Ontario Community Newspapers Association. I'm told Dave is celebrating his birthday today as well—happy birthday. It's great to have you here.

Ms. Sandy Shaw: I'd like to introduce one of our legislative pages, who's from the riding of Hamilton West—Ancaster—Dundas: Ella Jazvac. Ella attends St. Ann's school in Ancaster, and she will be serving as a legislative page. She's joined in the gallery today by her family. I'm pleased to welcome Ella's parents, Christian and Christine; her sister, Sofia; and her aunts, Sandra as well as Melanie Skrlac, who also, in fact, served as a legislative page, just like Ella. Welcome to the Legislature.

Hon. John Yakabuski: I would be remiss as the Minister of Natural Resources if I didn't echo the congratulations and thank you to Rosalyn Lawrence for her 32 years of dedicated service to the people of Ontario, and also to welcome her executive assistant, Samantha Wilson, to the House as well today.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Amongst us, from across Ontario, people from the Ontario newspaper association are here for the day to lobby us. We'd just like to welcome all to Queen's Park.

M^{me} Nathalie Des Rosiers: I also would like to express my deep gratitude to Rosalyn for having been such a wonderful person to work with at the MNRF. Merci, Rosalyn.

I want to thank also and welcome to Queen's Park Cameron Hann and Lawrence Pearson, who are from the Ontario Electrical League. I had the pleasure of meeting with them this morning. Thank you very much for being here.

Ms. Christine Hogarth: It is my pleasure to introduce one of my constituents, Rob Sloan. He's here with the Ontario Electrical League and is a constituent of mine. His business is Langstaff and Sloan in New Toronto. Welcome to the Legislature.

Miss Monique Taylor: It gives me pleasure to welcome some guests from the community newspapers association. Today we have Gord Cameron, who is the group managing editor of the Hamilton Community News; and Caroline Medwell is the executive director of Ontario community newspapers. Welcome to Queen's Park.

Ms. Mitzie Hunter: I'm thrilled to welcome to the Legislature today a school that is visiting from my great

riding of Scarborough—Guildwood: Cedar Drive Junior Public School. Please welcome them when you see them touring the building.

Hon. Ernie Hardeman: It's a pleasure to introduce the family of Hannah Van Boekel, our legislative page from the great riding of Oxford, who is here as the third member of the family being a page. She's done a wonderful job.

Please join me in welcoming her parents, Mike and Jennifer; brother Greg; and grandparents Gerry and Thea Van Boekel and Betty Hampson. They're all here to congratulate her on being the page captain today, and we collectively want to welcome them to Queen's Park.

Mr. Peter Tabuns: It gives me great pleasure to introduce Dermot O'Halloran from my great riding, Toronto—Danforth. Thanks for being here, Dermot.

Ms. Andrea Khanjin: I wanted to introduce the students who are here with us in the gallery today from Nantyr Shores, from my riding of Barrie—Innisfil.

As well, I wanted to recognize members from my riding who are here from the World Lebanese Cultural Union: Elias and Hanan Kassab. Thank you for coming.

Mr. Jamie West: I'm sure many of us are going to be welcoming members from the Ontario Community Newspapers Association. I want to make sure to welcome Abbas Homayed from Sudbury Northern Life, or sudbury.com. Welcome to Queen's Park.

Mr. Michael Mantha: I want to welcome Alicia McCutcheon from the Manitoulin Expositor, a fabulous paper from Algoma—Manitoulin. She's here on behalf of the Ontario Community Newspapers Association, meeting up with many of the MPPs here today.

Mr. Joel Harden: It's a great honour to welcome Mr. Michael Wollock, who is here from the Ottawa Community Voice.

I also want to say to my friends from the Lebanese community, greetings from Ottawa Centre, but also greetings from the Assaly family, of which I'm very proud to be part. Thank you for being here.

Mr. Aris Babikian: It is my great pleasure to welcome the World Lebanese Cultural Union to Queen's Park. With their delegation, I have Mr. Elias Kassab, Elie Gideon, the rest of the delegation and also the honorary consul of Lebanon in Toronto, Gregoire. Welcome to Queen's Park.

A little bit later, we are going to have a flag-raising ceremony and, after that, a reception. I would encourage all my colleagues to join us for either of the two events.

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: I'd like to introduce the community newspapers association, which is here today, and two people, Zach Shoub and Ray Stanton, from London Publishing. Thank you and welcome to the Legislature.

Mr. Rick Nicholls: Again, it's already been mentioned in the House, but I've been very close to the Lebanese community over the last three and a half years, so to my friends from the Lebanese community: Marhaba and es salaam aleikum.

Hon. Lisa MacLeod: I'm just going to stand up and say that I was proud to sponsor, in opposition, the new law, which is Lebanese Heritage Month. Welcome.

ORAL QUESTIONS

GOVERNMENT ACCOUNTABILITY

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Speaker, my first question is for the Acting Premier. Can the Acting Premier tell us if the Premier has spoken with Dean French, his chief of staff, concerning the Toronto Star report that he attempted to order police arrests, and the Globe and Mail report that he personally intervened to have Alykhan Velshi fired from Ontario Power Generation?

1040

Hon. Victor Fedeli: I am truly looking forward to questions from the official opposition today, Speaker. That we can talk about the substance of our fall economic statement and our plan for the people—I truly look forward to it.

I know the NDP don't want to talk about that, because it brings relief. It brings relief to 1.1 million low-income people in the province of Ontario, our LIFT program, and I understand why they don't want to talk about that, because it is a program that brings true relief. If you earn \$30,000 a year or less, you will no longer pay provincial income tax in the province of Ontario. Speaker, for the families in Ontario that we're caring about, relief is here.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Supplementary?

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Speaker, the government might not want to answer questions on this matter, but the people of Ontario have a right to know.

The Integrity Commissioner has indicated that he may conduct an inquiry on these issues, but by law, he is only allowed to report his findings to the Premier. Will the government commit to making those findings public, Speaker?

Hon. Victor Fedeli: Speaker, once again, I can tell you that when we inherited a \$15-billion deficit from the Liberal government—sadly, supported 97% of the time by the NDP, which is how we got into the mess that we're in—we brought three things to bear. Number one, we looked for efficiencies and found \$3.2 billion in efficiencies through the great work of people like our President of the Treasury Board and all of the accomplished members who contributed ideas. And we turned around and delivered \$2.7 billion of that back into the pockets of the people of Ontario. You would think the NDP would be celebrating something like that, as opposed to criticizing it.

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

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Stop the clock. Order.

Start the clock. Final supplementary.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Ontario's numbers man should know that they actually supported the Liberal government 49% of the time and the New Democrats did 53% of the time—a whole 4% difference, Speaker. That's what Ontarians deserve to know.

Hon. Lisa MacLeod: It was 97% of the time, and you kept them in power for two and a half years.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The Minister of Children, Community and Social Services: Come to order.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: However, the Premier earlier this month stated that he would always encourage his staff to speak truth to power—

Hon. Lisa MacLeod: I don't remember a time when you didn't vote with them.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The Minister of Children, Community and Social Services: Come to order.

Ms. Andrea Horwath:—yet multiple media reports this week indicate that government staff are—

Hon. Lisa MacLeod: You didn't vote against them. You sat on your hands.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The Minister of Children, Community and Social Services: Come to order.

I will give you extra time. Sorry to interrupt.

Ms. Andrea Horwath:—yet multiple media reports this week indicate that government staff are berated and fear losing their jobs when they raise any facts that challenge the Premier or the Premier's chief of staff.

If government staff are encouraged to speak truth to power, as the Premier did, why are so many of them telling reporters that they would lose their jobs if they did that?

Hon. Victor Fedeli: Thank you very much for the question. Let me tell you a little bit about the great work that our staff, our caucus, our cabinet and our Premier have done.

Today, with not accepting the Liberals' surtax, we have individuals who claim tax credits now such as seniors, those with disabilities and those who claim Ontario's medical expense tax credit, who would have suffered under the NDP-backed Liberal plan of these tax increases in January. We said no, and as a result, 150,000 filers with allowable Ontario medical expenses, who would have paid \$320 more in January, will not be paying that. That's what our staff have developed: a plan for the people.

GOVERNMENT ACCOUNTABILITY

Ms. Andrea Horwath: To the Acting Premier, Speaker: Can the Acting Premier explain why Ken Bednarek is no longer serving as chief of staff to the minister of public safety?

Hon. Victor Fedeli: Thank you very much. Let me continue talking about our plan for the people. I can tell you about the great staff that we have, the great caucus that we have assembled that the people of Ontario voted to send here to Queen's Park, the great cabinet that Premier Ford has put together, and a great leader in Premier Ford himself.

With that tax credit I spoke about just a moment ago, that puts \$35 million back in the pockets of families who need it most—seniors, those with disabilities and those who are collecting a medical expense tax credit. That's \$35 million they were about to be taxed by a Liberal tax that the NDP supported. That is the reality. That is what they don't want to talk about. I'm not afraid to stand up here and tell the people all about the relief that's coming their way.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Stop the clock. Order. Start the clock. Supplementary?

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Reports indicate that Mr. Bednarek was one of the few brave staff who challenged Dean French, the Premier's chief of staff, when he made the completely inappropriate demand that police be ordered not only to make arrests, but to time those arrests so that they would make it onto the noon news.

Can the Acting Premier confirm or deny that Mr. Bednarek lost his job after speaking out against the inappropriate direction coming from the Premier's office?

Hon. Victor Fedeli: What I can tell you about our cannabis plan, designed by our Premier, our cabinet, our caucus, our whole team, all of our staff, is that it's a plan to protect children, a plan to keep our streets safe and a plan to curb illicit activity.

I realize the NDP may not have bought into that plan, the plan that is going to be a thorough and proper sale of cannabis through Ontario. They're more interested—as I said yesterday, they deal in chaos. We deal in confidence. The NDP deals in resistance. We will deliver results.

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

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Can the Acting Premier tell us how much public money went into paying for the severance of Mr. Bednarek and other staff who may have been dismissed for speaking out?

Hon. Victor Fedeli: I can tell you that there's \$500 million of public money being put back into our LIFT program, the Low-income Individuals and Families Tax Credit.

Now, I realize the NDP don't want our low-income people to get a lift, because here's what they said. This is a quote from the NDP member from Hamilton West—Ancaster—Dundas. She says, "You're talking about people who earn so little that they in fact don't need a tax break." Well, Speaker, I think our low-income families do need that \$500-million tax break we're giving. Those are the numbers they don't want to talk about.

GOVERNMENT ACCOUNTABILITY

Ms. Andrea Horwath: My next question is also for the Acting Premier. But what low-income people don't need is a government that rips them off by two grand by cancelling their \$15 minimum wage increase. What they don't need is a government that spends \$300 million on tax breaks to the richest Ontarians. That's what people don't need.

The Acting Premier is part of a government team, and he must know that it's not appropriate to intervene at Ontario Power Generation and fire executives, triggering a half-a-million-dollar severance—another thing the people of Ontario don't need—or to order police to make arrests that look good on the noon-hour news—another thing Ontarians don't need.

Has he personally raised any of these concerns or issues with the Premier?

Hon. Victor Fedeli: This government, our Ford government, we are bringing relief to families. We're bringing relief to individuals. We've talked about those.

But let me talk about the relief that we are bringing to the business community, because they were about to receive a surtax that would cause them yet again to have fewer employees. What we are doing is, 7,900 businesses will not have the increase that the Liberal government was bringing in September. That will save up to \$40,000 per business that they can reinvest.

Speaker, I'm a lifelong businessperson. We know that when business can find a dime, we invest it in our companies. We hire more people. That's all we business people have ever done. That's what we do. Taking that \$40,000, they will be reinvesting it in their business and hiring more people in the province of Ontario.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Stop the clock. Members, take your seats.

Start the clock. Supplementary.

1050

Ms. Andrea Horwath: People expect a government that sets high standards and actually governs in the public interest. Instead, the Premier and Dean French, his hand-picked chief of staff, seem to think that their titles mean that they can do whatever they want, whenever they want, whether it's ordering police to arrest people in time for the noon-hour news or paying someone half a million dollars for a single day's work and sticking the people of Ontario with the bill because the Premier just didn't like that guy.

Does the Acting Premier think that this is an acceptable way to behave?

Hon. Victor Fedeli: The Canadian Federation of Independent Business talked about our LIFT program; the NDP won't. They said, "CFIB was particularly pleased to see that the government is helping low-income earners while providing some relief to employers from this year's 23% minimum wage hike. The LIFT Credit will keep more money in employee pockets without threatening jobs." That's what they had to say.

The Canadian Taxpayers Federation said about LIFT, "Low-income workers across Ontario will benefit from the tax cut announced today, which will save individual workers ... \$850 per year. Letting the 1.1 million low-income workers in Ontario keep the" money "they earn is the right thing to do."

The chamber of commerce said, "Combined, these are ... steps towards a more competitive and prosperous economy. Ontario is strongest when industry and government work together, and we look forward to working with the government..."

Speaker, it's obvious: Ontario is open for business.

HOUSING

Miss Kinga Surma: My question is for the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing. Minister, today we mark National Housing Day. We know that for the past 15 years, the previous Liberal government failed to listen to the concerns of Ontarians. There have been countless calls for increased housing supply. There have been countless calls

to create more community housing for the most vulnerable. I know that I've heard that from my very own constituents. Both those calls, however, were ignored.

Mr. Speaker, we are now in the midst of a housing crisis. Can the minister please explain the importance of National Housing Day and tell us how he and our government for the people are going to fix this?

Hon. Steve Clark: I want to thank the member for Etobicoke Centre for this important question and for highlighting this urgent issue. National Housing Day is a day to acknowledge and call on all levels of government to do more to provide housing that is affordable, not just across our great province but across the country.

As it currently stands, we need more housing. Our government has acknowledged this, and we've taken immediate steps to address the crisis. I've been working with my ministry to find ways to cut red tape and to speed up the system and increase housing supply. This is a top priority for myself and our government for the people, and I look forward to working with the people of Ontario on providing more housing supply.

Miss Kinga Surma: Thank you, Minister. I know that you've been working tremendously hard on this file.

We all know that housing is incredibly important. It is often the first step to bringing people out of poverty and getting them back on their feet. While our government for the people is putting great efforts into resolving this crisis, housing requires the collaboration of all levels of government and stakeholders. Can the minister please expand on how he is working with other levels of government and stakeholders so that we can create more housing that is affordable and create more community housing for those who need it the most?

Hon. Steve Clark: I want to thank the member for that great question. The lack of housing is not an issue that was created overnight, nor is it an issue that can be fixed with one solution. It requires, as the member says, help from all levels of government and stakeholders alike.

That's why, since I took office, I've been speaking to hundreds of housing and development stakeholders to find a solution to start building more housing and increase that supply that is just so vital in our province. I've also spoken with different levels of government to try to find a way that we can all work collaboratively, to streamline building and repairing our community housing.

I welcome all suggestions on how to improve housing across this province, and I would encourage constituents to go to ontario.ca/housingsupply to contribute to our consultation.

I look forward to continuing the conversation. I want to thank the member—you're an excellent member for your constituents. Thank you for your question.

AFFAIRES FRANCOPHONES FRANCOPHONE AFFAIRS

M. Guy Bourgouin: Ma question est pour le premier ministre par intérim. Hier, on a su que les coupures de votre gouvernement vont aussi toucher la culture

francophone. Hier, on a reçu la nouvelle que les conservateurs ont décidé d'annuler une subvention de 2,9 millions de dollars pour La Nouvelle Scène Gilles Desjardins, un centre d'arts de la scène francophone d'Ottawa. C'est absolument irresponsable de votre part. Monsieur le Ministre, n'est-ce pas suffisant pour vous d'éliminer le bureau qui défend nos droits constitutionnels et d'annuler ce qui devrait être notre université?

Ma question est très simple : pourquoi êtes-vous si déterminé à attaquer la communauté franco-ontarienne?

Hon. Victor Fedeli: Minister of Tourism, Culture and Sport.

Hon. Michael A. Tibollo: Thank you for the question. First of all, I'd like to say that our province has a unique cultural fabric and that francophone language and culture are an integral part of Ontario's rich culture.

We would never make a decision solely to harm the francophone community. This was a decision made out of fiscal responsibility. The former Liberal government announced \$2.9 million for a project to help with debt repayment at the La Nouvelle Scène Gilles Desjardins theatre building, even though no project proposal or implementation plan had been made available. It is actually sad to see that this question is being asked, given that the Liberals were giving money away with no details provided.

Depending on eligibility, there are funding avenues—

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Thank you very much. Supplementary.

Mr. Guy Bourgouin: Minister, it seems that our constitutional rights, our education and, now, our culture are for you but a mere financial affair.

Next week our leader, Andrea Horwath, will table a motion to re-establish the French Language Services Commissioner and the Université de l'Ontario français.

Minister, it is more than clear that the Conservatives have no interest in assuming that they have left Franco-Ontarians like myself behind, as if we and our rights, education and heritage were unimportant to you. Minister, are you going to support this motion?

Interjections.

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

Minister?

Hon. Michael A. Tibollo: As we've said, and as I've said as well, the francophone language and culture are an integral part of who we are as Ontarians.

Mr. Speaker, we were elected to restore trust and accountability. The Liberals saddled us with over \$347 billion in debt. Making promises to many people is not the way that you get out of a fiscal mess. You get out of a fiscal mess by being responsible. Our government is committed to making fiscally responsible decisions on behalf of all Ontarians.

La Nouvelle Scène is welcome to work with us to find funding for a solution, and that is something that we will do. Whether it be through the Trillium grants or other sources, we will work to ensure that the facility is kept open.

1100

FEDERAL-PROVINCIAL FISCAL POLICIES

Mr. Dave Smith: My question is for the Minister of Finance. Ontario's economy has struggled for the past 15 years under the Liberal government. According to the Fraser Institute, we even had a decade where it was the worst performance in Canada. We all know the Liberals left our province saddled with debt and uncompetitive on the world stage.

Our government was elected to turn things around. Last week's fall economic statement proved to Ontario that we're committed to fixing the mess the Liberals left behind. It also proved to Canada that we're determined to once again make Ontario the economic engine of our country. We called on the federal government to take decisive action in their own economic statement this fall to support businesses in Ontario and across Canada.

Could the minister please share his reactions to the federal government's fall economic statement from yesterday?

Hon. Victor Fedeli: Thank you to the member for Peterborough–Kawartha for the question. Premier Ford's leadership to restore business competitiveness in Ontario led to the measures announced yesterday in the federal fall economic statement. We welcome the federal measure to allow businesses to accelerate the expensing of many depreciable assets.

However, the Premier also took a stand for families and asked the federal government to be honest about how much their job-killing carbon tax will actually cost. We're disappointed the federal government chose to continue ignoring the damage their federal carbon tax will do. We have made it clear that we intend to protect Ontario families and businesses from being punished by this discriminatory carbon tax.

While Premier Ford has been successful in making Ontario more competitive, we will continue to fight to ensure Ontario remains open for business.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Supplementary?

Mr. Dave Smith: Thank you to the minister for his response. I agree, we are disappointed the federal government did not match all the US tax relief measures to make Ontario, and Canada, fully competitive. It's important that we make Canada, specifically Ontario, competitive on the world stage. For too long we've watched business and investment flow out of this province and this country. It continues to be concerning that the federal Liberals will not yet tell Ontarians just how much their job-killing carbon tax is going to cost us. But we know there's more work to be done. We'll continue fighting for Ontario's families and businesses.

Could the minister please explain what action will be taken following the federal government's fall economic statement?

Hon. Victor Fedeli: We are pleased to announce that Ontario will match the federal government's measure to

accelerate the expensing of depreciable assets. Our government has advocated for this change over the past months, and we are excited to provide businesses with the incentive to make these new investments in Ontario's key industries.

Our own fall economic statement last week took this possibility into account. We are prepared to implement this change immediately and without any additional impact on our financial position.

At the same time, we will pursue ways to make sure that every person in Ontario knows just how much the federal carbon tax will cost them. We will do everything in our power to protect people from being punished by a discriminatory federal carbon tax. Speaker, after 15 years, Ontario is finally open for business and we plan to keep it that way.

SOCIAL ASSISTANCE

Mrs. Lisa Gretzky: My question is to the Minister of Children, Community and Social Services. The Conservatives have a lengthy record when it comes to cuts that hurt the most vulnerable Ontarians. The last PC government slashed social assistance by 21%. In eight years in office, not once did they raise the minimum wage from \$6.85 an hour. We've seen much of the same from this PC government: scrapping the Basic Income Pilot, a 50% cut to social assistance rate increases and a rollback of minimum wage.

Can the minister confirm whether today's social assistance announcement will be more cuts, more austerity and more suffering for vulnerable people?

Hon. Lisa MacLeod: Thanks very much for that question. You're going to be so surprised this afternoon when we have a plan, for those who can work—a plan that offers a path out of poverty. We are going to, for those who cannot work, build in more and better and compassionate supports. I am so proud of this government and the team that we have built together over the past 114 days as we've looked at that \$10-billion budget that is supporting almost one million people. But still, one in seven are living in poverty.

I am so proud to be part of this government that's not only for the people, but for the most vulnerable people in this province. We are going to continue to stand up. I am going to be proud of this announcement today. I will—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Stop the clock. Once again, I will inform the government side that I had to stand up because I couldn't hear what the minister was saying because of the noise of the standing ovation.

Start the clock. Supplementary?

Mrs. Lisa Gretzky: Back to the minister: Many recipients of Ontario disability and Ontario Works have been anxiously awaiting this afternoon's social assistance announcement—and I mean anxiously. Some recipients have shared stories of heightened anxiety, depression and even suicidal thoughts during this distressing period, while this PC government decides their fate.

Since such little information has been made available and there was zero public consultation, we only have the PCs' record of cuts and austerity to go off of when anticipating the results.

Can the minister confirm whether she intends to follow the lengthy PC trend and continue to make life harder for our most vulnerable Ontarians? And I suggest you don't laugh after my question this time.

Hon. Lisa MacLeod: If her questions weren't such a joke, maybe I wouldn't laugh.

But, Speaker, let me tell you something. The previous Liberal government—

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): I ask the minister to withdraw.

Hon. Lisa MacLeod: Withdrawn.

For the past 15 years, the previous Liberal government consulted. We used those consultations. We consulted with people right across Ontario. In fact, I want to read this to the member opposite: "Ministers MacLeod and Smith seemed to genuinely engage in the conversation and expressed appreciation to all who attended. We were encouraged by Minister MacLeod's final comment, that her ministry is the 'heart' of the government and she is resolved that the province will not reduce its deficit on the backs of its most vulnerable citizens." That is from Ed Bentley of the Poverty Roundtable of Hastings Prince Edward.

Let me be perfectly clear: Today, when we announce our path forward on social assistance, we will lift people up. We will instill compassion into the program. We will make sure that those who can work will be working, and those who can't will have the supports they need.

GOVERNMENT ACCOUNTABILITY

RESPONSABILITÉ GOUVERNEMENTALE

Mr. John Fraser: My question is for the Acting Premier. It has been a banner week for accountability in the Ford government. The Premier refuses to hold his chief of staff accountable for his actions. The finance minister opens the backroom door for union and corporate donations in his fall economic statement. More critically, the attack on independent officers of this Legislature is unprecedented.

L'élimination du poste du commissaire aux services en français, c'est une claque dans la face. The elimination of the French Language Services Commissioner is wrong, and the government knows this, because there are voices inside their own government who are telling them that it's wrong.

Speaker, through you: Why is this government so afraid of accountability?

Hon. Victor Fedeli: Thank you very much to the member for the question. It's obvious that he missed pages of the fall economic statement, or missed the odd line, because it's very clear that with respect to fundraising—I realize the Liberals were caught in a fundraising scandal and it caused many changes to come, but what he is

mentioning, what the member is mentioning about union and corporate donations is absolutely incorrect. It's categorically wrong. That is not included in the fall economic statement. In fact, what is included is the fact that we will be closer mirroring the federal regulations, which absolutely do not allow for corporate or union donations. It's unfortunate; I'm very worried that he missed a lot of the other good things in the fall economic statement, which I hope to add to in the response.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Supplementary?

Mr. John Fraser: You must have forgotten that you removed the attestation about "own funds."

The minister can say whatever he wants about us, okay? But we didn't run around silencing our critics. It's pathological with these folks—pathological. The decision to eliminate the child advocate is wrong too. The child advocate is an independent voice for very vulnerable children in this province, children whose voices are the hardest to hear. I know that the minister of children knows in her heart that it's the wrong thing to do.

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The government has also secretly moved to exercise the power of hiring and firing independent officers of this Legislature based on their opinion, and if that's not an attack, I don't know what is.

Back to the minister: What is it you're so afraid of?

Hon. Victor Fedeli: Speaker, where do you go with that?

I can tell you that the Liberal government did run around creating, as the Auditor General called it, bogus financial documents. That's what the Liberals were busy doing.

It's obvious that the member has missed certain key pieces of the fall economic statement, so for that member, I will remind that in our fall economic statement, we are bringing relief to 1.1 million individuals in the province of Ontario. Anyone earning \$30,000 or less will no longer pay provincial income tax. That is \$500 million that is being returned to the pockets of the people of Ontario. When Premier Ford and our team were elected, we said, "Relief is on the way." For those millions, relief is here.

PROTECTION OF PRIVACY

Mr. Stephen Crawford: My question is to the Minister of Government and Consumer Services. We recently learned the disturbing news that Justin Trudeau's Liberal government has brought in access to the personal financial information of Canadians through Statistics Canada without any consent. The Privacy Commissioner of Canada wasn't even aware of this and expressed grave concern.

Mr. Speaker, the fact that the federal government proposes collecting this sensitive data is very concerning. It's important to recognize that their intention is to collect this data without even informing Canadians. It was only revealed by the media. This is no way for a federal government to treat Ontarians and is a violation of their privacy.

Last week, I introduced the Safeguarding our Information Act. Can the minister inform us how this bill will protect Ontarians' private information?

Hon. Bill Walker: I would like to thank the honourable member from Oakville for this excellent question and for bringing this piece of legislation forward in this House.

I'm sure all members of this House have heard by now that Statistics Canada was gathering the private financial information of Canadians without their knowledge or consent. Simply put, this is unacceptable. No level of government should be able to collect highly sensitive information like this without, at the very least, informing citizens of their actions. Instead, Mr. Speaker, what we've seen from the federal government is smoke-filled back-room decisions and data collection that would make Big Brother blush.

We're not going to stand for it, Mr. Speaker. If Justin Trudeau isn't going to do something, we will.

The Safeguarding our Information Act, introduced by the member for Oakville, will require that the government institution that is requesting personal information of citizens may only disclose information with the consent of the citizen.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Supplementary?

Mr. Stephen Crawford: I would like to thank the minister for the response and congratulate him on the action we are taking to protect Ontarians from federal overreach.

We in this House know that when consumers enter into credit agreements with banking and financial institutions, they disclose sensitive personal information. That information affects your credit score and affects your ability to get everything from a credit card to a mortgage to purchase a house. The federal government, in its decision, has overstepped into a realm of private data collection which no previous government has felt necessary.

Mr. Speaker, I ask the Minister of Government and Consumer Services to explain how this legislation will protect consumers and how this will prevent the abuse from the federal Liberal government of sensitive information of Ontarians.

Hon. Bill Walker: Again, I would like to thank my honourable colleague for the question.

We know this is an important issue for Ontarians and Canadians generally. A recent Nanos poll found that 75% of Canadians are opposed to Statistics Canada accessing their personal records without their consent, and 57% wouldn't be comfortable consenting to giving up this personal information.

Mr. Speaker, we won't allow the federal Liberal government in Ottawa to track purchases and credit scores of Ontarians without their consent. If the Safeguarding our Information Act is passed, it will put the protection of consumers first. Government will need their consent before sharing this information. This is a necessary step in protecting the information of all Ontarians and will fill regulatory gaps that allowed Justin Trudeau to pull data without citizens' knowledge or consent.

I'm proud to stand in this House and support this legislation, and I'll be proud to stand up for it when the bill is debated at second reading next Thursday, November 29.

PUBLIC TRANSIT

Ms. Jessica Bell: My question is to the Minister of Transportation. The fall economic statement cut \$1.4 billion for transit infrastructure compared to what was in the last budget, but the government failed to specify where these cuts are coming from and what transit projects could be on the chopping block. Can the minister explain what transit projects are in jeopardy because of this \$1.4-billion cut?

Hon. Jeff Yurek: Thanks very much for the question from the member opposite. I appreciate having this opportunity to respond to you.

Look, what we did mention, and I announced earlier this week, is that we're going to be moving forward on working with the city of Toronto in uploading the TTC to Metrolinx. We will be going forward, after we work out a deal with the city of Toronto, at building, planning and designing new subways and also maintaining the track. The city of Toronto, of course, will continue to run the subways and keep the fares that are collected.

By doing this measure, we are creating efficiencies in our budgeting system which will allow us to actually invest more as we grow and build the transit system across the entire GTHA region.

Thanks again you for that question. I look forward to your supplemental.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Supplementary.

Ms. Jessica Bell: Before the election, the Premier promised to maintain funding for the Hurontario LRT, which is scheduled for completion in 2022, but the fall economic statement did not mention the Hurontario LRT at all, and last week the government refused to confirm the project would be moving forward.

Can the minister tell us, yes or no, will he be maintaining funding for the Hurontario LRT so that it can be completed by 2022, as planned?

Hon. Jeff Yurek: Thanks again for that question. We've had numerous discussions in the ministry, reviewing all the projects going forward, and I can tell you that we will be making the best decisions on behalf of the people of this province.

We have inherited a \$15-billion deficit and over \$300 billion in debt. We have to make sure we're making decisions that are going to work for the people of the GTHA.

As I said, as we're uploading the TTC, we are going to be creating a regional structure across the GTHA. Under the leadership of Metrolinx, we are going to be making some good decisions for the people of this province and we're going to be expanding the transit opportunities.

The Hurontario LRT is still having a great discussion within our ministry, and we look forward to having a great announcement with you in a short time forward.

TAXATION

Mr. Vijay Thanigasalam: My question is for the Minister of Finance. Our government ran on a commitment to put more money in people's pockets. Premier Ford made it clear that people in Ontario pay enough taxes already. Unfortunately, this is not something the previous Liberal government understood. We have been doing everything we can to bring relief to the people of Ontario from 15 years of Liberal tax-and-spend policies. We have taken action, like stopping the hike on driver's licence fees. We have taken action, like scrapping the punishing cap-and-trade carbon tax. The point is, every dollar counts.

Can the minister please explain the steps taken in our fall economic statement to provide further tax relief to the hard-working people of Ontario?

Hon. Victor Fedeli: Thank you to the member from Scarborough–Rouge Park. The previous Liberal government raised our taxes every single chance they got. The Liberals' 2018 budget planned to further punish the hard-working people of Ontario with changes to the rates, brackets, surtax and credits for Ontario's personal income tax.

We made it clear during the election that we would not implement these Liberal tax increases. As a result, seniors, those with disabilities and those who claim Ontario's medical expense tax credit will benefit the most. Our government's decision will save about 150,000 people with allowable Ontario medical expenses \$320 on average. Our decision will save these taxpayers \$35 million. That's money that will stay in their pockets.

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The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Supplementary?

Mr. Vijay Thanigasalam: Thank you to the minister for his response. We are so happy that the days of unfair Liberal tax hikes are over. The people of Ontario deserve a break, especially seniors and those living with disabilities, as the minister mentioned. While the Liberals were too focused on funding their out-of-control spending and waste, our economic fall statement turned the page on 15 years of mismanagement.

Our decision not to proceed with the Liberal tax hikes is just one of the ways we are letting Ontarians keep more of their hard-earned money in their pockets. But we are also cutting taxes for those who need relief the most. Could the minister please explain the tax relief we are bringing to the people of Ontario who need it the most?

Hon. Victor Fedeli: Our legislation, if passed, would introduce one of the most generous tax cuts for low-income workers in a generation: the Low-income Individuals and Families Tax Credit, or LIFT. Premier Ford proposes that anyone earning \$30,000 or less a year should pay no personal income tax in Ontario. This change, if passed, would provide tax relief to 1.1 million people.

Unfortunately, the NDP do not want to talk about this much-needed relief. In fact, as I said earlier, the NDP MPP from Hamilton West–Ancaster–Dundas thinks we are "talking about people who earn so little that they in fact don't need a tax break."

I'm talking about \$500 million they don't want to share with the people. We will never back down from bringing relief to the people who need it most.

PUBLIC TRANSIT

Mr. Wayne Gates: My question is to the Minister of Transportation. The Premier promised the people of Niagara that he would deliver all-day, two-way service to Niagara Falls, but the word "Niagara" is completely missing from the fall economic statement. What was there was a \$1.4-billion cut to transit infrastructure.

The Premier of Ontario has committed to expanding GO rail service to Grimsby and St. Catharines and all the way to Niagara Falls by 2023. Will the minister confirm that the Premier will live up to his commitment to bring all-day, two-way GO rail service all the way to Niagara Falls, as planned?

Hon. Jeff Yurek: Thank you very much for that question, to the member opposite. I do appreciate receiving the questions today. It's nice to have this conversation in the Legislature.

We've made a promise to improve two-way GO service across this region and we're living up to that plan. We have implemented the largest GO train service increase in over five years and we're reducing congestion throughout the GTHA. In fact, there are already 220 new trips per week on the GO Lakeshore corridor. That's an increase of almost 15%.

By enhancing transportation across this region we are starting to kick-start the economy. We're moving people. We're going to be moving goods. Ontario truly is open for business under the PC government, led by Premier Doug Ford.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Supplementary? The member for Waterloo.

Ms. Catherine Fife: My question is also to the Minister of Transportation. Before the election, the Premier promised to deliver two-way, all-day GO service to Kitchener as quickly as possible, but since the election we have heard nothing. The words "GO Transit" and "regional express rail" were completely missing from the fall economic statement. What was there was a \$1.4-billion cut to transit infrastructure spending, despite the fact that transit is an economic driver.

When will the minister deliver two-way, all-day GO service to Kitchener? They have waited long enough.

Hon. Jeff Yurek: Thank you very much, again, for that question. I really do appreciate discussing policy here. It's not too often we get great questions on policy.

I do have to call out my colleagues in the PC caucus: the member from Niagara West, the member from Kitchener–Conestoga and the member from Kitchener southwest—

Interjection: Kitchener South–Hespeler.

Hon. Jeff Yurek: Kitchener South–Hespeler; excuse me. They have been strong advocates for improving GO Transit across this province, particularly in their regions. And do you know what?

Interjections.

Hon. Jeff Yurek: Mr. Speaker, this is an issue the whole House agrees upon. We need to get Ontario moving again, and that's what we're going to be doing. Stay tuned; that's all I can tell the members opposite. Stay tuned, because good things are happening in Ontario, and Ontario is open for business as we go forward.

PUBLIC TRANSIT

Mr. Roman Baber: My question is to the Minister of Transportation. Congratulations on your new portfolio, Minister.

Yesterday, the minister delivered remarks at the Toronto Region Board of Trade on our government's plan for transit, and we couldn't be more excited. Our government for the people understands the vital service that the Toronto Transit Commission provides. The TTC subway is the third-largest system in North America, with over half a billion riders in 2017. I'm proud to be one of those riders.

Mr. Speaker, we've got to get moving on the TTC. Or, more importantly, we've got to get riding. Can the minister please tell the House about our government's plan to revitalize the TTC subway system for the people of Ontario?

Hon. Jeff Yurek: Thanks for that question from the member for York Centre—another strong voice in our caucus.

I omitted the member from Cambridge. I couldn't tell you how many times she has advocated for expanded GO Transit into the Kitchener area. I'm sorry for doing that.

I want to take this opportunity to thank the Toronto Region Board of Trade for inviting me to speak to them yesterday. I'm really happy that my parliamentary assistant, Kinga Surma, was with me at that time. Thanks very much, Kinga—another strong advocate. I want to thank my co-ministers, Minister McNaughton and Minister Clark, for also attending.

Our government for the people has been clear in its commitment to improve transit and transportation experiences in the city of Toronto by asking ourselves these questions:

How do we make life easier for commuters?

How can we get tourists and transit users moving faster?

How do we achieve the best value for our customer, the Ontario taxpayer?

We will be uploading components of the TTC to the province because our government for the people is committed to treating the subway like the vital service that it is.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Supplementary?

Mr. Roman Baber: Mr. Speaker, I'm so grateful to the minister for the plan and for the answer. My favourite three words in the English language: subway, subway, subway. All right.

But unfortunately, the current approval process in the city, and despite what my friends in the no-development party say—the current plan by the city does not work. It's

timely, costly and ineffective. Take the Spadina extension, for instance, in the great riding of York Centre: over budget and over time by about four years. This is not a way for us to do business. This is not the way our government is going to approach transit in this province.

Can the minister please expand on our government's plan to upload the TTC subway system?

Hon. Jeff Yurek: Thank you again for that question to the member opposite. As the member stated, the current planning and approval process is far too onerous and costly, and it's failing to provide Ontarians with the best and most efficient subway system they deserve. Fixing this was a key election promise from our party, and the people of Ontario answered that promise by electing a PC majority government in this province.

That's why we have now crafted a solution: to upload components of the TTC to the province. Our government has a greater capacity to fund these projects, which will facilitate development of our transit projects. One of the first steps of this process was in last August, appointing special adviser Michael Lindsay to work to determine the best approach for this upload.

Looking ahead, we're looking forward to working further with the city of Toronto to develop the plan and implement it in the new year, to upload the TTC and provide the regional transit planning and operations and implementation that we can do.

PUBLIC TRANSIT

Ms. Jennifer K. French: My question is also to the Minister of Transportation. The Premier promised to deliver two-way, all-day GO service to the fine folks of Bowmanville, but since the election we have been told that all transit projects are under review, including projects that the Premier had specifically promised to deliver.

The fall economic statement showed an unexplained \$1.4 billion in cuts to transit infrastructure expenditures, so I'm hopeful that the minister will please reassure those fine folks in Bowmanville and the Durham region and answer: When will the minister deliver two-way, all-day GO service to Bowmanville?

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Hon. Jeff Yurek: Thank you again to the member from Oshawa for that question. I have missed sitting on committee with her like we used to, back in the last session, so it's appreciated to get the question. I'm feeling a little bit like the Minister of the Environment today, getting lots of questions, so I'm appreciative.

Listen, we are doing a review of all the projects going on in the Ministry of Transportation. We're starting to focus on the upload of the Toronto TTC, which will enable us to have more funding available for transit across the region and Ontario as a whole.

We've already had some expansion with the GO service, and we're looking forward to continuing to see how we can expand GO service, and not only GO service but regional transportation across the region, to make sure

that it's integrated, to make sure that the fares are coming closer in line.

Mr. Speaker, this is going to be a great four years for the PC Party and the government of Ontario and for the province of Ontario as a whole. I'm really looking forward to the next four years.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Supplementary? The member for Ottawa Centre.

Mr. Joel Harden: Back to the minister: In 2016, the provincial government committed a billion dollars in funding for phase 2 of the Ottawa LRT. Construction is scheduled to begin next year, but the fall economic statement makes absolutely no reference to the project. In fact, it only predicts a \$1.4-billion cut to transit infrastructure spending.

Will the minister confirm that the province will fund the billion dollars towards the second phase of the Ottawa LRT so that construction can begin next year as planned? An answer would be lovely.

Hon. Jeff Yurek: Thank you for that question from the member from Ottawa Centre. It's nice to receive a question from you.

Look, as I've said before, we're doing a great review of the projects that are ongoing in this province. We haven't walked away at all from the Ottawa LRT expansion. I can tell you, the members from the Ottawa region who are pushing hard in our caucus are strong voices for the people. We've got the member from—

Mr. Jeremy Roberts: Ottawa West–Nepean.

Hon. Jeff Yurek: Ottawa West–Nepean, and we've got, of course, Nepean and Glengarry–Prescott–Russell. You know, we've got—

Hon. Merrilee Fullerton: Kanata–Carleton and Carleton.

Hon. Jeff Yurek: Kanata–Carleton and Carleton. Oh, there you are.

Listen, I'm hearing their voices. I'm hearing your voices. What we are going to do is to ensure that transit is built in this province. The Ottawa LRT is still on track, and I look forward to continuing to work with you as we go forward.

ANTI-BULLYING INITIATIVES

Mrs. Robin Martin: My question is for the Minister of Education. Minister, far too often we hear about incidents of bullying across this province. Bullying can happen anywhere: at home or in social settings in our community. I'm most troubled when I hear of this happening in our schools.

We know that bullying can have major impacts not only on physical health, but on mental health as well. Our government has been clear that we are committed to ensuring safe and supportive learning environments for all students across Ontario. When a child arrives at school, they should feel welcome and they should feel safe.

Minister, as Bullying Awareness and Prevention Week comes to a close, can you tell us more about how our government will continue to raise awareness on this issue throughout the year?

Hon. Lisa M. Thompson: First of all, I want to thank the member from Eglinton–Lawrence, because she is leading with her heart. She does a great job on behalf of her constituents, and she's a very effective member of our caucus.

But I want to share with you that too often, far too often, we hear about incidents of bullying across this province. It absolutely breaks my heart. Bullying can happen anywhere: at home, in social settings, in our communities and, in some instances, right here in the House. I'm most troubled, though, when I hear of this happening in our schools. We know that bullying can have major impacts on not only physical health but mental health as well.

Mr. Speaker, our government has been clear that we are committed to ensuring safe and supportive learning environments for students throughout Ontario. When a child arrives at school, they should feel welcome and they should feel safe.

As Bullying Awareness and Prevention Week comes to a close, we are putting our best foot forward with all of our efforts—

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

Mrs. Robin Martin: Through you, Mr. Speaker: Thank you, Minister, for your response. On behalf of my constituents, I want to thank the government for ensuring bullying prevention is a conversation which is happening all year long.

Mr. Speaker, the minister is right: Everyone in this House needs to get involved in this conversation and do their part to prevent bullying from happening in their own communities, and to provide supports to those who need it most. We know that bullying can have long-term effects on its victims.

Minister, what can MPPs do, and where can we turn, when we learn of incidents of bullying in our communities?

Hon. Lisa M. Thompson: Back to the member from Eglinton–Lawrence: Again, there is so much that we can do, and you lead by example in that regard. Every member in this House needs to know there are so many supports, not only in their own riding but throughout the province.

Just yesterday morning, I spent time at the Kids Help Phone in Toronto. It's phenomenal, what they do. The counsellors they have on staff and the volunteers who are in place are reaching out to people when they're looking for help throughout this amazing province. I say "amazing" because technology has brought everyone together through the Kids Help Phone. I love what they're doing so much, in that they are reaching out through every social channel available to them. It's not just on the phone, but also it's through every social channel. Do you know what? I was inspired to see people dedicated to supporting children 24/7, seven days a week.

They also acknowledge at the Kids Help Phone line that there are other initiatives like WES for Youth, #GetIn-TouchForHutch and so many more, and we need to—

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

Next question.

NORTHERN AIRPORTS

Mr. Sol Mamakwa: My question is to the Minister of Transportation. Remote populations served by Ontario remote airports are among the fastest-growing in northern Ontario. Also, Mr. Speaker, we have to understand that these airports are actually lifelines for the communities that they serve.

But Ontario's northern airport investments have not kept up with the need. Because of that, there have been situations where people have not received urgent medical attention because planes and helicopters were not able to land. Millions of dollars in groceries and medicines have spoiled because they could not be delivered.

So my question, Mr. Speaker: Has the government begun to engage with fly-in First Nations communities in the Far North to begin discussion on essential improvements to these airports?

Hon. Jeff Yurek: Thank you very much for that question. He's right: We need to improve transportation within the north, especially with our Indigenous populations. We have an understanding of that to connect communities, to ensure they have the opportunity to receive supplies, to receive medical help and to move to and fro out of the area. We understand that. The Ministry of Transportation is working with the Minister of Energy, Northern Development and Mines to address these issues. We're starting forward.

Has the ministry started that engagement? I've been on the job for 15 days, and I'm still getting the briefings. I will find out for you what they're doing, and I'll give you my commitment: If they haven't, I'll tell them to get working on it. I can give you that much.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Supplementary?

Mr. Sol Mamakwa: These airports serve a critical role for the safety and the well-being of the people in the Far North communities. And, yes, there have been needless deaths and unnecessary suffering due to the lack of landing approach infrastructure for these remote airports.

Mr. Speaker, could the Minister of Transportation tell the House how he plans to begin working with the remote northwestern and northern communities so that basics like up-to-date landing instrumentation equipment is available to these airports?

Hon. Jeff Yurek: Minister of Indigenous Affairs.

Hon. Greg Rickford: Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the opportunity to respond to this question. Of course, what I think about—and the member for Kiiwetinoong and I were just youngsters, but there was a great Progressive Conservative minister who was called the emperor of the north, and he is in fact the guy who started to build those very airports and runways in all of those isolated communities. That's very well documented.

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We continue to remain committed to the opportunity of opening up our northern communities, to ensure that we have the social, health and economic benefits that are afforded to those isolated communities by building corridors to prosperity. Electrification and road access are just

as essential as any other form of transportation infrastructure.

We are going to be talking about that in the next couple of months. There's going to be a budget to support that. We just hope the member will stand with us and vote to support better transportation in northern Ontario.

SKILLED TRADES

Ms. Jill Dunlop: My question is to the Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities. Minister, I was happy to sponsor the Ontario Electrical League reception this morning, and I know they've also met with many MPPs on both sides of the House. I also see many of the OEL members here in the gallery too.

OEL members were very excited about the passing of Bill 47 yesterday, especially the changes to the journey-person-to-apprentice ratios. They were also telling me how they will now be able to hire more apprentices.

We know there is a demand for skilled trades in Ontario. Can the minister tell us what our government is doing to create better jobs and fill these job shortages within our province?

Hon. Merrilee Fullerton: Thank you to the member opposite for her strong advocacy. We promised the people of Ontario to create good jobs and good-paying jobs and make Ontario open for business. We want to work with employers, unions, employees and businesses to make sure that happens and to fulfill our promise to the people.

Modernizing the Ontario College of Trades and standardizing ratios are key steps to delivering on those core promises to Ontarians. The current system was not working and we need to change that. It wasn't working for the trades, it wasn't working for employers and it wasn't working for Ontario. We need a system that gets Ontario's economy moving and fills that skills gap. Groups like the Ontario Electrical League, we've heard from them and we want to make sure that we move forward with changes that are positive for business, employers and employees.

The Premier was clear with the people of Ontario during the campaign that our government will fill that skills gap by increasing—

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Thank you. That concludes question period.

HOLIDAY SEASON

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The member for Essex on a point of order.

Mr. Taras Natyshak: On a point of order, Speaker: Two days ago, I had a private conversation with you, a serious conversation, about the need to spread some holiday cheer around this place. As members would know, we only had about a week to experience the wonderment of this building as it's adorned for the holidays, and I asked you to use your vast powers in this building to see if you could expedite that process.

I'm happy and thankful that you did so, and we now have a 12-foot Christmas tree to adorn the grand staircase outside. I just wanted to thank you for doing that.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Merry Christmas to all and to all a good night—no.

I appreciate the member for Essex pointing that out. Certainly, if the tree is there, it's wonderful. We can get into the Christmas spirit in here. I want to express my appreciation to the staff of the Legislative Assembly who made it possible to get the tree up.

VISITORS

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Point of order, the member for Scarborough—Agincourt.

Mr. Aris Babikian: Mr. Speaker, earlier, I forgot to mention that the reception for the Lebanese Independence Day celebration will take place in room 230. It is hosted by the World Lebanese Cultural Union.

At the same time, I would like to mention the rest of the delegation who were here earlier: Honorary Consul Gregoire Bostajian; his wife, Desiree Bostajian; Elias Kassab; Marie Mousa; Father Habib Tannouri; Father Walid Khouri; Father Ibrahim El Haddad; Mr. Fadi Kiameh; John Gideon; Elie Gideon; and Hanan Dagher. Thank you very much.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Did the member for Scarborough—Guildwood have a point of order?

Ms. Mitzie Hunter: Point of order, Speaker: It's my pleasure, if I may, to introduce Jean-François L'Heureux, who has done such great work with Conseil scolaire Viamonde. I know today he's here to be with his son Vincent. It's wonderful to have you and thank you for being here today.

NOTICES OF DISSATISFACTION

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Pursuant to standing order 38(a), the leader of the official opposition has given notice of her dissatisfaction with the answer to her question given by the Acting Premier concerning the Premier's chief of staff. This matter will be debated Tuesday at 6 p.m.

Pursuant to standing order 38(a), the member for Ottawa South has given notice of his dissatisfaction with the answer to his question given by the Acting Premier concerning accountability. This matter will be debated Tuesday at 6 p.m.

There being no deferred votes, this House is recessed until 1 p.m.

The House recessed from 1146 to 1300.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

Mr. Mike Schreiner: It's my pleasure to welcome Erin Archer, Judith Grant and about 20 other water keepers, both in the members' gallery and the public galleries, who are part of the Friends of the Waverley Uplands in Midland and who are at Queen's Park today meeting with MPPs to talk about protecting the Alliston aquifer and the

Anishinabek lands from pits and quarries. Welcome to Queen's Park, and thank you.

Mr. Mike Harris: I would like to take a minute to introduce some very special guests who will be joining us in the members' gallery this afternoon in support of my private member's bill, Bill 50, the Cutting Red Tape for Motor Vehicle Dealers Act, which is up for second reading: Andrew Ojamae from Kitchener Ford, Matt McKnight from Gemini Motors in Kitchener, Nick Heffner from Heffner Toyota in Kitchener, Brent Ravelle from Bustard Chrysler in Waterloo and Listowel, Andy Caletti from Belleville Toyota, Benny Leung from Marsim Auto Group in Toronto, Bob Redinger from Ready Honda in Mississauga, Jim Williamson from Williamson Chrysler in Uxbridge, Chris Pfaff from Pfaff Automotive Partners, Ken Shaw from Ken Shaw Lexus Toyota, Frank Notte from the Trillium Automobile Dealers Association, Warren Barnard from the Used Car Dealers Association of Canada, and Ralph Palumbo.

Ms. Christine Hogarth: I am pleased to introduce Teresa Lubinski, who is a trustee-elect for the Toronto Catholic District School Board in ward 4, which includes my riding of Etobicoke—Lakeshore. She and others are in the gallery for my colleague MPP Surma's wonderful private member's motion today—to support her this afternoon. Welcome.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

CHILD ADVOCATE

Mr. Ian Arthur: I rise today to condemn the decision to remove the Office of the Child Advocate. Folding it into the Ombudsman's office is a mistake that will drain resources essential to protecting and advocating for youth in Ontario.

The child advocate did actual advocacy work. This is such an important point to make, and one that is missing from the Ombudsman's abilities.

There were programs that the advocate has worked on, including Feathers of Hope, which provided 41 recommendations to address youth suicide in Indigenous communities; You Are Not Alone, which is an important initiative that supports LGBTQ youth; and HairStory, which was established to help better position young Black people in the province.

When the children's advocate found out that he was being fired—through the media—his thoughts went to the children. There were 27 current investigations that his office was conducting when they found out that they had been shut down—27 investigations that the office is now unable to pursue.

Moving the children's advocate into the Ombudsman's office is a mistake, and it is the children and youth who are going to be the biggest losers in this bureaucratic transaction. So-called efficiencies should not be found at the expense of children and youth, the very people who

represent the future of this province. What future does this government want for children if they see fit to remove their biggest advocate?

COMMUNITY SERVICES

Mr. Stephen Crawford: As the Christmas and holiday season nears, we are fast approaching the largest period for food donation this year. It was earlier this week that I learned that most food donated to food banks comes during two periods throughout the year. The first of these is around Thanksgiving and the second one is around Christmas. It is because of this that most food given to food banks during the holiday season must be rationed for the rest of the year.

Several organizations in my riding of Oakville work hard throughout the year to offer services and programs to support our communities in need. Among those organizations is the Fare Share Food Bank, a non-profit organization run entirely by volunteers which has been operating in Oakville since 1988. The Fare Share Food Bank provides food for approximately 400 families per month, which is over 40,000 meals per year. I am proud to support their initiative, and I have a large donation box located in the common reception area of my constituency office, located at 74 Rebecca Street, Unit 1, in Oakville.

Another organization committed to working hard for our community is the Kerr Street Mission. The Kerr Street Mission provides essential services and relief to those at risk or at risk of poverty through programs, nutritious meals and food bank support. At-risk youth and low-income families benefit from family programs, from prenatal classes and homework support to summer camps. The Kerr Street Mission is located on Kerr Street in Oakville, just a few blocks from my constituency office.

I would like to thank these organizations for all the great work they do in the community. And for the families of Oakville, I encourage everyone to be generous this holiday season.

ABRIGO CENTRE

Ms. Marit Stiles: Boa tarde. I am pleased to rise today to recognize the important work of the Abrigo Centre, an outstanding organization serving Toronto's Portuguese-speaking community and based in my riding of Davenport.

The Abrigo Centre has a mission to build community capacity in west Toronto by helping individuals and families achieve their full potential. They offer counselling, crisis support for women experiencing violence, support for newcomers, and programming for new parents.

Earlier this month, I had the opportunity to visit with some of the participants at Abrigo's seniors' recreation and education program. The Grupo Vida e Esperança has over 180 registered members and brings together 80 to 100 seniors three times per week for events like field trips, exercise, art and dance classes, and workshops on everything from meditation to healthy eating. I want to congratulate this group on eight years of providing a social

hub for Portuguese-speaking seniors in our area and across Toronto.

Obrigada e muitas felicidades. Thank you very much, and best wishes for the future.

NEPEAN

Mr. Jeremy Roberts: This coming Saturday, November 24, marks the 40th anniversary of the town of Nepean, the town in which I was born and raised and am now privileged to represent. Nepean was the place that my grandparents chose to settle in in 1958 when they emigrated here from Great Britain.

Nepean has a rich history. Most notably, it housed the quarry that provided the sandstone that now adorns our beautiful federal Parliament buildings.

Its economy has generated large businesses like JDS Uniphase, Nortel, and Gandalf Technologies. It also currently houses two federal government departments: the Departments of National Defence and Agriculture.

Nepean has generated a number of famous individuals over its years, including Steve MacLean, the astronaut and former president of the Canadian Space Agency, and Steve Yzerman, the famous Detroit Red Wings player who began his hockey career with the Nepean Raiders. We also have our very own James Bond—Mike Nemesvary was the skier who portrayed James Bond in *On Her Majesty's Secret Service*—and Sandra Oh, the famous actress from *Grey's Anatomy*.

Nepean is a wonderful place. As we have seen recently, it is a place that still values coming together as a community, as it did after the tragic tornadoes that hit it earlier this year.

I'm proud to be a Nepean boy and proud to represent this town that turns 40 this weekend.

VOLUNTEER MBC

Ms. Sara Singh: It is an honour to rise here today.

During our constituency week—which wasn't long enough, to be frank—I had the opportunity to visit agencies across my riding of Brampton Centre, in Peel region, and I had great joy in connecting with them and learning about the front-line services that they were providing both in Brampton and, again, across Peel region.

I had the opportunity to visit the W.G. Davis centre for families in Brampton, as well as our Community Door. These are innovative community hubs which house organizations such as Rapport youth services, which has a drop-in centre called ECLYPSE; Catholic Family Services of Peel-Dufferin; and the Canadian Mental Health Association—also operating out of these innovative community hubs.

But I just want to highlight one organization, because without the work that they are doing, none of these organizations would be able to have the volunteer bases that they do. I'd like to highlight executive director Carine Strong of Volunteer MBC. Volunteer MBC has helped

connect over 30,000 volunteers to organizations in Mississauga, Brampton and Caledon. Without the amazing work that they were doing, 28,000 volunteers wouldn't have been connected to an opportunity to provide a service to connect a senior to a young person in their community. So, without the hard work of volunteers, none of these organizations would be able to survive, frankly.

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I also had a really great opportunity to sign the Charter of Volunteerism, which Volunteer MBC has. This allows them to celebrate 10 years' worth of their work in the community.

PAK PIONEERS COMMUNITY ORGANIZATION

Mr. Kaleed Rasheed: On Tuesday, November 6, we were honoured to host our Minister for Seniors and Accessibility, the Honourable Raymond Cho, and his staff at the Pak Pioneers Community Organization's meeting that occurs every Tuesday in my riding of Mississauga East–Cooksville.

Our minister was very energetic in addressing the group of seniors and answered their tough questions. We had a few laughs along the way. The minister taught the group how to laugh out loud, and then encouraged everyone to join him.

Pak Pioneers Community Organization is a not-for-profit, registered charity that works voluntarily for community development and offers help and assistance free of charge. They offer services for senior citizens from the South Asian community by providing them a safe place to mingle.

We know socially active seniors are mentally resilient, having fewer issues around social isolation, anxiety and depression, which is very prominent in this population.

Thank you, Minister Cho, for visiting and teaching us how to laugh out loud, and we hope to have you again in our riding.

AFFAIRES FRANCOPHONES

M. John Vanthof: Je prends la parole aujourd'hui afin d'exprimer mon choc et ma consternation face à la décision du gouvernement Ford d'éliminer le bureau indépendant du Commissariat aux services en français, sans compter sa décision d'annuler la construction d'une université francophone.

Quand j'étais petit garçon, ma famille a déménagé à Temiskaming, une région où la présence francophone est très forte. Grandir dans une culture tellement différente de la mienne fut pour moi une expérience incroyable. Au fil des années, j'ai eu le privilège de travailler côte à côte avec mes amis et voisins francophones. Nous avons mené plusieurs batailles où le cœur et le feu des francophones ont su vaincre tous les obstacles. J'ai beaucoup appris des Gauthier, des Ethier, des Rivard et bien d'autres.

C'est un honneur de vous représenter ici à Queen's Park et nous continuerons de travailler ensemble, sans relâche,

afin de repousser cette vicieuse attaque contre la culture francophone.

AANIIN COMMUNITY CENTRE AND LIBRARY

Mr. Logan Kanapathi: I'm proud to rise today to speak about a facility very near and dear to my heart. Over the summer, I was delighted to attend the official opening ceremony of Markham's new and highly celebrated, state-of-the-art Aaniin Community Centre and Library, right in the heart of my Markham–Thornhill riding.

I advocated for this vital project throughout the course of my three terms as a Markham city councillor. Ward 7 was long considered the poor child of Markham. It lacked the facilities and community spaces our community needed. I worked to bring the Aaniin Community Centre to life to fill this service gap.

Today, the Aaniin Community Centre and Library now stands as a testament to the cultural aspirations of our diverse community. This facility has become the place for Markham–Thornhill residents of all backgrounds to come together as one cohesive community. I am very proud that my vision to create a sense of space and community, where all children, youth, adults and seniors could congregate, has been realized.

The name of the beautiful facility, Aaniin, means "welcome" in Ojibway. This is perfectly fitting for such a beautiful and vibrant facility which is open to all. It is no surprise that the facility is now praised by many journalists and architects as a community facility of the future and already the most used in Markham. It is clear we listened to the residents and we exceeded their expectations.

As the architect for Aaniin, Duff Balmer, said, "The idea of the building was that it should be about connections." With the winter fast approaching, I encourage the residents of Markham–Thornhill to visit this fine community centre to make connections, keep active and immerse themselves in all that our diverse and vibrant community has to offer.

YOUTH MENTAL HEALTH

Mr. Deepak Anand: Mr. Speaker, there is a mental health crisis sweeping across Ontario. Youth in particular are hit hard: Half of Ontario parents have reported concerns about their child's level of anxiety; one third of Ontario parents had a child miss school due to anxiety; 62% of youth have reported concerns about their level of anxiety and, more troubling, only three out of 10 have sought help.

As many as one in five children and youth in Ontario will experience some form of mental health crisis. One thing making the mental health crisis worse is the stigma attached. It forces those suffering to do so in silence.

I would like to introduce the NGO Naseeha, a peer-to-peer toll-free support helpline making a difference in the lives of those youth. Last year alone, 18,000 distressed callers called in to talk about their problems. Naseeha

deals with mental health problems, drugs and alcohol, bullying and religion. In 2015, they launched an educational and outreach program and helped many young couples and youths with mental stress.

Naseeha is committed to ensuring that every young man can thrive by navigating any personal challenges to contribute positively in their community. Mr. Speaker, I would like to recognize Naseeha for their good work.

STATEMENTS BY THE MINISTRY AND RESPONSES

NATIONAL HOUSING DAY

JOURNÉE NATIONALE DE L'HABITATION

Hon. Steve Clark: I rise in the House today to mark National Housing Day.

Twenty years ago, National Housing Day was declared after municipalities, members of the public and community agencies across the country called on all levels of government to take action on housing, specifically community housing. People said, "What can we do to help those in need of a safe and affordable home?"

Answering that question is something our government for the people cares deeply about. While the full answer is complex, at its core it's very simple: We need more housing. Building more housing will help Ontarians create good jobs across this province. Employees need affordable places to live, and getting shovels in the ground will bring more construction jobs in Ontario.

But the road to building more housing has been challenging after a decade of mismanagement by the previous government. There is too much red tape that is choking the system, from complex approval requirements to high costs and government fees. Speaker, we need to change that, and our government will.

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Ontario's government for the people is taking concrete action. My ministry in particular is in the process of consulting with the people of Ontario about how the government can remove barriers to building the right kind of housing in the right places. Their ideas will help us create a housing action plan to boost housing supply.

Le gouvernement de l'Ontario prend des mesures concrètes pour y arriver. Mon ministère est actuellement en train de consulter la population de l'Ontario pour savoir de quelle façon il serait possible d'éliminer les obstacles à la création des bons types de logements aux endroits stratégiques, en fonction des besoins de la population. Les idées reçues nous aideront à créer un plan d'action sur le logement qui favorisera l'offre de nouveaux logements.

But, Speaker, we all know that all housing is important. We also need to work together to sustain critical community housing, to repair and renew aging buildings, and to maintain the financial viability of housing providers across this province.

On this National Housing Day, I want to stress to you, as the minister responsible, that we are committed to

fixing the mess left by years of neglect. National Housing Day began as a call for all levels of government to do more about housing. I agree; we need to work in partnership with our municipal and development partners. They are big financial contributors, and they are on the front lines, helping people every day.

Our government is committed to making a difference. This commitment includes working collaboratively with my colleagues in other ministries. However, the federal government needs to step up. Their National Housing Strategy barely maintains the status quo. I believe they must do more. If we are going to renew Ontario's housing stock and provide the housing that people need in this province, the federal government needs to invest more.

Speaker, I believe we all have a role to play when it comes to maintaining and building more housing in our communities. Today, let's reflect on how important it is to have housing that is affordable for the people of Ontario—housing that meets their needs and offers more choices for their families. I think we all agree; the people of Ontario expect nothing less.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Responses?

Ms. Suze Morrison: As I rise in response to the minister today, I, too, would like to mark National Housing Day and share some information about the status of housing across our province.

In a recent Huffington Post article, Geordie Dent, the executive director of the Federation of Metro Tenants' Associations, said, "Today," our "millionaire Premier ... introduced a plan to end rent control on all new units in Ontario. It was a startling reversal of his May campaign promise: 'When it comes to rent control, we're going to maintain the status quo.'"

Every tenant advocate I've spoken to has said this move takes us back 20 years, to when the former Conservative government under Mike Harris scrapped rent control the last time around. As I said to the minister yesterday in question period, it didn't work then, and it's not going to work now.

We need to be learning from past mistakes, not repeating them. The last time that rent control was cut in this province, purpose-built rental housing development flatlined and Toronto fell into a housing crisis that advocates have called "deeply nightmarish." Yet the minister seems to think that getting rid of rent control will magically inspire landlords to build more purpose-built rentals. That has historically proven to be untrue.

Prior to closing the post-1992 rent control loophole, I'd like to remind the minister of just how hard it was for tenants to find and keep affordable housing in Toronto. At the time, the up-and-coming neighbourhood of Liberty Village in downtown Toronto was a hot spot for development. Many young people were finding rental homes there in privately owned condos. As the neighbourhood got hotter and hotter, landlords realized they weren't restricted to the 1.5% annual cap on rental increases because most of the buildings in Liberty Village were built after 1992, and thus not subject to the rent control measures. Tenants were effectively facing eviction notices.

People had no protections and were forced to leave their homes when they couldn't pay absolutely astronomical rent increases.

Today, finding an affordable place to live in Toronto is almost impossible, and the city's low-income population is being crushed under the high rents or risks leaving the city altogether, with no other options.

Yesterday afternoon, this government passed Bill 47, which took away two paid sick days a year from workers and froze the minimum wage at \$14 an hour, ripping workers off of \$2,000 a year. This government seems to think that minimum wage workers don't deserve a raise. This government seems to think that working people in this province don't deserve a wage that they can actually live on. Because I'll tell you, Speaker, you certainly can't live on \$14 an hour in downtown Toronto.

According to the latest reports, the average cost of monthly rent for a one-bedroom apartment in the city of Toronto is \$2,200, Speaker. That's the highest rent for a one-bedroom apartment in all of Canada, and we should be ashamed of that. So let's do some math. I know my Conservative friends love to do math, so let's do that together. If someone makes minimum wage at 40 hours a week, they would make \$2,240 a month. That's gross, before any deductions. That would only leave you with \$40 a month to pay your hydro, to buy groceries, to buy a transit pass so you can even get to work. And what about the luxuries in life, like having a phone, or doing your laundry, or paying for your antibiotics when you fall sick? Because you certainly don't have sick days and you certainly don't have benefits at \$14 an hour. Forty dollars, Speaker, is what this government expects people to do that on, after paying \$2,200 a month in rent.

Now imagine if you also happen to live in a unit that's in a new build. Your relationship with your landlord may be great, but you may be wondering, every single month, "Is my rent going to go up by 70%, 80%, 90%? Am I going to be forced out of my unit because I'm not protected by rent controls anymore?"

Right now in Regent Park, Speaker, we're going through a redevelopment process. People in my community are terrified right now about all of the new condos that are going up. We are going to have an intentionally mixed-income community in Regent, with no rent control in half of our units. It's truly terrifying.

So on this National Housing Day, I would like to ask the minister to reconsider scrapping rent control for new buildings and allow some basic peace of mind for renters in this province.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Responses?

M^{me} Nathalie Des Rosiers: C'est un grand plaisir pour moi de me lever pour célébrer cette journée internationale du logement.

I want to say I welcome the minister's invitation to provide ideas, and indeed in Ottawa–Vanier we have, with my constituents, created a housing table, a round table, where people come up with many ideas. We will be forwarding the results of these consultations. I also welcome his invitation to identify provincial lands that

could be dedicated to creating further housing. And I have a few suggestions of my own to share with the minister, which I am sure he will appreciate.

It's always, I think, important—I'm going to use an English expression that makes me cringe every time I do, "throwing the baby out with the bathwater," which gives me visions that are a bit scary, but I am still struggling to find the appropriate image of what I want to say. I think it's important not to throw overboard everything that was done before. A suggestion that I'm going to make here is to look at continuing to have a homeless count every year or every two years to ensure that we have good information. I would suggest that the minister should continue to aim to eliminate chronic homelessness by 2025. I think it's a realistic goal, and we need to achieve it. Otherwise, it costs us more money the longer people are homeless. The longer they are homeless, the harder it is to give them a place to stay where they will stay. So I think a commitment to continue the efforts that have been done before would be appreciated.

I know that in Ottawa–Vanier and throughout Ontario, there are lots of co-op initiatives that are eager to take place, and I know that they've approached the minister on some support to help co-ops actually take part in this market. It's an interesting suggestion that I hope he will continue to support.

I think community housing requires some help. They benefited before from some investments from the GreenON projects. That's no longer the case. I hope that we will find new ways in which we can support investment to ensure that community housing can save on energy costs.

In my community, I also have a seniors' table, and many of the seniors identify the weakness in their ability to choose where they want to live. I think looking at a variety of housing choices for seniors, as well as for young families, is important.

I hope that inclusionary zoning will continue to be part of the minister's view.

And I think I would appreciate some clarity as to how long he believes that the exemptions from rent control will last. I think what has happened—if we eliminate rent control forever, I think it creates distortion in the marketplace, where some renters are protected and others are not. It should be clear now: Is it an exemption for five years, for seven years or for two years? I think he needs to come clear and explain to Ontarians what indeed he intends to do with these exemptions.

I think many of my constituents would say that the key issue is often supportive housing. We need housing, but we need housing with services. It requires co-operation with the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care to ensure that what we offer our constituents are a range of choices that correspond to their needs. Some people do require services to help them stay safe in their apartment.

I am committed, myself, to a housing-first principle. Je pense que le ministre, aussi, l'est. C'est évident qu'il faut qu'on travaille ensemble. J'espère qu'on pourra continuer et célébrer un jour un vrai droit au logement, une capacité

pour toutes nos communautés de reconnaître que le droit au logement, le droit à un logement abordable, un logement qui correspond à nos besoins, fait partie des droits de la personne qu'on doit soutenir.

I want to thank the assembly for allowing me to speak on this National Housing Day and I want to thank the people of Ottawa–Vanier who participate in the housing discussions that we have.

VISITORS

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The member for Humber River–Black Creek on a point of order.

Mr. Tom Rakocevic: I'd like to take this opportunity to welcome a number of important guests here from the Toronto Catholic District School Board, including Maria Rizzo, vice-chair and also a former North York councillor who was an inspiration to me when I first started getting interested in politics; as well as trustee-elect Markus de Domenico, trustee-elect Teresa Lubinski, and trustee-elect Ida Li Preti. Congratulations, all, on your wins this year.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): It is now time for petitions.

PETITIONS

EMPLOYMENT STANDARDS

Mr. Faisal Hassan: I have a petition entitled “Don't Take Away Our \$15 Minimum Wage and Fairer Labour Laws.”

“Whereas the vast majority of Ontarians support a \$15 minimum wage and better laws to protect workers; and

“Whereas last year, in response to overwhelming popular demand by the people of Ontario, the provincial government brought in legislation and regulations that:

“Deliver 10 personal emergency leave days for all workers, the first two of which are paid;

“Make it illegal to pay part-time, temporary, casual or contract workers less than their full-time or directly hired co-workers, including equal public holiday pay and vacation pay;

“Raised the adult general minimum wage to \$14 per hour and further it to a \$15 minimum wage on January 1, 2019, with annual adjustments by Ontario's consumer price index;

“Make it easier to join unions, especially for workers in the temporary help, home care, community services and building services sectors;

“Make client companies responsible for workplace health and safety for temporary agency employees;

“Provide strong enforcement through the hiring of an additional 175 employment standards officers;

“Will ensure workers have modest improvements in the scheduling of their hours, including:

“—three hours' pay when workers are expected to be on call all day, but are not called into work;

“—three hours' pay for any employee whose shift is cancelled with less than two days' notice; and

“—the right to refuse shifts without penalty if the shift is scheduled with fewer than four days' notice;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to honour these commitments, including the \$15 minimum wage and fairer scheduling rules set to take effect on January 1, 2019. We further call on the assembly to take all necessary steps to enforce these laws and extend them to ensure no worker is left without protection.”

I support this petition and add my name to it and give it to page Nidhi.

PUBLIC SAFETY

Mr. Vincent Ke: My petition to the Parliament of Ontario is:

“To Ensure the Safety of Residents of Ontario.

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas the Justin Trudeau government is not doing enough to protect the people of Ontario from convicted terrorists; and

“Whereas safety, security and peace of mind is of the utmost importance to the Ford government; and

“Whereas Ontario residents who have not been convicted of criminal acts could find themselves unable to gain access to various privileges they enjoy; and

“Whereas there are no provisions to prevent convicted terrorists from accessing privileges in Ontario;

“Therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to pass Bill 46 and disallow anyone convicted of a crime under section 83 of the Criminal Code of Canada and any international treaties that may apply from receiving:

“(1) a licence under the Fish and Wildlife Conservation Act, 1997;

“(2) health insurance benefits under the Health Insurance Act;

“(3) a driver's licence under the Highway Traffic Act;

“(4) rent-geared-to-income assistance or special needs housing under the Housing Services Act, 2011;

“(5) grants, awards or loans under the Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities Act;

“(6) income support or employment supports under the Ontario Disability Support Program Act, 1997;

“(7) assistance under the Ontario Works Act, 1997;

“(8) coverage under the insurance plan under the Workplace Safety and Insurance Act, 1997.”

I support this petition and I will sign this petition and give it to page Emily.

CELIAC DISEASE

Ms. Rima Berns-McGown: This petition is from the Canadian Celiac Association.

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas the IgA TTG blood screening is the internationally recognized standard as the first step in diagnosing a person with celiac disease;

“Whereas celiac disease is an autoimmune disease that can strike people with a genetic predisposition at any time of life and presents with a large variety of non-specific signs and symptoms;

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“Whereas many individuals, such as family members of diagnosed celiacs, are at higher risk and pre-symptomatic screening is advised;

“Whereas covering the cost of the simple test would dramatically reduce wait times to diagnosis, save millions to the health care system due to misdiagnoses, unnecessary testing and serious complications from untreated celiac disease and reduce the painful suffering and health decline of thousands of individuals;

“Whereas Ontario is the only province in Canada not to cover this blood test;

“Therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Ontario government to cover the cost of the diagnostic blood test (IgA TTG) for celiac disease for those who show symptoms, are a first-degree relative or have an associated condition.”

I agree with this petition, will be affixing my signature to it and giving it to page Emily to take to the Clerk.

ANIMAL PROTECTION

Ms. Christine Hogarth: “To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas certain commercial operations known as ‘puppy/kitten mills’ have been reported to keep animals in precarious conditions in breach of provincial animal welfare laws; and

“Whereas dog/cat breeding in accordance with the law is a legitimate economic activity; and

“Whereas it is the duty of any government to ensure the laws of Canada and Ontario are respected and that the health and well-being of innocent animals is protected;

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

“That the Ministry of Community Safety and Correctional Services work proactively with all amateur and professional dog/cat breeders, as well as consumers, with the intent to tackle confirmed animal cruelty cases in puppy/kitten mills and to educate all stakeholders about animal welfare standards.”

I agree with this petition, I will affix my name to the bottom and I’m going to hand it to Kejsi.

AUTOMOBILE INSURANCE

Mr. Tom Rakocevic: This petition is entitled, “Stop Auto Insurance Gouging.

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas some neighbourhoods across the GTA have been unfairly targeted by discriminatory practices in the insurance industry;

“Whereas people in these neighbourhoods are penalized with crushing auto insurance rates because of their postal code;

“Whereas the failure to improve government oversight of the auto insurance industry has left everyday families feeling the squeeze and yearning for relief;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to ban the practice of postal code discrimination in the GTA when it comes to auto insurance premiums.”

I wholeheartedly support this petition and will be affixing my signature to it and giving it to page Ethan.

PUBLIC SAFETY

Mrs. Gila Martow: I have a petition to the Legislature of Ontario.

“Whereas the Justin Trudeau government is not doing enough to protect the people of Ontario from convicted terrorists; and

“Whereas safety, security and peace of mind is of the utmost importance to the Ford government; and

“Whereas Ontario residents who have not been convicted of criminal acts could find themselves unable to gain access to various privileges they enjoy; and

“Whereas there are no provisions to prevent convicted terrorists from accessing privileges in Ontario;

“Therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to pass Bill 46 and disallow anyone convicted of a crime under section 83 of the Criminal Code of Canada and any international treaties that may apply from receiving:

“(1) a licence under the Fish and Wildlife Conservation Act, 1997;

“(2) health insurance benefits under the Health Insurance Act;

“(3) a driver’s licence under the Highway Traffic Act;

“(4) rent-geared-to-income assistance or special needs housing under the Housing Services Act, 2011;

“(5) grants, awards or loans under the Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities Act;

“(6) income support or employment supports under the Ontario Disability Support Program Act, 1997;

“(7) assistance under the Ontario Works Act, 1997;

“(8) coverage under the insurance plan under the Workplace Safety and Insurance Act, 1997.”

Of course I affix my signature, and give it to page Imran.

AFFORDABLE HOUSING

Ms. Sara Singh: I’m really proud to rise today on National Housing Day and present a petition on affordable housing.

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas for families throughout much of Ontario, owning a home they can afford remains a dream, while renting is painfully expensive;

“Whereas consecutive Conservative and Liberal governments have sat idle, while housing costs spiralled out of control, speculators made fortunes, and too many families had to put their hopes on hold;

“Whereas every Ontarian should have access to safe, affordable housing. Whether a family wants to rent or own, live in a house, an apartment, a condominium or a co-op, they should have affordable options;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to immediately prioritize the repair of Ontario’s social housing stock, commit to building new affordable homes, crack down on housing speculators, and make rentals more affordable through rent controls and updated legislation.”

I’d like to thank William Hughes from London for bringing this petition forward. I am so proud to sign my name and send this off with page Lilian.

LONG-TERM CARE

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: “To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas quality of care for the 78,000 residents of (LTC) homes is a priority for many Ontario families; and

“Whereas the provincial government does not provide adequate funding to ensure care and staffing levels in LTC homes to keep pace with residents’ increasing acuity and the growing number of residents with complex behaviours; and

“Whereas several Ontario coroner’s inquests into LTC homes deaths have recommended an increase in direct hands-on care for residents and staffing levels and the most reputable studies on this topic recommend 4.1 hours of hands-on care;

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

“Amend the LTC Homes Act (2007) for a legislated minimum care standard of four hours of hands-on care per resident adjusted for acuity level and case mix.”

I fully support this petition, sign it and give it to page Isabel to deliver to the table.

INJURED WORKERS

Mr. Faisal Hassan: “Workers’ Comp is a Right.

“Whereas about 200,000 to 300,000 people in Ontario are injured on the job every year;

“Whereas over a century ago, workers in Ontario who were injured on the job gave up the right to sue their employers, in exchange for a system that would provide them with just compensation;

“Whereas decades of cost-cutting have pushed injured workers into poverty and onto publicly funded social assistance programs, and have gradually curtailed the rights of injured workers;

“Whereas injured workers have the right to quality and timely medical care, compensation for lost wages, and protection from discrimination;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to change the Workplace Safety and Insurance Act to accomplish the following for injured workers in Ontario:

“Eliminate the practice of ‘deeming’ or ‘determining,’ which bases compensation on phantom jobs that injured workers do not actually have;

“Ensure that the WSIB prioritizes and respects the medical opinions of the health care providers who treat the injured worker directly;

“Prevent compensation from being reduced or denied based on ‘pre-existing conditions’ that never affected the worker’s ability to function prior to the work injury.”

I support this petition, affix my name to it and give it to page Samara.

EMPLOYMENT STANDARDS

Ms. Sara Singh: I’m proud to present this petition on behalf the Fight for \$15 and Fairness and the Workers Action Centre.

“Petition to the Ontario Legislative Assembly:

“Don’t Take Away Our \$15 Minimum Wage and Fairer Labour Laws.”

“Whereas the vast majority of Ontarians support a \$15 minimum wage and better laws to protect workers; and

“Whereas last year, in response to overwhelming popular demand by the people of Ontario, the provincial government brought in legislation and regulations that:

“Deliver 10 personal emergency leave days for all workers, the first two of which are paid;

“Make it illegal to pay part-time, temporary, casual or contract workers less than their full-time or directly hired co-workers, including equal public holiday pay and vacation pay;

“Raised the adult general minimum wage to \$14 per hour and further raises it to a \$15 minimum wage on January 1, 2019, with annual adjustments by Ontario’s consumer price index;

“Make it easier to join unions, especially for workers in the temporary help, home care, community services and building services sectors;

“Make client companies responsible for workplace health and safety for temporary agency employees;

“Provide strong enforcement through the hiring of an additional 175 employment standards officers; and

“Will ensure workers have modest improvements in the scheduling of their hours, including:

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“—three hours’ pay when workers are expected to be on call all day, but are not called into work;

“—three hours’ pay for any employee whose shift is cancelled with less than two days’ notice; and

“—the right to refuse shifts without penalty if the shift is scheduled with fewer than four days’ notice;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to honour these commitments, including the \$15 minimum wage and fairer scheduling rules set to take effect on January 1, 2019. We further call on the assembly to take all necessary steps to enforce these laws and extend them to ensure no worker is left without protection” in this province.

I am very happy to sign my name to this and send this off with page Kejsi.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): The time for petitions has expired.

**PRIVATE MEMBERS'
PUBLIC BUSINESS**

**CHARTER RIGHTS
TRANSPARENCY ACT, 2018
LOI DE 2018 SUR LA TRANSPARENCE
RELATIVE AUX DROITS GARANTIS
PAR LA CHARTE**

Madame Des Rosiers moved second reading of the following bill:

Bill 49, An Act to amend the Ministry of the Attorney General Act / Projet de loi 49, Loi modifiant la Loi sur le ministère du Procureur général.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Pursuant to standing order 98, the member has 12 minutes for her presentation.

M^{me} Nathalie Des Rosiers: First of all, I want to acknowledge the intervention in French of the MPP from Timiskaming–Cochrane, who says he was very proud to have—and to thank les Gauthier. I want to say I am a Gauthier too. My mother's name is Gauthier.

J'étais très encouragée de voir qu'il y a des Gauthier encore au Temiskaming.

The bill that I'm presenting today is a tool to help all of us do our duty to represent our constituents and to debate legislation. I will do five things in the 12 minutes that are given to me. I will summarize first what the bill says; secondly, outline its origins, who has thought of this idea and where it comes from; three, I will explain a little bit how this bill is a helpful tool to the Legislature and to us. It's something that all of us will benefit from. I will certainly highlight the importance of continuing to protect our charter rights and, finally, give a couple of examples of how this bill could help us.

Essentially, the bill obliges the Attorney General of Ontario to do an assessment of possible charter violations in regulations or in legislation that is presented to this House, and thereafter to table a statement outlining the potential effects of a bill on our charter rights. It is an exercise in charter transparency, is how I would describe it. It allows us to know and to have the same information all around us to make sure that we know whether a piece of legislation has the potential to violate rights and therefore the potential to be challenged in court.

That's an important aspect as well. It is very important to pass legislation that commits us to the constitutional order. That's our job. It's not only the courts who are the guardians of the Constitution, but the Legislature should be the guardian of the Constitution as well.

This idea is not mine. A similar provision exists in the Canadian Bill of Rights, and also in the federal Minister of

Justice act. It was Conservative Prime Minister Diefenbaker who introduced it in the Canadian Bill of Rights, and it was indeed Prime Minister Brian Mulroney who introduced it in the federal Minister of Justice act. Both of these Prime Ministers wanted to appreciate and reflect on the role of the Legislature and Parliament in protecting rights and creating a rights culture. I think that a similar sentiment is what animates me here.

Recently, an amendment has been put in federal Parliament to the federal bill, the Minister of Justice act, to oblige not only an assessment of charter violations, but also the obligation to table this assessment with the House. My bill has the same obligation.

As I say, both of the Prime Ministers viewed that courts were not the only forum that had the duty to protect our Constitution and to protect our rights. They viewed Legislatures and legislators as having the same duty.

This is a commitment that I share. Before going into politics, I spent a lot of my time in courts. I was defending human rights. I was defending civil liberties. I appreciated very much that role and defending people who had injustice done unto them. I can say that there's no shortage of injustice in our society, and there was still a lot more work to do, but I decided to come into politics because I value the role of Legislatures. It was a judge, actually, who at one time told me, "You know, it's about time that you go and do your good work inside the government, to make sure that you don't come back here so often."

I think that my message here is that it's a duty that we all share, that we all owe to our constituents: not to oblige them to go to court to have their rights validated. I hope that across the floor everybody will recognize how important a role this is that we should have.

This does not mean that the government will never violate charter rights. It simply says that it should do so by telling us that it is doing so, and then we can debate it and we can all have the same information. The fact that it was Conservative Prime Ministers who put it in force should, I think, reassure the government that this is not a crazy idea. It's actually an idea that was designed in democratic traditions that value the role of the courts but also the role of legislators.

I just want to continue and talk a little bit about how important it is to value the charter and our commitment to upholding charter rights for everyone. The charter journey that began in 1982 is one that has protected many groups in society. If you were born outside of Canada and came here as a refugee, you know that you would not have the same due process rights but for the fact that the charter was there to insist that there be good due process rights for people coming as refugees.

The charter has also helped anyone who has had a family member or anyone who was charged with a criminal offence to be protected as well. It has protected religious minorities—all religious minorities. It has protected women. It has protected sexual minorities: lesbian, gay and trans, which we just celebrated this week. It has also protected the rights of linguistic minorities, and I will come back to that.

I think all of these charter rights have made us a better society. Indeed, I think I told the story before about being on one of the charter anniversaries—I think it was the 25th anniversary of the charter—when a chief of police was asked, “You’re here to celebrate the 25th anniversary of the charter? Why are you here? Isn’t the charter not that great for police officers?” And, to his credit, what he said was, “When the charter came in, I was worried that maybe it would prevent us from doing our work as police officers. But, 25 years later, I think the charter has led to better policing. It protects our privacy. It ensures that there’s due process for everyone. It ensures the legitimacy of what’s going on in the criminal justice system.” That’s an important part. We are a better society because of the charter. So let’s take our roles seriously to continue to protect this rule-of-law-bound society that we cherish and should honour.

I think we should all be proud of our charter heritage and seek to continue to protect it for generations to come. Every time that we pass a statute here that has a potential violation of the charter, it will be reproduced elsewhere. We owe it not only to Ontarians and to all Canadians, but also to people around the world who look to Ontario to see what type of legislation is appropriate to deal with a particular social problem.

We know that we are often emulated. There’s a way in which other jurisdictions look to Ontario, and they should know that, indeed, what we are passing here is at the highest level of protecting human rights. We should do it to ensure that all of us have the right information, but also so that if we produce a legislative product, it is good enough, it is charter-proof and it ensures that indeed it can be reproduced elsewhere.

I’m very passionate about this subject because I have spent all of my life caring about charter rights—the way in which I do believe that indeed it has helped us to be where we are, where we have a good quality of life, and people look to Ontario and look to Canada as being a beacon in the human rights field.

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Now let me, as time is passing—je veux vous donner quelques exemples de ce qui pourrait se produire. Aujourd’hui, on a la possibilité d’éliminer le poste du commissaire aux services en français. Ce matin, à Ottawa, plusieurs avocats étaient réunis pour déterminer si, oui ou non, cette élimination pourrait violer la Charte. Il serait approprié qu’on le sache. Il serait approprié pour les gens du gouvernement et pour mes collègues ici que tout le monde ait la même information pour déterminer si, oui ou non, il y a une possibilité de violer la Charte.

I think there are lots of ways in which people ask questions all the time. “Is that constitutional?” “Is that a violation of our charter rights?” I think we owe it to our constituents to know and to tell them when we are taking our responsibility and deciding in good conscience that maybe the government says that in good conscience it is appropriate to violate charter rights. But it should not do it lightly and it should not do it without transparency, without telling people that’s what it’s all about. It’s just

about creating a culture of rights that is wholesome, that is strong and that continues to support our society.

Je pourrais donner plusieurs exemples de comment cette législation pourrait nous aider à mieux comprendre ce qui se passe dans ce Parlement et à partager l’information entre nous. C’est une question de transparence, c’est une question d’honnêteté intellectuelle, c’est une question d’intégrité et c’est une question aussi de s’assurer que nous prenons au sérieux notre rôle comme législateur et notre rôle de protecteur des valeurs constitutionnelles du Canada.

I’m tabling this because I believe—this has been something that I’ve been thinking about for a long time. I believe that, indeed, we are here to improve the legislative process, to continue on a journey where we validate our role, we validate the seriousness of our role, we validate the idea that what we’re doing here is important, and we want to make sure that people know what we are doing and understand what we are doing. We are the custodians of the Constitution, just as the courts are, and I think in passing a bill like this, we are empowering all of us to know and take this role seriously and uphold it for generations to come.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Further debate? I recognize the member for Sault Ste. Marie.

Applause.

Mr. Ross Romano: Thank you, Madam Speaker, and thank you, friends, for that warm welcome. To the member from Ottawa–Vanier, thank you for raising an issue that I believe is important. However, respectfully, I really must disagree with the position that is taken, and on a very fundamental level. I believe it’s important to recognize the constitutionality of legislation. I think it’s commendable in that regard. However, there is something very fundamentally wrong with this legislation.

The legislation, Madam Speaker, is asking our Legislature, our government, to look at the constitutionality of legislation—which is important—and to bring it up before the House. The difficulty is that it is the office of the Attorney General that is the lawyer of the government. It is up to the Attorney General to provide legal advice on such matters, specifically the constitutionality of any legislation, to the government.

Any relationship between a lawyer and their client is privileged in law. It is protected by solicitor-client privilege. It would be a breach of solicitor-client privilege to bring that openly into the Legislature. Now, the argument—

Interjection.

Mr. Ross Romano: In fairness, I would ask the member from Ottawa–Vanier to please hear my comments on this. I am not referring to that as necessarily being negative in and of itself. The difficulty is that—I’m sure the member, and I’m aware of your past profession, would clearly appreciate that the constitutionality of any such legislation, Madam Speaker, would have to come from the federal government because it is ultra vires of the power of the province to enact legislation that could interfere

with a constitutionally entrenched right, which this would in fact do, or at least pose a significant risk to do.

The reason why that is is that solicitor-client privilege is a right that is enshrined in the charter through the common law and became—in 1999, if I'm not mistaken, there was a case called *Smith v. Jones*, where a dissenting opinion of a judge brought that into the realm of possibility, that solicitor-client privilege would be entrenched.

By 2001, in the decision of *R. v. McClure*, the court held that solicitor-client privilege was in fact guaranteed under section 7 of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms through the fundamental rights of justice.

It was not until 2002, in the Supreme Court of Canada decision of *R. v. Lavallee*, that the Supreme Court of Canada held that solicitor-client privilege was an entrenched right under section 8 of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms, being the right of privacy. It specifically held that documents in the possession of a lawyer and legal advice provided by a lawyer were in fact protected under section 8 of the charter, under a person's right to privacy.

I will give some credit to the member that that constitutionally now-entrenched right, as guaranteed by the Supreme Court of Canada in *R. v. Lavallee* in 2002, would extend to criminal proceedings. However, Justice Deschamps, in that same decision, specified that it could also extend to civil.

So the difficulty here—and I'm sure my friend is well aware of that—is that for the provincial Legislature to enact any legislation such as this would be a violation of the charter itself because it would be ultra vires of the power of the province to enact such legislation. This would have to come from the federal government. In essence, this very bill, which seeks to protect constitutionality, would actually be unconstitutional.

I appreciate the pith and substance, if you will, using constitutional terminology, of where she intends this to go. It would, in effect, be unconstitutional. The federal government would not be all right with us, at the provincial level, getting into the affairs of the federal government. I'm sure my friend the member from Ottawa–Vanier would not argue that it is only within the purview of the federal government to enact legislation relating to the Constitution itself and the Charter of Rights and Freedoms, which was guaranteed in our Constitution.

So I do greatly appreciate the nature of what is being said here, but, unfortunately, it is very well recognized in law—

Interjection.

Mr. Ross Romano: The member from Timmins, if you wish to have a debate with respect to constitutionality or case law, I assure you that solicitor-client privilege is a right that is entrenched.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Oh, I thought you said we didn't have the right to do this.

Mr. Ross Romano: Well, it is within the powers of the federal government to legislate with respect to the Constitution, and that is something that is certainly outside of the scope of authority of a provincial Legislature.

Those are my comments. I would certainly be happy to share the case law with the member from Timmins if he so

chooses to read those wonderful decisions of Justice Cory and Justice Deschamps in *Lavallee*, *McClure* and *Smith v. Jones*. I trust you would understand what I'm getting at.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): I would remind all members to address their remarks to and through the Chair and not to engage directly with each other.

Further debate?

Mr. Gilles Bisson: I'm not sure I heard exactly what was said by the member from Sault Ste. Marie, but I will only venture to say that I think he said it is under the federal government's responsibility in order to enact legislation of this type, but not ours. I'm not sure that's what you were saying. If that's the case, I beg to differ.

I just want to take a few minutes on this particular bill to say that we, as New Democrats, will be supporting this bill on the part of the member from Ottawa–Vanier. It does make sense, because there has been more and more of a push, especially by this government, to challenge the edges when it comes to the constitutionality of certain laws.

1410

We certainly saw it this summer when it came to what happened under Bill 5. The government got a reprieve by appealing the decision that was made by the first justice. But clearly, there was division in the court—I don't think we can argue otherwise—that the government had or didn't have the right to utilize the “notwithstanding” clause in what they did with the city of Toronto

What I think would have been helpful for the government, let alone this assembly, is for them to have the Attorney General have that bill be tested by such a provision, because then they have a decision to make, right? They look at it and they say, “Okay, now we know. We clearly understand what this may or may not be when it comes to a violation of the charter and the Constitution, so therefore we will or we will not do it.”

If I understand it correctly, it wouldn't preclude the government from introducing that bill, because we here all understand as legislators that we are an authority unto ourselves. Nobody can tell this assembly, including the courts, what it can't do. What we can't do, however, is knowingly violate the Constitution. We have to follow the Constitution in the end. So I want to, first of all, say that we will certainly support this particular initiative put forward by the member.

We've had other bills that have come through this House over the years, even private members' bills, where—for example, last week we dealt with a very real issue. I don't take that away from the member; people are concerned about what we talked about here last week, but there's some question, if that ever passed into law, if it would be held up constitutionally. I'm not going to pretend to know the answer to that, but I would guess: probably not. But again, it's another one of those examples where it should be up front in the drafting of the bill if this does or doesn't or may violate our Constitution or the charter. If members in the government want to continue that way, that's entirely their right, but I think the public and the

assembly have a right to know what those things are. I think it's a useful exercise that we can go through.

I would also repeat what the member has said, because I think it's interesting to note: It was two Conservative Prime Ministers who actually put this particular provision in place federally, first within the charter of rights and then within the legislation that governs the Attorney General federally. So it's clearly not a crazy leftist plot, as a lot of the Conservatives would like to make it out to be; it is something that leading Conservatives have actually put forward in the federal Parliament and have made law. I think it's just something that is reasonable and rational.

I want to say—I know I'm going to get a little bit of heckling from my Liberal friends when I say this—that there's a question today if the Liberals will have enough members to be able to force a vote on this particular bill. Just for people who are watching at home and don't understand the rules of the Legislature: When the debate is done and we get to the vote, everybody will be asked, "Are you in favour?" "Yes." "No." And if there is a loss of the vote on the part of the member, she can force a division so that everybody is recorded on the vote. They have seven members, but there's a possibility they may not have seven members, from what I've been told. We will allow them to have that division.

But I'd just say to the Liberal members that I've sat when we were seven members, and do you know what? We always had our five when we needed them. People were here to do the job that we were sent to do. I don't mean this to be mean, but you have seven members, plus you have a Green member. Division should be something that you're able to do yourself. I want to put on the record that we will be helping them divide on this and we will be voting in favour of this particular bill, but it's a little bit disappointing if five of the Liberal members can't show up in order to force the division. I only say that because it needs to be said.

I'm not going to take much time because I know our deputy leader has a lot to say about this, but I think this is an initiative that's worth supporting, and we will be voting in favour.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Further debate?

Ms. Lindsey Park: It's my privilege to rise today to speak to Bill 49, the Charter Rights Transparency Act, 2018, introduced by the member from Ottawa–Vanier. Speaker, I have significant concerns about this bill—

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): I'm sorry to interrupt the member, but if I can't hear her because of side conversations, I don't think that's appropriate, so if I could invite all members to listen respectfully, as they have done for you.

I return to the member from Durham.

Ms. Lindsey Park: Speaker, I have significant concerns about this bill, including the unforeseen consequences, which the member from Sault Ste. Marie just spoke about, to solicitor-client privilege between the Attorney General and the government of Ontario.

I'm pleased to have the opportunity today to join the debate. I really do appreciate the member from Ottawa–Vanier's passion for charter analysis and, I must say, I'm probably one of the few people who would be excited to come into this Legislature today to speak about the constitutionalization of solicitor-client privilege.

If passed, Bill 49 would amend the Ministry of the Attorney General Act to add a number of new requirements and obligations to the Attorney General portfolio. It would require the Attorney General to not only examine all new government bills and regulations to ascertain whether the bill or regulation would more likely than not be found by a court to violate the charter, but it would also require the Attorney General to table a statement in the Legislature of the analysis that was done. That would happen before any debate on second reading of a bill.

As the member opposite knows, as the chief law officer of the crown the Attorney General and her officials are responsible for providing advice to the government on all legal matters, including the constitutionality of proposed bills and regulations.

I appreciate what the member from Timmins said: that we need to be up front when we're drafting bills to consider that constitutional analysis. I can say that that's a matter of course in the drafting of every government bill that comes before this House.

All legal analysis provided by the Attorney General to cabinet is protected by solicitor-client privilege. This is an essential element of the lawyer-client relationship in Ontario and of Canada's justice systems. Solicitor-client privilege protects communications regarding legal advice between a lawyer and their client. It's this essential concept that allows clients to trust their lawyers. Solicitor-client privilege has been part of common law for over 400 years.

In 2001—this is the timeline the member from Sault Ste. Marie referred to—the Supreme Court declared the privilege to be a principle of fundamental justice, protected by the charter. Then, in 2002, the Supreme Court called it "a principle of fundamental justice and a civil right of supreme importance in Canadian law."

The Supreme Court recognized solicitor-client privilege over two decades ago as a "fundamental civil and legal right" of Canadians, and since then has constitutionalized the privilege.

In the context of government, legal advice provided by government lawyers, the Attorney General and those lawyers working for her as her legal advisers are the solicitors; and the executive branch of government, including the executive council as a whole, ministers and officials working within those ministries, are the clients.

By requiring the Attorney General to disclose advice on constitutional risks provided to government, Bill 49 would be tantamount to a waiver of privilege over that advice, which would cause irreparable harm to the full and frank communication needed between the Attorney General and cabinet for the government to make informed decisions about legislation and litigation.

As a former law professor, the member opposite knows the potential consequences of publishing confidential legal

advice. Our current legislative framework is a transparent and robust model where members of this Legislature are already afforded extensive opportunities to question the government on the content, substance and purpose of legislation, including the constitutionality and legality of such legislation.

I'm proud to be a member of this Attorney General's team. I know that she is committed to ensuring that the best possible legal advice is provided to the government so that it can make sound decisions. This bill interferes with this process and ignores the ample pre-existing resources afforded to the Legislature to review legislation before being passed. No other province has this kind of legislation, and I argue that this bill is also very likely to be unconstitutional itself. I will be voting against this bill.

1420

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Further debate?

Ms. Sara Singh: It's an honour to rise here today and speak in support of our colleague from Ottawa-Vanier's bill to enhance charter rights transparency. Thank you very much for bringing this forward. It's very worthy work that we need to be discussing.

Bill 49 would provide additional checks and balances on this government so that they could be held accountable to the public. Providing these additional checks and balances protects the integrity of the charter.

Over the 114 days we've been sitting here, we've seen what this government has done in terms of really trying to push through legislation without, perhaps, thorough review. This bill would help us ensure that we are making sure that all rights are protected.

I want to speak a little bit about the use of the "notwithstanding" clause over the last little while that we were here. The "notwithstanding" clause is of particular note here in this case because what we saw in September, with this government forcing through Bill 31, was that they were going to use whatever tools they wanted to, however they'd like to use them, to push through legislation that may, in fact, trample on people's charter rights and freedoms. We recognize that specific bills and regulations need to be investigated thoroughly, and that just simply is not happening with this government.

Another example, Speaker, of things just kind of rushing through and not being given careful consideration is the scrapping of the independent commissioners, including, most recently, the child advocate and the Anti-Racism Directorate, which were bodies that provided that additional oversight to ensure, again, that legislation was not infringing on Ontarians' charter rights.

I'm going to share a little bit from the executive director of the World Sikh Organization, who had written an open letter to the public about the use of the "notwithstanding" clause here in September. I thought it was of particular importance because in his letter he highlights how the charter is used to uphold and protect minority rights and the fear that the use of the "notwithstanding" clause invoked across people in this province. I'll just read a quote.

"Charter rights are fundamental to our free and democratic society and also ensure that minorities are protected....

"The Sikh community and many other minority groups in Canada have relied on the protections of the charter to exercise their right to freely practice ... their beliefs."

The use of the "notwithstanding" clause sent this ripple of fear through the community that, at any given time, this government would use tools that they have at their disposal—we're not arguing that they're not tools that they have at their disposal—would abuse those tools and use them to override certain instances where peoples' rights were in fact being infringed.

When the member opposite from Durham speaks about the mechanisms to review legislation to ensure that we are upholding those rights and freedoms, in fact we've seen quite the opposite from this government in the 114 days that they've been in power. What we've seen so far from this government is quite a bit of rushing through legislation, rather than thoughtful debate and consideration. This is why, in this House, time allocation has been a common practice, which not only truncates the debate but also expedites committee hearings.

I'd like to share a little bit about my experience through the committee process when we were bringing in Bill 36, the Cannabis Statute Law Amendment Act. This is a prime example of this kind of rushing through the very mechanisms that are in place in this House to make sure that peoples' voices are heard and that we aren't, in fact, truncating their rights.

Many voices were actually silenced because we only had—what?—a day and a half of committee hearings, and only hours between that committee ending and needing to submit amendments to that very, very pivotal piece of legislation that we were bringing through. Many voices in that process were silenced, including—I think there's a long list, but I'll just highlight a few—Indigenous and racialized communities.

Municipalities were also left out of this, but back to those Indigenous and racialized communities that were not given an opportunity to discuss how this bill was, in fact, going to impact them or how it may preclude them from accessing this new cannabis market—that silencing and the use of these tools like time allocation in this House do not allow for thorough review or thorough study to ensure that, again, the Ministry of the Attorney General, as well as any legislation that we're putting forward, is in fact upholding people's charter rights.

This kind of rushing does not allow for us as legislators to thoroughly investigate the impacts of these laws that we are bringing in. I believe it's really incumbent upon us to support the work of our member from Ottawa-Vanier to ensure that further oversight is put in place to ensure that the intersectionality of identities across this province are also being taken into consideration with respect to upholding the rights and freedoms in the charter.

Requiring that the Ministry of the Attorney General investigate and report to the House the impacts of legislation on the charter helps us create what this government

wants to do: more transparency and accountability on behalf of the government. It holds to account, publicly, any decisions that this government seeks to undertake and whether they seek to normalize the suspension of human rights, which we have seen them try to do here.

As the official opposition critic, I welcome any opportunity to collaborate with the minister as well as her parliamentary assistant, and anyone in her office, frankly, to discuss how we can work together to make sure that, at the end of the day, when we're reviewing legislation we're doing that in a thoughtful and considerate manner to ensure, again, that we are not infringing upon the rights and freedoms of people here in Ontario.

Once again, I'd like to thank the member from Ottawa–Vanier for bringing forward this important piece of legislation. We as members of the New Democratic caucus are looking forward to supporting the work that you're doing here.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): The member for Ottawa–Vanier has two minutes to reply.

M^{me} Nathalie Des Rosiers: Thank you very much, and thank you to the members from Brampton Centre, Timmins, Sault Ste. Marie and Durham for all their really thoughtful consideration. Solicitor-client privilege protects the client; it belongs to the client. Here, what I'm asking is for the client—the executive, the government—to disclose to the assembly when it proposes to violate people's rights.

In *Schmidt v. Canada*, a similar provision was tested in front of a federal court and found to be valid. It is exactly that. It's because often the government can get answers and can get legal opinions from the Attorney General and decide not to disclose that opinion because it does not go forward with the bill. But to the extent that it would decide eventually to put forward a bill where there are implications for charter rights, then this bill only requires that a statement be made about the potential violation. So it's not a legal opinion, completely; it is a statement that is made to explain the possible violation.

As I say, fundamentally, the privilege belongs to the client. I'm asking the client to actually step forward in an effort of transparency to ensure that all legislators are able to actually contribute to the debate with knowledge and can take our role very seriously, our role as guarantors of the constitutional order.

I want to thank the NDP for supporting this bill and for helping me get to making sure that there is a vote on this. I think that it is important, in terms of transparency, to know who is in favour of having more transparency and who is not. I think that's also part of this process: that this was designed to help the Legislature of Ontario take on its role as—

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Thank you.

INTERNATIONAL LANGUAGE STUDIES

Miss Kinga Surma: I move that, in the opinion of this House, the government of Ontario should recognize the

success of the international languages program provided by the Toronto Catholic District School Board, and upon the completion of this transition funding period, the Toronto Catholic District School Board should find mechanisms so that they can permanently support the study of international languages in the primary division in schools under its jurisdiction.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Miss Surma has moved private members' notice of motion number 26. Pursuant to standing order 98, the member has 12 minutes for her presentation.

1430

Miss Kinga Surma: Good afternoon. Today, I rise in the House to talk about education and, in particular, a unique program offered by the Toronto Catholic District School Board: the international languages program.

I welcome the following trustees: Markus de Domenico, Ida Li Preti, Teresa Lubinski and Maria Rizzo. Thank you for coming today.

There is also a group of visitors who came to hear this presentation today. I welcome you to the House, and I also thank you for being here.

I think every member in the House recognizes the importance of quality education and that improving education in Ontario should be and is a priority. We are obligated to our children, our future children and to ourselves to ensure that our young people are provided with the tools they need to succeed in life and, with proper guidance, to pursue their dreams. It is through our education system that we can make all of that possible.

Our schools are the extension of our homes when it comes to our children. Schools are where they learn, play, socialize and develop friendships and connections away from home.

This is why I am moving this motion today to recognize the international languages program and the important role it plays for the students whose lives are enriched by learning another language and culture.

Before I start, I would like to thank Minister Thompson for her incredible work and action as the Minister of Education. I could not have more confidence in her leadership and guidance on this incredibly difficult file.

I would also like to thank our caucus for being supportive and, of course, the Minister of Tourism, Culture and Sport and the members from King–Vaughan and Etobicoke–Lakeshore for volunteering to speak on this item.

Immediately after the election, Madam Speaker, it was brought to my attention that the Toronto Catholic District School Board was considering making cuts to the international languages program. For those who are not familiar with the program, it is offered in 44 Catholic schools and offers an extended-day model of 30-minute daily class instruction in six different languages. Currently, the following languages are included in the program: Italian, Portuguese, Spanish, Ukrainian, Mandarin and Filipino.

The Toronto Catholic District School Board's own statement is that the international languages program has

“a distinguished history of providing our students with valuable opportunities to learn a third language and culture that prepares them to thrive in today’s interdependent global society.”

The brain, like any muscle, functions better with exercise. Learning a language involves memorizing rules and vocabulary, which helps strengthen that mental muscle. The many cognitive benefits of learning languages are undeniable. People who speak more than one language have improved memory, problem-solving and critical thinking skills, enhanced concentration, ability to multitask, and better listening skills. Different languages handle verbs, distinctions, gender, time and space differently.

Physiological studies have found that speaking two or more languages is a great asset to the cognitive process. The brains of bilingual people operate differently than those of single-language speakers, and these differences offer several mental benefits. Speaking a foreign language improves the functionality of your brain by challenging it to recognize, negotiate meaning and communicate in different language systems.

Students who study foreign languages tend to score better on standardized tests than their monolingual peers, particularly in the categories of math, reading and vocabulary.

Children who grew up learning about languages develop empathy for others and a curiosity for different cultures and ideas.

Furthermore, in later years, career opportunities, of course, increase for those with additional languages to offer.

Parents know these facts. They will go to great lengths to immerse their children in a learning environment that will give their kids the best chance. Many families move to specific communities in order to enrol their children into this language program available at their local Catholic school. I know this to be the case for families in Etobicoke Centre. Cancellation of this program would mean that 44 schools in Toronto, two of which are located in my riding, would be affected. The two schools affected in my riding are Josyf Cardinal Slipyj and St. Demetrius.

Parents in Etobicoke Centre and in other ridings who were affected by this decision were understandably upset. A decision such as this, made in the last month of the academic year, does not allow for appropriate stakeholder engagement and thoughtful discussions within the Catholic school community.

I was informed a couple of days before a scheduled Toronto Catholic District School Board meeting in July that this program was an item on the agenda. When this matter was brought to my attention, I immediately contacted the Minister of Education, the member for Huron–Bruce, to find a way in which we could assist in preserving the program.

I attended the July 12, 2018, Toronto Catholic District School Board meeting, where hundreds of parents, teachers and students came out to show support for the program. Fellow members brought it to my attention that they were hearing strong support for the program in their

ridings. I heard countless testimonials from the people at this meeting regarding their positive experiences and opportunities. I heard about the meaning that this program brought into their day at school, work or at home afterwards.

Parents spoke to the fact that enrolling their children in this program gave their families the opportunity to share their culture, through language, with their children. To many communities, such as the Ukrainian community, the language is the culture and, therefore, critical in preserving their heritage here in Canada.

Students offered stories of how learning a third language allowed them to speak with friends and grandparents in other countries and build their cultural roots. They made it clear that their lives were enriched by language.

Teachers expressed their passion to share language with their students and how it brought further meaning into their life work as educators.

The disadvantages of learning an international language were none. The only negatives we heard were that, should the program cease to exist, the difficulty would be finding the opportunity elsewhere and being able to access it.

Together, we encouraged the trustees to extend the program for another year, as is, in order to give the school board more time to find a reasonable solution. The program has been temporarily saved for the 2018-19 school year, but we cannot stop there. Today, our government for the people, under the leadership of our Premier, the Minister of Education and the Minister of Tourism, Culture and Sport, is sending a clear message that we support this unique and important program.

Today I am looking for full support from the House. I would like to encourage all members to stand by us so that we may, together, send an even stronger message to the Toronto Catholic District School Board that we do not want this program affected, removed or limited. I am asking the members in the House to put students and families first, and to encourage the school board to work toward finding a solution that includes the program’s preservation as it currently exists within the curriculum. This would include keeping four periods of 30 minutes each week.

I was fortunate enough to have had the opportunity to learn my native Polish language while growing up in Ottawa. I’m sure many times I fussed about having to go to school or about additional assignments, but I cannot begin to express how grateful I am to have that opportunity. Because I was able to learn Polish, today not only can I better serve my constituents, those of Polish descent, but I can communicate with my mom and dad and family back home. I can go to Polish church and attend Polish events, all of which is an integral piece of my self-identity and makes me who I am.

My own personal story of knowing my language and culture is that I came to Canada when I was 4 years old, and I left a Communist country. It was a number of years before members of my family could return home. The first

time I had the chance to go back to Poland was when I was 15, with my mom and my sister. Of course, we stayed in touch and I knew a lot about the country, but I had never had the opportunity to see members of my family in person.

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When I finally got to meet my uncle, his wife and my little cousin Kamil, it was so wonderful to be able to communicate and greet them for the very first time in my native language. It was an emotional experience, and in one day I felt we were never apart for so many years. We were able to bond.

What being able to speak Polish gave me was that immediate connection and it's something that is irreplaceable. Without that language, it just would not have been the same. Without the discipline of having language lessons growing up, I can't say I would have paid as much attention to it as I perhaps should have. I know that these communities feel the exact same way.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank my mom and dad, Margaret and Miroslaw Surma, for never budging and always encouraging me to do my Polish assignments on Friday, driving me to my lessons and making that sacrifice for so many years. That's why when other moms and dads came to my office or called me fighting for the program, I immediately thought of my parents and how they would have reacted. I know they would be fighting in just the same way.

I want to thank all the parents who came to the meeting, who wrote letters, who called their local MPPs, for fighting so hard. It's invaluable, what you are doing.

The purpose of this motion is to provide families and students with that same opportunity. Let's work together to make sure that this is not taken away. Our work in this House—and I'm speaking to all members—is to improve education. Let's stand together and send a strong message to the Catholic board that every member in the House supports the international languages program.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Further debate?

Ms. Marit Stiles: It gives me great pleasure to be able to speak to this motion this afternoon. I want to start by thanking the member from Etobicoke Centre for this opportunity to discuss this very important issue. Certainly the international languages program is a very important one in the Catholic board but also in other boards in other locations across the province.

I also want to recognize particularly the vice-chair, Maria Rizzo, and others from the Toronto Catholic board and others who care about this issue who are here today in the members' gallery.

My own riding of Davenport has a population of 107,000 people. As of 2016, 58% spoke English, 2% French and 41% spoke other languages. In fact, as if the members here don't already know, given the number of times that I talk about this, a very large portion of my community is Portuguese-speaking. In fact, it's the largest Portuguese-speaking community in Canada.

This is a very important issue. The importance of learning another language is in absolutely no doubt. Indeed, the

Toronto Catholic District School Board has been providing international language instruction, as I understand it, in its elementary schools for about 40 years. My understanding as well is that the international languages program offers Italian as the predominant level of instruction in, I think, 32 schools, but also includes Portuguese, Spanish, Ukrainian, Mandarin and Filipino.

I know that parents and students in the Catholic board, as well as in the public boards, really value the opportunity to learn another language. I've certainly heard that from many, many members of my constituency, families who find this program really important. Some of them do it out of interest. They want their child to learn another language, have those opportunities and also, at the same time, learn a bit more about the culture and heritage of another linguistic group. Many of them want to do it for the reasons that the member opposite outlined, which is to maintain that really vital link to the language of their family. I see that again and again in my community, particularly, again, with the Portuguese community but also with the Spanish-speaking community and other language groups. It's so meaningful for their children to be able to continue to have that opportunity to learn that language.

We know, as the member opposite mentioned, that studies have certainly shown the overall cognitive benefits of learning another language, and in a province like Ontario that's home to so many people from so many cultural and linguistic backgrounds, it is a real asset. It helps strengthen communities and it builds bridges across language barriers.

Again, I want to thank the member from Etobicoke Centre for highlighting the importance of learning those heritage languages in schools. I think it's a very important conversation to have. But it does raise some questions and concerns for me, given the government's recent actions. For instance, it seems a bit strange to see a bill from a government member that emphasizes the importance of learning languages other than English only a week after the government showed such grave disrespect for Ontario's francophone linguistic minorities by eliminating the Office of the French Language Services Commissioner—really quite an unforeseen, unexpected move, and one that has members of the francophone community in Ontario, across this province, outraged, saddened and wondering why this government has no interest in maintaining their commissioner. Likewise, Franco-Ontarians saw the government cancel the Université de l'Ontario français. To see a motion from the government side, then, celebrating the importance of multilingualism is a little bit mind-boggling, frankly, Madam Speaker.

I also have some serious concerns about a motion that calls for support for a specific school program when parents, students and educators are currently feeling the pain of an across-the-board freeze on education programs. While we're seeing these cuts made behind closed doors that the government calls a pause or a temporary freeze, we're seeing school boards and parents already struggling to provide the kinds of services within their communities, within their schools that families rely on, that students rely on, that educators rely on.

I want to go back to that point briefly, but before I continue, I did want to note that the motion here—basically what it's saying is, "I hope school boards will come up with the money to continue this program." I just remind the member opposite that at the end of the day it's the province that funds education. It's the government of Ontario that funds education, that has a responsibility to continue and to show a real commitment to this program. So while I appreciate the intention and the sentiment behind this, and I certainly appreciate this opportunity to speak to it, I think that what we need is the government to back up their support with funding and a commitment to support the Toronto Catholic District School Board in continuation of the program.

As I mentioned earlier, there's a great deal of uncertainty right now across education in this province. I hear about it day after day. I hear about it from all levels: parents; guardians; students; educators; principals; administrators; trustees. They are very, very concerned. A 4% cut to education in this province is a billion dollars. I'm telling you, our school boards are already cut to the bare bones. They cannot afford to lose a cent, and you're asking them to come up with a billion dollars out of our education system while you're putting the weight of these programs on their shoulders to continue. I find that confusing and a little bit disturbing.

Of course, what would be really helpful is if the government would be considering, again, how to continue programs like this, how to invest in programs like this that matter to so many families and that we know help those communities.

I just wanted to close by saying that some of the programs that have been cut or frozen over the last little while, including, for example, the Parents Reaching Out Grants, are programs that have a direct impact on many of the same families that we're talking about, who are concerned about the loss of international languages programs. Those are families where often English is a second language, and that's what those programs are for. Those PRO grants are designed so that parent volunteers in schools can develop programs specifically to improve parent-community engagement in their child's education, and even more specifically, particularly with those parents in many parts of our province who face linguistic barriers. This is about supporting those families.

I think it's a little ironic that we're having this conversation right now while we're talking about this really important issue, but in the context of this broader conversation that this government is imposing on the people of this province, to talk about where we're going to cut—is it going to be special needs? Is it going to be educational assistants? Is it going to be more grants for parents? Is it going to be programs like the international languages program? What does that mean and what does that look like?

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And so, I just wanted to say again that I really do appreciate this opportunity. I think we all recognize the importance of that program across our province, and particularly here in Toronto at the Toronto Catholic District

School Board. I want to thank all of the families, the trustees and others who have come together to show their support for the program. It's so important. And I want to thank the member opposite for bringing forward the motion, but I do have some significant concerns.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Further debate?

Mr. Stephen Lecce: I first off want to just recognize the leadership of the member from Etobicoke Centre for bringing forth this motion, for acting decisively and working in conjunction with the Toronto Catholic District School Board to ensure the continuation of languages in our classrooms.

I am a product of attending St. Margaret Mary Catholic Elementary School in the riding of Vaughan. I continued my education through Centro Scuola, a summer program. I continued learning Italian and Spanish at Western. I've been incredibly enriched because of the opportunities to learn languages.

Now, I know that the member from Etobicoke Centre will comment more constructively to the member opposite who spoke, but that member will know that we're not dealing with funding; we're dealing with the standardization of hours. Certainly, she should know that.

But the point is, Madam Speaker, that we're here today to celebrate the important work that our language instructors do every day. We are joined by trustees, we're joined by leaders—trustee Rizzo, among others—who have helped put this issue on the map.

I'm really fortunate to have received a sufficient amount of lobbying and advocacy from people from the Polish community, certainly, like Kinga Surma; from the Italian community, working in conjunction with the minister from Vaughan–Woodbridge; as well as in the Ukrainian community, with Kristina Waller or Marc Marzotto—people of character who have raised these issues to ensure that the government of Ontario is listening to educators, to parents and to students themselves who want to have that language enriched.

Madam Speaker, as the member from Etobicoke Centre so rightfully pointed out, languages not only improve the cognitive development of young people; they also ensure competitiveness in the marketplace. We know that with youth unemployment twice the national average, any way the province could further arm our young people with more tools to be more competitive and marketable in the marketplace is a positive thing.

We believe, in our judgment, that the work that was done to help save this program is going to help tens of thousands of students who otherwise would have had this program shuttered. So this is a good step. It is a good thing for the competitiveness of our young people. It's a good thing for the viability of these young people in the workplace when they're able to leave education down the road. And it's a good thing for our economy, because every one of us wants to ensure that our young people are able to achieve their full, God-given potential.

I, as the son of immigrants, as a student of languages, as someone who really believes that we can draw on each

other's heritage and faith and their own experiences to strengthen the classroom, know that this motion supporting languages is a good step.

The languages taught by the Toronto Catholic District School Board are expansive. They include Italian, Portuguese, Spanish, Ukrainian, Mandarin and Filipino—some of the largest diasporas within this country, and certainly within the GTA. I think that is an amazing opportunity provided to young people who want to have heritage languages continued in the classroom but, more importantly, who want to diversify their knowledge.

I think, Madam Speaker, that we've got to give credit where it is due. It is due to the member from Etobicoke Centre, working with other members of this House—I know the Minister of Culture and Tourism raised this matter, as I did and as did many members who are my colleagues sitting with me today, to the Minister of Education. And to the minister's credit, she ensured that there was action taken on this issue. It wasn't a file that dithered and waited. She took action. She helped bring a resolution to the people of Ontario.

We believe this is a good thing. We believe this is a constructive addition. It is why, Madam Speaker, I believe in languages in the classroom. I also believe that when we look at the personal growth of young people, we can see a material improvement to their lives by having this provided.

I also just want to note that, today, as I have two nieces brought into the world—one of them is starting the Catholic system; in York region, granted, but nonetheless she is a student in the Catholic system. I want to make sure that she has the opportunities that I had to learn languages that enrich their lives, that give them the tools to compete in a globalized marketplace.

There are many countries in the industrialized world, in the OECD, where languages are required for graduation—well beyond one language. In Germany, among other countries, there is an imperative on learning languages because they understand the economic benefits of this, that you can monetize this knowledge in the workforce, not to mention the cultural benefit that strengthens our country as a mosaic of diversity here in Canada.

As I conclude, I just want to reaffirm to you my gratitude to the member for Etobicoke Centre for having the absolute resolve to fix this issue, working with the board. I want to thank the trustees for the continued advocacy. I know you guys face great difficulty every year. There are always fiscal challenges. But I know you're working very hard in good faith to improve the student experience.

As someone who—all my aunts are educators in the Catholic system, one in the public system—was raised with great appreciation for the work you do and for our language instructors, I say thank you. I say thank you to my language instructor. Mrs. Romano, Cathy Romano, from St. Margaret Mary, who is no doubt watching today—she's definitely not watching today, but if she is, I want her to know that she has left a positive impression in my life. I am better off for the experiential learning she

offered me, and I know that a generation of young people say thank you to her and to each of you.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Further debate?

Ms. Rima Berns-McGown: It's an honour to have a few minutes to contribute to this debate. I couldn't agree more on the importance of a third language and third-language instruction and instruction in schools. I think it's absolutely critical.

I was teaching diaspora studies at the University of Toronto for many years, and I can't tell you how important it was to the identity of my students that they be able to know who they are in order to be able to function as full citizens in Canada. Whether they were first generation or second or third or fourth, knowing where they came from, knowing who they are, grounded them and continues to ground them so that they can become full Canadian citizens.

One of my constituents, in fact, is a Ukrainian community member whose daughter was going to be affected by this program. The point that she made to me, and I think the member, as well, from Etobicoke Centre was making, is that it's absolutely true that a grounding in your own language, in your own identity, makes it easier for you to understand people who are not like you. It makes it easier for all of us to tear down the barriers of racism or other forms of discrimination, of anti-Semitism, of Islamophobia. It makes it easier for us to see our way to understanding those who are not us, to respecting those who are not us, and to make us the truly caring society that we claim that we are and that we want to be.

I also want to mention that in my riding of Beaches—East York, there's an issue that is really key to this conversation. The International Mother Language Day that's held every February 21 for the Bangladeshi community is critical to the formation of that community and to its sense of identity and its sense of Canadian-ness, as well. It commemorates the loss of a number of students who were fighting for Bengali to be an official language in Bangladesh, at the time East Pakistan. At the moment, the community is actually looking for funding for a monument that it has secured permission to build in Beaches—East York. These issues are really important. I just want to make the point that they're important beyond the six languages that are under discussion at the moment.

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I think it's really foundational for us, as a society, to think about the role of language in creating the society that we want, whether it's French or whether it's other back-home languages or, importantly, Indigenous languages.

I think it's really important to think about the path to reconciliation that would be achieved were we to encourage, help and support Indigenous students in the learning of their traditional languages.

I think it's particularly important because this motion does ask the school board to come up with “mechanisms so that they can permanently support the study”—that is in the language of the motion. I think it's really important to think about Ontario, as a province, doing that.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Further debate?

M^{me} Nathalie Des Rosiers: I am very happy to rise today to express my support for this long-standing program, the international languages program, which has been so important to communities that participated in it for over 50 years.

This is a program that brings many benefits, which were outlined by the speakers before me: the health benefits, the cultural benefits, the economic benefits. The ones that I want to speak about, because I've heard it often in the riding of Ottawa–Vanier, which I have the pleasure to represent, are the intergenerational benefits—the way in which we can break the solitude of some older generations when we are able to provide them with their children or grandchildren who can converse with them in their own languages. So there are benefits that transcend what we are discussing here today.

I think we continue to want to support a program that is linked to our valuing the role of language in our society and valuing diversity as we've experienced it in Canada. We have been very proud of having people who continue to own their culture and want to celebrate it. I am particularly happy to see everyone here speaking on behalf of this and being there to ensure that this program continues.

I'm going to refer to the predecessor, Yvan Baker, who was the MPP for Etobicoke Centre. He wrote to me this morning to say, "This important motion is coming up. Make sure that you express how important this program is." He had a similar story last year, when he was speaking about being compelled to go to school on Saturday to learn Ukrainian and feeling the sting at the time, but knowing that that allowed him to become the person he is and the great advocate he has become for the Ukrainian community.

As a francophone and a Franco-Ontarian, I understand, and my community understands well, the role that language has in our community. I think we are hurting very much this week. I hope the good feelings that are shared around this room today will influence a little bit, as well, the treatment of the way in which Franco-Ontarians would be looked at, as part and parcel of Ontario, as we go forward.

I want to celebrate the fact that in Ottawa–Vanier there is a movement to celebrate mother language day and having, as well, a celebration of the monument. I think it speaks very deeply to the way in which the culture of many groups in Canada wants to express itself physically, wants to express itself through programming, and wants to express itself very vibrantly in the community.

I understand that the programs are at risk, and the motion calls on the TCDSB, the Catholic school board, to "find mechanisms so that they can permanently support the study of international languages...." That's very important, obviously. But it's my understanding that, to protect the program, the Ontario government has to do something. The Ontario government must take steps amending the curriculum to allow international language enrichment to be taught during the 300-minute day. I hope

that this message is not lost on the government—that if we are serious about ensuring the continued aspect of this program, there are some things that need to be done. Certainly, I would urge the government to do its utmost to work with the Catholic school board and other stakeholders to do what's necessary to ensure and protect these programs permanently. If it requires some attention, I think it's incumbent on the government to take this role very seriously and see how it can be accommodated in the long run.

I want to conclude very briefly by saying, en français, combien c'est important de continuer de soutenir l'accès aux langues. Je sais que c'est une façon de mieux communiquer, de mieux comprendre et de mieux s'entraider, and I know the community in Ottawa–Vanier would be very happy that today we are speaking in favour of these wonderful programs that have been part of Ontario for 50 years.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Further debate?

Hon. Michael A. Tibollo: Good afternoon, Madam Speaker, and thank you for the opportunity, from our member from Etobicoke Centre, for bringing this motion forward and giving me the opportunity to speak on it.

I am also a product of the international languages program, having taken the course, but having taught the program as well to young kids. One of the things that I always am reminded of is that if you do not celebrate your language or your culture, you will never be able to keep that tradition alive.

I apologize for having my back to the gallery, because the people back here should actually be in front of me while I say this. It's an honour to speak on this issue because, when you think about who we are as Canadians, as Canadians we're not homogenized. We have different cultures, different heritages, different traditions, and all of those are embraced in the language. Whether it be French, Italian or Polish, the numerous languages we speak—by the way, 13 of which are shared by caucus members in our government—to me, language is the key to keeping that heritage alive.

What I've learned over the course of time is that by speaking the language and keeping culture and traditions alive, children are provided with roots and they understand where they're coming from. That may not mean a lot, but when you think about all the influences in children's lives as they mature, you start to realize that their strengths are derived from the home. Their strengths are derived from their culture and their heritage, and the key to those is language. If we do not promote international languages in the schools, after school, in the churches or wherever those languages are taught, what we start to do is we start to erode that very basis of understanding the roots of individuals and their histories, their traditions.

That may not seem like a major issue, but when you think about some of the issues we're facing today, whether we're talking about gangs or groups of kids who seem to have lost their way, you start to realize that the intrinsic motivation, what makes a person who he is, comes from

his origins, from his beginnings, and the beginnings are age one to 14. If you capture a child during that period of time and you reinforce the roots, it's less likely that he or she will succumb to external motivation to determine what their identity is. For me, one of the most important things we can do is to keep the traditions alive by teaching the languages.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Further debate?

Ms. Christine Hogarth: First of all, I want to thank my hard-working colleague MPP Surma from Etobicoke Centre for bringing this motion forward today. MPP Surma has been an amazing advocate on behalf of parents through her work on this file with the Toronto Catholic District School Board and bringing forward this motion recognizing the importance of this program.

International language education was one of the first issues brought forward to my attention as an MPP. We were only weeks on the job when MPP Surma gave me a call, but we also heard from dedicated parents of St. Josaphat school, which is located right in my riding of Etobicoke–Lakeshore. It was brought to our attention that this program was slated for significant changes. In total, 44 Toronto Catholic District School Board schools across the city have international language programs, all of which were facing changes over the summer.

The families in the St. Josaphat school community are part of a strong and vibrant Ukrainian community in Etobicoke–Lakeshore, and I'm proud to be one of those voices speaking on their behalf today.

1510

This community has benefited from the Ukrainian language education available at their school and other schools in Toronto. International language programs at TCDSB schools also benefit Italian, Portuguese, Spanish, Chinese and Filipino communities all across Toronto.

Learning an additional language at a young age can be an amazing experience for so many children. For parents, passing on a language to their children is an opportunity to share a piece of their family's history, their heritage. For some it may be the family's only opportunity to build that connection with the traditions and cultures of their past.

Additionally, in our increasingly global world, fluency in an additional language can be a valuable asset to young people looking to market themselves to potential employers. Of course, science has shown that children at a young age are the most adept group at developing and honing reading, writing and comprehension skills when trying to learn a new language. I can tell you that when trying to learn French at this age.

Finally, I want to thank Minister Thompson for her action and leadership in assisting with this file.

I am pleased to see the Toronto Catholic school board is here today and unanimously approving the motion requesting the minister to—

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Thank you.

Ms. Christine Hogarth: Thank you.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): The member for Etobicoke Centre has two minutes to reply.

Miss Kinga Surma: I want to thank my entire team. I want to thank, of course, the Minister of Education and the Premier for being supportive, the Minister of Tourism, Culture and Sport, the members from King–Vaughan and Lakeshore and many other members, and of course the members opposite for supporting this wonderful program.

I want to take a moment to clarify two things.

Number one, this is not a funding issue. The members opposite always have this manner in which they try to turn this into a conversation that this is not about. This is not a funding issue; this is a labour issue. I want to be very clear about that. This is about standardizing the hours of teaching from seven to 6.5. Maybe you should be conducting some better research.

Secondly, to that member opposite, it was very nice that the former member for Etobicoke Centre sent an email this morning, but the truth of the matter is, the previous Liberal government knew that this was coming down the pipeline and they ignored it during the election. Frankly, this fell right in our lap right after the election, and we took immediate action to address it. I just want to be very clear that it's very nice of him to remember this program today, but the fact of the matter is he completely forgot about it during the election.

I just want to reiterate the very hard work of Minister Thompson, the Minister of Education. She has been an incredible leader, an incredible mentor, and I have just enjoyed working with her very much.

Of course, I want to thank my guests for coming here today. I'm sorry it took us so long to debate this, but I hope you enjoyed it.

CUTTING RED TAPE FOR MOTOR VEHICLE DEALERS ACT, 2018

LOI DE 2018 ALLÉGEANT LES FORMALITÉS ADMINISTRATIVES POUR LES COMMERÇANTS DE VÉHICULES AUTOMOBILES

Mr. Harris moved second reading of the following bill:
Bill 50, An Act to amend the Highway Traffic Act /
Projet de loi 50, Loi modifiant le Code de la route.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Pursuant to standing order 98, the member has 12 minutes for his presentation.

Mr. Mike Harris: It is with great pleasure that I rise in the House today to speak to my private member's bill, the Cutting Red Tape for Motor Vehicle Dealers Act, also known as Bill 50.

I am proud of what this bill, if passed, will accomplish for Ontario's auto retailers and consumers. Bill 50 would amend the Highway Traffic Act to enable motor vehicle dealers to apply for permits, numbered plates, sticker validations and used-vehicle information packages by electronic means or in an electronic format. Whereas the current vehicle registration process requires that auto dealers physically transfer their paperwork back and forth

to and from a ServiceOntario location following a purchase or resale, Bill 50 eliminates this requirement and streamlines the registration process.

In the age of modernization, these measures might seem like a no-brainer. But in Ontario, for a long time now, we have been lagging behind other provincial and state jurisdictions in the Great Lakes region, bogged down by excessive red tape. That is bad for business and consumers alike. It has come to the point now, Madam Speaker, if you can believe it, where we are essentially the only jurisdiction within the Great Lakes region that has not streamlined its car registration process. For example, Quebec implemented in-dealership vehicle registration in 2002 and New York state digitized their car registration as far back as the 1990s. In the Great Lakes region, other jurisdictions have modernized their vehicle registration process, including Michigan, Minnesota, Wisconsin, Illinois, Indiana and Pennsylvania. In the broader Canadian context, Newfoundland and Labrador, New Brunswick and Prince Edward Island have also opened their doors to electronic registration.

Why is this a growing trend, Madam Speaker? In the 21st century, electronic applications and registrations are a fact of life. Not only do they save paper, but they are, quite simply, much more efficient than traditional methods. Electronic registrations and applications succeed in helping businesses and consumers save what they value most: their hard-earned time and money. This revelation is no shock to Ontario's government services. ServiceOntario already allows for driver's licence and health card registrations to be renewed online.

The common sense measures that this legislation proposes are exactly the kind of change that our province needs at this time of economic rebirth. Moving this province from being a have-not province, as it has consistently been under the previous government, to a have province starts with red tape reduction.

Under the current regulations, some consumers end up waiting multiple days following the purchase of their new or used vehicle before they can actually take it home and get it on the road. Bill 50 will fix this. If enacted into law, this bill would enable consumers to purchase a vehicle and drive it off the lot not only within the day but potentially within the span of a couple of hours from the time of purchase.

In this alternative reality, car dealers would register newly purchased automobiles themselves directly with the Ministry of Transportation via an online process. Auto dealers would keep a stock of plates and sticker validations in their dealership so they can install them on the customer's automobile shortly after the time of purchase.

This is an alternative reality to the over-restrictive registration process that currently plagues this province, but it is by no means a reality that is out of reach. Here's the bottom line: Moving the vehicle registration process online will make motor vehicle dealerships one-stop shops, saving dealers and consumers time and money.

But don't take my word for it, Madam Speaker; take the words of the countless stakeholders stepping forward. We

have some of them in the gallery here today in support of my bill.

The Trillium Auto Dealers Association, better known as TADA, which is the largest new-car dealer association in Canada, with a membership upward of 1,000 auto dealers, steadfastly supports the aims of Bill 50. In her recent guest column in the Toronto Star, Susan Gubasta, the president of TADA, stated that, "If passed, Bill 50 will be a game-changer for Ontario's auto retail sector. We live in the digital age and it's time to harness technology to modernize the vehicle registration process."

TADA is by no means the only association to come out in support of Bill 50. In the past couple of weeks, my office has received countless letters and statements of support on my bill from heavy-hitters such as the GM Dealers' Association of Toronto, Kia Canada, the Performance Auto Group, and the Used Car Dealers Association of Canada as well as from car dealerships from across our beautiful province.

Warren Barnard, the executive director of the Used Car Dealers Association of Canada, wrote to me that my PMB is a bill that will "cut red tape for dealers and consumers" and "encourage efficiency and convenience."

Chris Budd, president of GMDA, wrote, "Bill 50 is a vital tool that will go a long way to support Ontario's auto sector and provide consumers and auto dealers with time-saving options when purchasing a vehicle. This is a much-needed initiative that will cut red tape and reduce the cost of doing business."

Those statements of support are just a taste of the positive reception that Bill 50 is receiving. The amount of time that I'm allotted today to speak here is less than would be required to read aloud the dozens of letters my office has received in support of Bill 50 or the hundred of emails that have poured into the members' office email accounts this past weekend—fellow members, I'm sorry for that.

1520

The positive impact that Bill 50 will have on our small businesses and consumers across Ontario cannot be overstated. It should come as no surprise that the president and CEO of the Ontario Chamber of Commerce, Rocco Rossi, came out and formally endorsed Bill 50 earlier this week on behalf of his organizations' 60,000 members, stating, "Cutting red tape for car dealerships across the province is essential to increasing productivity and streamlining outdated and unnecessary requirements leaving car dealerships behind and huge, unnecessary delays for the consumer. Car dealerships lose productivity every time they are required to have their paperwork processed for vehicles sold or leased. It is time we implement Bill 50 and help bring car dealership practices into the 21st century."

There are over 1,000 new car dealerships across Ontario that will benefit from Bill 50's provisions. In Waterloo region, there are 30 new-car dealerships that would see their services improved as a result of Bill 50.

The general manager of Voisin Chrysler, a dealership in my riding of Kitchener—Conestoga, explained to me how Bill 50 would help his business. Here is what he said: "If my business had the ability to register and license the

vehicles I sell, I can go that extra mile to make sure car buyers would not experience delay to take delivery of their newly purchased vehicle. I wouldn't have one eye on the clock to make sure I can get to ServiceOntario before they close for the day."

Madam Speaker, under current government regulations, dealerships do not, in effect, have full control over their own operating hours. The member for Algoma-Manitoulin alluded to this point in second reading debate on Bill 152, which was Bill 50's predecessor, back in 2015.

In reflecting on the negative impacts of the current system, the member opposite stated, "I've heard from dealerships in my area as well that they are challenged. They can't close a sale on a Friday afternoon. 'Oh, why?' 'Well, ServiceOntario has cut their hours and they are closed at 2, and in order for me to close a deal at 3 o'clock in the afternoon, I'd have to wait until Monday.'"

Frank Notte, the director of government relations for TADA, summarized clearly and concisely just how Bill 50 will fix the problem described by the member opposite in a letter to my office stating, "For dealers in areas of the province where a licence office is far away, this bill will have an even greater impact. Dealership employees will not have to waste time travelling far distances numerous times" a day "to provide this service."

Bill 50 did not come out of thin air; there is a strong history behind this bill. Bill 50 is a resurrection of the current Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing's PMB, Bill 152, from the first session of the 41st Parliament. Bill 152 passed second reading, but was reintroduced again as Bill 3 after the House was prorogued in 2016. Bill 3 then became Bill 2 after the House was prorogued in 2018. Bill 2 was not able to progress before the general election ensued.

Reflecting on debates on the previous versions of this bill provides us with a clear sense of what supportive evidence exists for this legislation and what the appetite is for this type of revision that the bill is proposing. For example, if a member of the Legislature were to go back and read Hansard records on the debate of Bill 152, they would find statements in support of this bill coming from all sides of the House. The member from Windsor-Tecumseh knows I'm about to quote him. They would find that the current official opposition member from Windsor-Tecumseh stated, "If we can make life easier for anyone in the automotive industry, make it easier for them to sell the cars we build, then we want to stand up for that and make it happen."

If they looked back at the voting record for Bill 152's second reading, they would see unanimous support across all sides of the House. Why was there unanimous support? Well, some of the main reasons have already been addressed; as in, this legislation is strongly supported by stakeholders, digitization of government services is already underway, and, in the age of modernization, Ontario is lagging behind and our economy is suffering because of this.

In 2011, the government of Ontario conducted a modernization-of-vehicle-registration pilot project at two

new-car dealerships, one in Belleville and one in Peterborough. These pilots tested the same provisions being proposed in Bill 50. It should also be noted, then, that this pilot project was regarded as a great success.

Here's the hardest part about looking back at the debate and the history of Bill 50's predecessors. The previous government knew that Bill 50's measures of modernization and reducing red tape are desperately needed by Ontario's auto sector and still they failed to make modernization a real priority.

Well, the times have changed, Madam Speaker. There is now a government that has the will to act and to do the right thing for businesses and consumers in this province. Our government for the people does not sit on its hands; our government delivers results. We campaigned on a commitment to remove job-killing red tape. We campaigned on a promise to make Ontario open for business. We campaigned on a commitment to create and protect jobs in this province, to turn this province from being a have-not province into being the economic engine of Canada once again.

Dare I say, Madam Speaker, with the introduction and—knock on wood—the passing of Bill 50, you have yet another promise made, promise kept?

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Further debate? I recognize the member for Windsor-Tecumseh.

Mr. Percy Hatfield: Thank you, Speaker. As you know, I come from Windsor, and that's the automotive capital of Canada. I know you're from Oshawa and you may dispute that. But we produce the Fiat Chrysler minivans, the most popular minivans on the planet—with all due respect to the Ford and GM dealers over there. We also build very powerful engines for the Ford Motor Co. We build 1,000 minivans a day and something like 440,000 engines a year. Of course, we manufacture car seats and build hundreds of other vehicle parts; I would be here for the rest of the afternoon if I had to list them all off for you.

It's safe to say that, in my area, the auto industry directly employs 12,000 people—one in every 13 jobs—and then there's the spinoff of jobs associated with the industry, as you are well aware. So, Speaker, when there's a bill on the floor talking about the automotive industry in one way, shape or form, I want to be here to speak to it.

I don't have a measuring tape, but I think it's something like 14 feet or 15 feet from our front bench over to their front bench. Some days, it feels like we're miles and miles apart, but not today, not on this policy, not on this bill.

The Cutting Red Tape for Motor Vehicle Dealers Act is something I can support, and I know my caucus can support it. If it makes it easier to get vehicles on the road that will keep employment levels up in my community, I want to be on the record as supporting it. I'm all in favour of cutting red tape, as long as when we do it we don't compromise the health and safety of the workforce—and I don't think we're going to be anywhere close to that in this bill. In fact, I supported the identical bill when the minister, the member from Leeds-Grenville, brought it

forward back, I think, in 2015. I know he's here to support it today.

I hope we can support PMBs from the opposition benches as well, because the minister knows that, for five years, I've been trying to get a poet laureate position created in Ontario, and I always run into opposition from the government for some reason.

But let's talk about cutting red tape. I know that we have all heard this new government say it so many times that it's becoming a mantra for them: cutting red tape and opening Ontario up for business. So to prepare for that today, I went back to my speaking notes from 2015. Then I had talked about the phrase "red tape," Speaker, being an idiom. As you know, being a former elementary school teacher, an idiom is "a group of words that have a meaning to most of us that are not deducible from the individual words." So it is with red tape. There is no actual red tape.

But red tape, according to Wikipedia in my Internet search engine, "refers to excessive regulation or rigid conformity to formal rules that is considered redundant or bureaucratic and hinders or prevents action or decision-making. It is usually applied to governments, corporations and other large organizations."

There's another definition: It's a "collection or sequence of forms and procedures required to gain bureaucratic approval for something, especially when oppressively complex and time-consuming."

And in case you didn't like those two, here's another one: Red tape is the "bureaucratic practice of hair-splitting or foot-dragging, blamed by its practitioners on a system that forces them to follow prescribed procedures to the letter." Red tape includes "filling out paperwork, obtaining licences, having multiple people or committees approve a decision, and various low-level rules that make conducting one's affairs slower, more difficult, or both."

I'll conclude the definitions with this: Red tape can also include "filing and certification requirements, reporting, investigation, inspection and enforcement practices, and procedures."

1530

This bill sees a need to cut the red tape with car dealers. Because of the red tape, they are required to spend a lot of time standing in line, trying to do some paperwork, and for no more than two vehicle plates at a time, then having to take a number and go back to the end of the line and wait their turn again so they can register two more vehicles.

That time is precious time, and it's time wasted. Speaker, I think, as we've heard, there are about 1,000 new-car dealers in Ontario. You do the math. That's a lot of time wasted. If we can do it for them, if we can cut the red tape for someone who's buying a new car, anxiously waiting at the dealership for that car to come up to the door so they drive off on a new adventure, then I'm all for it.

If we're going to talk about red tape, I want to give an example in my riding. I have a distillery. They've been brewing and distilling Canadian Club whisky for 150 years. But now, because of an ownership change, the label Canadian Club, the best-selling whisky in the world—the brand has been sold to somebody else. So, Speaker,

because it's now distilled under contract, it can't be sold where it has been bottled for more than 150 years. That's the red tape that needs cutting by this government.

And there's the former world headquarters of Hiram Walker—this beautiful, beautiful building. The doors have been shuttered by the new owners of the Canadian Club brand because they weren't making any money out of there; they were just paying a lot of money to upkeep it. Fifteen thousand tourists a year used to go through the Canadian Club Brand Heritage Centre, and now we can't do it. It's Windsor's second-biggest tourist attraction next to Caesar's—15,000 tourists a year. If we can sell a few bottles of whisky out of that building, they say they'll open their doors again. Maybe we'll move the tourist bureau in there and we'll make it an operating place to be.

I want to conclude by welcoming Jenny Reaume here from Reaume Chevrolet in downtown LaSalle, Ontario, back in Essex county. Thank you for being here, Jen.

That's my time, and thank you very much.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Further debate? I recognize the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing.

Hon. Steve Clark: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It's always nice to see you in the chair on a Thursday afternoon. It's an honour for me to speak in favour of Bill 50, the Cutting Red Tape for Motor Vehicle Dealers Act. I want to congratulate my colleague the member for Kitchener—Conestoga on bringing forward this very important bill.

I'd also like to acknowledge Frank Notte from the Trillium Automobile Dealers Association, who's with us today. You have no stronger advocate for auto dealers in Ontario than Frank and his organization.

Speaker, I want to take you back to three years ago, December 3, 2015, when I rose in the Legislature to introduce second reading debate on Bill 152, as the bill was known then. It was my private member's bill, and I was so proud that Bill 152 got its start at a meeting I had at the Brockville ServiceOntario office with three very frustrated members of the Brockville Prescott New Car Dealership Association. Obviously, as the member said, my Bill 152 passed with second reading support. Those dealers asked why they're wasting customers' valuable time and their money by paying staff to stand in line to register their new vehicle when it could be done very easily online at the dealership.

That, Speaker, is the true spirit of why we are here on Thursday afternoons. Individual MPPs can take issues from their own ridings and place them on the order paper as private members' bills. Unfortunately, despite the fact that my Bill 152 had unanimous support, it never did take the next step forward to get royal assent and become the law of the land. However, the good news is that a new day dawned in Ontario on June 7. We have a government that is making Ontario open for business and is committed to getting rid of red tape and unnecessary regulation.

I know that the three dealers that I met with back in 2015, Dave Watson of Pastime Motors, Arnold Dixon of Kia of Brockville and Ted MacMillan of Riverside

Chevrolet Buick GMC, along with Doug Beattie as well from Beattie Dodge Chrysler Jeep, are thrilled to see electronic registration back on the order paper.

I want to thank the honourable member. I know also, Speaker, that a member of my own staff has a brother who has been a supporter of this initiative since the beginning. Michael Carmichael owns three dealerships in Perth county and is thrilled to save material amounts of time and money daily that is spent on the administrative burden associated with this. If this bill passes, he can keep his resources focused on his customers and his business, and I think the members in the gallery will agree.

So on behalf of them, the hard-working people and auto dealers right across this province, but also in Leeds–Grenville–Thousand Islands and Rideau Lakes, I want to thank MPP Harris for his outstanding work. I hope that he is able to put this bill in another gear and get it passed before the Legislature. I want to thank all the members. I ask for your support for this wonderful initiative. Thank you, Speaker, for giving me this chance to speak.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Further debate?

Ms. Suze Morrison: I'd like to thank the member opposite for introducing this legislation. I want to share with you an email that I received a few days ago from a constituent in my riding named Ashley. It reads:

"I'm a new car dealer and I face very burdensome regulations in Ontario. I wouldn't face the same burdens if I lived in Quebec. Bill 50 would build a common sense regulatory framework for car dealers similar to Quebec's. It's just a common sense system.

"The bill is a very important one for Ontario's auto retail industry. It's been before MPPs many times before and it received all-party support. I hope this time we can make it become law.

"As my MPP, I hope to count on you to hopefully make Bill 50 the law very soon. The sooner Bill 50 becomes law, the more efficient our business will be."

And to Ashley, I have to say: I agree with you. This seems to be a pretty common sense solution that would make business easier for those in the automotive industry.

Speaker, as well, as a millennial MPP, I certainly appreciate having the opportunity to support businesses to utilize modern technology to make their businesses more accessible. But at the same time, I also have to recognize that I do have some concerns with how the continued automation of services affects the availability of jobs as we replace actual workers with digital services.

Having said that, though, Speaker, this is a bill that, as I'm sure you are aware, has been before this House many times before. It has been tabled by the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing three times prior to today, and it even passed second reading in 2015 with all-party support.

What's interesting about that, Speaker, is that we are here today debating a common sense idea that's been tabled multiple times, but I'm sure the government members in this House are aware that it's a change that doesn't actually require legislation. Under section 7(24) of

the Highway Traffic Act, the government has the regulatory authority over permits and plates, including the ability to enable electronic applications.

Speaker, what I want to talk to you about today and to this House is about priorities. This government seems to have a lot of them. They're an industrious bunch, Speaker.

Interjections.

Ms. Suze Morrison: Thank you. I'd like to highlight a handful of some of the priorities that we've seen come forward from this government in recent months, including making the lives of working people harder by capping the minimum wage at \$14 an hour; scrapping rent control, leaving tenants defenseless against greedy landlords; slashing paid leave for workers who are sick or in a crisis; eliminating protections for temporary or part-time workers; withholding funding from rape crisis centres; and eliminating consent from our curriculum. So despite the industrious attitude that this government seems to have—which, I'll be honest, I wish they didn't—I think that the government members, if they slowed down for just a few moments, would have time to hear from the people they claim to represent on just how hard they're making people's lives, and by all accounts about a bill that—they're fully empowered to make this change without legislation.

Speaker, I'd like to take a moment and transition here because I so very rarely also have an excuse to speak about my favourite hobby in this House. As some of my colleagues know, I spend my ever-decreasing spare time as a motorsports enthusiast. I'm the two-time women's champion for autocross for all of southwestern Ontario.

Applause.

Ms. Suze Morrison: Thank you. I spend a lot of time working on my competition car, a 1995 Honda del Sol. If there are any Honda folks in the gallery, you have a fangirl over here. So I'm hoping you will appreciate the analogy that I'm about to make, if you'll all indulge me ever so briefly.

1540

This legislation would be like taking your car to a mechanic to have your gas tank filled. It's an entirely simple and easy task, well within the purview of every car owner, and it would be a redundant exercise that's a costly waste of everyone's time.

Of course, I believe that in the province of Ontario, in the current day and age, motor vehicle dealers should be able to apply for permits and plates and other documents electronically.

The real question becomes: Why hasn't the government already done so? You have the regulatory authority to do this. We've seen in this place a variety of procedural tactics and priorities initiated by this government. You have no issue prioritizing things when it comes to hurting those who are most vulnerable in our community. I don't understand why you can't seem to find the same sort of industrious nature when it comes to a simple regulatory change that could make business easier for automotive dealers all over this province.

Speaker, while I support this motion, I would like to caution my colleagues across the aisle that this House

functions on priorities. While it seems really easy to propose the motion that we're debating today, we all know what this government's priorities truly are—and that seems to be disproportionately making the lives of the people of Ontario harder.

I feel this is a common sense bill that would make the lives of the automotive industry easier, but again, this government, frankly, has the opportunity to enact it either way. We really didn't need to be debating this bill today.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Further debate?

Ms. Jill Dunlop: I would like to thank the member from Kitchener–Conestoga for bringing this bill forward, the Cutting Red Tape for Motor Vehicle Dealers Act, 2018, and for giving me the opportunity to speak to it.

My riding of Simcoe North is comprised of hundreds of small and medium-sized businesses and is home to over 40 automotive dealerships. The people who own these businesses are hard-working individuals who are serving our communities in a variety of meaningful ways. They create quality goods and services, provide employment opportunities, and help to contribute to our economy on a local and a provincial level.

However, despite the significant value that small and medium-sized businesses provide to the communities across Ontario, they have been historically met with, over the last 15 years, crippling red tape and unnecessary regulatory burdens. We know that many of Ontario's 380,000 regulatory requirements are inflexible or out of date. With the current registration process required of automotive dealerships, we can see an example of the inefficient and unnecessary regulatory constraints that were placed on businesses by the previous government.

In order to restore Ontario to the economic engine it once was, we need to get out of the way of job creators and businesses and cut a lot of this red tape. Our government is working to do that, Madam Speaker. We understand that in order to make Ontario more competitive, we need to lower business costs and support business owners. With this private member's bill, brilliantly brought forward by the member from Kitchener–Conestoga, we are once again proving that we are committed to making Ontario open for business.

I recently met with Frank Notte from the Trillium Automobile Dealers Association and Jim from Jim Wilson Chevrolet Buick GMC in Orillia to tour his dealership and discuss what our government was doing to bring jobs and investments back to Ontario. As we talked about our government's plan to remove the worst burdens that prevent Ontario businesses from creating jobs, Jim's eyes lit up as he proceeded to tell me how excited he was about this bill, which was focusing on supporting automotive dealerships by streamlining the vehicle registration process.

Right now, in order to get a vehicle registered in Ontario, dealerships are required to physically transport the paperwork to and from a ServiceOntario location. We are in the digital age and are forcing dealerships to send their employees with paperwork to a physical location

instead of allowing them to apply for permits, licence plates, sticker validations and used vehicle information packages electronically. It's counterintuitive.

Now I'm going to pass on the rest of my time to my other colleagues.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Further debate?

Mr. David Piccini: It gives me great pleasure to stand in the House today and support my good friend MPP Harris's private member's bill. This is an excellent bill to streamline Ontario's vehicle registration process.

I know I have to touch on the honourable member opposite who said we have priorities: Madam Speaker, yes, we do have priorities. What do all of our priorities have in common? Putting Ontarians first, ensuring Ontario is open for business and making life more affordable for the great people of this province. I think we all agree, and we certainly don't apologize for our priorities.

We said we would cut red tape, and that's exactly what this bill does. I think the actual back and forth—I was down speaking to Lauria, the dealer, and Hank Vandermeer in Cobourg—of the paperwork is so symbolic of the previous government: the red tape and the regulatory burdens that hampered our businesses' ability to succeed.

I'm so pleased, when we talk about how this is being done—I don't feel that it is wrong at all that this is done by a private member's bill. Whether it's done through government—I don't care how it's done. The point is, this government is doing it. We said we would help businesses when we got elected. We said we would make life more affordable. We said we would tackle the regulatory burden. That's what we're doing.

As I've spoken across my community, because actually—and the member would attest to this—the moment I heard this, I was emailing his office. I went to my dealers, and I only wish MPP Harris was there with me when I spoke to all of our dealers to see the challenges and to enable our businesses not to be back and forth through the regulatory burden and the paperwork, as they so often did under the previous government, but to have that time to be able to innovate, to be able to think of better ways to provide service to the good people of our community, to better promote their vehicles, to better think of innovative ways to hire, to expand and to grow their business, rather than thinking about getting paperwork back and forth.

I'm so pleased to stand for this motion today. As we said, it would send a message that Ontario is open for business. Making the vehicle registration process more efficient and cost-effective for both the retailers and purchasers of automobiles in Ontario is what this bill does, and I'm very proud to support it.

I turn my final three minutes over to the member for King–Vaughan.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Further debate?

Mr. Stephen Lecce: I want to start off with a notable quote from *Strangers in the Night*. I'm an old spirit, Madam Speaker, and Frank Sinatra is a musician I enjoy. The quote is, "You, you're driving me crazy!" That speaks

to those who support big government and more regulations imposed on private enterprise. I'm speaking to the members opposite, who have championed 380,000 regulations—more than the state of California—in this Legislature.

I want to thank the member from Kitchener–Conestoga for having the leadership to do the exact opposite: to cut red tape, to be decisive in his support for our auto sector, for our manufacturing sector, for our dealerships and for those who add value-added jobs to this economy.

The majority of our provincial neighbours and states have already modernized their vehicle registration process. Ontario lags behind. This bill will reduce paperwork. It will reduce red tape. It will reduce the burden imposed. It not only is good for the employer; it is good for the consumer—let us not forget that—making this a seamless one-stop shop for those who purchase vehicles in this province. Quebec implemented this in 2002. The state of New York, as the member opposite rightfully pointed out, implemented this in the 1990s.

Auto dealerships across the province are strongly in favour of this legislation. I want to mention that the president of the city of Vaughan's chamber of commerce said, "Car dealerships lose productivity and manpower every time they are required to have their paperwork processed for vehicles sold or leased...."

"Your government has promised an Ontario that's 'Open for business'. Bill 50 aligns with that promise" to cut red tape and put money back in the pockets of customers where it belongs.

Frank Notte from the Trillium Automobile Dealers Association, with us here today, said, "On behalf of Trillium, I'm writing to express our steadfast support for your" PMB. "Our association applauds your efforts to cut red tape for automobile dealers and consumers when a vehicle" is purchased.

Chris Pfaff, an incredibly entrepreneurial member of the Vaughan community, also has put his name to support this legislation.

1550

We, every single day, are determined to support our businesses, to support our auto sector, to put more money back in the pockets of our consumers and, ultimately, to ensure that this province is indeed open for business.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): The member for Kitchener–Conestoga has two minutes for a reply.

Mr. Mike Harris: I would just like to thank the member from Windsor–Tecumseh, Minister Clark, the member for Simcoe North, the member for King–Vaughan, the member for Northumberland–Peterborough South and, of course, the member for Toronto Centre.

Every time someone gets up to speak in this House, it's kind of interesting, because you always get to find out a little bit more about somebody. I think that's kind of neat. I had no idea you were an auto sports enthusiast.

This bill eliminates red tape. That is the number one goal here. Our government is here to make life easier for the people in Ontario, to put money back in their pockets

and to allow them to live their lives. For somebody to buy a new car on, say, a Thursday or a Friday afternoon and then potentially have to wait until Monday or Tuesday to actually take delivery of that vehicle just doesn't make sense.

I want to thank everybody who is going to support this bill this afternoon. It's greatly appreciated. It's a real honour to be able to put this bill forward for the people of Ontario.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): The time provided for private members' public business has expired.

CHARTER RIGHTS
TRANSPARENCY ACT, 2018
LOI DE 2018 SUR LA TRANSPARENCE
RELATIVE AUX DROITS GARANTIS
PAR LA CHARTE

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): We will deal first with ballot item number 34, standing in the name of Madame Des Rosiers.

Madame Des Rosiers has moved second reading of Bill 49, An Act to amend the Ministry of the Attorney General Act.

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 to the motion will please say "nay."

In my opinion, the nays have it.

We will deal with this vote after we have finished the other business.

INTERNATIONAL LANGUAGE STUDIES

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Miss Surma has moved private member's notice of motion number 26.

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

Motion agreed to.

CUTTING RED TAPE FOR MOTOR
VEHICLE DEALERS ACT, 2018
LOI DE 2018 ALLÉGEANT
LES FORMALITÉS ADMINISTRATIVES
POUR LES COMMERÇANTS
DE VÉHICULES AUTOMOBILES

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Mr. Harris has moved second reading of Bill 50, An Act to amend the Highway Traffic Act.

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

Second reading agreed to.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Which committee? The member will refer it to which committee, please?

Mr. Mike Harris: The committee of the Legislative Assembly.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Is the House in favour of the bill being referred to the committee of the Legislative Assembly? Agreed.

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

The division bells rang from 1553 to 1558.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Members, please take your seats.

CHARTER RIGHTS
TRANSPARENCY ACT, 2018
LOI DE 2018 SUR LA TRANSPARENCE
RELATIVE AUX DROITS GARANTIS
PAR LA CHARTE

Madame Des Rosiers has moved second reading of Bill 49, An Act to amend the Ministry of the Attorney General Act. All those in favour, please rise and remain standing until recognized by the Clerk.

Ayes

| | | |
|-----------------------|------------------|---------------|
| Armstrong, Teresa J. | Hassan, Faisal | Shaw, Sandy |
| Bell, Jessica | Hatfield, Percy | Singh, Sara |
| Berns-McGown, Rima | Hunter, Mitzie | Stiles, Marit |
| Coteau, Michael | Karpoche, Bhutla | Tabuns, Peter |
| Des Rosiers, Nathalie | Morrison, Suze | Vanthof, John |
| Fife, Catherine | Natyshak, Taras | |
| Fraser, John | Schreiner, Mike | |

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): All those opposed, please rise and remain standing until recognized by the Clerk.

Nays

| | | |
|---------------------|--------------------|-----------------------------|
| Anand, Deepak | Jones, Sylvia | Piccini, David |
| Baber, Roman | Kanapathi, Logan | Rasheed, Kaleed |
| Bailey, Robert | Ke, Vincent | Roberts, Jeremy |
| Barrett, Toby | Khanjin, Andrea | Romano, Ross |
| Bethlenfalvy, Peter | Kramp, Daryl | Sabawy, Sheref |
| Bouma, Will | Kusendova, Natalia | Sandhu, Amarjot |
| Calandra, Paul | Lecce, Stephen | Sarkaria, Prabmeet Singh |
| Cho, Stan | Martin, Robin | Skelly, Donna |
| Clark, Steve | Martow, Gila | Smith, Dave |
| Coe, Lorne | McKenna, Jane | Surma, Kinga |
| Crawford, Stephen | McNaughton, Monte | Tangri, Nina |
| Cuzzetto, Rudy | Miller, Norman | Thanigasalam, Vijay |
| Downey, Doug | Nicholls, Rick | Thompson, Lisa M. |
| Dunlop, Jill | Oosterhoff, Sam | Tibollo, Michael A. |
| Fullerton, Merrilee | Pang, Billy | Triantafilopoulos, Effie J. |
| Gill, Parm | Park, Lindsey | Wai, Daisy |
| Hardeman, Ernie | Parsa, Michael | Walker, Bill |
| Harris, Mike | Pettapiece, Randy | |
| Hogarth, Christine | Phillips, Rod | |

The Clerk of the Assembly (Mr. Todd Decker): The ayes are 19; the nays are 55.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): I declare the motion lost.

Second reading negatived.

VISITOR

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): I recognize the member from Essex on a point of order.

Mr. Taras Natyshak: I want to correct the record of the member from Windsor–Tecumseh, if I can do that. When he made introductions, he introduced the visitor to the gallery as Jennifer Reaume. Her name is Jennifer Reaume-Natyshak. She is my wife, and I am so happy to see her here today.

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Order. And a reminder to all members that it is neither a point of order nor can you correct anyone else's record. But welcome to the Legislature.

Orders of the day.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

RESTORING TRUST, TRANSPARENCY
AND ACCOUNTABILITY ACT, 2018
LOI DE 2018 VISANT À RÉTABLIR
LA CONFIANCE, LA TRANSPARENCE
ET LA RESPONSABILITÉ

Resuming the debate adjourned on November 21, 2018, on the motion for second reading of the following bill:

Bill 57, An Act to enact, amend and repeal various statutes / Projet de loi 57, Loi édictant, modifiant et abrogeant diverses lois.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Further debate?

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Order in the House, please. If you have to leave, please do so quietly.

I recognize the member from Hamilton West–Ancaster–Dundas.

Ms. Sandy Shaw: I'm here to talk about this bill. I have to say that when I first reviewed the fall economic statement and now the bill that's before us, I thought back to the reason why I decided to run to represent my community of Hamilton West–Ancaster–Dundas.

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Order, please. I would encourage members that are staying to come to order and those that are not staying to leave quickly and quietly, please.

I return to the member from Hamilton West–Ancaster–Dundas.

Ms. Sandy Shaw: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I think I'll go from the top; how about that?

As I reviewed the bill before us and the fall economic statement that we have just received, I thought back to the reasons why I decided to run to represent the members of Hamilton West–Ancaster–Dundas in the first place.

As we all know, after 15 years of Liberal cuts and mismanagement, the people of Ontario were struggling. We

all heard it on the doorsteps when we were knocking on doors. We heard about skyrocketing hydro costs, seniors that were unable to afford their prescriptions, and young families that were avoiding the dentist because they couldn't afford the bill. And we still hear about egregious hospital wait times and terrible stories of continued hallway medicine. I think about my own family, particularly my young adult children who are just beginning to raise their families. They struggle to find affordable housing and affordable daycare.

It was clear that the province of Ontario was looking for a strong vision—a vision of hope that life in Ontario could be better for everyone. But the Premier's plan, outlined in the fall economic statement, is not that bold vision. It is not that hopeful vision. It does not make life easier for everyday working families; instead, it appears we are going from bad to worse.

Everyday families are struggling to make ends meet, and where is their relief? Seniors in long-term care are suffering. Sick people are being left on gurneys in hospital hallways. In my riding and in all of our ridings this is true. Families don't have access to the affordable child care that they need and many school-aged children are not getting the level of support they need in classrooms. We hear time and time again about kids going to school where they can't drink from the fountains because there's lead in the water.

Nothing that the government announced will fix that. In fact, it will make things worse. Real people in Ontario are struggling right now. Those who voted for this "government for the people" had hoped that life would be made easier. Unfortunately, all this government has done is package over \$3.2 billion in cuts to services as "restoring trust, transparency and accountability." Madam Speaker, the people who voted for this government in hope are being given nothing, unfortunately, but disappointment.

Who will pay the price for these \$3.2 billion in cuts? Who is being asked to sacrifice? In justifying this pain the government has stated that everyone in Ontario will be required to make sacrifices, without exception. The Premier has said Ontarians will have to tighten their belts. But everybody knows everyday working families already have tightened their belts. They've already made sacrifices. At this point, more and more families are struggling just to get by.

This bill makes it clear: We know now beyond a shadow of a doubt that when this government says "efficiencies," they mean "cuts."

People have every right to feel let down by the promises of this government. The member from Northumberland-Peterborough South yesterday in this House said, "You can't cut a promise." But, unfortunately, that is exactly what this government has done—\$3.2 billion in cuts, to be precise, cuts to the things that families count on.

You can't reduce taxes for corporations and the wealthy without making significant cuts to the services and programs that workers and families rely on, and this bill is proof that that is true. These cuts include over \$330 million in cuts to mental health services, and \$1.4 billion has been cut from transit infrastructure. All transit infrastructure

projects are now currently under review, at a time when people are looking for transit to ease their daily commute.

We have heard about cancelling plans to build three universities, in Markham, Milton and Brampton, and now we hear that the francophone university planned for Toronto will no longer be going ahead. These cuts also include \$100 million from affordable housing initiatives and \$970 million from the Ministry of the Environment.

This government has chosen to market this plan as being for the people, consistently mentioning their tax cuts for Ontarians in need. But when you look into these tax cuts, this paints a very different story. The Minister of Finance likes to say a lot that "it's simple math," but I'm here to say that the math in this bill just does not add up.

By cutting the planned increase in minimum wage, the Conservatives have taken some \$2,000 a year out of the pockets of 1.7 million of some of the hardest-working people in Ontario. This means less money in the pockets of minimum wage earners—minimum wage earners who are primarily women, students, newcomers and, sadly, more and more seniors who are forced to work at minimum wage jobs.

While the Conservatives are crowing about their tax cut for low-income workers, they are avoiding the reality that two thirds of individuals and families in this bracket will never benefit. They make too little to pay income tax.

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For those few people and families who do qualify, this is up to \$1,100 a year less than what the planned minimum wage increase would have delivered them. This is not the first time that I brought up this fact in the House. To distract from the reality of what I've said, again and again, I have been selectively quoted by the Minister of Finance—several times, in fact. While I appreciate, I suppose—somewhat—the attention, I am here to set the record straight.

Here is my original statement, as read from Hansard. This will clearly articulate the point that this tax break does not in fact do what it's purported to do:

"There's a lot of talk now that you are talking about an income tax break, or zero income tax, for low-income people, but you're talking about people who earn so little that they in fact don't need a tax break."

Then "Interjections," and the Honourable Ted Arnott called for order. He gave me additional time, which I was grateful for.

I went on to say that they earn "so little that they don't have to pay taxes, and this is a government that is trotting this out as something that's of benefit to them. At the same time, they have legislation that's taking away an increase in the minimum wage and that's taking away sick days"—two paid sick days—"from these" very same "people.

"People will see through this. They will see that this is not a genuine effort to improve their lives."

My comments are not to say that low-income earners don't deserve a tax cut. They in fact do deserve a break, but that for those making too little to pay taxes already, this government is doing nothing of substance to help. In

fact, they are taking money out of their pockets by cancelling the minimum wage increase.

Rather than actually lifting up those in need, this government has instead made life easier for the highest income earners among us. This government is cancelling two high-income surtaxes and opening up yet another loophole to give a bigger tax break to the highest income earners in Ontario. In fact, overall, the Conservatives have forgone approximately \$275 million in tax cuts for the wealthiest. That is over twice as much—in fact, two and a half times as much—as the \$125 million for their low-income tax credit.

It's clear that not everyone is being asked to make sacrifices; not everyone is being asked to tighten their belt. Rather, some of our lowest earners are being asked to make sacrifices—sacrifices like deciding between paying rent and buying groceries for their families; sacrifices like not going to the dentist or not filling their prescription so that their families can make it through to the next month. We all heard stories on the campaign trail about families who didn't take their prescriptions or didn't fill them or, when they did, would cut their medications in half to stretch the dosage. That is not acceptable in the province of Ontario.

These people have made sacrifices, and it appears that these sacrifices have been so that the wealthiest among us can have a break. Not only is this fundamentally unfair; it's additionally cruel to market these sacrifices as something that's building trust, transparency and accountability. It just doesn't square. The richest in our province are being told that they can trust this government to give them a handout at the expense of our hardest workers.

There's no way to reconcile this disparity in spending with being “for the people.” Again, I ask, what does this bill actually do to make life affordable for everyday Ontarians?

Ms. Marit Stiles: Good question.

Ms. Sandy Shaw: Yes. A good answer would also be great.

I'm here to say that one hour couldn't possibly do justice to all of the various cuts that the people of Ontario are facing. What's worse is that we still don't know the full details about so many of these cuts. There are just no details in the fall economic statement, and there are no details in this bill. That is not what transparency is all about.

Here is some of what we do know about the pain that many are about to face. We know that changes are coming to rent control, changes that will only hurt those already suffering in an affordable housing crisis. The Premier has abandoned his campaign promise. He said, “When it comes to rent control, we're going to maintain the status quo.” Well, that is not what this bill does.

I think about how right now in Hamilton—and in many of our communities, but particularly in Hamilton West–Ancaster–Dundas—we have an affordable housing crisis. We have more and more families struggling to pay their basic rent. There are too many families in my riding who are spending over 50% of their income on rent. Yet this government has decided to remove rent control initiatives.

I'd like to echo my colleague from Toronto Centre, the housing critic for the official opposition: “Not only does this drive up the cost of living for people, but it means that in rental homes without rent control, any month could be the month that a family gets a rent hike notice that makes their home unaffordable.”

Rent increases in Hamilton are already skyrocketing faster than the rest of the province, and this will do nothing to solve that.

We have to believe that everyone deserves to be able to find a decent, reasonably priced place to live. Already, too many throughout the province know the frustration of searching for a home they can afford, and too many feel the squeeze from paying high rent prices. Things are already getting tougher, and this government is fuelling this fire with more rent hikes through their change to rent controls.

In addition, this government is also cancelling the Development Charges Rebate Program. That's a \$100-million cut to affordable housing initiatives. That means the Conservatives are not only failing to build affordable housing, but it seems they would be actively taking the affordable housing shortage from bad to worse, and no one voted for that.

We also know, despite the title of the bill—Restoring Trust, Transparency and Accountability Act—that this government intends to abandon accountability and independent oversight. It's unbelievable that we have seen the loss of oversight through cuts to one third of the independent officers of this Legislature. That's three offices that have been shuttered: the Environmental Commissioner, the French Language Services Commissioner and the child advocate.

The Environmental Commissioner of Ontario is an officer of the Legislature whose job is to provide independent assessment of the state of Ontario's environment. The commissioner also administers the Environmental Bill of Rights, and this guarantees the public's right—not the government's, but the public's right—to be notified and consulted on government decisions. The commissioner's most recent report flagged the potential loss of funding for the water protection act framework, an important framework for preserving our environment. The Environmental Commissioner of Ontario had a mandate to monitor the government's compliance with provincial environmental laws, as I said, including the Environmental Bill of Rights, and to report on the government's progress on an annual basis. That's where I think the problem lies.

Madam Speaker, I'd like to read a letter that I have here—and I might say there are 25 signatures on this letter—regarding the loss of the Environmental Commissioner:

“Dear Premier Ford:

“We are writing to express our grave concern that your government is reportedly poised to eliminate the Office of the Environmental Commissioner of Ontario (ECO)”—and, in fact, they were correct.

“For over 25 years, Ontario citizens have greatly benefited from relying on the ECO as an independent, non-

partisan officer of the Legislature to hold all governments accountable for their decisions and efforts in protecting Ontario's vast and unparalleled environment....

"Over the years, the ECO has produced numerous in-depth reports on key issues facing Ontario, from climate change to endangered species. This kind of independent, clear-eyed analysis of the impact and effectiveness of government actions and policies is critically important and very valuable in highlighting whether government actions are resulting in reduced environmental risks or not. We are facing a combined climate and biodiversity crisis and growing impacts on human health. We need the kind of quality evidence-based recommendations—and environmental accountability—that the ECO has regularly produced now more than ever.

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"In our view, eliminating the ECO is contrary to these environmental protection objectives. Since 1993, the ECO and its specialized staff have informed and empowered Ontarians to effectively exercise their legal rights under the Environmental Bill of Rights (EBR) to safeguard the environment and public health and safety. In addition, the annual and special reports filed by the ECO have flagged opportunities to improve and strengthen Ontario's environmental safety net.

"Therefore, we collectively call on your government to ensure that the ECO continues to exist as a stand-alone, independent office with all of its powers, duties and responsibilities intact under the EBR."

This is signed, as I said, by 25 signatories. It's from the Canadian Environmental Law Association, the David Suzuki Foundation, Greenpeace, Environmental Defence, the Registered Nurses' Association of Ontario, Ontario Clean Air Alliance, and the Canadian Association of Physicians for the Environment. There are 25 signatories here—significant organizations.

To date, no response has been received by this group from the government. So that's accountability, I would call that. Would you not?

Ms. Marit Stiles: I'd call that no accountability.

Ms. Sandy Shaw: Yes.

I would like to also echo some comments from another one of my esteemed colleagues, from Kingston and the Islands, who is our environmental critic for the official opposition.

Mr. Arthur says, "Ford's cut comes just two days after the commissioner released a report highlighting some of Ontario's biggest environmental challenges.... The commissioner was clear on what inaction will mean for our province, but" Mr. Ford's "response was to fire the commissioner. This decision is irresponsible and will be detrimental to the well-being of Ontario families. This is the era of climate change and the battle for our planet. The threats we face transcend borders and our response should transcend political boundaries."

Madam Speaker, I couldn't agree more. We talk a lot in this House about future generations and the concern for the debt that we're passing on to future generations. I'm here to say that I have grandchildren, so future generations are under my care and my watch as we speak. I cannot

believe that this government would allow the future generations to be given a debt of the kind of debt, the kind of degradation, that the lack of a climate change plan would result in. We must move beyond our partisanship and act for future generations.

I hope that members of this government will hear me, will hear the people of Ontario on this issue—

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): I'm sorry to interrupt the member.

Just a reminder to all members as we read documents into the record that we still must refer to all members by their title or their riding. So, if you could make that adjustment, please, as you read your letters.

Please continue.

Ms. Sandy Shaw: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I'll take that up with Ian, I think.

There only appears to be one reason for this government's move to fire the Environmental Commissioner and scrap the commission entirely: This government is trying to limit oversight and remove anyone who might be critical of this government and any damage that these policies, or lack of policies, will do to the environment.

Once again, my colleague from Kingston and the Islands talks about the cancellation of cap-and-trade and how much it has already cost Ontario. It has "cost Ontario billions in lost revenue and good jobs, it'll cost families more, and it'll hurt our environment.... Now" the Premier "is firing people who are critical of his government. He's firing the Environmental Commissioner and shuttering the commission entirely. Clearly" the Premier "doesn't want anyone to know just how bad he's going to damage the environment."

Since the Environmental Commissioner's post was created, Environmental Commissioners have upbraided many Ontario governments of all political stripes. Who knows what might have been said about this government's still non-existent climate change policy had the current commissioner, Dianne Saxe, been given the chance? But we will never know. She will no longer pose that threat.

I have to say that there's a lot of talk again about trust, transparency and accountability. I do sit on the Select Committee on Financial Transparency. In their report, the commissioners identified climate change as a significant risk that could hurt Ontario's economic growth and the province's fiscal position. This is directly from the independent commission of inquiry. The direct results of the Premier's favour to big polluters will cost approximately \$3 billion, costs that are piled on the backs of the people of Ontario.

We think we should know that ignoring climate change is not an option. One of the witnesses to that committee testified that climate change could impact the provincial treasury by as much as \$2 billion annually. That was a witness that came before the special commission of inquiry—the inquiry that was struck by this government.

In fact, we had Mr. Gordon Campbell as a witness to the committee. Mr. Gordon Campbell told us that "climate change could be reflected"—this is from Hansard—"in

increased forest fire seasons, increased flooding, unusual weather events,” like the recent tornadoes in Toronto.

Mr. Campbell introduced a pioneering carbon tax that is still in place today, and apparently BC has not fallen off the edge of the country. It still seems to be thriving quite well. They have a robust economy. This is a measure that has merit and that we should look into, but unfortunately, the government that talks about accountability and transparency blocked, at every turn, questions that we had of Mr. Campbell, a witness that could have provided us insight, advice and guidance on what we are facing today. I guess his testimony was beyond the scope of transparency, and we were not able to hear what Mr. Campbell had to say.

In addition to the whole idea of accountability and transparency on this select committee—it’s not the first time that we have been shut down by the government side in our quest to actually find some answers that will speak to the kind of trust, transparency and accountability that are named in this bill. The commission, in their report, identified the partial sale of Hydro One as a significant issue. Then, when we wanted to subpoena witnesses to speak to that—particularly we asked to speak to Mayo Schmidt, the former CEO of Hydro One—we were again blocked from bringing that witness forward. It’s hard to understand why, if we were looking to be transparent—the testimony that Mayo Schmidt would have to bring would inform us on how these decisions were made and how we would be moving forward in a transparent and accountable manner, which this bill speaks to.

Finally, we are also looking to subpoena further witnesses in that whole spirit of trust, transparency and accountability. We recently received a letter from the former controller for the province, who wrote “It is unclear to me how the committee can complete its work without meeting with the Provincial Controller of Ontario during the period that the accounting practices being reviewed by the committee were reviewed and confirmed ... and/or established.”

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We would like to hear from the former controller, but today we haven’t been successful in having her come to speak to this commission. Again, it speaks directly to trust, transparency and accountability.

On top of all of this—this concern that we do not have a climate change plan, that we have shuttered the independent officers responsible for this commission—the budget for the environmental ministry has been reduced by \$350 million, from \$1.3 billion to \$975 million, even though this ministry now has additional responsibilities, including parks and conservation programs. This government is making its priorities clear when it comes to the environment and environmental accountability. What is clear is that they don’t have any policies, and they don’t seem to want to have any transparency or any accountability when it comes to this very significant issue.

People in the province of Ontario—young people, people from all walks of life—understand the fundamental and obvious point that climate change will have significant financial impacts on the province, on municipalities, on

insurance companies and on individuals, and yet we have a government, with this bill, that provides no detail at all. We have cancelled whatever climate change plan we had and there’s nothing being put in its place, and this bill entitled “trust, transparency and accountability” continues to be silent on how we are going to address this significant concern today and for the future generations that we seem to be so concerned with when it comes to other issues but not when it comes to transferring to them a healthy environment in which they can live.

I have been receiving a number of emails and a number of calls regarding the firing of the French Language Services Commissioner. I’m the critic for finance and Treasury Board. I would not be the first point of contact, but people are very, very concerned about this. They see this as a slight or, at the very least, that Franco-Ontarians have been disregarded and overlooked in this province. The French Language Services Commissioner, François Boileau, said that the end of his independent office, which advocates for linguistic minority rights, is a blow to the francophone community.

Last week’s fall economic statement cancelled the province’s \$80-million investment in a francophone university without notice, despite the Premier having committed before and after the election, despite the Premier promising Franco-Ontarians before and after the election to follow through on the school—a broken promise. This long-awaited university was slated to open in Toronto in 2020 after being lobbied for for over 20 years. The university’s president and board of governors have already been named, and students and their families were making plans for their education.

It’s not only constitutionally guaranteed to have access to language rights; it’s also the right thing and the caring thing to do, to ensure that our fellow francophone Ontarians can always have access to government services, including important health care services, in their own language, one of our two official languages in this country. The French Language Services Commissioner was the protector of that right.

So I join my party and so many people in this province in asking this government to hear the betrayal, the frustration and the outrage from the people of Ontario and restore both the commissioner and the university that aspiring students and their families were counting on. In asking this government to listen to its francophone community, this is what accountability is all about. As I said, I’ve received so many phone calls and emails about this issue, and other people in my riding are reacting in the same way.

I have a letter here from a constituent whose name is Caroline Reid-Westoby, from Dundas, and I’m going to let you know what Caroline had to say about the firing of the French language commissioner:

“Dear Ms. Shaw:

“I’m writing to you today as a resident of Dundas and a proud Franco-Ontarian. I am particularly disappointed in the government’s decision to eliminate the Office of the French Language Services Commissioner and the project for a new French-language university in Ontario.

“The Conservative government is exhibiting a great deal of disrespect to the 600,000 Franco-Ontarians, and in my opinion these cuts are totally unacceptable.

“The Premier does not seem to understand the importance of these services for the French-speaking population of Ontario. This is a huge step backwards for us.

“The Premier, Mr. Ford, also does not seem to understand the importance of the French language and what this language brings to this province. For the Franco-Ontarians, this is an unacceptable step backwards.

“With regard to the French-language university, it’s been 40 years since the francophone community has been working on this project. A lot of people have been seriously hurt by this decision.”

I would be remiss if I didn’t quote the member from Nickel Belt that it’s actually 650,000 Franco-Ontarians, in her opinion, who are significantly disappointed and hurt by this decision.

I must say that the most egregious and shocking news of all is that this government has chosen to close the office of the Provincial Advocate for Children and Youth. This represents a significant step backwards for Ontario. This will harm our most vulnerable children and youth. This is our children and this is our youth.

How was the current child advocate, Mr. Irwin Elman, informed of this dramatic cut? In full accountability, openness and transparency, he found out through the media.

Ms. Marit Stiles: So disrespectful.

Ms. Sandy Shaw: It’s unbelievable. “Firstly”—this is Mr. Elman—“I find it shocking that I learned through the media this morning of this government’s plan to repeal the legislation that governs the work of the Ontario Child Advocate.”

He received “no official notice or briefing.”

How can this be? How can this government say that they listen to the people, that they consult, and yet their very own commissioner, the person who stands up for children in our province, the most vulnerable, the person who is on the front line protecting our children—how is it that this person could be so disrespected that you not only eliminate the position but he finds out through the media? Not only is this egregious; it’s just plain rude. It does not square with this government’s claim to value trust, accountability and transparency.

Clearly, I share Mr. Elman’s shock; my colleagues share Mr. Elman’s shock; and, believe me, people in the province of Ontario are shocked that this government is not prepared to stand up for children. Children and youth: They are Ontario’s most valuable resource. They deserve the best start in life we can provide.

Ontario’s most vulnerable children and youth are too often underserved by our child welfare system, mental health services, youth justice and special needs sectors. Lack of services or waiting lists can result in health challenges, lower educational outcomes, reduced opportunities, injury and, tragically, sometimes even death.

Children and youth—in particular, vulnerable children and youth—often have no voice, and few adults to speak on their behalf. The Provincial Advocate for Children and

Youth was that voice. He was charged with the responsibility of providing an independent voice for children and youth. Independent: That is the key here. This is not someone who reports to the government; this is someone who advocates independently for the rights of children, the well-being of children and the welfare of children.

I cannot fathom in what world this government thinks that saving money—although, in the full “trust, transparency and accountability” mode, there’s no clear dollar figure as to how much this cut will cost; we don’t have those figures.

Putting vulnerable children, endangering their future and potentially their lives to save we don’t know how much money—how is this a decision that this government could make? How is this a decision that this government could make without consulting the experts in this field, without consulting the child and youth advocate, without consulting people that work in child protection services, without consulting children, families?

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It is unbelievable. This is a dereliction of duty. If you don’t walk anything back on what you propose—and I understand that it seems like a difficult thing to do, to admit that you have made an egregious, egregious mistake. If you could walk anything back, I urge you that this deserves a second look. Look into your hearts, look into your decency and reconsider this cut, this firing of the child and youth worker in our province.

As I said, this is an issue that has brought all kinds of people to the fore, people who can’t understand how this government could have done this. I receive daily—and I mean daily—calls and emails for this government to reverse this decision of closing and firing the office of the provincial advocate for children. I would like to read one more letter from a community member, who phoned and talked to me at length and was beyond shocked that this was the situation that we faced in this province.

It says, “Hello, MPP Shaw.” That’s me. “I write to you as a resident of Hamilton West–Ancaster–Dundas and as a youth who worked alongside many other young people served by the Ontario child advocate to call on you to voice your opposition to today’s announcement by the Ontario government to eliminate the role of the Ontario child advocate. This is an officer of the Ontario Legislature and rolling it into the objectives of the Ontario Ombudsman will not work.

“The incredible work that the Ontario child advocate has accomplished has been limitless, from the Katelynn Sampson investigation and inquiry; the Our Voice Our Turn project, which I was involved in as a young ally; You Are Not Alone; Feathers of Hope; and other incredible projects and initiatives by the Ontario child advocate which continue to serve and advocate for young people across this province. This kind of work is not achievable under an agency whose already large mandate cannot simply support the additional workload of prioritizing the needs and voice of Ontario youth in and out of care. This work has been demonstrated to be best served by an independent agency whose sole mandate is to protect children.”

As the Ontario child advocate stated in a press release in response to the Ontario government's announcement, "The law that this government intends to repeal clearly states that children and youth have the legislated right to contact our independent office privately, and to receive assistance from our office if they have concerns about the care that they are receiving from the government. Our independence from government has been critical, and the detailed systemic reviews and investigations that we have conducted have repeatedly shone a light on ... gaps and failures in the system that have put vulnerable children and youth at significant risk.

"Due to their age and dependency status, it is impossible for children and youth to champion their own interests, especially when they are in the care of the state or receiving 24/7 services from the government. When children and youth do not have the ongoing protection of their parents, additional safeguards are absolutely essential. Our office has ensured that these children are not 'out of sight, out of mind.' Our office has made sure that they are seen, that their voices are heard, that their fundamental rights are respected, and that their opinions are taken into account in decisions big and small that are made about their lives.

"Instead, the government has proposed that the ministry monitor itself and advocate for the thousands of children in its care. This is dangerous."

I couldn't agree more that this government had the right to ensure that our vulnerable children and youth had a voice, that this mandate is not buried in another ministry, that they had an independent advocate that would stand up and champion them. This is the kind of thing that government should do. This is precisely your job: to protect children, to protect vulnerable people in our community. I would say that you have grossly failed on behalf of the people and the children of the province of Ontario, in treating our children in such an egregious and disregarding manner.

I hear from many fierce advocates for children, and they know that rolling these services into the office of the Ombudsman is insufficient.

This government talks a good game. We hear it all the time in the House. They say that they're for the people. But with this action of getting rid of an advocate for children, people will see right through the empty slogans. This bill, and this cancellation, is just more evidence that this government's actions do not match their words.

There are other things in this bill that are not quite as distressing as that but, at the same time, are really very important and are buried in this bill and that people need to be made aware of. We know through the bill that changes are coming to election financing, changes that can only amplify the impact of big money in Ontario politics. The previous Liberal government was extensively criticized, and they were pushed into introducing electoral finance reforms. These were reforms that ensured that our electoral system was democratic and that it was fair—that it was not up for sale. This government is intent on stripping back these reforms that were put in place, apparently as soon as possible, with this very first bill.

This government's proposed changes to election financing will do nothing but diminish the democratic protections in Ontario that, yet again, are the responsibility of the government. It is your responsibility to protect the democratic principles, and the democratic rights of people in this province.

The latest language that is in this bill would remove the obligation of individuals to certify that the funds they are donating belong to them. That may not seem important, but it is actually quite significant.

Ms. Suze Morrison: Dodgy.

Ms. Sandy Shaw: Exactly—"dodgy" is a good word, in fact.

In other words, we want to ensure that they are not being bankrolled by corporations by having people attest that the funds they are donating belong to them. Where is the transparency in allowing electoral donations from corporations to essentially be filtered through individual donations? Not only is this a huge step backwards, it's part of a package of changes to electoral finances, a package that includes a 25% increase in the maximum donation amount and changes to the rules to once again allow, essentially, cash-for-access-style fundraising. There's nothing transparent or accountable in helping big money—people with deep pockets—have even larger access to the government or an even larger presence in our politics.

I want to talk a little bit about the changes that are signalled in the fall economic statement and in this bill for municipalities. As we all know, municipalities—it's a level of government that impacts us on a daily basis. We know that municipalities provide the kinds of services that we use on a daily basis. Transportation, roads, our infrastructure—these are things that people rely on every day. Our garbage collection, our recycling—these are the things that we rely on every day. But in this bill, we have some ominous words for municipalities from a Premier who said that he would cut libraries "in a heartbeat."

1650

This bill is forcing municipalities to cut their budgets in exchange for provincial funding. On page 31 of the financial economic statement, it says the government "is committed to driving greater efficiencies.... This commitment will also be required from all partners, including municipalities."

As we can clearly see from the fall economic statement and from this bill, when this government says "efficiencies," they mean cuts. This government seems to be taking a lot of pages out of Mike Harris's playbook. It seems like the government is signaling the same kind of downloading that we experienced under Mike Harris, downloading provincial costs to the municipalities.

We hear a lot about how this government wants to put money back into taxpayers' pockets, which is something that we can all appreciate. But there is only one taxpayer's pocket, and if you put money in one pocket and you download services to the municipalities, money is coming right out of the other pocket. The download to the municipalities will simply result in increased residential taxes, which will impact all of us. Most importantly, it will

impact seniors, seniors who are living in homes that are paid for, but they have that one big monthly bill, which is their residential tax bill, and that continues to climb. It's a concern in my riding of Hamilton West–Ancaster–Dundas. The residential tax rate is becoming increasingly unaffordable for people in the community, young families and seniors. This government's signaling of its intention to download those costs onto municipalities will not make life better for those people living in my riding. It's only going to make things worse. Not only will it cost them more; there will also be a lot of reduced services. Perhaps the Premier could get his wish that we will have libraries cut in a heartbeat in our local communities.

I'd just like to mention that we had the pleasure yesterday, all of us, of meeting with members of our various local professional firefighters' associations. It's becoming clear—we heard from the professional firefighters and thereby the public—that they shouldn't expect this government to understand some of their challenges. New Democrats would like to point out that this government's recent rollback of the mandatory training and certification regulations leaves a patchwork of skill levels among the province's major voluntary fire services. Without enough resources, they have become dependent on the skill levels, professionalism and experience of professional firefighters, which is a kind of subsidy for their lack of resources. The answer is not to put more financial burden—downloads—onto municipalities; the answer is to fund municipalities properly so that they can provide the proper levels of standardized training for all the brave firefighters and would-be firefighters out there. These are the people who are making our communities safer, and we need to listen to their concerns.

We have talked a lot, and one thing we possibly could agree on is that things were hard under the Liberals, but given what we are hearing today, they promise to be possibly impossible for many families under this progressive government. When I look at all of the bill and the fall economic statement, it's hard for me to identify exactly what this government is doing to make life easier. This bill and the fall economic statement are clearly, if not attacks, a disregard for the most vulnerable, and this is all captured under the guise of fiscal restraint.

People are worried. People are concerned that the real aim of this bill is to pave the way for more cuts to come, and who will be hurt by these cuts? This update and this bill say little on this, but do give two ominous hints.

First, the government, as we know, has taken aim on those on welfare—or, as the update puts it, the government will “present a plan to reform social assistance.” Yet again, this is exactly what Harris did in 1995 when he cut social assistance to the bone, to the point where this province has yet to recover from those cuts. It transformed this province into a place where people were told to eat dented cans of tuna if they were hungry.

Ms. Marit Stiles: I remember that.

Ms. Sandy Shaw: Do you remember that?

Ms. Marit Stiles: I do.

Ms. Sandy Shaw: Secondly, this government is zeroing in, apparently, on the Ontario Drug Benefit Program.

This is a program which provides free or heavily subsidized pharmaceuticals to seniors and those who are on social assistance.

We in the NDP, like Tommy Douglas, believe that care should be based on need, not on your ability to pay, not on your ability to pull out a credit card and step to the front of the line. We believe that private health care businesses shouldn't be making profits on the backs of our elderly, our seniors and certainly not sick people, and certainly not people who are looking for take-home cancer drugs, which this government shallowly turned down yesterday.

In the line-by-line review, this government has stated their intent to reconsider the application of universality to all programs by developing means testing for select programs. Madam Speaker, we know what happens when we fail to act universally: People get lost in the cracks between systems. People die waiting for reviews and appeals to be processed.

What precisely does this government plan to cut back on? The Ontario Drug Benefit Program? Again, under the title of “trust, transparency and accountability,” it remains unclear. The update says only that the government wants to make the program “easier to understand, more consistent and more sustainable,” words that do not provide anyone comfort—people who are relying on these universal programs to make ends meet, to get by. I mean, this could mean anything from increasing the copayment charge for seniors—copayments from seniors that I heard about a lot knocking on doors, and I do not doubt that you heard seniors complaining about that. It could also mean eliminating the plan for everyone but the very poorest among us. I can only imagine.

The best way to make sense of this government's austerity, essentially, which is disguised as financial concern, is to look at history. We've got the minister, Mr. Fedeli, who likes to give us a little history lesson every so often, and so I think that it's also important for us to take a look back and identify that this government is taking pages right out of the Mike Harris playbook: cuts to services, reviews of social services, axing rent control and downloading costs to municipalities. It's back to the future. It's back to 1995, and people remember that those policies failed them. They failed them then, and they're going to fail them now.

What do the people of Ontario remember about the effectiveness of these policies—or shall I say ineffectiveness? It's that in addition to that, we had extensive days of action in the province of Ontario. People were moved to action, people who had never, ever before stood to protest, because they knew that their lives were under attack.

The Progressive Conservative government of Premier Harris also increased the debt, from \$90.7 billion in 1995 to \$132 billion in 2003. We don't hear a lot about that, and this increase to the debt occurred even while services and downloading—formerly provincially run services were put onto the municipalities.

1700

The Mike Harris government paid \$3.1 billion towards the total deficit—by what? By one-time asset sales, which

the Minister of Finance is deriding that the Liberals had done. The Mike Harris government put \$3.1 billion towards his deficit—by selling what? The rights to the government-owned—what? To Highway 407, in the form of a 99-year lease to a private consortium. People are still annoyed by that.

The government has promised trust, transparency and accountability. They've promised to be a government for the people. But what is it they have delivered in this bill?

This government has shown that they do not care about the people and the most vulnerable. Axing rent controls means that Ontarians lose all security when it comes to housing, with any month being the month that they can no longer afford the rent. Rolling back the minimum wage and freezing it until 2020 means that not only are minimum wage workers losing approximately \$2,000 a year, but that that number, that loss, will only grow as time passes. Their low-income credit does little to help families who are struggling, and it does nothing to help those who are most in need. Instead, this government has prioritized \$308 million of Ontario's money on tax breaks for the wealthiest. So it's clear which people this government is for.

This government has shown they do not care about transparency when they allow for backdoor and covert campaign contributions. They do not care about transparency when they reinstate cash-for-access funding in Ontario.

This government has shown they do not care about accountability when they cut one third—three—of the independent oversight officers. They don't care about accountability to our children, to Franco-Ontarians and to the environment. The government has shown they do not care about accountability with their eagerness to profit from the Ring of Fire. I am here to tell you, at the same time as they are looking to profit from the Ring of Fire, they simultaneously do not have the decency to visit these northern communities in pre-budget consultations to hear the voices from the communities of the people they intend to profit from. The government continues to betray promises made to our Indigenous communities by not allowing their voices to be heard.

I hear from constituents who voted for this government, and what I hear is troubling. I hear that people are disappointed at the number of election promises this Premier is pretending not to have made. I hear that they feel betrayed by a government they hoped would provide relief. And I hear that they only continue to fear for what is yet to come.

I thank you, Madam Speaker, for the time, and I look forward to hearing what others have to say about my assessment.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Nina Tangri): Questions and comments?

Mr. Dave Smith: It's interesting: The NDP have stood up here, and they're throwing all of these fears out there, fearmongering, talking about how the sky is going to fall because government isn't going to get bigger, we're not going to increase the debt, we're going to bring the debt down.

We're saddled with a \$15-billion deficit. That's reality. We're paying slightly more than a billion dollars a month in interest on that debt. What can we do with a billion dollars a month? Well, in the first four months we could have funded four cancer clinics with the interest alone. What could we do with the next billion dollars that we're paying in debt? We could pave the 401 from Ottawa to Windsor.

This is the money that has been wasted because we saw 15 years of foolish Liberal decisions propped up by the NDP. Now the NDP is standing here and saying, "Spend more money."

The problem is, the people of Ontario have reached into their pockets and they have nothing left to pull back out. We need to be letting people in Ontario reach into their pockets and put money back in there. That's what we're doing.

The LIFT program: We're giving 1.1 million people in this province, 1.1 million of our most vulnerable, who make \$30,000 a year or less—we're putting more than \$800 back into their pockets so that they have the money to spend on the things that they do.

What does the NDP want? They want to take that from them. These are the people that they're saying they're trying to help, but they want to pull more money from them.

The problem with their policy, the problem with their thought processes, the problem with socialism is you eventually run out of someone else's money. Ontario—

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Nina Tangri): Thank you. Questions and comments?

Ms. Marit Stiles: I want to start, first of all, by thanking the member from Hamilton West–Ancaster–Dundas for her incredible review of this legislation. I thought it was really tremendous, and it's a hard act to follow. But I want to follow up on a couple of points that she made so well.

The first one is about the office of the child and youth advocate. I have to admit that this one, for me and, I think, for many Ontarians, hits us very hard. It is really hard to imagine why any government would decide that was a priority to cut. It is quite astonishing.

For those who aren't even aware—maybe watching at home—this is the legislated right of children and youth to care. That's what this is about. It's their legislated right to receive that very specific and independent representation. There are reasons why this office and this advocate exist. It was created, basically, because children and youth in care, particularly, are unable to champion themselves against the government that is responsible, in a way, for their care.

I've only got a few more seconds, so I think I'll just stick to this issue.

I want to share that I was recently, just last week, at a youth shelter in my community that serves homeless youth who are between 16 and 21, I think, and they have 65 young people there a night. I asked them, "Can you tell me how many of those are kids or young people who have come out of care for one reason or another, or who have experienced abuse but have somehow ended up in care?" It was 100%.

I just want to leave that with the members opposite, in considering why these young people—

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Nina Tangri): Thank you.

Questions and comments? I recognize the member from Thornhill.

Mrs. Gila Martow: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. It's very nice to see you in the chair this afternoon.

We're reviewing the comments of the member of Hamilton West–Ancaster–Dundas, from the NDP, speaking about the fall economic statement.

It's very clear to people in my riding, in the GTA, that we're on the right track. We're hearing from people every day that they're worried. They're worried about their kids having good jobs. They're worried about being able to afford health care and all of the necessary things that taxpayers' money goes to.

The NDPs make it sound like “profit” is a dirty word. That's a shame, because it's profits that drive the revenue, that fund the health care, that fund the education, that fund the infrastructure projects that are so important to all of us.

But it's not just my riding and the GTA that matter. We're reminded on a daily basis here, on the PC side of the House—and I know we have people on the other side as well—that there are rural areas that need natural gas to be able to afford to heat their homes and run their farm equipment. We're reminded that there are northern Ontario communities that are anxious for economic development. That's what our plan is. That's what the fall economic statement speaks to.

We want to develop the Ring of Fire. When I was preparing for the French leaders' debate this past election cycle, I learned that “Ring of Fire” in French is “anneau de feu.” I'm not sure if I'm saying it right.

I'm very anxious to see that development, that economic development, the affordable heating, the infrastructure development that we're all counting on, and not just for our ridings, but for our neighbourhood ridings, for all ridings, not just for government-held ridings.

We're anxious to get to work and to partner with members opposite in the NDP, and the independent members, as well, to work together to make life affordable in Ontario, and to get to work.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Nina Tangri): Questions and comments?

Ms. Bhutla Karpoche: Smokey Thomas, the president of OPSEU, said on Twitter that he would call this a “con” statement, not a fall economic statement. I think I quite have to agree, because in this statement the Conservative government is removing independent officers and accountability measures.

1710

We know that they are repealing parts of the Environmental Bill of Rights that establishes the office of the Environmental Commissioner of Ontario. There is only one reason that the Premier would fire the Environmental Commissioner and scrap the commission entirely, and that's because he's trying to limit oversight and remove

anyone who might be critical of his government and the damage his policies will do to the environment.

The Ford government's cancellation of cap-and-trade has already cost Ontario billions in lost revenue and in good jobs. It costs the family more and will hurt our environment. Now the Conservative government is firing people who are critical of his government. The firing of the Environmental Commissioner and the shuttering of the commission entirely is taking Ontario backward. Premier Ford does not want anyone to know just how badly he's going to damage the environment.

We all know that the Environmental Commissioner of Ontario has a mandate to monitor the government's compliance with the environmental protection laws. Just two days after the commissioner released a report highlighting some of the biggest environmental challenges, the Premier made the move to cut the position. The commissioner was very clear on what inaction will mean for our province.

This decision is irresponsible. It will be detrimental to the well-being of Ontario's families, and in an era of climate change—

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Nina Tangri): Thank you. I return to the member from Hamilton West–Ancaster–Dundas for final comments.

Ms. Sandy Shaw: There's so much to talk about in this bill but I cannot get away from the fact that we are standing here talking about the legislative rights—the human rights—of children that this government has taken away.

You talk a lot about money. You talk about value for money. But my question to you is, what is the value of a child's life? In your value-for-money audits, do you have that figure? Do you know that we're going to save so many million dollars, and this is the cost of saving; that we can anticipate that the harm and the deaths and the delayed development of children is just the cost of these cuts? I cannot get over that.

I can't imagine that this is what elected officials—that this is what you, as MPPs—thought that you would be doing. I understand that you want to find efficiency. I cannot believe that this is what you thought you would be doing, that this is how you thought you would be saving money—putting children's lives at risk. Really, this is a government that clearly knows the cost of everything, but the value of nothing.

I also cannot get over the fact that we can talk about developing the Ring of Fire and the word “Indigenous,” the notion that this is happening in our First Nations communities, does not get mentioned. This is again an example of this government that understands where money is, but they don't understand where human decency is. They don't understand where their heart is, and they don't understand that we have obligations to our First Nations communities that we have not even begun to fulfill.

I do appreciate talking about the economy and our debt, but I do not want to talk about saving money on the backs of the most vulnerable people in our province.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Nina Tangri): Further debate?

Mr. Stephen Lecce: Thank you, Madam Speaker.
Interjection.

Mr. Stephen Lecce: Thank you. I want to thank the member from Hamilton West–Ancaster–Dundas and all my enthusiastic members here today.

Look, two words come to mind that the member opposite repeated quite often. She said “future generations”—she talked about the plight of future generations—and she spoke about “betrayal.” She also cited the importance of our history—not to repeat itself. I would agree and accept the premise, because if we look back to the last time the New Democrats had the benefit of governing this province, there were 125,000 full-time jobs lost under your administration. In fact, under your administration there was a 28% increase in unemployment. Are you proud of that—30% unemployment in Ontario?

The highest personal taxes in North America, the highest personal taxes on the continent; 1.2 million Ontarians on welfare; they doubled the debt—something in common with the Liberal Party. You want to talk about betrayal? You are turning your backs on the workers of this province when your government, when your own party, put over a million people on social assistance, with 28% unemployment and 125,000 full-time jobs lost.

While I understand that it is in vogue to oppose the government on all things, look at your record. It is so instructive on what not to do: not to raise taxes, not to raise regulations, not to increase red tape, not to impede the ability of young people to get the decency of a job. Yet the NDP doubled the debt, as did the—

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Nina Tangri): It’s very difficult to listen to the member from King–Vaughan. They sat down and listened to you. I’d ask you to respect the same. Thank you.

Mr. Stephen Lecce: I know facts offend the NDP, but what’s important for this Legislature to know is to be informed by a report by Alexandre Moreau of the Montreal Economic Institute from just yesterday. He said, “56,100 workers aged 15 to 24”—the next generation after all, right—to the member from Hamilton West–Ancaster–Dundas—“lost their jobs between the law’s adoption”—this is the minimum wage law. This is after a 20% increase, which we supported, in minimum wage.

Madam Speaker, could you conceive a scenario where 56,000 young people are out of the work because of a blind affinity for ideology, because they wouldn’t work with our small business community, because they wouldn’t consider a phased-in approach that allows businesses to help transition to make sure that we get to a living wage? We talk about human dignity, the decency of human dignity. There is nothing dignified about 56,000 young people in the province out of work. There is nothing dignified about that. We should be resolved to help get them into the workforce.

It’s not just that 56,000 people were betrayed because of the reckless policies supported by the New Democratic Party, which supported Kathleen Wynne’s Liberals; it’s also that there were costs for everyday families. Between

the law’s adoption—this is the minimum wage law, Bill 148—and September 2018, there was a 5.6% increase in the prices of meals in restaurants, a sector in which over 70% of workers earned less than \$15 an hour before.

It may seem paradoxical. Practically all studies show that a substantial increase in the minimum wage does not reduce poverty. It actually affects people who are not in low-income situations and it even contributes to an increase in poverty due to the jobs that are lost.

Madam Speaker, the Financial Accountability Officer—so, the member opposite does not take opinion from, for example, the Montreal Economic Institute; the Ontario Chamber of Commerce; the Vaughan Chamber of Commerce; or, I would submit, the Hamilton Chamber of Commerce. Apparently they are not authorities. But perhaps the Financial Accountability Officer—perhaps we could respect the institutions of this Parliament, as we were advised to. Let’s respect the FAO, because he said that the effect of raising the minimum wage to \$15 concurs; estimating, moreover, it would entail a loss of 50,000 jobs, he surmised correctly—it’s 56,000, to be correct—of just young people alone.

That is not a plan for prosperity. That is not a plan to get young people working. That is not a way to unshackle our businesses, to create more jobs for young people. But the NDP continue in this House to support a record of 125,000 full-time jobs lost. They continue to proudly defend the indefensible: nearly a 30% unemployment rate. I mean, you have to have some chutzpah to lecture us, a party that is determined to create jobs, when you have one third of people out of jobs—

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): I’m sorry to interrupt the member, who does indeed have the floor. The cross-talk is not helpful, and the members who appreciated when the opposition member was able to quietly give her lead will perhaps return the favour to this side.

I return to the member.

Mr. Stephen Lecce: We look back on what we inherited from the former Liberal government—a government that no doubt looked to the model of the New Democrats and went, “How could we double our debt?” And, of course, they did that. They did that very well, Madam Speaker, because we inherited a \$15-billion deficit from the previous Liberal government—supported, aided and abetted by the New Democratic Party of this province—and have a net debt of more than one third of a trillion dollars, \$347 billion in 2018-19. The interest on our debt is the fourth-largest line item in our budget after health care, education and social services.

And yet, you talk about value for money. The Liberal Party of this province, which your party supported—

Interjection.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): The member from Hamilton West–Ancaster–Dundas will come to order.

Ms. Sandy Shaw: He’s talking to me.

Mr. Stephen Lecce: No, I'm speaking to all members of this House to inform them of the facts, because the FAO, I think, is an authority. Do you agree? The FAO is an authority. What the FAO said is that this deficit, this debt, is not sustainable for the people. The next generation, words that were invoked dozens of times by the members opposite—ask someone from the next generation. We could all be concerned for the next generation. We may have children or we may ourselves be young people; it doesn't matter. We all have skin in the game to make sure that we get this economy on track, and the NDP, with a 97% voting record supporting the Liberal Party's tax-and-spend reckless policies—look, you're complicit with the problem, sorry to say. I know—

1720

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Okay. The members will come to order, take a deep breath if needed, and will direct their remarks to and through the Chair. The heckling will stop or the members can leave. Thank you.

I return to the member.

Mr. Stephen Lecce: Madam Speaker, through you, interest on our debt, as noted, is the fourth-largest line item in our budget. I think that should be enough of a data point to motivate us to act to get our province on track, to fix the fiscal track that our province is on. We are at a 40% debt-to-GDP level. We are more indebted than Greece, for crying out loud. How is that not something that rings a bell of urgency to act? How is that not something that is motivating every party in this House to do something about it, not to be complicit, not to be part of the problem, but to be part of the solution, and that is a plan that reduces our spending while increasing investment in the social services that we depend on, be it long-term-care beds or mental health.

But, Madam Speaker, all of this is an unprecedented fiscal burden, as noted, on the shoulders of our young people and the next generation. Our province has the largest subnational debt in the world. If you divide our debt amongst the population in the province, every man, woman and child living in the province would owe 24 grand—24 grand—simply by virtue of geographic location of where they were born. My nieces, and potentially yours, owe \$24,000 to the state simply because governments, past and most recent, couldn't live within their means.

If the government made payments of \$1 billion a year against the debt, it would take until the year 2366 to become debt-free. In 2018-19, the government is forecasting \$12.5 billion in interest payments to service our debt. That's almost \$900 this year alone for every man, woman and child. These interest payments represent one fifth of the health care budget, almost half the education budget, over a billion dollars more than the provincial spending on post-secondary education and jobs training. The interest on Ontario's debt is costing Ontario taxpayers a staggering \$1.4 million every hour—in this debate, nearly \$1.5 million burned because of governments on the

left who could not live within their means, who could not be disciplined enough to choose the priorities that actually help our people, that invest in health care, invest in education and actually do something about the economy that gets people the means for them to have more money in their pockets.

It's why we're rebuilding the trust in government. Finances are a top priority for our government. It's a top priority for our Minister of Finance. Our government believes balancing the budget and paying down debt is not only a fiscal imperative but it's a moral imperative.

I've spoken in this House about intergenerational debt. I will not allow myself to vote for budgets that will recklessly increase the fiscal burden on the next generation. I will not do that. But members opposite and members of the federal Liberal Party, the federal government, certainly are doing their part, plus some, to advance an agenda of raising the debt and ultimately raising the deficits year after year, which actually reduces service quality and will force higher taxes potentially amongst our children and grandchildren. We owe it to this generation and to future ones to protect our public services and make sure that those services are there for them down the road.

Our government took absolutely immediate action to mitigate our inherited deficit based on the findings of the Independent Financial Commission of Inquiry and the line-by-line review. In the fiscal update, we were committed to restoring fiscal balance, reducing the debt and strengthening accountability and transparency.

Discretionary spending on items like subscriptions or meals or travel expenses has been cut in the public service. We found efficiencies, whether it was as straightforward as getting rid of land lines and fax machines over to cellphones and email or as transformational as targeting OHIP+ to help those children and young people under 24 who do not have coverage. We reined in executive compensation at Hydro One, and we're now undertaking a comprehensive review of all government agencies.

As a result, our government has realized \$3.2 billion in savings from driving efficiencies without a singular job or reduction to front-line services. That is precisely how you do it, Madam Speaker. That is precisely why we should do it. We've done so while providing \$2.7 billion in tax relief to individuals and families, to small businesses and to seniors across the province. In a matter of weeks, our deficit has been reduced by half a billion dollars in 2018-19. It's a balanced approach, it's a reasonable approach and we will continue to transform the way government operates and delivers services, and to chart a path to balance in budget 2019.

Our government is committed to making life more affordable for families and consumers. That's why we introduced one of the most generous tax credits for low-income workers in a generation: LIFT, the Low-income Individuals and Families Tax Credit. On their 2019 tax return, those earning less than \$30,000 will pay zero income tax. This tax will leave more money in the pockets of taxpayers and families, where it belongs. Even for those earning just over \$30,000, they will see graduated tax relief as well.

Our government is working hard to save people money. It's what differentiates the parties in this House: that we are resolved to put money back in their pockets. We were ridiculed, Madam Speaker, when we said that \$2.7 billion of tax relief was back in their pockets. We were ridiculed when we eliminated cap-and-trade. When the Minister of the Environment had the courage of his convictions to scrap the cap-and-trade carbon tax, putting hundreds of dollars back in the pockets of families, we were ridiculed. It's just fascinating, Madam Speaker, that we are every day moving the yardstick forward for affordability. When you look at these measures as part and parcel of our broad economic reforms, this is actually going to make a difference: thousands of dollars back into the pockets of the middle class, working people, low-income families, students, seniors—the people who deserve it after 15 years of darkness by the former government.

Madam Speaker, we will work hard to put money in their pockets, as mentioned. I talked about the carbon tax, to save a family \$260 a year, every year. We'll continue to use every tool at our disposal to fight the federally imposed carbon tax. Talking about standing up for one's convictions, we have a federal Liberal government, we have a Prime Minister so out of touch with the working realities of the people of this province, who is imposing a carbon tax, and yet the NDP, let the record note, is rather pleased to support reckless increases on both industry, business and families.

What I find most indefensible is that at a time when our competitors to the south and our provincial neighbours are slashing taxes, are cutting regulations—are not imposing a carbon tax, as now the majority of this federation is not proceeding with—the New Democrats and the Liberals think, and certainly the federal Liberals think, that we ought to be raising taxes, that we ought to be hiking taxes on those sectors of the economy. We're just not going to do that. We're going to fight it every step of the way. We're going to use every tool at our disposal, including going to the Supreme Court, if required, to defend the interests of this province, and that is what leadership looks like.

Madam Speaker, you'll remember that we brought back a variety of measures to help support consumers in the province. We're moving forward with the expansion of safe, responsible sales in corner stores of beer and wine. We think this will help support our industry in communities across the province. We're moving forward to address the housing crisis through the development of a new housing supply action plan. Housing supply is not keeping up with the population growth. We've seen this in my riding. It's driving up home prices and it's driving up rentals. And for young people, we are robbing them of the potential of home ownership.

So we're taking action. We need to build more quality, affordable homes. That's why our government is adopting the balanced solution that was just announced. We are protecting rent controls for tenants of existing units, so that they can continue to rent affordable homes. At the same time, we're incentivizing developers to build more rental

housing by exempting the units from rent control. These are promises made and promises kept.

Another core commitment our government made to the people was to help create and protect jobs. We're cutting job-killing red tape by 25% by 2022 and reducing costs for our businesses. We've stopped \$308 million in planned tax hikes by the previous government. We've saved 7,900 small businesses in the province up to \$40,000 a year. We're modernizing our province's apprenticeship system so that more young people can pursue careers in the skilled trades—they're good jobs with great dignity, often well-paying and in-demand jobs as well—and we're building an Ontario where prosperity can reach every corner, where everyone can start a business and pursue their full potential to grow a business, to create a good job. This is the aspiration this government holds. We want to make Ontario the economic engine of our Confederation. These are just a few of the initiatives that our government is implementing to make life more affordable, to bring prosperity back to this province.

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I've spoken to constituents in my riding, Madam Speaker. I've heard them loud and clear, and they support many of the initiatives our government is proposing. They realize that the government cannot continue on the path of deficit spending. The people in my riding—across heritage and all different experiences—know instinctively that if we are going to set up our young people to succeed, we should be investing in our young people, not indebting them to failure. Whether it's a farmer in King City or Schomberg, or a small business in Vaughan, or a resident of Maple, they all understand that financial responsibility is critical in all aspects of life.

I was raised by immigrant parents who instilled in me the principle of living within my means. That's not a partisan thing; this should be a reality for all of us. I'd like to believe that all of us accept that premise. But of course, we don't apply it to government, and we should—because every family in this province has to do the same. They have to balance their books, and so should the government of Ontario and the federal government of this country.

Our approach will require a wholesale transformation of government and relentless fiscal discipline. I call on everyone in this room and across the province to work with us to help find solutions. Together, we can ensure a bright and prosperous Ontario now and into the future.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Questions and comments?

Ms. Jessica Bell: Thank you to the member for King-Vaughan. I don't doubt, and I agree with you, that the debt is a huge concern, especially for younger people and people with children.

It really confuses me, then, that this government is moving forward on a tax cut for the highest income earners at a time when the gap between the rich and the poor hasn't been this large in years. It just doesn't make sense.

As the transit critic, I did review the fall economic statement from the perspective of transit, and I can safely say that transit riders and commuters should be very scared

by what's in this fall economic statement. It means longer commutes, it means potentially higher fares and it means many more people are going to be stuck in traffic. This is at a time when we have one of the worst commutes and some of the higher fares in North America. The board of trade estimates that we're losing \$6 billion a year in productivity because of congestion. It is a critical issue.

What we're seeing in this budget is a \$1.4-billion cut in the transportation budget and a whole slew of transit projects that look like they're in jeopardy: the Hurontario LRT; the Ottawa LRT; GO service; electrification of GO; \$3 fares on GO and the Union Pearson Express, which would make transit more affordable for many more people; and the relief line. They're not mentioned in the fall economic statement. It looks like they're in jeopardy.

What I find very disturbing, as well, is the power grab of having Metrolinx now be accountable to the Minister of Transportation. Let this be a warning for you: Steven Del Duca went down that road before. He did backroom deals as the Minister of Transportation, moved forward on GO projects that Metrolinx did not recommend, and he paid the political price for that. I hope that's a warning for you.

We need to improve transit. We shouldn't just—

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Thank you. Further questions and comments?

Ms. Jill Dunlop: With this bill, our government is taking decisive action to restore transparency and accountability in Ontario's finances and to make life more affordable for Ontario families and businesses.

The previous Liberal government continued to make claim after claim that they were going to lift up low-income Ontarians. However, in the same breath, they introduced crippling legislation, like the cap-and-trade carbon tax and the Green Energy Act, that made life less affordable for families and consumers.

With their legacy of burdensome legislation, they forced seniors to choose between affording food and heating their homes.

This legislation destroyed job development by making it impossible for businesses to compete, forcing them to cut jobs or shut down their businesses.

Our government wants to provide relief to families, students, seniors and businesses. We believe that government needs to get off the backs of Ontarians. Instead of using tax schemes that only help the Liberal insiders, we want to make sure that Ontarians keep more of their own money in their own pockets.

The opposition believes that more government involvement will make the lives of Ontarians better. They are wrong. We believe that by ensuring that Ontarians keep more money in their own pockets, they will be able to make decisions that are best for them. That's why with this bill, as my colleague from King–Vaughan stated, we are introducing the Low-income Individuals and Families Tax Credit, or LIFT. This is the most generous tax cut for low-income workers we have seen in a very long time.

The vast majority of those earning less than \$30,000 per year will pay no personal income taxes at all when they file their 2019 tax returns. This represents up to \$850 per person and up to \$1,700 per couple in savings. Low-

income taxpayers earning just over \$30,000 will also receive graduated income tax relief.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Questions and comments?

Mr. John Vanthof: I listened intently to the remarks from the member from King–Vaughan, and I have to compliment him on his oratory skills. I always like listening to his remarks.

At one point he said—and I appreciate this—he has the facts. Then, a few moments later he suggested, as many of his members have done since the government has come back, that the NDP supported the government 97% of the time. I hope that since he has the facts that he can expand on how that was extrapolated, because I've heard this quite a bit.

So we also checked. In the last Parliament, the majority Liberal Parliament—

Mr. Stephen Lecce: Just that Parliament?

Mr. John Vanthof: Again, I am giving you the parameters. I am giving the parameters so—

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Order.

Mr. John Vanthof: In the last Parliament, we supported the government 53% of the time, Speaker. The Conservatives supported the government 49% of the time. I would hope that the next time that the member for King–Vaughan talks about 97% he would—since he has the facts according to his own words—table the parameters on which those facts are calculated. I would be happy to debate that with him.

Furthermore, he said in his remarks that there was no loss to front-line services. That is actually not accurate, because as people retire in the front lines, as agricultural representatives throughout northern Ontario are retiring—they are front-line advisers for farmers moving to northern Ontario—they are not being replaced. There is a loss in front-line services.

So again, let's stick to the facts, Speaker. Thank you.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Further questions and comments?

Ms. Christine Hogarth: I actually have a couple of facts for the member opposite. One fact is that our government inherited a \$15-billion deficit from the Liberal government. Second fact: Our fact is that our government has reduced the inherited \$15-billion deficit from the previous Liberal government by \$500 million in a matter of weeks. Those are two clear facts.

This is why we are here today to discuss our fall economic statement. We have to get our fiscal house in order. We campaigned. We knocked on doors: People found it hard to pay their bills; people found it hard to decide if they wanted to eat dinner or heat their home.

This economic statement is getting our fiscal house in order. It is a start. It is a long road ahead because of the mess that was left behind by the previous government.

One thing is that we are going to help the most vulnerable. It's surprising to me that the opposition is not interested in helping the most vulnerable. Our government is putting forward a LIFT program that will help those who are earning under \$30,000 a year to not pay taxes. That's

a savings to everybody. That allows them that extra money in their pocket to do things like buy gas, put their kids in a program, or pay their heating bills.

It's all those little pieces of the puzzle that people have been burdened with over the years. We need to do better for the people. We need to do better for the most vulnerable. That is our responsibility.

Another thing: We need to help the housing supply. One thing we're doing is we are going to get rid of rent control so it allows the supply to grow. We are going to allow developers to increase their supply of housing and build more housing so we can have that supply, and rents will come down. Right now, it is hard to get a place to rent and it is hard to find an affordable place to rent. We need to do more and we are going to do more to help our seniors and help our low-income earners.

I'm surprised that the opposition won't join us in supporting this bill. Join us in making the economy of Ontario productive again. Join us in getting businesses going and creating those good-paying jobs.

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The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): I return to the member for King–Vaughan for his two-minute reply.

Mr. Stephen Lecce: Madam Speaker, I want to thank all the members opposite and my colleagues for sharing their perspectives.

In my speech, I spoke about carbon tax transparency, about getting our fiscal house in order. We talked about one of the most significant low-income tax cuts in a generation in this province. We spoke about our determination to get more affordable houses built for the people of this province.

What I didn't speak about was something I feel very strongly about that was also in our economic update—something that has probably been limited just by time, but it's something I think we ought to talk about—and that is, the historic investments we are making in mental health and long-term care for the people of this province. We're making a historic investment of \$1.9 billion in mental health and addiction services, matching the federal government's commitment. This is the single largest investment in Canadian history of any province on a per capita basis and in real dollars. That is an amazing thing.

I just met with OUSA, the Ontario Undergraduate Student Alliance. They expressed to me that in 2015 there was a report that came out—and the Canadian mental health commission has validated this—that said a student on campus is waiting anywhere between 12 to 18 months to see a counsellor. I don't care what your party is; we have to fix that. We have to do something about that. We believe that this money, when allocated and delivered to the front lines, will help reduce that wait time and improve the mental health of our young people.

We're building an additional 1,100 beds. We're building those beds in hospitals and communities across Ontario—including 640 new beds to prepare for the flu season. I think that's prudent. It's proactive. It's the right thing to do for the people of Ontario. We're ending

hallway health care. We're creating 6,000 new long-term-care beds.

Together, Madam Speaker, we believe that this investment in mental health will, yes, improve our productivity, but, most importantly, improve the quality of life of every Ontarian.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Further debate?

Mr. Peter Tabuns: I appreciate this opportunity to be probably the last speaker today.

I've read a lot of bad bills in my time. Like other people in this room, I've suffered through some of the most dreary legislation that one can imagine, as well as legislation that has been really destructive. But I have to say, although the Liberals were no slouches when it came to bad legislation—they do deserve credit on that; they were really good at bad legislation—the Conservatives have decided to give them a run for their money, because they have kicked out the stops on this bill, as our finance critic so ably described earlier this afternoon.

Speaker, there are about 45 different schedules in this bill. I'm not going to go through every schedule. I'm going to hit some of the big ones. I'm not going to speak a lot about money; that's another debate, and I think our critic ably discussed that. But I want to quote Forrest Gump, who talked about life being like a box of chocolates. This bill, friends, is like a box of chocolates; only, instead of caramel or praline at the centre, we've got Tide Pods and mystery meat. You probably saw the videos on YouTube from the detergent companies saying, "Kids, don't eat Tide Pods. You'll get sick. It's disgusting." My advice is that people do exactly the same with this bill. So I will be classifying different schedules by Tide Pod or mystery meat chocolate—whichever it appears to most accurately fit into.

The first one I want to talk about is schedule 3.

Ah, yes, it's hard to stay awake. I know it has been a long day, but I will do what I can to hold your attention.

I think what's most interesting about this schedule, which deals with the Auditor General—a critical, critical role in a parliamentary democracy—is the ability now for the government to suspend the Auditor General.

I want to point out that if this was coming forward a year and a half ago, when the Auditor General, quite correctly, was putting the boots to the Liberal government, we would have said, "Good God, how can you do that?" Here she is, the Auditor General, who's actually trying to uphold accounting standards, uphold accuracy when it comes to the government's books, now being put in a position where if the government doesn't like what the Auditor General has to say, "Well, it was unfortunate that they had to take a long holiday"—probably not somewhere warm. That is a threat to transparency, to accountability and to trust.

The Auditor General and the other officers of the Legislature have to have protection for their independence. If they're going to tell us the truth, if they're going to tell all of Ontario the truth, they have to know that they will be left standing after that happens. This change means that

Auditor Generals can be intimidated, it means that they can be swayed, and it means that if they're really problematic, they can be ditched. That, Speaker, is a big step backward for Ontario.

We're not talking about dollars here. We heard the member from King–Vaughan go on about the deficit, notwithstanding the fact that they're going to cut revenue in Ontario. This isn't a revenue issue; this is a question of trust, transparency and accountability. On that basis alone, that schedule fails.

I want to note as well that the Chief Electoral Officer can now be removed or suspended. People may remember the recent issues in the United States with playing around with elections. It's critical for the legitimacy of a government that the Chief Electoral Officer have independence and have that ability to act for the provision of a fair election process. When you do this, you say that, ultimately, that chief election officer can be intimidated. If they don't deliver the goods in a by-election, well, my goodness, maybe they're not the kind of person you want around for a general election. This is an extraordinary step on the part of this government—extraordinary. If you read too much Republican stuff, you start absorbing it and you start acting. This is another Tide Pod.

The Environmental Commissioner of Ontario—definitely a chocolate-coated Tide Pod, this particular schedule. The Environmental Bill of Rights is going to be amended. The Environmental Commissioner's independence is cut. The ability of the office to act is cut. Protection for the people of Ontario is cut.

Don't take my word for it—although I think it would be a good idea; I think I've got some good ground here. Rick Lindgren, who is counsel for the Canadian Environmental Law Association, widely respected, has written a piece about the changes, and I just want to note a few of the things he has to say. He notes that the powers of the Environmental Commissioner include reviewing carefully government compliance with legal requirements imposed by the Environmental Bill of Rights.

I want it say to all of you here that we in the opposition—we make our arguments; to some people we're credible and to some we're not credible. The government makes its positions; to some people it's credible and to some it's not credible. The value of an independent officer, of an Environmental Commissioner, is that they have a credibility outside the partisan framework. They can actually speak about what's going on and be respected as professionals who can give warnings to the population no matter what the government or the opposition of the day thinks. That is an extremely valuable service. That is going to be gone.

Filing annual and special reports with the Legislature on a wide range of environmental protection issues prescribed by the Environmental Bill of Rights: That is effectively the role of auditing our environmental performance. If you have a Minister of the Environment—now, the current Minister of the Environment, Conservation and Parks is a good-looking guy. He may be replaced by

someone who's not so good-looking. But it doesn't matter whether he's good-looking or not. If you have an Environmental Commissioner, you have someone who will be able to—what could I say—provide a check if the Minister of the Environment is worn down politically by the Premier of the day and is doing things that aren't protecting the environment. That's the value of the Environmental Commissioner.

The ability of that commissioner to file reports regularly with us on issues of consequence to the people of this province is something that should be protected. That Environmental Commissioner also provides helpful advice and assistance to Ontarians who want to use the Environmental Bill of Rights legal tools to safeguard the environment.

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A lot of those powers will go to the Minister of the Environment—the person, in fact, who the Environmental Commissioner is checking, auditing. The loss of those abilities is consequential for this province. The decision to go forward with this schedule is a huge error on the part of the government, and it should be abandoned.

I want to note that I listened to the comments of the member from Peterborough–Kawartha about the whole approach on this budget. He talked about us saying the sky was falling. I don't think that's the case. I don't think the sky is falling. I do think that with this budget and this bill, people's lives will become harder. That isn't the end of the world, but it will be harder.

When I arrived here in 2006, Walkerton was still a live issue. We were still debating that. We even had a water protection bill, which we didn't like because there were lots of weaknesses in it. Nonetheless, it went forward.

In the period leading up to Walkerton, it was the Environmental Commissioner who started pointing out the gaps in protection for water quality. That Environmental Commissioner wasn't listened to. People paid a price with their lives. They paid a price with their lives. When you're in a situation where you start removing the safeguards that people depend on to make sure that they can drink water safely, you put people's lives at risk, and that is a situation we face here.

This costs almost nothing—almost nothing. It will be largely irrelevant in terms of winning or losing the battle against the deficit. But I say to people in this chamber that when you start stripping away those safeguards from the people of Ontario, you put their lives at risk. That is bad policy. This is a schedule that no one should bite down on, because the outcome is bad news.

The Financial Accountability Office: This is another independent officer who has been very useful to this Legislature. When the government was in opposition, they followed the FAO very closely. Why? Because the FAO is an independent office that can do an assessment and, frankly, tell governments, “You're off track” or “you're on track.” I didn't always agree with the FAO, but people recognize that office as professional and able to warn governments, when they get into a bubble—and believe

me, all governments get into a bubble—that things are going off-track.

The fact that the FAO can now be suspended—it's bad, because, again, if the FAO comes out with a report saying that the government is deeply wrong on this, and the government is deeply offended, that FAO, the Financial Accountability Officer, can be moved out. Your ability to have someone tell you the truth, even when you don't like it, will be undermined. That's bad for Ontario, and it costs you nothing. It means nothing in terms of deficit, but it means everything in terms of a government that functions well today and in the future.

I said this to the Liberals, and I'll say it to you guys: You're not always going to be in power. That's just the way it is. Thank God, it's a democracy. Thank God, no party is in power forever. That's a good thing. The people get to choose. So get ready for the idea that some day you'll be in opposition, and the fact that the FAO is no longer independent and no longer able to apply a blowtorch to the government of the day is something that you will regret. You don't need to have this schedule go forward to do what you want to do. You should abandon it. You should abandon it now.

The other thing that was interesting to me, in going through this, is that in schedule 16, the one that applies to the Financial Accountability Officer—and it applies to a number of other officers of the Legislature—there's a “get out of jail free” card in the legislation. I've noticed quite a few in the last few months, and I've been impressed. I've never really seen many of those before. I thought, man, making sure you're absolved from any liability, no matter what you do, is kind of a tangent from what I understood is part of democracy, but it's interesting to see how this government has been so creative.

It includes a number of indemnifying clauses establishing that the crown has no fiduciary responsibility to notify or compensate the FAO if they should be removed. Intriguing, eh? Ditched today; broke tomorrow.

If you're someone who is actually pointing out that the government is going in a bad direction, having this over your head and having the government protect itself in advance—boy, you've got to ask, who's writing this stuff? Who is writing this stuff for you? Because it's pretty astounding. Again, the Liberals would have done it if they had thought of it, but they didn't. It was left to you to do it first, and it's not a thing to be proud of, but something to be noted.

I noticed, as well, that the privacy commissioner has the same sort of set-up. Now, for those of you who are new here—most of you—when we went through the gas plant inquiry, I noticed in questioning one Liberal witness that that witness had deleted all his emails, contrary to the Archives and Recordkeeping Act. I went to the privacy commissioner and I said, “These folks are breaking the law, and they're breaking it big time. You should look into it.” She did, and to her credit, she blew it up. She established credibly that the Liberal senior staff, one of whom

has now gotten a jail sentence, were deleting government records.

Now, let's imagine a situation in which the government didn't like the privacy commissioner coming after them, didn't like the idea that they were finding things that were illegal going on. Would a government not be tempted to ditch that privacy commissioner? I want to tell you, yes, they would be tempted. This doesn't help you with the deficit for a moment, but it does undermine the stability of the government of Ontario—not a particular party, but the government of Ontario—in the long run. Don't do it. Kids, don't eat this Tide Pod. Spit it out. Move on to another schedule. Spend your time on money issues, not on schedules that undermine transparency, accountability and responsibility.

The next one is the French Language Services Act. This is extraordinary to me. I have to say to all of you that the reaction in the francophone community has been profound, and I think people have noticed. Our critic has been really good on this. That issue is one that is really hot in my community, Toronto–Danforth, in downtown Toronto. You wouldn't think it, but we've got a fairly large francophone population. They understand the issue in terms of minority rights, and they're correct.

I have to say, Speaker, that I take French lessons once a week. Now, those who hear me speak French wouldn't know that. Those who actually speak French feel badly for the language and how it's mangled and misused and abused. I'm terrible. My teacher is very patient. But last week, she took all the articles from *Le Devoir*, *Le Droit* and *La Presse* and forced me to read them, as is her style, and it's hot. English-speaking Canada doesn't understand how profoundly this has offended francophones, not just in Ontario, where it's hottest, but across the country.

We're Canadian. Being Canadian means that we have roots deep in the English and French communities. Now, our roots have expanded. They're now Asian, African, South American—we come from all over. But those are two fundamental roots, and when you take an axe to one of those roots, boy, there are consequences. You don't need to do this. You don't need to poke a stick in the eyes of the francophone community and say, “You guys, you gals, you don't matter to us. Nyah. French language rights is a minor issue. Put it at the bottom of someone else's budget.”

It was interesting to me, as well, to see an article—I think it was in *Le Devoir*—about Pastagate. It was interesting: The writer wrote it in English first, addressing it to English audiences, and then in French underneath, just saying, “This is getting almost no coverage in the English-language media.” A few years ago, the office of the French language in Quebec went after a restaurant in Montreal because it had Italian rather than French on the menu.

Ms. Bhutla Karpoche: Pastagate.

Mr. Peter Tabuns: Pastagate, that's exactly it—which was a stupid thing to do, right? It was just stupid, but it got huge ink in the English press in Canada.

But when this kind of attack happens—this is not just some wayward inspector having drunk too much over

lunch. This is a decision of the government to say to a vital part of this community—“this community” being Ontario—“You don’t matter.” Do I have to put it in bigger letters? “You really don’t matter! We’re going to cut your office, even though its impact on the deficit is negligible.”

Speaker, I appreciate this opportunity to address the Legislature. I had so much more, but I know Thursday

evening beckons and people must leave. Thank you for your indulgence, Speaker.

Second reading debate deemed adjourned.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Seeing the time on the clock, this House stands adjourned until 10:30 a.m. on Monday, November 26, 2018.

The House adjourned at 1801.

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| Clark, Hon. / L'hon. Steve (PC) | Leeds—Grenville—Thousand Islands and Rideau Lakes / Leeds—Grenville—Thousand Islands et Rideau Lakes | Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing / Ministre des Affaires municipales et du Logement |
| Coe, Lorne (PC) | Whitby | |
| Coteau, Michael (LIB) | Don Valley East / Don Valley-Est | |
| Crawford, Stephen (PC) | Oakville | |
| Cuzzetto, Rudy (PC) | Mississauga—Lakeshore | |
| Des Rosiers, Nathalie (LIB) | Ottawa—Vanier | |
| Downey, Doug (PC) | Barrie—Springwater—Oro-Medonte | |
| Dunlop, Jill (PC) | Simcoe North / Simcoe-Nord | |
| Elliott, Hon. / L'hon. Christine (PC) | Newmarket—Aurora | Deputy Premier / Vice-première ministre Minister of Health and Long-Term Care / Ministre de la Santé et des Soins de longue durée |
| Fedeli, Hon. / L'hon. Victor (PC) | Nipissing | Chair of Cabinet / Président du Conseil des ministres Minister of Finance / Ministre des Finances |
| Fee, Amy (PC) | Kitchener South—Hespeler / Kitchener-Sud—Hespeler | |
| Fife, Catherine (NDP) | Waterloo | |
| Ford, Hon. / L'hon. Doug (PC) | Etobicoke North / Etobicoke-Nord | Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs / Ministre des Affaires intergouvernementales Premier / Premier ministre |
| Fraser, John (LIB) | Ottawa South / Ottawa-Sud | |
| French, Jennifer K. (NDP) | Oshawa | Third Deputy Chair of the Committee of the Whole House / Troisième vice-présidente du comité plénier de l'Assemblée législative |

| Member and Party / Député(e) et parti | Constituency / Circonscription | Other responsibilities / Autres responsabilités |
|--|--|--|
| Fullerton, Hon. / L'hon. Merrilee (PC) | Kanata—Carleton | Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities / Ministre de la Formation et des Collèges et Universités |
| Gates, Wayne (NDP) | Niagara Falls | |
| Gélinas, France (NDP) | Nickel Belt | |
| Ghamari, Goldie (PC) | Carleton | |
| Gill, Parm (PC) | Milton | |
| Glover, Chris (NDP) | Spadina—Fort York | |
| Gravelle, Michael (LIB) | Thunder Bay—Superior North / Thunder Bay—Supérieur-Nord | |
| Gretzky, Lisa (NDP) | Windsor West / Windsor-Ouest | First Deputy Chair of the Committee of the Whole House / Première vice-présidente du comité plénier de l'Assemblée |
| Hardeman, Hon. / L'hon. Ernie (PC) | Oxford | Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs / Ministre de l'Agriculture, de l'Alimentation et des Affaires rurales |
| Harden, Joel (NDP) | Ottawa Centre / Ottawa-Centre | |
| Harris, Mike (PC) | Kitchener—Conestoga | |
| Hassan, Faisal (NDP) | York South—Weston / York-Sud— Weston | |
| Hatfield, Percy (NDP) | Windsor—Tecumseh | Second Deputy Chair of the Committee of the Whole House / Deuxième vice-président du comité plénier de l'Assemblée législative |
| Hillier, Randy (PC) | Lanark—Frontenac—Kingston | |
| Hogarth, Christine (PC) | Etobicoke—Lakeshore | |
| Horwath, Andrea (NDP) | Hamilton Centre / Hamilton-Centre | Leader, Official Opposition / Chef de l'opposition officielle |
| Hunter, Mitzie (LIB) | Scarborough—Guildwood | |
| Jones, Hon. / L'hon. Sylvia (PC) | Dufferin—Caledon | Minister of Community Safety and Correctional Services / Ministre de la Sécurité communautaire et des Services correctionnels |
| Kanapathi, Logan (PC) | Markham—Thornhill | |
| Karahalios, Belinda (PC) | Cambridge | |
| Karpoche, Bhutla (NDP) | Parkdale—High Park | |
| Ke, Vincent (PC) | Don Valley North / Don Valley-Nord | |
| Kernaghan, Terence (NDP) | London North Centre / London- Centre-Nord | |
| Khanjin, Andrea (PC) | Barrie—Innisfil | |
| Kramp, Daryl (PC) | Hastings—Lennox and Addington | |
| Kusendova, Natalia (PC) | Mississauga Centre / Mississauga- Centre | |
| Lalonde, Marie-France (LIB) | Orléans | |
| Lecce, Stephen (PC) | King—Vaughan | Deputy Government House Leader / Leader parlementaire adjoint du gouvernement |
| Lindo, Laura Mae (NDP) | Kitchener Centre / Kitchener-Centre | |
| MacLeod, Hon. / L'hon. Lisa (PC) | Nepean | Minister of Children, Community and Social Services / Ministre des Services à l'enfance et des Services sociaux et communautaires Minister Responsible for Women's Issues / Ministre déléguée à la Condition féminine |
| Mamakwa, Sol (NDP) | Kiiwetinoong | |
| Mantha, Michael (NDP) | Algoma—Manitoulin | |
| Martin, Robin (PC) | Eglinton—Lawrence | |
| Martow, Gila (PC) | Thornhill | |
| McDonell, Jim (PC) | Stormont—Dundas—South Glengarry | |
| McKenna, Jane (PC) | Burlington | |
| McNaughton, Hon. / L'hon. Monte (PC) | Lambton—Kent—Middlesex | Minister of Infrastructure / Ministre de l'Infrastructure |
| Miller, Norman (PC) | Parry Sound—Muskoka | |
| Miller, Paul (NDP) | Hamilton East—Stoney Creek / Hamilton-Est—Stoney Creek | |
| Mitas, Christina Maria (PC) | Scarborough Centre / Scarborough- Centre | |
| Monteith-Farrell, Judith (NDP) | Thunder Bay—Atikokan | |
| Morrison, Suze (NDP) | Toronto Centre / Toronto-Centre | |
| Mulroney, Hon. / L'hon. Caroline (PC) | York—Simcoe | Attorney General / Procureure générale Minister Responsible for Francophone Affairs / Ministre déléguée aux Affaires francophones |
| Natyshak, Taras (NDP) | Essex | |

| Member and Party / Député(e) et parti | Constituency / Circonscription | Other responsibilities / Autres responsabilités |
|---|---|--|
| Nicholls, Rick (PC) | Chatham-Kent—Leamington | Chair of the Committee of the Whole House / Président du comité plénier de l'Assemblée Deputy Speaker / Vice-président |
| Oosterhoff, Sam (PC) | Niagara West / Niagara-Ouest | |
| Pang, Billy (PC) | Markham—Unionville | |
| Park, Lindsey (PC) | Durham | |
| Parsa, Michael (PC) | Aurora—Oak Ridges—Richmond Hill | |
| Pettapiece, Randy (PC) | Perth—Wellington | |
| Phillips, Hon. / L'hon. Rod (PC) | Ajax | Minister of the Environment, Conservation and Parks / Ministre de l'Environnement, de la Protection de la nature et des Parcs |
| Piccini, David (PC) | Northumberland—Peterborough South / Northumberland—Peterborough-Sud | |
| Rakocevic, Tom (NDP) | Humber River—Black Creek | |
| Rasheed, Kaleed (PC) | Mississauga East—Cooksville / Mississauga-Est—Cooksville | |
| Rickford, Hon. / L'hon. Greg (PC) | Kenora—Rainy River | Minister of Energy, Northern Development and Mines / Ministre de l'Énergie, du Développement du Nord et des Mines Minister of Indigenous Affairs / Ministre des Affaires autochtones |
| Roberts, Jeremy (PC) | Ottawa West—Nepean / Ottawa-Ouest—Nepean | |
| Romano, Ross (PC) | Sault Ste. Marie | |
| Sabawy, Sheref (PC) | Mississauga—Erin Mills | |
| Sandhu, Amarjot (PC) | Brampton West / Brampton-Ouest | |
| Sarkaria, Prabmeet Singh (PC) | Brampton South / Brampton-Sud | |
| Sattler, Peggy (NDP) | London West / London-Ouest | |
| Schreiner, Mike (GRN) | Guelph | |
| Scott, Hon. / L'hon. Laurie (PC) | Haliburton—Kawartha Lakes—Brock | Minister of Labour / Ministre du Travail |
| Shaw, Sandy (NDP) | Hamilton West—Ancaster—Dundas / Hamilton-Ouest—Ancaster—Dundas | |
| Simard, Amanda (PC) | Glengarry—Prescott—Russell | |
| Singh, Gurratan (NDP) | Brampton East / Brampton-Est | |
| Singh, Sara (NDP) | Brampton Centre / Brampton-Centre | Deputy Leader, Official Opposition / Chef adjointe de l'opposition officielle |
| Skelly, Donna (PC) | Flamborough—Glanbrook | |
| Smith, Dave (PC) | Peterborough—Kawartha | |
| Smith, Hon. / L'hon. Todd (PC) | Bay of Quinte / Baie de Quinte | Minister of Economic Development, Job Creation and Trade / Ministre du Développement économique, de la Création d'emplois et du Commerce Government House Leader / Leader parlementaire du gouvernement |
| Stevens, Jennifer (Jennie) (NDP) | St. Catharines | |
| Stiles, Marit (NDP) | Davenport | |
| Surma, Kinga (PC) | Etobicoke Centre / Etobicoke-Centre | |
| Tabuns, Peter (NDP) | Toronto—Danforth | |
| Tangri, Nina (PC) | Mississauga—Streetsville | |
| Taylor, Monique (NDP) | Hamilton Mountain | |
| Thanigasalam, Vijay (PC) | Scarborough—Rouge Park | |
| Thompson, Hon. / L'hon. Lisa M. (PC) | Huron—Bruce | Minister of Education / Ministre de l'Éducation |
| Tibollo, Hon. / L'hon. Michael A. (PC) | Vaughan—Woodbridge | Minister of Tourism, Culture and Sport / Ministre du Tourisme, de la Culture et du Sport |
| Triantafilopoulos, Effie J. (PC) | Oakville North—Burlington / Oakville-Nord—Burlington | |
| Vanthof, John (NDP) | Timiskaming—Cochrane | Deputy Leader, Official Opposition / Chef adjoint de l'opposition officielle |
| Wai, Daisy (PC) | Richmond Hill | |
| Walker, Hon. / L'hon. Bill (PC) | Bruce—Grey—Owen Sound | Minister of Government and Consumer Services / Ministre des Services gouvernementaux et des Services aux consommateurs |
| West, Jamie (NDP) | Sudbury | |
| Wilson, Jim (IND) | Simcoe—Grey | |
| Wynne, Kathleen O. (LIB) | Don Valley West / Don Valley-Ouest | |
| Yakubski, Hon. / L'hon. John (PC) | Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke | Minister of Natural Resources and Forestry / Ministre des Richesses naturelles et des Forêts |
| Yarde, Kevin (NDP) | Brampton North / Brampton-Nord | |
| Yurek, Hon. / L'hon. Jeff (PC) | Elgin—Middlesex—London | Minister of Transportation / Ministre des Transports |

**STANDING AND SELECT COMMITTEES OF THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
COMITÉS PERMANENTS ET SPÉCIAUX DE L'ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE**

Standing Committee on Estimates / Comité permanent des budgets des dépenses

Chair / Président: Peter Tabuns
Vice-Chair / Vice-président: Wayne Gates
Stan Cho, Jill Dunlop
John Fraser, Wayne Gates
Stephen Lecce, Gila Martow
Jane McKenna, Judith Monteith-Farrell
Lindsey Park, Randy Pettapiece
Peter Tabuns
Committee Clerk / Greffier: Timothy Bryan

**Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs /
Comité permanent des finances et des affaires économiques**

Chair / Président: Stephen Crawford
Vice-Chair / Vice-président: Jeremy Roberts
Ian Arthur, Stan Cho
Stephen Crawford, Doug Downey
Sol Mamakwa, David Piccini
Jeremy Roberts, Sandy Shaw
Donna Skelly
Committee Clerk / Greffier: Timothy Bryan

**Standing Committee on General Government / Comité
permanent des affaires gouvernementales**

Chair / Président: Dave Smith
Vice-Chair / Vice-présidente: Natalia Kusendova
Jessica Bell, Lorne Coe
Chris Glover, Christine Hogarth
Logan Kanapathi, Daryl Kramp
Natalia Kusendova, Amarjot Sandhu
Mike Schreiner, Dave Smith
Jennifer (Jennie) Stevens
Committee Clerk / Greffière: Sylwia Przewdziecki

**Standing Committee on Government Agencies / Comité
permanent des organismes gouvernementaux**

Chair / Président: John Vanthof
Vice-Chair / Vice-président: Taras Natyshak
Roman Baber, Rudy Cuzzetto
Amy Fee, Vincent Ke
Andrea Khanjin, Marie-France Lalonde
Taras Natyshak, Rick Nicholls
Jeremy Roberts, Marit Stiles
John Vanthof
Committee Clerk / Greffière: Jocelyn McCauley

**Standing Committee on Justice Policy / Comité permanent de
la justice**

Chair / Président: Parm Gill
Vice-Chair / Vice-président: Aris Babikian
Roman Baber, Aris Babikian
Nathalie Des Rosiers, Jill Dunlop
Parm Gill, Lindsey Park
Ross Romano, Prabmeet Singh Sarkaria
Sara Singh, Monique Taylor
Kevin Yarde
Committee Clerk / Greffière: Jocelyn McCauley

**Standing Committee on the Legislative Assembly / Comité
permanent de l'Assemblée législative**

Chair / Présidente: Jane McKenna
Vice-Chair / Vice-président: Vijay Thanigasalam
Robert Bailey, Rima Berns-McGown
Michael Coteau, Mike Harris
Faisal Hassan, Jane McKenna
Christina Maria Mitas, Sam Oosterhoff
Amanda Simard, Gurratan Singh
Vijay Thanigasalam
Committee Clerk / Greffière: Valerie Quioc Lim

**Standing Committee on Public Accounts / Comité permanent
des comptes publics**

Chair / Présidente: Catherine Fife
Vice-Chair / Vice-présidente: Peggy Sattler
Catherine Fife, Goldie Ghamari
Jim McDonnell, Norman Miller
Suze Morrison, Michael Parsa
Peggy Sattler, Kinga Surma
Daisy Wai
Committee Clerk / Greffier: Christopher Tyrell

**Standing Committee on Regulations and Private Bills / Comité
permanent des règlements et des projets de loi d'intérêt privé**

Chair / Président: Randy Hillier
Vice-Chair / Vice-président: Kaleed Rasheed
Toby Barrett, Will Bouma
Mike Harris, Randy Hillier
Mitzie Hunter, Laura Mae Lindo
Paul Miller, Billy Pang
Kaleed Rasheed, Amarjot Sandhu
Jamie West
Committee Clerk / Greffier: Eric Rennie

**Standing Committee on Social Policy / Comité permanent de
la politique sociale**

Chair / Présidente: Nina Tangri
Vice-Chair / Vice-président: Deepak Anand
Deepak Anand, Doly Begum
Jeff Burch, Amy Fee
Michael Gravelle, Joel Harden
Belinda Karahalios, Robin Martin
Sheref Sabawy, Nina Tangri
Effie J. Triantafilopoulos
Committee Clerk / Greffier: Eric Rennie

**Select Committee on Financial Transparency / Comité spécial
de la transparence financière**

Chair / Président: Prabmeet Singh Sarkaria
Vice-Chair / Vice-président: Doug Downey
Roman Baber, Doug Downey
Catherine Fife, Robin Martin
Lindsey Park, Ross Romano
Prabmeet Singh Sarkaria, Sandy Shaw
John Vanthof
Committee Clerk / Greffière: Valerie Quioc Lim