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CONTENTS / TABLE DES MATIÈRES

Wednesday 27 March 2019 / Mercredi 27 mars 2019

ORDERS OF THE DAY / ORDRE DU JOUR

Time allocation

Mr. Gilles Bisson	3861
Mr. Prabmeet Singh Sarkaria	3862
Mr. John Vanthof	3863
Mr. Sam Oosterhoff	3864
Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong	3866
Vote deferred.....	3867

Report, Environmental Commissioner

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott)	3867
-------------------------------------	------

Wearing of hockey jersey

Mr. Dave Smith.....	3867
---------------------	------

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS / PRÉSENTATION DES VISITEURS

Mr. Percy Hatfield.....	3867
Mr. Dave Smith.....	3867
Ms. Jill Andrew.....	3867
Mr. Rudy Cuzzetto.....	3868
Mr. Faisal Hassan.....	3868
Hon. Raymond Sung Joon Cho.....	3868
Mr. Chris Glover	3868
Mr. Randy Hillier.....	3868
Mr. Sheref Sabawy.....	3868
Mme France Gélinas	3868
Hon. Caroline Mulroney	3868
Hon. Michael A. Tibollo	3868
Ms. Andrea Khanjin.....	3868
Mr. Daryl Kramp.....	3868
Ms. Jane McKenna.....	3868
Mr. David Piccini.....	3868
Mr. Dave Smith.....	3868
Mr. Roman Baber.....	3868
Hon. Monte McNaughton	3868

ORAL QUESTIONS / QUESTIONS ORALES

Health care

Ms. Andrea Horwath.....	3869
Hon. Christine Elliott	3869

Health care

Ms. Andrea Horwath.....	3869
Hon. Christine Elliott	3870

Public transit

Ms. Andrea Horwath	3871
Hon. Doug Ford.....	3871

Taxation

Mr. Daryl Kramp.....	3871
Hon. Doug Ford.....	3871

Government accountability

Mr. Kevin Yarde	3872
Hon. Todd Smith	3872

Public safety

Ms. Christine Hogarth	3873
Hon. Caroline Mulroney	3873
Hon. Sylvia Jones	3873

Health care

Mr. Gurratan Singh	3873
Hon. Christine Elliott	3873

Public safety

Mr. Randy Hillier	3874
Hon. Sylvia Jones	3874

Public transit

Mrs. Robin Martin.....	3874
Hon. Jeff Yurek	3875

Education

Ms. Marit Stiles.....	3875
Hon. Lisa M. Thompson.....	3875

Beverage alcohol sales

Mr. Stan Cho	3876
Hon. Victor Fedeli.....	3876
Mr. Michael Parsa	3876

Fundraising

Mr. Gilles Bisson	3876
Hon. Todd Smith	3876

Energy policies

Mr. Doug Downey	3877
Hon. Greg Rickford.....	3877

Youth employment

Mr. Faisal Hassan.....	3877
Hon. Lisa M. Thompson.....	3878

Special-needs sports programs

Mr. Dave Smith.....	3878
Hon. Michael A. Tibollo	3878

World Theatre Day

Ms. Jill Andrew	3879
-----------------------	------

Visitors

Mr. Sheref Sabawy	3879
Mr. Deepak Anand	3879

DEFERRED VOTES / VOTES DIFFÉRÉS

Time allocation

Motion agreed to 3880

Order of business

Mr. Michael Coteau 3880

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS / PRÉSENTATION DES VISITEURS

Mr. Sheref Sabawy..... 3880

Mr. David Piccini..... 3880

Miss Monique Taylor..... 3880

Mrs. Nina Tangri..... 3880

Mrs. Belinda Karahalios..... 3880

Mrs. Amy Fee 3880

Order of business

Mr. Mike Schreiner..... 3881

Motion agreed to 3881

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS / DÉCLARATIONS DES DÉPUTÉS

Public transit

Mr. Peter Tabuns..... 3881

Arturo Comegna

Mr. Ross Romano 3881

Environmental protection

Mr. Ian Arthur..... 3881

International trade

Mr. Vincent Ke..... 3882

Ancaster arts centre

Ms. Sandy Shaw..... 3882

New Circles Community Services

Mr. Michael Coteau 3882

Crime prevention

Mr. Prabmeet Singh Sarkaria 3882

On Your Mark Academic Support Program

Ms. Marit Stiles..... 3883

Autism treatment

Mrs. Daisy Wai 3883

Assemblée parlementaire de la Francophonie

Ms. Natalia Kusendova 3883

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS / DÉPÔT DES PROJETS DE LOI

Teach the Reach Act, 2019, Bill 89, Ms. Stiles / Loi de 2019 sur l'enseignement de la méthode d'ouverture pivot, projet de loi 89, Mme Stiles

First reading agreed to..... 3883

Ms. Marit Stiles..... 3884

Lower Automobile Insurance Rates Act, 2019, Bill 90, Mr. Rakocevic / Loi de 2019 pour des taux d'assurance-automobile plus bas, projet de loi 90, M. Rakocevic

First reading agreed to..... 3884

Mr. Tom Rakocevic..... 3884

STATEMENTS BY THE MINISTRY AND RESPONSES / DÉCLARATIONS MINISTÉRIELLES ET RÉPONSES

Education reform

Hon. Lisa M. Thompson 3884

Ms. Marit Stiles..... 3887

Ms. Mitzie Hunter 3887

Mr. Mike Schreiner 3888

PETITIONS / PÉTITIONS

Veterans memorial

Mrs. Belinda Karahalios..... 3888

Animal protection

Mr. David Piccini 3888

Autism treatment

Miss Monique Taylor 3889

Veterans memorial

Mrs. Amy Fee..... 3889

Autism treatment

Mr. Jamie West 3889

Veterans memorial

Mr. Aris Babikian..... 3889

Autism treatment

Mr. Percy Hatfield..... 3889

Fish and wildlife management

Mr. Vincent Ke..... 3890

Autism treatment

Ms. Bhutila Karpoche 3890

Public safety

Mr. Deepak Anand..... 3890

Autism treatment

Mr. Faisal Hassan..... 3890

OPPOSITION DAY / JOUR DE L'OPPOSITION

Autism treatment / Traitement de l'autisme

Miss Monique Taylor 3891

Mrs. Amy Fee..... 3892

Ms. Andrea Horwath..... 3895

Mrs. Belinda Karahalios..... 3896

Mrs. Lisa Gretzky..... 3897

Mrs. Robin Martin..... 3898

Mr. Joel Harden..... 3898

Mr. Ross Romano	3899
Ms. Marit Stiles	3900
Mrs. Nina Tangri	3900
Ms. Catherine Fife	3901
Mme France G�linas.....	3902
Hon. Lisa MacLeod	3902
Ms. Bhutla Karpoche.....	3904
Miss Monique Taylor	3905
Motion agreed to.....	3906

**ADJOURNMENT DEBATE / D BAT SUR
LA MOTION D'AJOURNEMENT**

Autism treatment

Mr. John Fraser.....	3906
Mrs. Amy Fee.....	3907

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
OF ONTARIO

Wednesday 27 March 2019

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE
DE L'ONTARIO

Mercredi 27 mars 2019

The House met at 0900.

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

ORDERS OF THE DAY

TIME ALLOCATION

Resuming the debate adjourned on March 26, 2019, on the motion for time allocation of the following bill:

Bill 74, An Act concerning the provision of health care, continuing Ontario Health and making consequential and related amendments and repeals / Projet de loi 74, Loi concernant la prestation de soins de santé, la prorogation de Santé Ontario, l'ajout de modifications corrélatives et connexes et des abrogations.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): I understand when we last discussed this, the member for Timmins had the floor. I recognize the member for Timmins to continue.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. As you know, when we last debated this, I had proposed an amendment to the government's time allocation motion so that we actually find a way to give the public—the people who are the patients of our health care system, those who work in the health care system and those who pay for the health care system—an opportunity to come before a committee that travels through the province of Ontario in order to have their say on this bill.

Bill 74, we're told, is one of the largest transformations in health care in a generation or two. If that's true, I think then it's incumbent upon the province—and in this case, the Conservative government's responsibility—to make sure that, in fact, people have their say.

Mr. Speaker, you ran in the same election that we all ran in in this place. We don't ever remember, in the last election, the then Conservative Party saying, "We're going to do a great, big health transformation."

They talked about trying to deal with hallway medicine. Well, you can deal with hallway medicine by reversing the flatlined budgets that the Liberals put in place for five or six years that caused much of what the problems are in the health care system today. We all remember that. When the Wynne government was in place, and the McGuinty government before that, they froze our hospital budgets. As a result, hospital costs increase, hydro costs go up, wages go up, and more people come into the hospital. Costs went up and they couldn't operate within those limited budgets. What they ended up doing was having to close down departments, and it caused bed shortages, which then led to hallway medicine.

In the last election, the government didn't say, "Well, we're going to do a health transformation bill. In order to be able to do this, please vote for me." What they did is they talked about ending hallway medicine which, for a lot of people, could just mean, "We're going to actually properly finance hospitals in our province to be able to provide services to the people of this province."

We have said, by way of this amendment to the motion that we put forward today, that there needs to be an opportunity for the public to be heard. This is the people's legislation. This is the people's government. And if the people are to be respected, we need to make sure that they get an opportunity to be able to be heard when it comes to this particular bill.

As it stands now, the government, which is now just as bad and worse than the Liberals were when it comes to time allocation, have time-allocated this bill in such a way that there will only be short committee hearings here at Toronto. Well, I love the city of Toronto, Mr. Speaker; I think Toronto is a great city. But there are other great cities and towns across this province, where people live—people in your riding, my riding and other ridings across the province, who interact with the health care system, people in Pikangikum and others, who quite frankly want to be part of inputting what is the problem with our health care system and what they see as a solution. I think more and more as people look at this particular legislation, they may find it somewhat wanting when it comes to finding a solution to what we call "hallway medicine" and to other problems that we have in our health care system.

Now, I want to say this, very quickly. The government says the health care system is in crisis. There are a lot of things that you can attribute to the health care system, but you can hardly say it's in complete crisis because the reality is, if you get a heart attack in the province of Ontario or you get involved in a car accident, you will be dealt with and treated pretty well and very efficiently, very quickly. We have a very good health care system when it comes to taking care of those trauma-type things, especially things like heart attacks etc. It's a whole different story in the Far North, as my good friend the member from Kiiwetinoong knows. You're far away from centres of treatment so you have to fly everybody out in most cases. But the point is, we do well. Where we don't do well is on the elective side—surgeries for knees and hips, the types of surgeries and treatments that are not life-threatening. Those are the things that are the slowest.

The other big problem is the question of what goes on when it comes to hallway medicine. You have it in your hospitals, and I have it in my hospitals. People go into the emergency, they need a bed, and you're scrambling trying

to find a bed for the patient. You sometimes end up having to stay in the emergency for a night or two. Sometimes you end up in the hallway on the ward. That is not the way health care should work for all kinds of reasons—also dealing with all kinds of germs and things that you can catch that are, quite frankly, not good for your condition.

I think what's important here is, if the government is truly serious about being the government for the people, well then you should listen to the people. We have a mechanism, long-cherished in this Legislature, that allows us to travel our committees across the province. We should take the constituency week that's coming up in a couple of weeks, we should take the constituency week in the month of May and we should go to places like Ottawa, London, Kiiwetinoong and others in order to be able to hear from the people when it comes to what type of changes need to be made in our health care system.

If this government wants to shut out the people, then I say, a pox on their house because, quite frankly, that's not what this Legislature should be all about. This is the people's chamber. This is the people's government. If the government is not prepared to respect the people by allowing them to get access to the Legislature by way of committee, I think we're short shrift—and I think that doesn't bode well for the future of this government and it certainly does not bode well for democracy.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further debate?

Mr. Prabmeet Singh Sarkaria: Good morning to all. I'm honoured to discuss this piece of legislation in the form of time allocation because it's key piece of legislation that will be strengthening our public health care system. It's so important that we take this seriously and that we recognize that we need quick action, because the status quo just doesn't work right now. We know that because we've heard that from Ontarians across this province when speaking to our constituents when we're in our communities. We know that Ontario's health care system is currently on life support. That's completely unacceptable. The people of Ontario deserve better than this.

More than 1,000 patients are receiving care in hallways and in storage rooms every single day. Our government believes that this is unacceptable. No one should be forced to lie on stretchers in hospital, in the hallways, while receiving care.

0910

When the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care announced this piece of legislation—along with two amazing parliamentary secretaries, the member from Oakville North–Burlington and the member from Eglinton–Lawrence, who spent a lot of time speaking to so many constituents and really listening to Ontarians when putting this piece of legislation—there was a story that really stuck with me from that announcement that I wanted to once again highlight in the House. That was a story about a gentleman who was in very good health but suffered a catastrophic injury that left him in a quadriplegic condition, unfortunately.

His family worked incredibly hard with his community hospital to transfer him to a place where he could receive

rehabilitative services. While he was otherwise stable, he still required the services of a mechanical ventilator. So despite this progress, the only option he had to access a life-saving ventilator was to stay in intensive care in his community hospital. Mr. Speaker, he was there for 13 months. Can you imagine 13 months, day in and day out, in intensive care? Why was that? Because there was no other place available to serve his needs. There was no other place in Ontario that offered rehabilitation services to people with spinal cord injuries who require mechanical ventilation.

That's the problem we are facing in Ontario right now. It's because of stories like these that we are ready to challenge the status quo and put an end to years of health care inefficiencies in this province. I know that when I was knocking on doors during the election, I heard so many of these stories, and we continue to hear so many of these horror stories with our health care system. That's why we needed to challenge the status quo, and that's exactly what this piece of legislation does and exactly why we need to act on it as quickly as possible.

Under the leadership of Premier Ford, our government ran on a commitment to end hallway health care. I made that commitment to my constituents of Brampton South, and it's a commitment that we take very seriously. This has been a clear objective of our government since being elected. We have to do more to ensure that our publicly funded system of health care is sustainable into the future and, more importantly, that high-quality care is there for us or our loved ones when they need it most.

Too much time and attention is spent on maintaining a siloed and fragmented system. The fact is that patients and families are getting lost in the health care system. They need a system that will put their needs first. Far too many people believe that it is the patient's or family's job to navigate a complicated system during what is already one of the most traumatic and stress-filled times of their lives. Mr. Speaker, that just isn't right. Our government is proposing changes to this.

With Bill 74, our government sets out our vision for patient-centred community care through fostering the establishment of local Ontario health teams. Ontario health teams would be made up of local health care providers and would be organized in a way to enable the teams to work as a coordinated group. These teams would be built to guide patients between providers. They will exist to ease patients and their families through transition points in the health care system. They would share responsibility for care plans, service provisions and outcomes and, most importantly, they would take the guesswork out of navigating our health care system.

Our health care providers work tirelessly to provide the best care possible. They work hard to connect us to the services we need, and they currently do it in spite of the fact that they have few tools in order to make those connections. Our health care providers should be able to easily link us to needed care. Patients should not have to repeat their health care history over and over again to every health care provider they are linked to. Through Ontario

health teams, patients would finally have a say in their own health care journey.

With safeguards, of course, in place to protect information, our overall plan would improve access to secure digital tools, including online health records and virtual care options for patients. This legislation, if passed, would expand Ontario's health mandate in order to bring the best of our system together and form deep roots that would put health care in our province on a solid foundation for the future. This is a long-term plan that will take a lot of hard work, but our government is up to the task.

I would also like to mention that our plan has been well received by health care providers as well as patients. There are a couple of quotes from some of the care providers that we have heard from about our plan.

The first quote that I would like to share is by Anthony Dale, the president and CEO of the Ontario Hospital Association. He said, "Ontario's hospitals are encouraged by the prospect of working more closely with partners in their communities to find local solutions to better meet patient needs."

Sue VanderBent, CEO of Home Care Ontario, said, "We need all parts of the health care system working together to help patients stay at home and to get them back home from acute care as quickly as possible. The current system, unfortunately, is fragmented, siloed and makes that cooperation difficult."

The Ontario Medical Association, the Ontario Hospital Association, the Registered Nurses' Association of Ontario and Home Care Ontario are excited for these changes because they all know that our health care system is in dire need of transformational change. The fact is that we have world-class programs and services being developed and delivered through our various agencies across our province, but once again we have locked away the value of our system in silos. Our government is committed to amplifying the strength of what's working by bringing our resources together and comparing what ideas and successes can be translated to improve other programs, to bring a consistency of approach to our health care system, a common vision, a single point of oversight, a united effort to get from where we are to where we need to be.

During the election, Premier Ford and our entire government ran on a commitment to end hallway health care. We are fully committed to delivering on that promise. The Deputy Premier, her incredible team and our entire government are working very hard to fix the health care system in Ontario. If passed, The People's Health Care Act will build a public health care system centred around the patient. It will organize health care providers to work as one coordinated team and it will create a system that is focused on patients and specific local needs. By re-centering our health care system on patients, families and caregivers, Bill 74 will reduce wait times and will help end hallway health care.

In summary, I think it's very important that this piece of legislation is moved forward. The current system, which is on life support across this province—the status quo—is just not acceptable. I still remember so many

conversations at the door with so many of my constituents speaking to the issue of hallway health care, speaking to the issue that this piece of legislation is going to help address. Not only that, it's a piece of legislation that is going to coordinate with what our government is currently doing in our plan—that when we go back in a couple of years to the people of Ontario, we will be confident in knowing that we have done our part to make sure we end hallway health care and we improve our health care system.

0920

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further debate.

Mr. John Vanthof: It's always an honour to be able to speak in the House—but today, not so much an honour; today it's a duty, because today we are talking about a time allocation motion where the government wants to basically cut off the voices of the people of Ontario regarding Bill 74.

We just fought an election in the province where both officially recognized parties said that they wanted to put an end to hallway health care. The member across the way just said that. I think we can agree on that; we both want to stop that. During that election, the Premier said—he made a pretty big deal about, he wouldn't have a problem fixing the province's books, because it's only four cents on the dollar, and what business person couldn't take four cents on the dollar? That's about as much as was said: ending hallway health care and four cents on the dollar.

But now it has been said that this is going to be the biggest transformation in the delivery of health care in the province since the inception of our public health care system.

Speaker, Premier Ford may have some qualities, but he is no Tommy Douglas.

What is most concerning—and all this debate is about, really, is, the official opposition wants to ensure that the people across Ontario have a right to have their voices heard before this transformation is made. That is all that this debate is about, because this time allocation motion prevents that.

So the government is talking about the biggest transformation in modern history, but they don't want to actually hear the people of the province. It's the government that claims to be for the people; they just don't want to talk to the people.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Only some people.

Mr. John Vanthof: Yes, some people—behind-closed-doors type of people.

This whole issue is about holding public hearings over a couple of weeks across the province. That is what this whole issue is about. Why this government is afraid to do that is beyond me, because any government should want to hear from as many people as possible. Over the long run, it's not going to delay this legislation very much, and you will actually hear voices from across the province.

One thing I have learned since I have come here is—all of us come from specific parts of the province. We want to serve our people—all members in the House want to do

that—but we all come from very different places and we have very different experiences. It's an incredible honour and a privilege for me to have learned about some of those experiences from some members on my own side and members on the government side.

While you're contemplating making this huge transformation, why wouldn't you want to get the experiences of people across the province before you go ahead with this transformation? Why? It's beyond me.

A few weeks of hearings across the province—it's basically due diligence. You've said yourselves, "This is the biggest transformation in history since Tommy Douglas invented it." Well then, it's due diligence that you should go across the province, listen to people across the province, and actually see what people's ideas are to help you fix it, if you can fix it; what people's ideas are about problems you've never encountered in your own part of the world.

Just one problem: If you came to Timmins or Kirkland Lake—I have a constituent who went for an MRI, from Kirkland Lake to Timmins. That's an emergency service for a test. The ambulance takes you—great, right? It sounds pretty simple. But after you've had the test, it's no longer an emergency procedure. Mike Checkley went on March 9 to Timmins for an MRI. He was on a stretcher in Timmins until March 13, because in parts of northern Ontario there is no patient transfer service. But unless you go to northern Ontario and hear Mike, and hear people like Mike, you're not going to understand the full impact of that. It's great that Mike reached out to me and I get to tell this story, but it's not about me. You need to hear this from Mike and from his wife and from all of the people—as many people as possible.

I can't understand how you guys can have plaques on your desks, saying, "For the people," and you have a chance to go talk to people through the committee system, which has been built over decades—centuries. You say you're for the people. You have a chance to talk to the people. The people would be very happy to see us because they want input on this bill. It would be actually to your advantage because you could actually explain it to the people, but for some reason, you don't want to. I don't understand.

Folks on the government side, you should actually go talk to the corner office and say, "You know what? Maybe we should actually follow what the plaque says and go to talk to the people," especially on this one. This one is going to be landmark legislation. If it doesn't work, or if it doesn't work as well as you think it's going to work—obviously you think it's going to work because you're speaking in favour of it—you're going to wear it.

Tommy Douglas was voted the greatest Canadian because he laid the foundation of our publicly funded, publicly delivered health care system. I sincerely hope, for my children's sake, my constituents' sake and their children's sake, that your legacy isn't that you were the last ones to tear it down. The only way you're going to be able to say, "We did our due diligence," is actually to take all of the tools you have at your disposal. You're a majority

government. You can just say, "You know what? We're going to talk to the people—a couple of weeks of hearings. We're going to actually go to where the finance committee didn't want to go. We're going to go to Pikangikum and see how we could fix our health care system in Pikangikum, to see how this"—whatever you call it, your MyCare health care, however your new system is going to work. How is that going to work in Pikangikum? The best way to see that is to go to Pikangikum and say, "You know, we're thinking about doing this. What do you think?" Go to Belleville and say, "We're thinking about doing this. What do you think?" Right? That makes sense. That makes perfect sense. Go to every region in this province and say, "Here's what we're proposing. What do you think?" And then you base your amendments or your legislation on what the people think. That's what a true government for the people would do, and for whatever reason, you're refusing to do it. You're refusing to use the tools you have at your disposal.

We're not talking rocket science here: Travelling committees have been used for years and years and years. This isn't rocket science. No one is going to complain if the provincial government spends a bit of money travelling their representatives around to actually listen to people from the province. You could even use a bus. What is the problem here? In the overall length of time in this bill, judging from what we see in this bill, this transformation is going to take a few years. So what is the problem taking a few weeks—actually, not delaying the calendar at all, because these are constituency weeks—and developing a schedule and going to talk to the people who are going to be impacted by this for years and years and years? What is the problem? Why won't you do this? Because, as much as the Premier gives out his phone number, not everybody is going to be able to phone the Premier—

0930

Mr. Gilles Bisson: The Premier's not always answering.

Mr. John Vanthof: Yeah, and the Premier doesn't always answer.

You have the opportunity. You have the tools at your disposal. You have the people at your disposal, the staff—a very competent legislative staff—to do this. You have all the tools to make this legislation the best it could be. We disagree with the premise, but you have the tools to make this legislation the best it could be, and you're refusing to use them. That is a travesty, and that is also proof that, really, many of you sitting here can say "for the people" as much as you want, but deep down you don't believe it, because you're afraid to actually listen to the people.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further debate?

Mr. Sam Oosterhoff: It's a great privilege to be able to rise today in the Legislature and participate in the debate on Bill 74, The People's Health Care Act. I know that there has been a great deal of work that has gone into this piece of legislation. Before I begin really speaking about some of the improvements, some of the need for improvement

that is seen across this province and the reason this piece of legislation is being brought forward, I want to take a couple of moments and recognize the excellent Minister of Health and Long-Term Care, the member who has done just a wonderful job on bringing together a lot of different people's perspectives on health care. There are a lot of different perspectives on what needs to happen in order to fix it. Also, I want to recognize the member for Eglinton-Lawrence, the parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care, for the excellent work she has done, as well as the member for Oakville North-Burlington, who has also just been an exemplary representative of her constituents and has travelled this province—I might add, in response to the earlier debate from the member from Timiskaming-Cochrane—speaking with countless members of the public, countless front-line professionals and countless people who have been involved in the health care system for a great deal of time, speaking with them about the issues that are so important to them.

The message we heard loud and clear was that we can't waste time. We can't waste time on more bureaucratic red tape, on more time spent in conversation, more time spent in committees to strike reports, to bring back surveys, to write reports, to bring back more committees and create round tables. We can't waste time on the treadmill that is the bureaucratic ennui that we can see in institutions—and unfortunately, what we saw for the last 15 years, because for 15 years the people of Ontario had a government that liked to talk about health care, that liked to talk about speaking to people, but never actually made the changes that were necessary to end hallway health care and to bring the health care people expect and deserve in the province of Ontario to fruition. Speaker, that is not what our government is going to do. Our government was elected on a clear commitment to end the hallway health care, and that means making the decisions that need to be made to get our publicly funded education—or our publicly funded health care system back on track.

I want to speak a little bit about—

Interjection: And the education one too.

Mr. Sam Oosterhoff: Yes, and education as well, as the member so aptly notes. All the systems—we're getting all them back on track.

I wanted to provide a little context to the House about why I'm supporting this legislation and why I think it's such an excellent step in the right direction for the future of our province and the future of health care here in Ontario and also for the constituents of Niagara West. I had the great privilege of also serving in the 41st Parliament. Some of those who are newer in this House may not remember what that was like, but I want to tell you, serving in opposition is a great privilege. It's a great responsibility, and I want to commend those who are serving in opposition for the important work that they do, because, frankly, it's not easy being in opposition. There is a lot of information that you don't always have access to. It can be difficult to get answers occasionally. I just want to thank the members for the work that they do in holding governments to

account. I did that myself as a member of the opposition for a year and a half.

It was a very good experience to see how an effective opposition can point out where a government can improve and where their priorities should lie. In that time, something I heard time and time again from my constituents was the lack of action on the part of the Liberal government, the lack of action when it came to the resources that were needed and the integration that was needed to address the challenges facing health care in the province of Ontario.

I want to read to this House a little bit from a letter—I have a whole stack of letters that came in at different points over the course of my service to the constituents of, first, Niagara West-Glanbrook and now Niagara West. I'm going to change the name for the sake of the House. They didn't want me to share the name, but I am allowed to quote from this letter. It says:

"I am writing to you about some of the difficulties and frustrations patients and caregivers are dealing with as the home care system continues to decline." This was on August 22, 2017.

"The home care system is so terribly disconnected and difficult to navigate that I (a young healthy person) find it completely daunting and exhausting to deal with. As hard as this is for me, it fills me with deep concern and worry that many unwell, or older unwell people, are finding it so frustrating to deal with that they are simply giving up and thus are not getting the help they need. I can't imagine how an ill person (with no one helping or advocating for them) would manage to deal with what I have had to deal with in the last four years.

"If I did not constantly advocate for my mother, and if it were not for the help of our local" MPP, "I am almost certain CCAC, and now the LHIN, would not support my mother's care needs.

"Since the system is so fragmented, it takes an enormous amount of time and energy for me to navigate it....

"How much of the allotted home care money actually gets used on the patients? How much is wasted on overpaid, overstaffed higher-ups who are out of touch with the actual needs of patients?

"Does anyone oversee the LHIN? Why is there no independent department to objectively listen to the issues clients are having with the LHIN or with other agencies?"

As you can see, Speaker, she goes on for pages and pages. These are just a couple of paragraphs. She asked me—this was, again, when I was in opposition—to promise to work towards an integrated health care system that put the patient at the centre, that stopped pouring endless amounts of dollars into paper-pushers' pockets, but really focused on what patients needed, and that was a more streamlined system, one that was responsive.

Speaker, I was just jotting down a couple of words here, thinking about what are some words that people use to describe Ontario's health care system. When I speak with my constituents in Niagara West, have the privilege of knocking on their doors and speaking with them about the issues that matter to them, I hear words like "fragmented"

and I hear words like “disconnected” and “difficult to navigate.”

What I want to hear when I knock on doors, and what I’m confident Bill 74 will finally bring to this province, are words like “nimble,” “responsive,” “holistic,” and “patient-centred.” These are the goals of the Progressive Conservative government; these are the goals of the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care; and these are the goals of all of us, as a team, who put our names on the ballot last year, because we believed in ending hallway health care and we believed in getting this province back on track. I’m very confident that the legislation before us today will be the piece of legislation that finally does that—that finally listens to the patients, that finally integrates services in a way that isn’t pouring tens of millions, in fact, hundreds of millions of dollars, into the pockets of hospital CEOs and bureaucratic make-work projects, but really focuses on front-line care in a way that the people of Ontario haven’t seen in a long, long time.

That’s really the motivation for all of us here on this side. It’s our motivation to make sure that as we make these changes to the health care system, each and every person in the province of Ontario can access health care when and where they need it. It’s about making sure that each and every person in this great province doesn’t have to worry about whether or not they’re going to have to spend the evening or the whole night or perhaps days in a hallway, like thousands of people do each and every day in the province of Ontario.

Our government committed to the people of Ontario during the election campaign that we would end hallway health care, and we’re committed to that promise. This is about creating a system where family doctors, hospitals, and home and community care providers work together in unison as a team and where, within these teams, providers can communicate directly with each other, creating a seamless care experience for the patient and their families. I’m so proud to support this bill.

0940

I can’t speak about health care without talking about our beloved West Lincoln Memorial Hospital in Grimsby. This is a hospital, Speaker, that the former Liberal government promised twice to build. When I was born there in 2000—sorry, not 2000; I’m young but not that young—in 1997, there were protests to keep that hospital open. So, when I was born there, my community was fighting for a new hospital, and the West Lincoln Memorial Hospital was promised to my community in 2005, cancelled in 2007, promised again in 2009, cancelled again in the 2012 budget.

But finally, after years and years of waiting for health care that works for the people, I had the great privilege of welcoming the Premier to West Lincoln with a firm commitment to build the West Lincoln Memorial Hospital in Grimsby. This is something that is just a sign of our government’s commitment to ending hallway health care, building the services that Ontarians expect and deserve, and making sure that we have a truly patient-centred system.

Thank you, Speaker, for giving me an opportunity to come and speak to this bill.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further debate? The member from London–Fanshawe.

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: Thank you, Speaker. On a Wednesday morning, that’s a lot of enthusiasm. That’s a good thing. We need enthusiasm in this Legislature. We need motivation in this Legislature.

When we talk about bills like Bill 74, which is a transformational change to health care like we have never seen before, we have to make sure we’re motivated to consult with the broader population and not just in this Legislature. That’s when we come to that point when we’ve debated the bill here in the Legislature, we’ve all had our time to do that, and then the government decides that it’s enough debate and wants to take it to committee.

In this case, it’s unfortunate that we’re seeing the kind of process where it’s really a short time where people are able to present to the committee. You have only until Thursday at noon, so I am making an announcement to the public who is watching about the presentations that are being offered on Bill 74 by this government. You only have from today until tomorrow at noon to submit your intention to present at the committee. That is not a lot of time. We have to remember that we have to give people enough time, so they can work around their schedules, to come to give their input on this legislation. Members have talked about how this is going to be the most significant change in this province when it comes to health care, but we’re not giving it the significant time it needs to hear from the people it affects. That’s the front-line people and that would be people who use health care.

I can tell you, in London–Fanshawe, I have met with a mother over the years. Her daughter has a rare disease. She has been trying to get health care through London Health Sciences Centre. What she has had to do is go to the States many times and pay out of her pocket. So, when this government talks about the most transformational change under public health care, they forget to tell us that they’re going to deliver it in a public, not-for-profit way. So, I would like them to hear from this mother and explain to them how she has had to pay out-of-pocket for services in the States. She has had to mortgage her house. She has had to take out lines of credit. That’s not the way health care should work.

When we’re talking about having the committee hold its presentations, you need to hear from people who use it, who have said they want it to be not-for-profit public health care delivery. Maybe during committee, when these people come to tell you—they want to hear from the mouths of the government members that you’re going to keep our public health care system a public health care delivery, not for-profit. They never say that and that is concerning. That is very concerning because sometimes what you don’t say says a lot.

So, why is it so hard for this government to want to travel a bill throughout this province to hear from the people of London, specifically? I remember coming to this Legislature, Speaker, and talking about all kinds of health

care issues—I still do it today—and about how London was affected. We had the under-dosing of chemotherapy drugs. You were here when that happened. We had this Ornge scandal. You were here when that happened. In those two cases, there was privatization involved.

We heard about mental health. I know London was one of the first ones that talked about how people were waiting in the hallway for days and they weren't getting help, and then they were discharged into the community, where they didn't have the resources, and the long wait-list to talk to someone in mental health: a doctor, a psychiatrist.

Here is the problem: Toronto, as the member from Timmins said, is a wonderful city. But we need to hear robust presentations from throughout the province. Yes, you have your two hearings here in Toronto, but not everybody can get to Toronto. That's why, when we put the amendment forward, we are cognizant that we need to hear from everyone.

Why is this government so—I want to say “belligerent,” but I don't know if that's out of order, but—so belligerent and not wanting to pay attention to what other people are letting them know, what other people have to say? When you talk about, “We've consulted over so many thousands of people,” and then they come up with this autism policy, and people come to this Legislature railing against it, screaming, yelling, being escorted out, you haven't listened to all of the people. That's what we're saying when we put this amendment forward: You must listen to more than just the people you think can get here in that short amount of time, in two days, April 1 and April 2.

We need to have more robust consultation. Open up your consultation process, because what's going to happen is, you are going to find that people who use the system are the ones who are going to pay for your mistakes, and then hopefully later, during an election, you will suffer those consequences. You will take responsibility in different ways for what you've done to people who use the system.

Autism is a perfect example. They made some changes. We don't want people coming here with wheelchairs and canes and walkers and in poor health, telling this government that they did it wrong, that they privatized the system and they didn't tell the people, and then they are suffering, because profits don't belong in public health care. Publicly funded health care should be publicly delivered, not-for-profit health care, because what happens is, all of the dollars that are used in the public health care delivery system are for front-line patient care. When it's a privatized system, people want to profit from health care delivery and so they squeeze those public dollars that they get when they're privately delivering health care because they want to see a profit. They're in the business of profit-ing.

Open up the consultation process on Bill 74—a huge change to health care. Let's hear from people who use it, and let's be up front with how you're going to deliver health care that should be not-for-profit public health care.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further debate? Further debate?

Mr. Bisson has moved an amendment to government notice of motion number 33, relating to allocation of time on Bill 74, An Act concerning the provision of health care, continuing Ontario Health and making consequential and related amendments and repeals.

Is it the pleasure of the House that Mr. Bisson's amendment 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.

A recorded vote being required, it will be deferred until after question period today.

Vote deferred.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Orders of the day? I recognize the government House leader.

Hon. Todd Smith: No further business, Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): No further business. This House will now stand recessed until 10:30.

The House recessed from 0950 to 1030.

REPORT, ENVIRONMENTAL COMMISSIONER

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): I beg to inform the House that the following document has been tabled: the 2019 Energy Conservation Progress Report from the Environmental Commissioner of Ontario.

WEARING OF HOCKEY JERSEY

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Point of order: the member from Peterborough–Kawartha.

Mr. Dave Smith: I seek unanimous consent today, on Special Hockey Day, to wear the jersey of one of the special-needs hockey teams in my riding.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The member from Peterborough–Kawartha is seeking the unanimous consent of the House to wear a Special Hockey Day sweater. Agreed? Agreed.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

Mr. Percy Hatfield: I wish to welcome Terry Yaldo from Midway Convenience in my riding. He's with the convenience stores association, who are here today. Welcome to Queen's Park, Terry.

Mr. Dave Smith: I'd like to welcome a number of special hockey teams to the Legislature today: the Colorado Ice Wizards from Colorado, the Durham Dragons, the Grandravine Tornados, the Guelph Giants, the Kitchener Ice Pirates, the Mississauga Crusaders, the St. Louis Blues special hockey team, and my personal favourite name, the Werewolves of London.

Ms. Jill Andrew: It is with great pleasure that I welcome Toronto District School Board students in the visitors' gallery today from Forest Hill Collegiate, Northview Heights Secondary and North Toronto Collegiate, who are spending the day with the NDP caucus touring Queen's

Park and exploring career journeys in politics and advocacy.

Thank you to the teachers, student equity program advisers and guardians who helped make this happen: Dr. Amita Handa, Kevin Sutton, Mary Karas, Miranda Cimera and Deborah Haines.

And a shout-out to the Sickle Cell Association of Ontario, and my god-daughter who is in the room, Jecema Hewitt Vasil.

Mr. Rudy Cuzzetto: Today I want to welcome the parents of Elizabeth Becke, our page captain, Joanne Becke and Larry Becke, as well as her friends Alanna Cameron and Kelli Cameron. Thank you for being here.

Mr. Faisal Hassan: I would like to welcome Stephen Mensah, a young man who is a leader in my riding of York South–Weston. Stephen, welcome to Queen’s Park.

Hon. Raymond Sung Joon Cho: I am very honoured and happy to introduce very important visitors from a very, very important organization, the Ontario Convenience Stores Association. They are Noah Aychental, chair; Wendy Kadlovski, Nicholby’s; Solomon Kim, Kitchen Food Fair; Nick Novakovich, That’s Entertainment; Yvonne Farah, Hasty Market; Nick Jabbour, Hasty Market; Jamie Arnold, Little Short Stop Stores; Terry Yaldo, Midway Convenience; James Moretti, Avondale Food Stores; Peter Flach, Rabba Fine Foods; Victor Vrsnik, 7-Eleven Stores; Winston Zhang, Organic Market; Tony Gallo, New York News; Kenny Shim, OKBA; Manish Thakker, Vani’s Convenience, independent; and, last but not least, the CEO of the Ontario Convenience Stores Association, Mr. Dave Bryans. Welcome to Queen’s Park.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): We’re running out of time. I would ask the members to keep their introductions as brief as possible.

Mr. Chris Glover: It’s with great pleasure I welcome to the House, from the Canadian Federation of Students, Kayla Weiler and Aleksei Shkurin; from the College Student Alliance, Justin Paolo Lim, Jecema Hewitt and Andrew MacNeil; from Centennial College, Miguel Meneses, Maria Peraza and Ivan Sharma; and from York University, Keith Davis. Welcome to the House.

Mr. Randy Hillier: I’d like to welcome to the Legislature Kristen Ellison from Cobourg, who is here as an advocate for children with autism and disabilities. Kristen, welcome to Queen’s Park.

Mr. Sheref Sabawy: I’m honoured to welcome the UTM Campus Conservatives and the president, Arsham Moradi. Welcome to Queen’s Park.

M^{me} France Gélinas: I would like to welcome Lisa Bailey, Serena Thompson, Alvin Merchant and Ulysse Guerrier from the Sickle Cell Association of Ontario. Welcome to Queen’s Park.

Hon. Caroline Mulroney: I would like to welcome constituents from my riding of York Simcoe: Robin Konstantopolous and her daughter Aristeia, who are here; as well as Jennifer Turner, who’s here for the first time.

Hon. Michael A. Tibollo: It’s truly an honour for me this morning to welcome to the Legislature Father Gianni Carparelli, the founder of Caritas, along with guests from

Italy Gabriele and Danila Petti, Tonino and Vincenza Foglietti, and Augustine and Rosella Benedetto. Benvenuti a Queen’s Park.

Ms. Andrea Khanjin: It’s my great pleasure to introduce our visitors from the Sickle Cell Awareness Group who are here with us today: Lanre Tunji-Ajayi; Doreen Alexander; Juliana Cassidy; Evet Saddler-Walters; Jacob Pendergrast; John, Marinela, Janine and Joshua Agapay; Princess Sanusi; Ade Omishore; MaryAnn Gordon; and lastly, Nevaya Wilkins. Welcome.

Mr. Daryl Kramp: I would like to welcome a number of people from my riding here today—great volunteers. To follow the Speaker’s wishes, I’ll make this as quick as I can. I’ll do it very, very quickly.

I’d like to welcome: Marg Werry, Elaine Badgely, Hubert Hogle, Elaine Rice, Geoff Webster, Shaune Lucas, Karen Hampel, Ian Hampel, John Wilson, Susan Cook, Rita Steele, Laurel Taylor, Barry Wannamaker, Nancy Fisher, Roy Willis, Bob Merrick, Donna Shabinsky, Brant Wilson, Lyle McKeown, Ron Reid, Ken Sinclair, Shelby Lawrence, Ross Sarles, William Lyons, Kelly Mumby, Linda McQuay, Chris Seeley, Bonnie Gryce and Tony Balasevicius.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Well said.

Ms. Jane McKenna: I’d like to just say a warm welcome this morning to Dave Bryans—I’ve known him and his beautiful wife, Jan, for many, many years—from the Ontario Convenience Stores Association.

Mr. David Piccini: I, too, would like to welcome Kristen Ellison, a constituent of mine who’s here at Queen’s Park, and to thank her for all her work in helping me organize a great round table with parents of children with autism in my riding just this past weekend.

Mr. Dave Smith: I have a second introduction. I have my constituency staff, Brock Terry and Andrea Dodsworth, in the Speaker’s gallery. Andrea also represents the Electric City Maroon & White.

From the Ontario Waterpower Association—with their headquarters also in my riding—I have Stephen Somerville, Heather Ferguson, Scott Stoll, Samantha Clarke and Paul Norris.

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

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Point of order, the member for Ottawa South.

Mr. John Fraser: Speaker, I received an email from the member from Glengarry–Prescott–Russell, who is unable to be here today. I am seeking unanimous consent to ask her question during question period.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The member for Ottawa South is seeking the unanimous consent of the House to ask a question in the place of the member for Glengarry–Prescott–Russell. Agreed? I heard a no.

Just a couple more members want to do introductions.

Mr. Roman Baber: I’d like to welcome to the House Angela Brandt and Misha Brandt, two special constituents, and to congratulate Misha Brandt on his bar mitzvah earlier this week on Sunday, which I had the pleasure to attend.

Hon. Monte McNaughton: I know they’re not in the House, but I will be welcoming to Queen’s Park later

today a very good friend of mine, a great public servant to the people of Lambton–Kent–Middlesex. Retiring MP Bev Shipley will be here today, as well as the new Conservative candidate in Lambton–Kent–Middlesex, Lianne Rood. I'm looking forward to welcoming them to Queen's Park.

1040

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The member for Orléans is standing.

Mrs. Marie-France Lalonde: Yes. I'm asking my colleagues for unanimous consent to ask a question on behalf of the member for Glengarry–Prescott–Russell, who has given written permission to ask a question on her behalf this morning.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The member for Orléans is asking unanimous consent of the House to ask a question in place of the member for Glengarry–Prescott–Russell. Agreed? I heard some noes.

ORAL QUESTIONS

HEALTH CARE

Ms. Andrea Horwath: My question is for the Premier. Yesterday, the government stated that they plan to set strict criteria for organizations that want to bid for health care contracts from the government's new mega-agency for health care. Will one of the criteria be excluding companies seeking private profit from public health care?

Hon. Doug Ford: Minister of Health.

Hon. Christine Elliott: I thank the leader of the official opposition for the question, but the point of the changes we are making to modernize our health care system is to centre care around patients, families and caregivers. There will be strict criteria for any organizations that wish to become a local Ontario health team. Generally speaking, they will be centred around being able to manage the funds that will be allocated to them and to spend those funds appropriately, to maintain the quality of care that's expected of them, to make sure that all health organizations are properly funded and able to deliver that care, and they will be required to continue to have patients, family members and caregivers be included in the design and implementation of the work that they do going forward.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Supplementary.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Well, Speaker, it also seems that the government is planning to centre profits around their friends in the private sector. It's concerning that the Ford government can't provide a simple answer on this, an answer that the public deserves. Yesterday, I asked specifically about private surgery services. A company called Advance Surgical Operatory in London, Ontario, wants the government's green light to expand procedures available at their private, for-profit surgery clinic.

Will the government exclude private operating rooms from their so-called Ontario health teams: yes or no? Please tell the public. They deserve an answer.

Interjections.

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

The question is referred to the Minister of Health.

Hon. Christine Elliott: Well, here is the answer to your question: We are centering care on patients, families and caregivers. We are strengthening our public health care system. If there are any funds left over in any particular year that are given to any local Ontario health team, they will be reinvested back into that public health care system the next year.

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

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Families have a hard time believing the government's commitment to defending public health care. The answers are not clear, and this government is not admitting to their plans when it comes to the privatization of our health care system. Perhaps it's because the same operating room that is so desperate to break into our health system got a personal visit from the Premier during last year's election campaign. Perhaps it's because the Premier himself said that he would leave "no stone unturned" in his hunt to privatize public services like health care.

I'm going to ask the Premier: Why is he unwilling to make a basic commitment to keep private, for-profit health services out of their Ontario health teams?

Interjections.

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

Stop the clock. Okay, we're just getting started. I'm going to ask the government to come to order. I have to be able to hear the questions. I have to be able to focus on what the Leader of the Opposition is saying. You would expect me to do so.

Start the clock. Response, Minister.

Hon. Christine Elliott: Through you, Speaker, I would say to the leader of the official opposition that she continues to ignore the fact that about 30% of our current health care services are delivered by companies that are privately owned but are paid for through the government, through our public health care system. Nothing is going to change from that under our new plan.

We are modernizing the system. We want to make sure that patients and families receive the truly connected care that they need.

Why the leader of the official opposition and her party continue this fearmongering—scaring patients, particularly seniors, is not responsible.

We are strengthening and modernizing our public health care system to make sure that patients receive better, more connected care. That's the end; that's what we're doing.

HEALTH CARE

Ms. Andrea Horwath: My next question is also for the Premier. Last night, I heard from residents from across Brampton about the state of their health care. They're

concerned about long hospital waits and getting the services that they need. They've already seen first-hand the risks of private, for-profit hospitals when the last Conservative government made their community the guinea pig for Ontario's first private P3 hospital.

This government should not be proud of their record on privatization. Whether it's in P3 hospitals or home care, they have made a mess of our health care system with their privatization drive.

That project delivered fewer beds while draining away public health dollars into private profits.

The government's omnibus health bill threatens to open the door even wider to unprecedented levels of private, for-profit health care.

Will the government amend their bill to keep private profits out of our public health care system?

Interjections.

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

Premier?

Hon. Doug Ford: Minister of Health.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The question is referred to the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care.

Hon. Christine Elliott: Thank you very much, Speaker. Again, through you, I would suggest to the leader of the official opposition that there is nothing to amend in Bill 74 because there's no drive towards privatization; there is nothing of the sort. What we are doing is modernizing our public health care system.

The situation that she refers to in Brampton is something that is happening across the province. That's what we're trying to fix.

We have a situation where 1,200 patients, every day across this province, receive health care in hallways of hospitals, storage rooms and other inappropriate places. We are trying to limit that.

We want to eliminate hallway health care and make sure that people receive the care in the places where they should—in safe, appropriate, clean environments—and that our great health care providers in Ontario are able to deliver the care that they want.

This truly connected care is going to help keep patients out of hospitals and create safe places—

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

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Speaker, the people of Brampton aren't looking for more private, for-profit health care or a mega health agency. They know that right now their dollars are being siphoned off into the pockets of private interests instead of being utilized for front-line care. They want investments in front-line care to ensure that they're not stuck in an ER hallway waiting days and days for treatment, or wondering how they can support loved ones without access to home care.

They remember the last time a Conservative government promised them that private, for-profit health care would improve their hospitals, and the waits are longer than ever because of that ill-advised direction that this party took us the last time they were in government.

Will the government amend their new health omnibus bill to ensure that the door is closed to private, for-profit health care?

Hon. Christine Elliott: Speaker, again through you: I would say that what the leader of the official opposition is talking about is absolute, complete and utter nonsense.

What we are doing is strengthening our public health care system. Bill 74 reflects that. We are talking about that here, to people in communities. I can tell you that I have done a lot of travelling since we've announced this bill. I've been to communities across Ontario—North Bay, Bracebridge, Ottawa, Northumberland, my own riding of Newmarket—Aurora—and people are excited about what we're bringing forward.

Providers cannot wait to apply to become local Ontario health teams, because they know that right now there are many impediments that are in place through the Ministry of Health—funding silos that have been set up that inhibit them from being able to communicate with each other. They want to do that. They want to be providing excellent patient care. That's what Bill 74 will provide.

I hope you will come and support us on it.

Interjections.

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

Start the clock. Final supplementary?

1050

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Speaker, I direct the minister and the Premier to the 2007 Auditor General's report that clearly shows that that P3 hospital in Brampton was built at a far higher cost than it should have been and delivered fewer beds than it should have and cost us more in interest payments and operating costs over time than it should have cost us because the dollars went into the pockets of private interests and not into the development of a proper hospital in Brampton.

Last night, I heard that those folks in Brampton want a health care system that they can count on, not one that feathers the nests of Conservative friends. Instead, they see a government laying off nurses and health professionals, making decisions behind closed doors and posing for photo ops at private health clinics.

There is a simple way that the government could gain some trust from the people of Ontario today—a simple way that they can gain some trust. When the Premier refused to acknowledge, on the campaign trail, that he was going to privatize health care—now he can get that trust back. Will the government amend their new health omnibus bill to ensure that the door is closed to private, for-profit health care?

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Please stop the clock.

I'm sorry to interrupt. The member for Kitchener—Conestoga has to come to order. The Minister of Natural Resources and Forestry has to come to order. The member for Niagara West has to come to order. The member for King—Vaughan has to come to order.

Start the clock. The minister to reply.

Hon. Christine Elliott: Speaker, again, through you: I would have to remind the leader of the official opposition that the hospital she referred to was built by the previous Liberal government. It had nothing to do with the Progressive Conservative government. The one thing we can agree on: 15 years of complete mismanagement and total disregard for patients.

What patients in Ontario need: That's what we're concentrating on with Bill 74. There is no need to amend that bill, because there is no element of privatization there. We are concentrating on strengthening our public health care system. We want to make sure that the people of Brampton and people across the province of Ontario can continue to access our public health care system for their services, that we can reduce their wait times, that we can connect their services, that we can make sure that they receive faster care.

All of those things are dealt with in Bill 74. So, please, I would urge you to read it again and support it.

PUBLIC TRANSIT

Ms. Andrea Horwath: My next question is to the Premier. For months, the Premier has insisted that he has a great track record when it comes to building transit, which comes as a surprise—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Stop the clock. Members please take their seats.

Start the clock. The Leader of the Opposition has the floor.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: —to people who watched him at Toronto city hall, where he did a far better job of tearing plans up rather than getting anything built.

Now it looks like he's at it again, Speaker. Last night, the Toronto Star revealed that the Ford government is ripping up Toronto's transit plans and insisting that they follow a vague new plan that includes a privatized relief line.

Why is the Premier meddling with long-established transit plans, and why is he determined to delay and destroy transit plans that are already approved and under way in Toronto?

Hon. Doug Ford: Through you, Mr. Speaker: When it comes to transportation, we're just beginning. It's nothing you've seen yet. We're going to build proper transit here in Toronto. We're going to finally get subways built, to get people from point A to point B right across the GTA. We're extending Eglinton. We're making sure we're building the downtown relief line. We're helping the people of Scarborough. My friends in Scarborough, help is on its way. We're going to be building transportation. We have a great announcement today from the Minister of Transportation: \$1.2 billion of infrastructure around Ontario. We're finally getting this province moving.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Supplementary?

Ms. Andrea Horwath: People in Toronto simply want transit that works. Instead, they have a Premier who seems more interested in wasting billions of dollars in rewriting

plans, delaying construction, issuing demands and privatizing transit lines so his well-connected friends can turn a profit.

The people of Ontario shouldn't be stuck with the bill because the Premier of the province decides, once again, that he wants to play mayor of Toronto. The people of Toronto deserve transit that works, not a plan written in crayon by the Premier, who has never met a transit plan he couldn't derail.

Will the Premier stop meddling, stop privatizing and work with the city of Toronto to get transit built?

Hon. Doug Ford: Through you, Mr. Speaker, again, we're going to build, build, build, subways, subways, subways around the GTA and around Toronto. We're expanding right across Ontario.

A great announcement is happening—\$1.2 billion. You'll be hearing from the best Minister of Transportation you could ever ask for. He's so busy, he can't keep up with the announcements. There are announcements every single day, no matter if it's making sure we extend GO, or making sure that we build roads and fix the roads, or building the greatest transportation system in the world.

We are putting more money into infrastructure than anyone in North America. We're going to be putting tens of billions of dollars into building infrastructure across this province.

TAXATION

Mr. Daryl Kramp: My question today is to our Premier. Last week, the Premier joined the Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs and the Minister of the Environment, Conservation and Parks down in Oxford to discuss the impacts of the federal carbon tax with some of the leaders in our agricultural sectors.

Farmers in my riding made it very, very clear that the federal carbon tax is going to cost them dearly in every aspect of their operations. Farmers are already some of our best stewards of the land. They've made their living for generations by preserving their land for their livestock, their crops, and to pass down to their families. Our government has been working hard to bring our farmers' cost of business down by scrapping the Green Energy Act and the disastrous cap-and-trade program.

Can our Premier please tell us what he has heard from the agriculture industry leaders on the impact of the disgusting, harmful federal carbon tax?

Hon. Doug Ford: I want to thank our chair of caucus, plus the great MPP from Hastings–Lennox and Addington. He is a true leader in our caucus.

Through you, Mr. Speaker: I visited our member's riding, and he's an all-star. When you go down the street, everyone loves the member. My friends, I was out with the Minister of Agriculture, we were in the rural area, finally got out of the bubble—we call Toronto “the bubble”—talked to the real people, the farmers who are working 18 hours a day around the clock, the best stewards of the environment.

Our Minister of the Environment has put an outstanding plan together, showing that you don't need a carbon tax

that's going to hurt the farmers, hurt families and hurt businesses, because the carbon tax does nothing for the environment—absolutely nothing.

We've already hit 22% reductions. We have 11 years to hit the 30% mark, and we're going to not only hit it, we'll surpass it.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Supplementary.

Mr. Daryl Kramp: I certainly thank the Premier for the answer.

When the people of Ontario elected this government, they elected a government that will bring an end to the 15-years of Liberal mismanagement and make life more affordable again for the people in the province of Ontario.

Mr. Speaker, sadly, we are now only a few short days away from having the federal government impose—that's "impose"—their carbon tax on the everyday, hard-working people in this province. That is clearly unacceptable.

I can tell you that this tax, being the worst tax that we have probably ever seen—our Premier and this party is going to do something about it. We are going to challenge them all the way, because this is unjust. It is not right, it is improper and it has to come to an end.

Premier, what are your thoughts on this?

Hon. Doug Ford: Through you, Mr. Speaker, I'll give you my thoughts, and I'm going to give you the thoughts of everyone, not just in Ontario but across this country. People can't stand this carbon tax. It puts a burden on the backs of every single family, not only in Ontario but across this country. It puts a burden on every single business, the hard-working people at the convenience stores who work 18 hours a day. There's no one who works harder than people waking up at 6, opening their stores at 7, working till midnight, and doing it over and over again seven days a week. It's going to hurt the convenience store owners. It's going to hurt the small business owners, the large businesses.

1100

We're trying to compete worldwide. We're trying to compete with one hand tied behind our backs. But my friends, a warning bell is going off. The warning bell is that on April 1, you're all going to be paying 4.5 cents more per litre for gas. You're going to be paying more for absolutely everything in the grocery store. It's going to be a recession when it comes to the carbon tax. We're going to—

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

Interjections.

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

Start the clock. Next question.

GOVERNMENT ACCOUNTABILITY

Mr. Kevin Yarde: My question is for the Premier. When asked about the appointment of Ron Taverner as OPP commissioner, the Premier called it a "transparent process." The Minister of Community Safety and Correctional Services claims that an "independent selection committee" made the decision.

Later that same day, a member of that very committee corrected her by reaching out to Dean French, saying, "The messaging in today's Legislature on the OPP commissioner uses the term 'independent' selection panel. Independent of who? I'm the deputy minister to the Premier and Ron reported to Mario when he was at TPS. I would drop the word independent."

So my question: Is the Premier willing to correct himself here today and set the record straight, or does he stand by those words?

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Stop the clock. I'm going to ask the member for Carleton to come to order.

Start the clock. Premier to reply.

Hon. Doug Ford: Government House leader.

Hon. Todd Smith: The member opposite is the same member who filed the complaint with the Integrity Commissioner in Ontario. The Integrity Commissioner here in the province went through an exhaustive interview process with numerous individuals who were allegedly involved in whatever the member was alleging, and when the investigation was completed, the Integrity Commissioner came out with a report—and I would like to point this out—that completely exonerated the Premier of Ontario for any wrongdoing in this case. We appreciate the finding of the Integrity Commissioner. We actually thank him for the investigation he has done. In our opinion, this matter has been put to rest.

There are a lot of other things that I know the members from Brampton, Markham and Scarborough should be asking, but they're not asking these questions on policy today. Instead, they're trying to play in the gutter and play gutter politics.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Supplementary.

Mr. Kevin Yarde: The question again is to the Premier. The Integrity Commissioner's report clearly states and clearly reveals that the secretary of cabinet had serious concerns about the categorization of this process as independent, yet day after day the minister and the Premier stood in this House and used the very word the secretary told them to drop. We've asked the Speaker for his view, but the minister could clear things up today. Now that it's been revealed that the secretary of cabinet was telling the government not to use the word "independent," is the Premier ready to admit that he and his minister were wrong to do so?

Hon. Todd Smith: Thanks to the member opposite for the question. The report makes it pretty darned clear. The report makes it very clear, as we said from the beginning, that this complaint was frivolous and without merit, and completely exonerated the Premier of Ontario.

I don't know why the member opposite and members opposite, including the leader of the official opposition, continue to play down in the gutter on this clearly political issue that they're dealing with over there, because nobody else really seems to care when it comes to this. People in Ontario want to know about what the government is doing when it comes to policy and creating jobs.

In honour of all of those great young athletes who are here for Special Hockey Day today, I would say Holy

Mackinaw! We've created 95,000 new jobs in Ontario thanks to the policies that we've introduced—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Stop the clock. Members take their seats. Order.

Restart the clock. Next question.

PUBLIC SAFETY

Ms. Christine Hogarth: Well, I have a policy question. My question today is for our Attorney General.

We on this side of the House and my PC colleagues across the hall here are supportive of the men and women in uniform by providing them with the tools and the resources they need to keep the streets and our homes safe. My constituents in Etobicoke–Lakeshore trust our government's willingness to crack down on violence committed by armed gangs, but they also appreciate our efforts to divert our youth from a path of crime and violence.

Mr. Speaker, can the Attorney General please explain to this House our government's approach to breaking the cycle of violence in our communities through the guns-and-gangs strategy?

Hon. Caroline Mulroney: I would like to thank the member from Etobicoke–Lakeshore for her question. I am proud to say that yesterday our government for the people announced the next phase of our comprehensive strategy to support the local fight against gun-and-gang violence in communities across Ontario. In August of last year, our government announced the first phase to fight the urgent gun-and-gang problem in Toronto. The province-wide second phase of the strategy addresses the threats faced by communities on all fronts through enhanced local enforcement, prosecution, and prevention and intervention initiatives.

One of the key elements of our prevention approach is to establish justice centres that will move justice out of the courtroom and into community settings by co-locating justice, health and social services all under one roof. This is a new model of intervention in Ontario that has proven to be effective in disrupting gang recruitment and protecting young people in communities in jurisdictions across North America.

Mr. Speaker, I am proud to say we are making good on our promise—

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

Ms. Christine Hogarth: I thank the Attorney General for her response. The PC candidates all campaigned on a promise to improve public safety in this province. As a member of this government for the people, I am proud to stand here today to know that our government is committed to tackling gun-and-gang violence across Ontario and keeping criminals off our streets.

I would now like to direct my supplementary question to the Minister of Community Safety and Correctional Services. Could the minister please outline how our investment in front-line policing will keep our families safe and tackle violent crimes in all of our communities?

Hon. Caroline Mulroney: To the Minister of Community Safety and Correctional Services.

Hon. Sylvia Jones: Thank you to the member from Etobicoke–Lakeshore. I know we've spoken many times on the justice and community safety file, and I know how important it is to you and the residents of Etobicoke–Lakeshore.

In addition to the new prevention and intervention measures yesterday, our government announced new supports and resources to help police forces disrupt and dismantle criminal gangs and keep innocent people in Ontario safe from guns and gangs. The gun-and-gang support unit will support police forces across Ontario to undertake major gun-and-gang investigations and prosecutions, as well as improve province-wide intelligence gathering, integration and coordination. In addition, our government is establishing a dedicated gun-and-gang specialized investigation fund to support joint operations between police forces.

Our government's commitment is clear: We will not stand by and let gangs prey on our young people and destroy the security that the people of Ontario deserve and expect from their government.

HEALTH CARE

Mr. Gurratan Singh: My question is to the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care. Yesterday we had a town hall in Brampton about our broken health care system, which packed the room with people who came to share their stories, people like Teresea. After giving birth, Teresea started to think and feel in a way that she described as really scary. She was having anxiety and irrational thoughts. Later, she found out that she was suffering from postpartum anxiety. As a new young mother, she went to Brampton Civic, and despite the best efforts from dedicated front-line workers, she had to wait hours because there were no rooms available for her. In order to be seen by a doctor, she had to share her deepest and darkest emotions in a hallway with strangers passing by.

1110

Now Teresea is pregnant for the second time and though she's excited, in the back of her mind she's also scared. She keeps on asking herself, "What if I suffer from postpartum anxiety again?"

Why is this government forcing mothers like Teresea to bare their souls in public?

Hon. Christine Elliott: I thank the member very much for his question.

I do agree with you. Right now we do have a broken system where people are not receiving the care that they deserve, and the transitions from hospital to home care and hospital to long-term care are fractured. That's what we are attempting to fix with the modernization of our health care system.

I share your concern and your constituent's concern about receiving care in hallways. As I've indicated before, that's happening in hospitals across the province: 1,200 people each and every day. It's not an easy thing to fix.

There's not one simple answer to it. We need to do a number of things on a number of fronts, but that's what we are doing with Bill 74 and also with our mental health and addictions plan. We have \$3.8 billion that is being invested by the province over 10 years to make sure that people such as your constituent receive the health care that they need for postpartum depression or for whatever their mental health or addiction problem is.

That is what we are doing. We are modernizing our public health care system in order to deal with situations exactly—

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

Mr. Gurratan Singh: In order to end hallway medicine so new moms like Teresea can receive care with some dignity, instead of fully funding Brampton Civic Hospital, instead of converting Peel Memorial health centre into a full-time, 24-hour hospital and instead of building a new hospital for our growing community, this government has voted against ending hallway medicine in Brampton.

My question is simple: Why?

Hon. Christine Elliott: The situation in Brampton is similar to many other fast-growing communities where they are experiencing higher levels of hallway health care. We want to stop that. We want to stop that in Brampton; we want to stop that across the province. But again, the answer is not simple.

One of the things we need to do is create more long-term-care homes, because, as you will know, the patients who are in hospital who don't need to be there anymore but have no other place to go remain in hospital for extended periods of time. That's one of the reasons why we made our campaign commitment to create 15,000 new long-term-care spaces within five years. We've already attained about half of that goal and we're working on it on a daily basis.

We also want to make sure that people receive the mental health and addictions care that they need in the community so that they don't need to go to the hospital as their last means of resort. And we know that many people cycle in and out of emergency departments.

Finally, we need to have better chronic disease management pathways, which is one of the reasons why—

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

PUBLIC SAFETY

Mr. Randy Hillier: My question is to the Minister of Community Safety and Correctional Services.

Speaker, last Thursday I was at a fundraising event in Perth for Lanark County Interval House, which provides vital services and assistance to victims of domestic violence. I was reminded of a commitment from the Ministry of Community Safety and Correctional Services three years ago to consider a pilot project on active GPS electronic monitoring of violent offenders.

Speaker, can the minister confirm if this pilot project was undertaken and share the results with the House?

Hon. Sylvia Jones: As the member from Lanark–Frontenac–Kingston would know, three years ago the Liberal Party was the government in power.

I can assure the member that we are actively engaged with our partners in probation and parole and, frankly, the Ministry of the Attorney General, as a justice file collectively, to study issues that are actually going to make our communities safer. What we have discovered is that there was a lack of action that was happening in the last 15 years.

We have signalled very strongly to our partners on both sides of the justice file, whether it's in policing or on the crown attorney side, that we will work together in a multi-ministerial approach to make sure that individuals within our community continue to understand and value the importance of our goal, which is to make communities safer.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Supplementary.

Mr. Randy Hillier: Again to the minister: I didn't hear an answer as to whether the pilot project was undertaken or not. I'm astonished that the minister would not know if it had been undertaken or not.

Speaker, will the minister commit to this House to review my previous correspondence with the ministry on this subject—I can send some of it over with the page right now—and report back on the status of an active GPS electronic monitoring system so that women who have experienced domestic violence can have greater security than just a restraining order on a piece of paper?

Hon. Sylvia Jones: As the member opposite knows, we collectively, whether in opposition or in government, have studied many systems. We made many suggestions when we were in opposition.

As I mentioned, this is a multi-ministerial approach that we are reviewing.

I want to highlight something on violence against women, sex trafficking and human trafficking: We already have a current investment in our government of \$174.5 million in funding for violence-against-women services. We are investing an additional \$1.5 million in funding for rural front-line services.

I don't think there is any doubt that we see challenges, whether it is in rural Ontario, where we have distance challenges, or in urban centres, where the increasing prevalence of human trafficking continues to become something that our police services—

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

PUBLIC TRANSIT

Mrs. Robin Martin: My question is for the best Minister of Transportation. As a Toronto MPP, I am proud that our government is delivering on our promise to tackle congestion in the GTA. For too long, gridlock has immobilized Toronto and the greater Toronto area, costing the province billions in economic productivity and Ontarians lost time and inconvenience.

Politicians here at Queen's Park and city council have run in circles talking about transit but not getting anything

done. We need less talking and more digging. We need to build a regional transit system that works for the residents of the GTA. We need to build subways, and we need to build them faster.

Could the minister please explain his plan to get subways built so that we can finally get Toronto and the region moving?

Hon. Jeff Yurek: Thanks to the member from Eglinton–Lawrence. Flattery will get you everywhere.

Mr. Speaker, transit is an important issue, and our government made a strong commitment to get it built. That was our plan at the start, it's our plan now, and it's our plan going into the future. That's all it's about: building transit. It's not about playing political games, and it's not about saying, "You're stealing the transit from Toronto." It's about building transit faster, at a lower cost for the taxpayers of this province.

We campaigned to upload the subway from the TTC. We campaigned on finally giving Scarborough the transit they deserve. We campaigned on extending the Eglinton LRT. We campaigned on extending the TTC to the north of Yonge Street. We campaigned to finally build the Yonge relief line. And we're going to get it done.

Interjections.

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

Restart the clock. Supplementary.

Mrs. Robin Martin: Thank you for that answer, Minister. It's great to hear that our government for the people is sticking to its goal and its plan to build transit. We can't be sidelined by politics. We need to deliver transit projects and subways right away. Unfortunately, the usual suspects at city hall are more interested in holding the region back and playing politics.

The people of Toronto and the GTA have waited years for transit to finally get built. For 15 years, they watched the Wynne Liberals fail to get the province moving. For decades, they watched Toronto city council fail to get the region moving.

Minister, the time for action is now. Can you commit today to taking the steps necessary to get subways built and the people of Toronto and the GTA moving easily?

1120

Hon. Jeff Yurek: Thanks for that question. Mr. Speaker, we're on the right track. Our government for the people is going to get shovels in the ground. Our government for the people is going to get people moving. We need to keep going on this right track. We will not let the NDP and the ideologues in city council hold us back any further. We have a plan, and we're going to deliver that plan. We will expand transit to Scarborough, we will extend the Eglinton LRT, we will build a downtown relief line and we will extend the TTC north to York region. That is progress for the people of Ontario and we're going to get this—

Interjections.

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

Start the clock. The next question is to the member for Davenport.

EDUCATION

Ms. Marit Stiles: My question is for the Minister of Education. With 10,000 education jobs set to vanish under the Conservative education plan, it's important to consider the impact that losing even one teacher will have on students in Ontario's small and rural schools. As boards meet to assess the damage, more details are slowly emerging. The Bluewater District School Board estimates at least 50 teaching jobs will be lost because of this plan. Grand Erie District School Board stands to lose 94 teaching positions as well as eight additional positions that focus on secondary school programming.

Speaker, how will taking away teachers help students in small and rural communities succeed?

Hon. Lisa M. Thompson: I'm very pleased to talk about how we're particularly going to be supporting schools across this province, both in urban and rural Ontario, because we have a plan that's going to work not only for parents and not only for teachers, but for students as well. When we talk about supporting our teachers, I want to be very clear, we're investing. The province of Ontario is going to be investing to make sure that no one loses, involuntarily, their job.

The numbers that are being quoted across the way actually have nothing to do—but have a premise of fear-mongering, Speaker. It's very, very sad. It's shameful that this party opposite is just grasping onto anything to try and fearmonger amongst our students, amongst our teachers and amongst our parents. As I said before, it is absolutely shameful because anyone who knows anything about school boards knows that this is the time of year that school boards take a look at their roster. They have to work through a process whereby they give notifications—

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

Ms. Marit Stiles: Mr. Speaker, the minister can't keep avoiding these questions. These are numbers coming from the boards themselves as a result of this minister's plan to cut education. For small and rural boards, losing teachers and support staff doesn't just limit the one-on-one attention kids deserve. It also means lost opportunities to pursue a variety of subjects. When teachers with specialized qualifications in music, arts, technology, physics or French retire but are not replaced, those courses will be lost. High school teachers estimate 34,000 classes could be lost under this government's scheme, and that will disproportionately hurt rural schools and rural students.

Speaker, the Liberals just spent 15 years attacking rural students by closing down their schools. Why is this government choosing to do the same?

Hon. Lisa M. Thompson: Well, I can tell you this—I need to be very clear to everybody watching and listening to the type of rhetoric that is coming from across the floor—it's absolutely shameful the manner in which this party opposite is trying to fearmonger, because the fact of the matter is we are supporting our classrooms. If we want the best learning environment possible, then that means supporting our teachers and supporting our students so,

ultimately, parents once again have confidence in the Ontario education system.

Let me tell you what we're going to be doing. As I said before, there will be no involuntary job losses. In fact, we're going to be working with school boards and investing to make sure that nobody has any bad experience on behalf of a situation that the school boards may impose. The fact of the matter is, again, we're investing over \$1 billion to make sure nobody involuntarily loses their job. We're going to get education in Ontario back on track, once and for all.

BEVERAGE ALCOHOL SALES

Mr. Stan Cho: My question is for the Minister of Finance. Our government campaigned on a clear commitment to bring more choice and more convenience to the people of Ontario. And the people told us, loud and clear, they want our government to expand the sale of beverage alcohol into big box stores, more grocery stores and corner stores. We believe that the people of Ontario deserve to have more opportunity to access the products that they want to buy. We know our government has been making progress on fulfilling our commitment to the people of Ontario.

Mr. Speaker, it's no secret that our family owes its success to its beginnings in the convenience store world. Now, with members of the Ontario Convenience Stores Association in the gallery today, could the minister please reiterate our government's commitment to bringing more choice and more convenience to the people of Ontario?

Hon. Victor Fedeli: Thank you to the member from Willowdale. Our government is committed to improving choice and convenience for Ontario consumers. That is why we invited people to share their views on the sale and consumption of beverage alcohol in Ontario through province-wide, online consultations. We are currently reviewing the 33,000 responses which will help develop our plan to expand sales into corner, grocery and big box stores.

We believe Ontario consumers are mature enough and responsible enough to have the freedom to make the choices that are best for them. Through these changes, ensuring the safe, responsible consumption of alcohol remains our top priority. The people of Ontario told us they want to see these changes, and we plan to deliver.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Supplementary: the member for Aurora–Oak Ridges–Richmond Hill.

Mr. Michael Parsa: I thank the minister for his response.

People across Ontario are excited about the prospect of having greater choice and convenience when buying beverage alcohol. Our government continues to make life easier for the people of Ontario, and we plan to continue this trend.

But let us take a moment to once again recognize the Ontario Convenience Stores Association at Queen's Park today. These business owners are the cornerstones of their respective communities. We know they create jobs and invest in the communities they call home. They are part of

the reason why our government is so focused on making Ontario open for business.

Could the minister please explain the importance of convenience stores in Ontario?

Hon. Victor Fedeli: Thank you to the member from Aurora–Oak Ridges–Richmond Hill. It is a pleasure to welcome the Ontario Convenience Stores Association to Queen's Park today. With over 7,500 members, half of whom are independent business owners, we're thrilled to join them this morning to talk about being open for business and open for jobs. That is why we cancelled the cap-and-trade carbon tax, which saved businesses \$880 million this year alone, that is why we're giving businesses more time to adjust to the \$14-an-hour minimum wage, and that is why we continue to cut red tape and reduce the regulatory burden that businesses face.

Through these changes, we want to continue supporting those in our business community who have been ignored for far too long.

FUNDRAISING

Mr. Gilles Bisson: My question is to the Acting Premier. Yesterday we asked the Premier whether he would join us in asking Elections Ontario to review concerns about political party fundraising. The Premier raised serious issues here in the assembly, and if he really meant a word he said, surely he would want an investigation conducted.

Will he add his name to the letter that we authored yesterday?

Hon. Christine Elliott: To the government House leader.

Hon. Todd Smith: Speaker, I'm not exactly sure how this has anything to do with government policy, again, from the member opposite, but I'm happy to tell you we have raised a fair amount of money since becoming the government of Ontario because we're working hard to do that. All of the fundraising that we're doing in Ontario follows the rules that are laid out by the legislation that has been passed here in the Ontario Legislature.

That's the same legislation that the official opposition would work within, we hope, and members of the independent realm over there. They would also have the opportunity to fundraise with those same rules in place, Mr. Speaker.

1130

I can assure you that the fundraising that our party has done so far has been according to those rules. It's been above board, and it's actually been very successful, so I can understand why members of the opposition party, according to media reports, are a little upset, because this party is selling something that the people of Ontario want to buy; they're not.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Opposition, come to order.

Supplementary question?

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Again to the Acting Premier: Other members of the assembly have said they're ready to join

us. In fact, some of those members sat in the government caucus not too long ago.

Maybe the Premier doesn't want Elections Ontario looking into his \$1,250-a-plate dinner and the lobbyists who were forced to sell those tickets. But we think that people deserve an answer. If the Premier doesn't agree, he should say so. Otherwise, he should join us today.

Will you ask your Premier to sign the letter, along with other members of this assembly?

Hon. Todd Smith: Speaker, we have the rules. We have an elections officer. We have fundraisers that happen every day. Yes, we've had all kinds of \$25 spaghetti dinners that the Premier has attended. We're really looking forward to heading out on the barbecue circuit and putting the pasta to bed for a while—having some good old-fashioned hot dogs and maybe some hamburgers, and seeing the people of Ontario, the people who are happy with the direction this government is taking.

We had a big fundraiser. We had a really big fundraiser. It was a record fundraiser, as a matter of fact. The official opposition, the NDP, are having their own \$800-a-plate fundraiser. I'm not sure if they followed the rules or not. There was some question about that. There was a lot of fuzziness. Maybe there will be an investigation into that. But they're charging \$800, and it comes with a special reward to spend time with the leader of the official opposition—

Interjections.

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

ENERGY POLICIES

Mr. Doug Downey: My question is for the PC—productive and competent—Minister of Energy, Northern Development and Mines.

After 15 long years, the previous Liberal government got complacent and tired. Their complacency caused waste and inefficiencies throughout all of government. The energy sector is an example of that waste, and the people of Ontario elected our government to clean it up. We cancelled the wasteful renewable energy projects our system never needed. We repealed the Green Energy Act to ensure the previous government's waste wouldn't continue.

Now we're taking another step towards cleaning up the hydro mess, and I would ask the minister why it is so important we modernize the Ontario Energy Board.

Hon. Greg Rickford: I'm not sure I can rival that acronymology, but I'll give my best effort, Mr. Speaker.

I spoke the other day at the Electricity Distributors Association. They were crying out for OEB modernization. Yesterday, at the Hydro One major customer conference, hundreds of people said, "Please reform the OEB," tired of submissions in the thousands of pages, lengthy delays for approvals, and uncertainty around costs, and rate and regulatory matters. It's time. This is the opportunity.

Last winter, the NDP stood in this place and said that we're not delivering power for Ontario in the heart of the

coldest winter. Now they're saying that we're not delivering power under a transparent model suggested and recommended by the Auditor General. Now they're saying they don't stand for delivering power for a modern OEB. They're saying that we're not delivering power under good principles of conservation that protect families, small businesses and Indigenous communities. We're plugging the cord in for a brighter future and a—

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

Mr. Doug Downey: Thank you to the minister for that answer. There's no doubt that under this minister's leadership the OEB will once again become a competent regulator, one that helps us increase efficiency by cutting through unnecessary red tape that has been burdening our economy for many years.

But that's not all our government is doing. We all know in this House how the previous government liked to spend money. They've never seen other people's money they didn't like to spend. When they ran out of that, they borrowed and taxed to spend more. Our government doesn't do that. We respect the taxpayer.

Can the minister please tell the members of this House how we're respecting the taxpayers with Bill 87, Fixing the Hydro Mess Act?

Hon. Greg Rickford: An appropriately named piece of legislation, it has indeed been described as a mess by not just people who pay their bills every month but by stakeholders who engage the OEB and the like, Mr. Speaker.

Listen to what the Auditor General had to say about things that go to cost. This was a significant and serious complaint. The Auditor General said, "Reducing electricity consumption through conservation efforts is of little value.... Investing in conservation during a time of surplus actually costs us more"—cost, cost, cost, Mr. Speaker.

Here's another one, from Tom Adams and Ross McKittrick in 2016: "Conservation programs cost about \$2 for every dollar they save."

Mr. Speaker, we're committed to keeping money in the pockets of the hard-working people of Ontario. We want to ensure that their energy bills are affordable and that they see in a transparent manner how much electricity is subsidized in moving forward, Mr. Speaker, to pursue a cut model and relieve Ontarians from the high cost of energy and the mess that was created.

YOUTH EMPLOYMENT

Mr. Faisal Hassan: My question is to the Minister of Education. For eight years now, FoodShare Toronto has employed, supported and mentored up to 20 students each summer while providing them the opportunity to earn up to two co-op credits. FoodShare prioritizes students who are behind in credits, newcomers, students from low-income families, racialized students and students with learning disabilities. Because of this government's cuts to our youth, FoodShare Toronto has been unable to participate in March break job programs and spring after-school programs.

Why is this government turning its back on organizations like FoodShare, which arm students with the skills to allow them to succeed in today's workplace?

Hon. Lisa M. Thompson: I am pleased to stand and address this question in the sense that I need to be very clear; I want to be crystal clear. We are investing in students and we're investing in programs that are going to make sure that they have the job skills and the life skills they need to go out and get a really good job.

I want to talk about just being at FIRST Robotics up in Barrie a couple of weekends ago. I was joined by member Downey and member Khanjin, and it was an amazing display of teamwork, of people, both mentors and teachers, excited about the students that they are enabling to embrace STEM in a very unique way. Those are the skills that they know our students need in order to move forward in the jobs of today and tomorrow. Those skills are the ones we're investing in and getting right once and for all in the learning environments in Ontario.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Supplementary?

Mr. Faisal Hassan: Again, my question is to the Minister of Education. Under this government's watch, Ontario's youth unemployment rate is 12.3%, higher than the rate for the rest of Canada. This Conservative government claims to be all about jobs but they do not seem to care about jobs for the youth in communities like York South-Weston.

Leaving programs like FoodShare Toronto in the dark about whether or not they will be able to continue to employ, educate and support students shows where the government's real priorities lie, and it is not with our youth.

When will this government stop balancing its budget on the backs of our young people?

Hon. Lisa M. Thompson: Again, I want to stand in front of everyone in this House today and say it's our PC government of Ontario that's actually going to be able to tout the success that we have in making sure our students have the job skills and life skills they need for the jobs of today and tomorrow.

Some of those skills actually involve embracing technology for good. I want to share an example of something that we've just learned about today. McDonald's Canada, for the first time, is today accepting applications from students via Snapchat. I'm telling you, Speaker, we need to make sure that we're doing everything we can to invest in proper studies, in a proper curriculum, so that our students are equipped to work with the means amongst them. Technology for good is absolutely a means to an end whereby we want to make sure they have the skills to go out and pursue jobs that they're going to have satisfaction in.

1140

Honest to goodness, Speaker, I'm excited about where we're going with our Ontario curriculum because it's going to make sure—

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

Next question.

SPECIAL-NEEDS SPORTS PROGRAMS

Mr. Dave Smith: My question is for the Minister of Tourism, Culture and Sport. In Ontario, we have more than 70 organizations involved in special-needs hockey, some of whom were in the House today as we celebrate Ontario's first-ever Special Hockey Day. As I outlined in my original private member's bill, Special Hockey Day coincides with the start of the 2019 Special Hockey International Tournament. Recognizing this day is important to raise awareness for the many special hockey organizations across Ontario and celebrate all of these exceptional athletes.

Can the minister inform the Legislature how our government for the people is working to promote Ontario's first-ever Special Hockey Day?

Hon. Michael A. Tibollo: Mr. Speaker, through you, I'd like to thank the member for Peterborough-Kawartha for his fantastic question and also commend him for the great work that he does advocating on behalf of people with special needs. I know how important this cause is to him, and this day shows the power that individual members can have in this place when they're passionate about a cause. I also want to thank the Minister of Finance for incorporating the legislation into the fall economic statement so that we were able to ensure that Special Hockey Day was enshrined in law at this time.

An international hockey tournament provides athletes the opportunity to compete against the best from around the world, allowing them to perfect their skills. It teaches the athletes the importance of teamwork and the value of working together, and it creates memories and friendships that last a lifetime. I'm honoured, along with my colleagues, to welcome all the athletes to this tournament. Congratulations to all.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Supplementary.

Mr. Dave Smith: I'd like to thank the minister for his answer. As he said, today is the opening ceremonies for the 25th anniversary of the Special Hockey International Tournament. It's the first time it's been back in Ontario since the great riding of Peterborough-Kawartha hosted it in 1992. This year's festivities are being held in Toronto at the Mattamy Athletic Centre, formerly known as Toronto Maple Leaf Gardens. This milestone event is being hosted by the Grandravine Tornados. I would like to take this time to wish all of the athletes who will be competing a safe and fun tournament.

Would the minister update the Legislature on how our government for the people is supporting our special-needs athletes?

Hon. Michael A. Tibollo: Thank you to the member for that question. Our government is committed to helping athletes with special needs realize their full potential. I'm happy to say that Special Olympics Ontario is a recognized provincial sports organization and receives funding through the Ontario Amateur Sport Fund. We also provide project-based funding to help deliver national and international amateur sports events in Ontario, like the 2019 International Special Olympics Ontario Invitational Youth

Games being held here in Ontario. Our government also recognizes how powerful sports truly are to the province of Ontario. This tournament is a great way to recognize the unique talents of special hockey players from here in Ontario.

I want to echo the member from Peterborough–Kawartha when I say good luck to all the athletes competing in the tournament and wish everyone a very special first-ever Special Hockey Day.

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

WORLD THEATRE DAY

Ms. Jill Andrew: I just want to tell everyone that it's World Theatre Day. I'd like to give a shout-out to b current, Tarragon Theatre, Solar Stage theatre and SExT—Sex Education by Theatre—and to so many others in Toronto–St. Paul's. I encourage us all to celebrate our theatres and support our theatre, our theatre workers, our art educators and art producers.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): I want to thank the government side for their assistance. I appreciate it very much.

VISITORS

Mr. Sheref Sabawy: I would like to welcome Mirza Naseem Baig from the Ahmadiyya community, visiting us at Queen's Park. Welcome to Queen's Park.

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

Mr. Deepak Anand: I'd also like to take the opportunity to welcome Naveed Ahmad Khan, Hadi Ali Chaudhry, Mukhtar Cheema and Abid Maqbool, along with Mirza Naseem Baig from Mississauga. Thank you for coming to Queen's Park.

DEFERRED VOTES

TIME ALLOCATION

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): We have a deferred vote on the amendment to government notice of motion number 33 relating to allocation of time on Bill 74, An Act concerning the provision of health care, continuing Ontario Health and making consequential and related amendments and repeals.

The division bells rang from 1145 to 1150.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Close the doors. I'm going to ask the members now to take their seats.

On March 26, 2019, Mr. Bisson moved an amendment to government notice of motion number 33, relating to allocation of time on Bill 74. All those in favour of Mr. Bisson's motion will please rise one at a time and be recognized by the Clerk.

Ayes

Andrew, Jill	Gélinas, France	Morrison, Suze
Armstrong, Teresa J.	Glover, Chris	Rakocevic, Tom
Arthur, Ian	Gretzky, Lisa	Sattler, Peggy
Begum, Doly	Harden, Joel	Schreiner, Mike
Bell, Jessica	Hassan, Faisal	Shaw, Sandy
Berns-McGown, Rima	Hatfield, Percy	Singh, Gurratan
Bisson, Gilles	Hillier, Randy	Singh, Sara
Bourgouin, Guy	Horwath, Andrea	Stiles, Marit
Burch, Jeff	Karpoche, Bhutila	Tabuns, Peter
Coteau, Michael	Kernaghan, Terence	Taylor, Monique
Des Rosiers, Nathalie	Lalonde, Marie-France	Vanthof, John
Fife, Catherine	Lindo, Laura Mae	West, Jamie
Fraser, John	Mamakwa, Sol	Wynne, Kathleen O.
French, Jennifer K.	Miller, Paul	Yarde, Kevin
Gates, Wayne	Monteith-Farrell, Judith	

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): All those opposed to Mr. Bisson's motion will please rise one at a time and be recognized by the Clerk.

Nays

Anand, Deepak	Harris, Mike	Piccini, David
Baber, Roman	Hogarth, Christine	Rasheed, Kaleed
Babikian, Aris	Jones, Sylvia	Rickford, Greg
Bailey, Robert	Kanapathi, Logan	Roberts, Jeremy
Barrett, Toby	Karahalios, Belinda	Romano, Ross
Bethlenfalvy, Peter	Ke, Vincent	Sabawy, Sheref
Bouma, Will	Khanjin, Andrea	Sandhu, Amarjot
Calandra, Paul	Kramp, Daryl	Sarkaria, Prabmeet Singh
Cho, Raymond Sung Joon	Kusendova, Natalia	Scott, Laurie
Cho, Stan	Lecce, Stephen	Skelly, Donna
Clark, Steve	MacLeod, Lisa	Smith, Dave
Coe, Lorne	Martin, Robin	Smith, Todd
Crawford, Stephen	Martow, Gila	Surma, Kinga
Cuzzetto, Rudy	McKenna, Jane	Tangri, Nina
Downey, Doug	McNaughton, Monte	Thanigasalam, Vijay
Dunlop, Jill	Miller, Norman	Thompson, Lisa M.
Elliott, Christine	Mulroney, Caroline	Tibollo, Michael A.
Fedeli, Victor	Nicholls, Rick	Triantafilopoulos, Effie J.
Fee, Amy	Oosterhoff, Sam	Wai, Daisy
Ford, Doug	Pang, Billy	Walker, Bill
Fullerton, Merrilee	Park, Lindsey	Yakubski, John
Ghamari, Goldie	Parsa, Michael	Yurek, Jeff
Gill, Parm	Pettapiece, Randy	
Hardeman, Ernie	Phillips, Rod	

The Clerk of the Assembly (Mr. Todd Decker): The ayes are 44; the nays are 70.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): I declare the motion lost.

Is the House prepared to vote on the main motion?

Interjection: Yes.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Ms. Elliott has moved government notice of motion number 33 relating to allocation of time on Bill 74, An Act concerning the provision of health care, continuing Ontario Health and making consequential and related amendments and repeals.

Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? I heard some noes.

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

All those opposed will please say "nay."

In my opinion, the ayes have it.

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

The division bells rang from 1155 to 1156.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Ms. Elliott has moved government notice of motion number 33 relating to the allocation of time on Bill 74.

All those in favour of the motion will please rise one at a time and be recognized by the Clerk.

Ayes

Anand, Deepak	Harris, Mike	Piccini, David
Baber, Roman	Hogarth, Christine	Rasheed, Kaleed
Babikian, Aris	Jones, Sylvia	Rickford, Greg
Bailey, Robert	Kanapathi, Logan	Roberts, Jeremy
Barrett, Toby	Karahalios, Belinda	Romano, Ross
Bethlenfalvy, Peter	Ke, Vincent	Sabawy, Sheref
Bouma, Will	Khanjin, Andrea	Sandhu, Amarjot
Calandra, Paul	Kramp, Daryl	Sarkaria, Prabmeet Singh
Cho, Raymond Sung Joon	Kusendova, Natalia	Scott, Laurie
Cho, Stan	Lecce, Stephen	Skelly, Donna
Clark, Steve	MacLeod, Lisa	Smith, Dave
Coe, Lorne	Martin, Robin	Smith, Todd
Crawford, Stephen	Martow, Gila	Surma, Kinga
Cuzzetto, Rudy	McKenna, Jane	Tangri, Nina
Downey, Doug	McNaughton, Monte	Thanigasalam, Vijay
Dunlop, Jill	Miller, Norman	Thompson, Lisa M.
Elliott, Christine	Mulrone, Caroline	Tibollo, Michael A.
Fedeli, Victor	Nicholls, Rick	Triantafilopoulos, Effie J.
Fee, Amy	Oosterhoff, Sam	Wai, Daisy
Ford, Doug	Pang, Billy	Walker, Bill
Fullerton, Merrilee	Park, Lindsey	Yakabuski, John
Ghamari, Goldie	Parsa, Michael	Yurek, Jeff
Gill, Pam	Pettapiece, Randy	
Hardeman, Ernie	Phillips, Rod	

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): All those opposed to the motion will please rise one at a time and be counted by the Clerk.

Nays

Andrew, Jill	Gélinas, France	Morrison, Suze
Armstrong, Teresa J.	Glover, Chris	Rakocevic, Tom
Arthur, Ian	Gretzky, Lisa	Sattler, Peggy
Begum, Doly	Harden, Joel	Schreiner, Mike
Bell, Jessica	Hassan, Faisal	Shaw, Sandy
Berns-McGown, Rima	Hatfield, Percy	Singh, Gurratan
Bisson, Gilles	Hillier, Randy	Singh, Sara
Bourgouin, Guy	Horwath, Andrea	Stiles, Marit
Burch, Jeff	Karpoche, Bhutla	Tabuns, Peter
Coteau, Michael	Kernaghan, Terence	Taylor, Monique
Des Rosiers, Nathalie	Lalonde, Marie-France	Vanthof, John
Fife, Catherine	Lindo, Laura Mae	West, Jamie
Fraser, John	Mamakwa, Sol	Wynne, Kathleen O.
French, Jennifer K.	Miller, Paul	Yarde, Kevin
Gates, Wayne	Monteith-Farrell, Judith	

The Clerk of the Assembly (Mr. Todd Decker): The ayes are 70; the nays are 44.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): I declare the motion carried.

Motion agreed to.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): This House stands in recess until 3 p.m.

The House recessed from 1200 to 1500.

ORDER OF BUSINESS

Mr. Michael Coteau: Point of order.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): I understand the member for Don Valley East has a point of order.

Mr. Michael Coteau: I hope it's appropriate timing, Mr. Speaker, but I'd like to ask for unanimous consent to deliver a member's statement in place of the member from Thunder Bay—Superior North. I hope my timing is right.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The member for Don Valley East is seeking the unanimous consent of the House to do a member's statement in place of the member for Thunder Bay—Superior North. Agreed? Agreed.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

Mr. Sheref Sabawy: I would like to take the opportunity to welcome the Conservative youth association from UTM. Welcome to Queen's Park. They are in the gallery today. I hope they enjoy their time at Queen's Park.

Mr. David Piccini: He stole my thunder. I, too, on behalf of MTCU, would like to welcome what we call the "shuttle bus Tories" from Mississauga—not to be confused with the minivan party; there are many more in our shuttle bus Tories club here.

Welcome to Queen's Park, and thanks for joining us this afternoon.

Miss Monique Taylor: I would like to welcome many families who will be joining us in the gallery today with autistic children and providers. Some of my friends who are here today are Sarah Klodnicki and Nancy Silva-Khan. I see Karen Botji in the gallery.

I know many folks who are with us today. I don't want to mess up everybody's name and leave anybody out. Welcome to you all.

Mrs. Nina Tangri: I also wanted to say welcome to our great students from UTM, as we call them.

I just want to give one little special shout-out to Livon Mamiza, who was a volunteer on my campaign and knocked on doors day and night with me. Thank you, Livon, for coming.

Mrs. Belinda Karahalios: I, too, would like to introduce the University of Toronto Mississauga students—the UTM alumni. It is my honour to welcome them to the Legislature.

Mrs. Amy Fee: I would like to welcome a couple of autism parents who are in the gallery today and that I had the privilege of meeting with this afternoon. Kristen Ellison is from Cobourg, and Stacy Kennedy is from Oakville.

ORDER OF BUSINESS

Mr. Mike Schreiner: Point of order.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Point of order: the member for Guelph.

Mr. Mike Schreiner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I seek unanimous consent to move a motion without notice

regarding the independent time to respond to the ministerial statement on education reform.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The member for Guelph is seeking the unanimous consent of the House to move a motion with respect to the opportunity to respond to the minister's statement today on education. Agreed? Agreed.

The member for Guelph.

Mr. Mike Schreiner: I move that the time for independent response to the ministerial statement on education reform be split between the MPP for Scarborough–Guildwood and the MPP for Guelph.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Mr. Schreiner has moved that the time for independent response to the ministerial statement on education reform be split between the MPP for Scarborough–Guildwood and the MPP for Guelph. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

Motion agreed to.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

PUBLIC TRANSIT

Mr. Peter Tabuns: Last night, we learned that Premier Ford wants to rip up the plans to build a relief line from Pape station to downtown. His team tells Toronto he doesn't want to connect to the Danforth subway line. He wants a whole new technology in place and, in coded language, he says he wants it to be built by a private company.

Let's set everything else aside about why it's a bad idea for Premier Ford to run the subway. Set aside the questionable real estate deals, the redirection of the system to serve his political goals and not the people of Toronto, the privatization of the operations. Let's just look at the move to stop progress on the construction of a vital transit link and throw it all into chaos.

This is what he and his brother did with Transit City almost a decade ago, and their actions then, in blocking new transit, contributed to gridlock in our city. People have difficulty now getting on the subway at rush hour along the Danforth, and slowing down the solution to that problem is madness. People in Toronto have seen the Premier destroy transit before, and no one is surprised, even if they are upset, that he is doing it again.

How can the Premier blame the city for slowing down subway building when he is saying directly that he's going to throw out years of planning and consultation to start over? The Premier talks about building transit, but all he's doing here is blocking it. Speaker, I'm asking him to stop this nonsense, get out of the way, guarantee the funding and get on with building a relief line so people can get to work now.

ARTURO COMEGNA

Mr. Ross Romano: Today I am very excited to highlight an incredible constituent of mine, Arturo Comegna,

owner and chef of Antico Ristorante in Sault Ste. Marie. Arturo was recently highlighted by the LCBO during their "winter recipes and northern Ontario" chef profile. The profile was done in a Master Chef competition style where Arturo's creation was a cornflake-crust Arctic char filet on an apple-beet salad paired with a Creekside Sauvignon Blanc, and from the pictures online it looks absolutely incredible.

Mr. Comegna first got his passion for cooking at the very young age of 12 when he first started waiting on tables. Now, at the age of 60 years, Arturo is living out his dream and his passion for cooking is as strong as ever.

I have a fun little story. My dad used to tell me stories about Arturo when I was a young child. He and Arturo had immigrated from Italy together to Sault Ste. Marie and worked together at Algoma Steel. Art was waiting tables on the side at a restaurant called Rico's and used to always say to my dad, "Tony, you've got to come with me and go work at Rico's. I make a lot more money here. It's great." My dad said, "Are you crazy? I'm not going to leave the steel plant."

Well, Arturo ended up leaving and going to Rico's, and shortly thereafter owned Rico's. Then he turned it into another restaurant he called Arturo's. Now he owns Antico. He is a very well known restaurateur in Sault Ste. Marie and someone I've grown to really care for. I love to eat there and would welcome everybody, when you're in Sault Ste. Marie, to come to Antico. You get a great meal.

ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION

Mr. Ian Arthur: Today, Dianne Saxe, the Environmental Commissioner of Ontario, tabled her last report to the Legislature. I would like to thank her for the incredible contribution she has made to our province as an independent, expert, non-partisan officer. Dianne executed her role as the guardian of the Environmental Bill of Rights with dedication, understanding and grace, speaking truth to power through the final days of her role. To her and the dedicated team at the ECO, truly, thank you.

To this government: You are failing on the most pressing issue we will face this century. You are betraying the future of your children and your grandchildren. You are demonstrating a level of selfishness and denial that is reprehensible. Your policies are a betrayal of care for the people and the planet.

The generational divide on climate has never been more clear as this government reverses policy after policy protecting our earth, of which we only have one. It has never been more clear as youth around the world take to the streets in protest of your failures. It has never been more clear than when would-be mothers decide they cannot bring children into this world that you are leaving.

1510

We cannot afford to simply mitigate. We cannot afford the economic costs of your inaction. It is time to face this crisis head-on and move beyond 40 years of inaction on climate.

INTERNATIONAL TRADE

Mr. Vincent Ke: Recently, I attended the first American-Canadian new economic innovation summit. This event was a huge success. The summit provided a new avenue for the coming together of Canadian, American and Chinese stakeholders to discuss financial technologies, entrepreneurial innovation and industrial policies, all of which are important to our economic future.

Our government's commitment to becoming a world leader in STEM, which stands for science, technology, engineering and math, can only be possible by attracting the best talent and being open to new business opportunities. This summit is the first step in promoting investment in Ontario and, most of all, creating rewarding jobs for all hard-working Ontarians. We are creating an environment where businesses can thrive and Ontarians can benefit from economic opportunities.

I would like to thank the organizers for hosting this summit. Your hard work and dedication is unmatched.

ANCASTER ARTS CENTRE

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Members' statements. The member for Hamilton West–Ancaster–Dundas.

Ms. Sandy Shaw: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to thank you for lunch today. That was very, very lovely.

Interjections.

Ms. Sandy Shaw: Yes. It was—not a special treat. I think we all get that opportunity.

I'm rising today to boast about an exciting project in my riding of Hamilton West–Ancaster–Dundas, and that's the Ancaster arts centre. This project would strengthen arts and culture in the community, create jobs, and highlight that our historic downtown Ancaster has much to offer. It would give our downtown businesses a boost and bring even more people into Ancaster each year.

The community of Ancaster has already put time and money behind this project. When asked to raise \$3 million, families and community members came together to raise over \$3.7 million, demonstrating the widespread support for this exciting project.

This is a collaborative community project, with the city of Hamilton contributing \$5.8 million and the federal government committing \$1.5 million to date.

The community recently received devastating news when it became public that \$3 million in planned provincial funding would not be coming. However, I am pleased to share that last week I met with the member from Flamborough–Glanbrook to discuss how we could reallocate provincial funds to this project.

I look forward to meeting with Minister Tibollo about how we can get the funding for Ancaster arts centre back on track and ensure that this innovative project is completed in the riding of Hamilton West–Ancaster–Dundas.

NEW CIRCLES COMMUNITY SERVICES

Mr. Michael Coteau: Today I rise to speak about two wonderful programs that are taking place in my community run by an organization called New Circles Community Services. They are an incredible organization serving the needs of many constituents in my community. They focus specifically on newcomers who face tremendous difficulties finding work here in Ontario. They're often trying to learn French or English and trying to gain work experience here in Canada. And many times, newcomers do face issues like poverty.

New Circles has recognized that while the barriers to enter into the workforce are many, it's often easily accessible and quick training programs that can make a difference in leading to finding their first job. That's why they offer two courses, Mr. Speaker. One is Retail and Customer Service Foundations, and the other is Business Office Skills training programs in partnership with Centennial College. There were two recent graduation classes in my riding of Don Valley East. These programs combine classroom learning with hands-on experience, as well as job-searching skills and developing things like resumés and different strategies. In fact, 75% of the participants in these programs actually end up finding a job within the first six months.

It was a priority for our government to fund these programs. I hope the current government sees the value in these types of programs and allows the continued funding for these important initiatives.

CRIME PREVENTION

Mr. Prabmeet Singh Sarkaria: Today I rise to bring awareness to the horrific news that repeat sex offender Madilyn Harks, formerly known as Matthew Harks, was released in Brampton. Harks has been convicted on three separate occasions of sexually assaulting multiple young girls under the age of 8. She has previously admitted to victimizing as many as 60 children. I am disgusted at the reckless decision that led to Harks's release in Brampton.

This is not the first time families in Ontario have been left wondering whether their justice system has broken down. Back in September, Tori Stafford's killer, Terri-Lynne McClintic, was sent to a healing lodge in Saskatchewan. Only after a national outcry did the federal government correct their mistake. The decision to move McClintic, like the decision to release Harks, lies at the feet of the federal government.

I would like to commend the Peel Regional Police for informing members of their community that this sex offender will be released and for monitoring her. Speaker, Brampton families deserve peace of mind. They should feel that their children are safe in their own community. The Liberal MPs for Brampton have a responsibility to take action and keep our residents safe.

ON YOUR MARK
ACADEMIC SUPPORT PROGRAM

Ms. Marit Stiles: Community Use of Schools funding has enabled school boards to provide space for many important community programs across this province. In my riding of Davenport, the wonderful On Your Mark program offers free one-to-one and small-group mentoring and tutoring for students of Portuguese- and Spanish-speaking heritage in elementary and high schools. It helps kids in the school system and encourages the pursuit of post-secondary education.

On Your Mark has assisted nearly 3,000 students to date and currently is serving 300 students from over 100 schools—I had to check my notes—across different Toronto school boards. It also helps parents to navigate the educational system and support their children. It's an incredibly successful and world-renowned program that is, sadly, at risk because the government has eliminated the Community Use of Schools funding.

Speaker, families do not want this important program to be another casualty of this government's cuts. In the words of two parents in the program, Maria Elisabele and Paulo Da Silva, who wrote to me: "Investing in this program is investing in the country's economy in the long term. On Your Mark is just a program, but it helps hundreds of students every year. The correct thing is to continue supporting this fantastic program and to think about the future of our students."

AUTISM TREATMENT

Mrs. Daisy Wai: I had the pleasure of meeting with autism families and organizations in my riding of Richmond Hill last week. I thank them for meeting with me and having an amicable and productive dialogue.

I have been caring for special needs children and their families for over 10 years. My heart is with them. I understand the challenges that parents, siblings, family members and teachers are going through. It is unfortunate that the previous government left us with a broke and broken program: 23,000 children were left out in the cold. It is not fair. However, it is a stress for families with children who are receiving treatment to share the funding.

We have listened to the concerns and have presented an enhancement program to respond to their needs. I really appreciate the minister for planning to double the existing funding to cope with the demanding needs.

1520

I would like to say that we care and we are listening to your concerns and suggestions. I will be holding round tables in Richmond Hill to meet with you, and I would like to keep it constructive and with respect. I continue wanting to work with you to come up with solutions that will work with everybody.

ASSEMBLÉE PARLEMENTAIRE
DE LA FRANCOPHONIE

Ms. Natalia Kusendova: Last month, I had the honour of representing our government for the people as the chair of Réseau des femmes at a conference hosted by the Assemblée parlementaire de la Francophonie, APF. I was joined by my colleagues the member from Nickel Belt and the member for Orléans as we brought Ontario's perspective into discussion on the themes of the rights of women, girls and refugees around the world, and the fight against cyber violence and human trafficking.

APF is an international organization representing countries and regions where French is an official language or where there is a notable affiliation with the French culture. The organization comprises 88 member states, including Ontario, Quebec, New Brunswick and Canada, with a mission of promoting cultural and linguistic diversity. I was honoured to join fellow French-speaking parliamentarians from countries such as Vietnam, Cameroon, Belgium, France, Central Africa, and many others, to highlight Ontario's progress in the fight against human trafficking.

In a pre-conference survey, we shared some important steps that Ontario has already taken, such as the Saving the Girl Next Door Act brought forward by Honourable Minister of Labour in 2016, which raised awareness and the level of discourse among parliamentarians in Ontario about human trafficking; and a new province-wide human trafficking consultation task force, called by our honourable minister responsible for women's issues and co-chaired by myself and the member for Cambridge, which is tasked with consulting women and survivors with lived experiences and experts and with reporting back to the minister.

I was honoured to represent Ontario and our government at this important summit. Our government is committed to supporting francophone Ontarians and continuing the fight against human trafficking.

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

TEACH THE REACH ACT, 2019

LOI DE 2019 SUR L'ENSEIGNEMENT
DE LA MÉTHODE D'OUVERTURE PIVOT

Ms. Stiles moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 89, An Act to amend the Highway Traffic Act to ensure the Dutch reach method is included in driver education programs / Projet de loi 89, Loi modifiant le Code de la route pour assurer l'intégration de la méthode d'ouverture pivot dans les programmes de conduite automobile.

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

First reading agreed to.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Would the member for Davenport like to explain her bill?

Ms. Marit Stiles: The bill amends the Highway Traffic Act to require the ministry to ensure that the Dutch reach method is explained in driver education handbooks or other written material prepared or endorsed by the ministry and is taught in driver education courses that are approved or licensed by the ministry. Knowledge of the Dutch reach method shall also be tested as part of the written portion of a driver's examination for a driver's licence, where appropriate.

The Dutch reach method is a method of opening a vehicle door used by a person in the vehicle to exit the vehicle in order to reduce the risk of injuring a bicyclist approaching the vehicle from behind.

LOWER AUTOMOBILE INSURANCE RATES ACT, 2019

LOI DE 2019 POUR DES TAUX D'ASSURANCE-AUTOMOBILE PLUS BAS

Mr. Rakocevic moved first reading of the following bill: Bill 90, An Act to amend the Insurance Act with respect to Automobile Insurance Rates / Projet de loi 90, Loi modifiant la Loi sur les assurances à l'égard des taux d'assurance-automobile.

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

First reading agreed to.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Would the member care to explain his bill?

Mr. Tom Rakocevic: Thank you, Speaker; I would.

The bill amends part XV, rates and rating bureaus, of the Insurance Act. A new section, 415.1, applies when the superintendent is considering approving a proposed or current rate for a coverage or category of automobile insurance for an insurer. The provision prevents the superintendent from approving the proposed or current rate if it would permit the insurer's return on equity to exceed the amount set out in subsection (3) or would result in the insurer's operating costs exceeding a specified percentage of the amount collected by the insurer in insurance premiums as set out in subsection (4). The section also requires insurers to provide the superintendent with specified information that is relevant to approvals under the section.

A new section, 415.2, requires insurers to provide the superintendent annually with information on how much their insured clients pay in insurance premiums each year, how many accident claims are made to the insurer each year, and how much the insurer pays out on those claims. The information is to be provided based on the postal codes of the areas in which insured persons reside.

STATEMENTS BY THE MINISTRY AND RESPONSES

EDUCATION REFORM

Hon. Lisa M. Thompson: It's a pleasure to rise in this House and take some time today to talk about something that Ontarians have wanted for a long time. I'm honoured

to stand in this House to share our government's new vision for publicly funded education in Ontario, Education that Works for You.

After the last 15 years, Speaker, we have inherited an absolute mess in the education system right here in this province. Because of that, we've been consulting, we've been listening and, most importantly, the Ontario PC government has been working tirelessly to improve Ontario's education system for families and students in every corner of this province.

One of our first steps was getting back to focusing on teaching the fundamentals of math. Parents and teachers, quite frankly, were asking for it, and we're delivering. I can tell you, one of our most important priorities is making sure that we get away from the discovery math that was failing our students right here in this province.

Speaker, making sure that students have a strong understanding of fundamental math concepts and skills as well as how to apply them is one of the best ways to prepare them for success, now and in the future. To support this work, we began the school year by releasing a teachers' guide and a parent fact sheet that highlight some of the fundamental math concepts and skills in the current curriculum. We also refocused \$55 million in existing math investments to district school boards to support math facilitators and leads, as well as provide release time for educators to participate in training and learning focused on the fundamentals of math.

In October, we introduced Bill 48. If passed, this bill would help keep our children and students safer and ensure that they are better supported in their learning.

Highlights of these proposed legislative amendments are:

Requiring the discipline committees of the Ontario College of Teachers and College of Early Childhood Educators to revoke an educator's certificate of registration for any act of sexual abuse of a student or child.

Safe and supportive learning environments have to be a priority as well, Speaker. That is why we're also mandating new teachers to successfully complete a math content knowledge test before seeking their teaching registration. Again, we have to make sure we have supportive learning environments and a focus on math.

Thirdly, we want to ensure that school boards have clear guidance with respect to students needing service animals in publicly funded schools. This is very, very important as well and it touches all of us, again, in every corner of this province.

Speaker, I'm pleased to share with you that since day one, the priority of this government, this PC government, has been listening to those who matter most: the people of Ontario. So in the fall of 2018, we launched a consultation that has gone on to become the largest consultation in the history of Ontario's education ministry. I'm very, very proud of that. Again, the reach has been unprecedented, and the response generated over 72,000 engagements of people, including parents, students, teachers, grandparents, business owners, potential employers—the list goes on.

1530

As a result of this consultation, I'm pleased to say, we have collected rich and diverse feedback because of the diverse group that chose to engage on topics such as job and life skills, health and physical education, standardized testing, how to improve students performance in science, technology, engineering and math disciplines, as well as the steps schools should take to manage technology, such as cellphone use in the classroom. The data our ministry collected and analyzed has helped us chart a new course for Ontario's public education system. We're getting it back on track, Speaker. I want to thank everyone who engaged in our consultation. I want to thank everyone in the PC caucus and our Premier, Doug Ford, for understanding the importance of giving a forum for people share their feedback, the importance of listening and for the sake of our students, ultimately, the importance of getting it right once and for all.

We heard a call to get back to the basics, to help empower students to solve everyday problems, increase their employability and be productive and resilient citizens. We heard that students need more opportunities and exposure to the skilled trades and STEM disciplines. Finally, we heard that we need to do better by our students and make sure they develop critical life skills, such as financial literacy, problem-solving and the ability to cope with stress.

It is time to modernize education in Ontario with a thoughtful and responsible approach. It is time to be innovative in how we improve and evolve the system. And it is time for Ontario to get the world-class system that it deserves. We are going to make sure that we support our students and our teachers in making sure we achieve that world-class system.

On March 15, I had the distinct privilege of sharing our vision with the people of Ontario. We hosted that announcement at the Ontario Science Centre, celebrating its 50th anniversary. In that announcement, we talked about our approach. It includes plans to modernize Ontario's classrooms to better prepare our students for the future and modernize learning in Ontario so that students are learning both inside and outside of the classroom. Our plan is to invest resources the right way, to deliver an education system that will produce dynamic and resilient students.

For the health and prosperity of our young people, Ontario must become a world leader in education. Some would say that we're already there, but others will tell you jurisdictions around the world have surpassed us when it comes to math, when it comes to science and when it comes to embracing technology for the good. We need to do better.

Just how will we do this, Speaker? Well, let me tell you: We're going to start by modernizing Ontario classrooms. There's no arguing that technology has made many aspects of our lives more convenient. Our youngest learners are getting access to devices like cellphones earlier than ever. We believe technology can be a great enabler, if it's used for good. It has the potential to offer innovative learning tools and access to resources for many students,

including those with special education needs. But devices such as cellphones, which are helpful for immediate communication and quick access to information, are too often, quite frankly, a distraction from learning when they are in the classroom.

Mr. Speaker, when it comes back to the consultation that we facilitated, I have to share with you that over 97% of consultation respondents supported some form of restrictions on cellphone use in the classroom. That's why, starting in the 2019-20 school year, we will be requiring Ontario school boards to implement a policy that will limit the use of cellphones in the classroom. Some school boards have already embraced similar approaches to the use of cellphones, but we want to make sure it's consistent across the province. This means that cellphone-based learning tools can continue to be used in the classroom for educational purposes, but not as a distraction to other students. We believe that when cellphones are used to better enable student learning and support student achievement, both students and teachers win.

Secondly, we're modernizing learning in Ontario, beginning with math. Let's talk about that for a little bit. Our government has a four-year math strategy that will help to provide students with a strong understanding of math fundamentals and how to apply them in real-world contexts.

Discovery math is done. Discovery math is gone under our watch.

That said, our four-year strategy will improve student performance, help students solve everyday math problems, and increase students' employability for the jobs of today as well as tomorrow. Students and teachers can look forward to a new math curriculum, to be phased in for every grade over the next four years. In addition to an improved curriculum, online resources will be available to support student learning.

As I discussed earlier, our government has also introduced legislation that will require new teachers to pass a math content knowledge test before registering with the Ontario College of Teachers. Our goal here is to ensure that teachers are confident and capable in teaching math, regardless of their primary teaching discipline or the grade level they teach. For teachers already in the system, the government will provide funding to support additional qualification courses in math. We have some of the best teachers in the world right here in Ontario. We're standing beside them, and we're going to make them better, if they choose to have those additional qualification courses.

But we know our focus cannot rest solely on math. We need to do better, overall, in our approach to help ensure that students are prepared for whatever path they choose after graduating high school.

That means building a skilled trades strategy into our education system that supports students who plan to explore this path. Students should feel empowered to explore opportunities in the skilled trades.

Do you know, Speaker, that right now there are less than 2% of high school graduates pursuing high-skilled trades in Ontario? The average age of apprentices in Ontario right now is 27. Clearly, we have a gap, and clearly,

this gap translates into tremendous opportunities for our young people right here in this province. But we have to make sure that pathway is understood, is eloquent and makes people excited to explore the high-skilled trades.

In that regard, students will have an opportunity to develop knowledge of the skilled trades through revisions to the elementary and secondary school curriculum. This will be coupled with rich experiential learning opportunities, inside and outside of the classroom.

Because we're committed to promoting apprenticeship pathways by increasing access to apprenticeship for students as well as their families, we will be expanding evidence-based, employer-focused supports that will include early exposure through increased opportunities for students to explore the skilled trades.

We just had a briefing yesterday within the Ministry of Education, and people are so excited to finally have a window open through which they can help students absolutely embrace the amazing futures that lie ahead for anyone interested in skilled trades. I look forward to playing a part in that, and I thank my ministry for all the amazing work that they're doing, not only with skilled trades, but in every focus that we have taken on to make sure we can get Ontario's education system back on track.

Let's talk a little bit more about skilled trades. We'll also be expanding the reach and opportunities for students to participate in skilled trades-focused programs that set students up for rewarding and successful careers. These programs include co-operative education, School-College-Work Initiative, Dual Credit Program, Specialist High Skills Major and the Ontario Youth Apprenticeship Program. And of course, we cannot forget about related skills like science, technology, engineering, culinary arts, the agri-food sector—Speaker, the list could go on and on. But specifically, our new science, technology, engineering and math—or STEM—strategy will enable Ontario to become a global leader in these subjects. Again, we want to lead the pack; we want to be in front, demonstrating to the rest of the world how we can satisfy a gap in a very eloquent and purposeful way. Because currently, we're hearing skilled trades, and that sector in particular, could use upwards of 100,000 new entries in the coming years—100,000 people could embrace the amazing opportunities and careers associated with skilled trades in the coming years. We want to make sure Ontario is leading the way in terms of making sure our students can embrace this opportunity.

1540

Our first step to do just this will be partnering with educators, students, parents, post-secondary institutions and industry leaders, because through partnering, the government will create a new environment, a new excitement and, most importantly, enriched learning experiences for students in STEM.

We will take a look at releasing the revised mandatory grade 10 career studies course. This revised course will explore high-growth industries, including STEM, which will reflect new mandatory learning for students.

That's not the only way we're improving the career studies course, Speaker. Financial learning, specifically financial literacy, is essential to building a well-educated, responsible workforce and preparing young Ontarians for a more prosperous future. The Minister of Finance and myself, when we met with the Jr. Economic Club, heard this message loud and clear. Students, on behalf of students, were asking for a greater focus on financial literacy, and I am so proud that the Ontario PC government is delivering on this very thing. Financial literacy will be embedded among a lot of curricula, but it will also be a major component in the revised careers studies course.

Ontarians can also expect other revised curricula, more specifically in the areas of Indigenous education, and health and physical education. A revised First Nations, Métis and Inuit studies curriculum for grades 9 to 12 will be released in late May for implementation in September 2019. I spoke to the Minister of Indigenous Affairs, and I'm really pleased to share with him that our curriculum will be developed in collaboration with Indigenous partners to increase learning about Indigenous perspectives, cultures, contributions and histories.

Building on this, the government will continue to work with Indigenous partners to develop an approach for more curriculum revisions. I know the minister was very excited when we talked about this very thing. Indigenous studies will not be a one-off under our watch. We are very pleased to share that Indigenous partners will be included in working with us for more curriculum revisions across subjects, grades and courses to strengthen Indigenous content and learning across the board, and we look forward to doing that very thing.

Of course, since day one, our government committed to revising the elementary health and physical education curriculum. Through the fall consultation, we heard loud and clear that there was a need for a revised, age-appropriate elementary health and physical education curriculum. However, age-appropriate does not mean removing entire topics. Speaker, I'm pleased to stand in front of you today to share with you that we will issue a revised elementary curriculum, based on real consultation with parents, that includes topics like body image and body shaming, online safety, consent, and sexual orientation. At the same time, gender identity and gender expression will be taught in later grades.

We are also proposing to introduce new mandatory learning into the curriculum. For the first time, students will have new, explicit mandatory learning on concussions, mental health, and families and healthy relationships—for the first time ever, Speaker. We know that we need to include learning about making good decisions, guarding against predators to prevent human trafficking and cyberbullying.

We also heard the need to do more on mental health, and we will be strengthening the curriculum with new mandatory learning throughout every elementary grade when it comes to wellness and mental health. That's why we are working with School Mental Health Ontario to ensure that we get this right.

And for the parents who feel their child may not be ready for some sexual health topics, I am very pleased to share with you today that there will be a clear opt-out policy in place, similar to other jurisdictions. Again, we are respecting parents—a promise made and a promise worth keeping.

Interjections: Promise kept.

Hon. Lisa M. Thompson: Absolutely.

The government will always respect the first and most important educators in student lives, and that is their parents. Mr. Speaker, our new vision is brimming with new and innovative ways our government plans to strengthen Ontario's education system over the next four years.

In conclusion, Speaker, since forming government, we have focused on building a system that best supports students, provides choices to parents, and respects taxpayers of the province—a system that supports improved student achievement, yet is sustainable over the long term. It is a challenging task ahead, but we can see the path forward that will help us accomplish this goal, and we're excited by it. By putting our vision in place, we will improve and evolve Ontario's publicly funded education system so that we can become, once again, a world leader in education.

Interjections.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Thank you. Please be seated.

Responses to the Minister of Education's ministerial statement?

Ms. Marit Stiles: While it's always a pleasure to be able to stand in this House and talk about the future of education in this province, I want to point out how very unusual it was to have such a lengthy ministerial statement—really what was just simply a reiteration, in fact a complete reannouncement, of what was announced on March 15.

For those watching or those sitting here today, waiting for us to have our important debate on our opposition day motion about the autism program, I want you to know that that was what that statement was about. In my opinion, that was about that.

So I am not going to refer to all of my many pages of information on the cuts to education this government has planned. I'm just going to highlight a couple of small things. The minister started out by saying that this is what people in this province voted for. Let me tell you, Mr. Speaker, not one person voted for larger class sizes for their children and less support for our kids—not one. Not one person voted for 10,000 teachers to be taken out of our classrooms, for those jobs to vanish. Not one person voted for this government to cut \$1 billion from our education budget right out of our kids' classrooms. That's what this minister refused to say in her statement just now.

She said nothing about those cuts, but that will be the effect of those cuts—larger classrooms, 40 kids in a classroom, smaller schools closing because they won't be able to offer the classes that students need—and four mandatory e-learning online courses, even for children who simply are not going to learn best that way. This is not 21st-century learning; this is 19th-century learning. This

is warehousing students. This is going backwards. Things were bad for 15 years before; you're going to make it worse.

Luckily, parents, teachers and kids are not going to stand for it.

Ms. Mitzie Hunter: Speaker, I will be sharing my time with the member from Guelph.

Today I was pleased to meet with over 300 students in grades 7 and 8 in Brampton at the Sandalwood Heights Secondary School and really talk to them about their future and how excited they were to go to high school. Public education is the cornerstone of any and all democratic societies. Without equal access to education, there can be no promise of equal opportunity from a government to its citizens. To give people the best chance for them to succeed, access to strong public education comes first. This government is putting public education and the future of our children last.

Over the course of my time as Minister of Education and then Minister of Advanced Education and Skills Development, including the trades, I firmly acted towards my belief that education has the capacity to be the great equalizer.

1550

Under the previous Liberal government, full-day kindergarten was rolled out for every four- and five-year-old. The average percentage of elementary students meeting the provincial standards of a B grade for reading, writing and math went from 54% to 71%. Performance gaps narrowed significantly for newcomers, students with special needs and Indigenous students. Ontario's students are now among the top performers in the world for literacy, math, problem-solving and science. High school graduation rates went from 68% to 86%. This is what you can do with the power of education. This is what was accomplished under the Liberals for the future of our children and youth.

Now we have a government who insist on putting children last, with millions of dollars of cuts to education; a lack of support for public educators—even threatening them—who are trying to really help our children living with autism to learn and grow; and, most recently, removing the cap, resulting in larger class sizes. The increase in average class sizes will significantly increase the size of general courses and jeopardize the viability of many smaller, specialized offerings, most profoundly in smaller rural communities. Across the province, boards will grapple with empty classrooms.

Employers are asking for graduates who are critical thinkers and creative, collaborative and effective communicators. These are competencies that are best realized in smaller, in-person classes, not larger or exclusively online. Students, parents and educators are asking for schools that are supportive and inclusive of diverse needs and interests, conditions best supported with more caring professionals in our local schools, not fewer.

The role of caring adults in the classroom cannot be understated. The teacher is the strongest predictor of a student's success outcomes. This government is taking away opportunity for so many young Ontarians at a time when we should be supporting our students to succeed in the

digital economy. This government is cutting so many teachers and reducing students' chance of success.

The government should not be making cuts, to the detriment of our children's future. Strong public education plays an incredibly important role in Ontario, and it is time that this government did their homework and acted accordingly.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): I now recognize the member from Guelph.

Mr. Mike Schreiner: I'm pleased to rise on behalf of the Green Party and respond to the minister's statement. I would ask the minister, moving forward, to stop selling what are clearly cuts to education as a modernization of Ontario's schools. I would ask her to stop using it as a distraction for the failure to invest in services for children with autism in our schools.

Time with teachers matters. Class sizes matter. Specialized programming for mental health, for Indigenous youth, for guidance counsellors and for children with disabilities matters. Even before the current round of cuts, the government announced cuts last fall of \$25 million to these kinds of services, services that are designed to support all students, including students with autism.

Failure to invest properly in young people—all young people, including young people in autism—has ripple effects for the future. Employers are telling me that they want more highly skilled and highly trained workers, and that means investing more in education, not less in education.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak, Mr. Speaker. I'll yield the rest of my time.

PETITIONS

VETERANS MEMORIAL

Mrs. Belinda Karahalios: “To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas over 40,000 Canadian Armed Forces members served in the war in Afghanistan including the 159 Canadians who made the ultimate sacrifice; and

“Whereas the Premier made a commitment to the people of Ontario to build a memorial to honour the bravery and sacrifice of our armed forces; and

“Whereas, by remembering their service and sacrifice, we recognize the values and freedoms these men and women fought to preserve; and

“Whereas the memorial will show our gratitude to our veterans, their families and to their descendants; and

“Whereas the memorial will be a place of remembrance, a form of tribute, and an important reminder to future generations of the contributions and sacrifices that have helped shape our country;

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

“That the government of Ontario immediately construct the memorial to honour the heroes of the war in Afghanistan.”

I affix my signature to this petition and give it to page Mirren.

ANIMAL PROTECTION

Mr. David Piccini: I'm pleased to table a petition here in the Legislature called “Animal Protection in Ontario.

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas all animals in Ontario deserve our protection but are largely going unprotected at this time;

“Whereas the Ontario Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (OSPCA) is the only agency in Ontario authorized to enforce animal protection laws;

“Whereas the OSPCA has continually cut back services, including the recent decision to stop investigating incidents involving farm animals, including horses, as well as failing to fully investigate poorly run zoos, dogfighting operations, puppy and kitten mills and even documented cases of dogs being tortured in the” GTA;

“Whereas the OSPCA has made itself completely unaccountable to the public by eliminating annual general members meetings and board elections as well as eliminating a government representative from their board meetings;

“Whereas the Ministry of Community Safety and Correctional Services provides an annual grant to the OSPCA of \$5.75 million of the public's dollars, for which the OSPCA is to provide province-wide coverage and other services which the OSPCA has failed to deliver;

“We, the undersigned, hereby petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to exercise its authority, through the Ministry of Community Safety and Correctional Services under the current funding transfer payment agreement and the OSPCA Act, requiring that:

“—through the OSPCA Act the government annul the bylaws of the OSPCA;

“—a new bylaw be required that re-establishes annual general members meetings, open board elections and a government representative attending board meetings;

“—the government immediately suspend funding to the OSPCA and conduct a forensic audit of the organization's use of public funds;

“—the government conduct a service delivery audit of the OSPCA relating to the enforcement of the OSPCA Act;

“—recognize the important job of animal protection by creating a more accountable system that ensures the immediate and long-term protection of the millions of animals who live among us.”

I'm pleased to affix my signature to this petition, Mr. Speaker, and will give it to this fine young gentleman, Ben.

AUTISM TREATMENT

Miss Monique Taylor: It always gives me great pleasure to table stacks of petitions that have come in from around the province. This one reads:

“Support Ontario Families with Autism.

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas every child with autism deserves access to sufficient treatment and support so that they can live” their life “to their fullest potential;

“Whereas the Ontario Autism Program was badly broken under the Liberals, and the changes introduced by the Conservatives have made it worse;

“Whereas the new funding caps are based on age and income, and not the clinical needs of the child;

“Whereas Ontario needs a true investment in evidence-based autism services that meets the needs of autistic children and their families;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to direct the Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services to invest in equitable, needs-based autism services for all children who need them.”

I couldn't agree with this more, Mr. Speaker. I'm going to affix my name to it and give it to Gajan to bring to the Clerk.

VETERANS MEMORIAL

Mrs. Amy Fee: I have a petition today to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

“Whereas over 40,000 Canadian Armed Forces members served in the war in Afghanistan including the 159 Canadians who made the ultimate sacrifice; and

“Whereas the Premier made a commitment to the people of Ontario to build a memorial to honour the bravery and sacrifice of our armed forces; and

“Whereas, by remembering their service and sacrifice, we recognize the values and freedoms these men and women fought to preserve; and

“Whereas the memorial will show our gratitude to our veterans, their families and to their descendants; and

1600

“Whereas the memorial will be a place of remembrance, a form of tribute, and an important reminder to future generations of the contributions and sacrifices that have helped shape our country;

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

“That the government of Ontario immediately construct the memorial to honour the heroes of the war in Afghanistan.”

I fully support this petition and will be affixing my name to it and handing it to the page.

AUTISM TREATMENT

Mr. Jamie West: I'd like to submit these petitions that were collected from Josée and Chad Pharand from Sudbury on behalf of their daughter Manon.

“Support Ontario Families with Autism.

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas every child with autism deserves access to sufficient treatment and support so that they can live to their fullest potential;

“Whereas the Ontario Autism Program was badly broken under the Liberals, and the changes introduced by the Conservatives have made it worse;

“Whereas the new funding caps are based on age and income, and not the clinical needs of the child;

“Whereas Ontario needs a true investment in evidence-based autism services that meets the needs of autistic children and their families;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to direct the Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services to invest in equitable, needs-based autism services for all children who need them.”

I'll affix my signature and give it to page Saniya.

VETERANS MEMORIAL

Mr. Aris Babikian: “Whereas over 40,000 Canadian Armed Forces members served in the war in Afghanistan including the 159 Canadians who made the ultimate sacrifice; and

“Whereas the Premier made a commitment to the people of Ontario to build a memorial to honour the bravery and sacrifice of our armed forces; and

“Whereas, by remembering their service and sacrifice, we recognize the values and freedoms these men and women fought to preserve; and

“Whereas the memorial will show our gratitude to our veterans, their families and to their descendants; and

“Whereas the memorial will be a place of remembrance, a form of tribute, and an important reminder to future generations of the contributions and sacrifices that have helped shape our country;

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

“That the government of Ontario immediately construct the memorial to honour the heroes of the war in Afghanistan.”

I gladly sign this petition and hand it to Stella.

AUTISM TREATMENT

Mr. Percy Hatfield: I have a petition given to me by Chris Brouillard-Coyle from Windsor. It's signed by people from Amherstburg, LaSalle and Essex as well.

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas every child with autism deserves access to sufficient treatment and support so that they can live to their fullest potential;

“Whereas the Ontario Autism Program was badly broken under the Liberals, and the changes introduced by the Conservatives have made it worse;

“Whereas the new funding caps are based on age and income, and not the clinical needs of the child;

“Whereas Ontario needs a true investment in evidence-based autism services that meets the needs of autistic children and their families;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to direct the Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services to invest in equitable, needs-based autism services for all children who need them.”

I fully agree. I’m going to sign this and give it to Aaryan to bring up to the front.

FISH AND WILDLIFE MANAGEMENT

Mr. Vincent Ke: “To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas the ban on hunting and trapping in sections of Ontario to protect the eastern hybrid wolf was put in place without regard for the overall ecosystem;

“Whereas this ban has adversely affected the ability of the Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry (MNR), hunters and trappers to properly manage animal populations and Ontario’s ecosystem;

“Whereas this ban is no longer needed and is in fact causing more damage to Ontario’s ecosystem and increasing unnecessary encounters between wildlife and Ontarians;

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

“That the Minister of Natural Resources and Forestry immediately lift the ban on hunting and trapping set in place to protect the eastern hybrid wolf.”

AUTISM TREATMENT

Ms. Bhutla Karpoche: This petition is titled “Support Ontario Families with Autism.

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas every child with autism deserves access to sufficient treatment and support so that they can live to their fullest potential;

“Whereas the Ontario Autism Program was badly broken under the Liberals, and the changes introduced by the Conservatives have made it worse;

“Whereas the new funding caps are based on age and income, and not the clinical needs of the child;

“Whereas Ontario needs a true investment in evidence-based autism services that meets the needs of autistic children and their families;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to direct the Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services to invest in equitable, needs-based autism services for all children who need them.”

On behalf of the parents and families in Parkdale–High Park, I fully support this petition and will be affixing my signature to it.

PUBLIC SAFETY

Mr. Deepak Anand: I’d like to read a petition 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 fully support this petition and will give it to page Julien.

AUTISM TREATMENT

Mr. Faisal Hassan: I would like to thank Sean Staddon for this petition.

“Support Ontario Families with Autism.

“Whereas every child with autism deserves access to sufficient treatment and support so that they can live to their fullest potential;

“Whereas the Ontario Autism Program was badly broken under the Liberals, and the changes introduced by the Conservatives have made it worse;

“Whereas the new funding caps are based on age and income, and not the clinical needs of the child;

“Whereas Ontario needs a true investment in evidence-based autism services that meets the needs of autistic children and their families;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to direct the Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services to invest in equitable, needs-based autism services for all children who need them.”

I fully support this petition. I will be affixing my signature to it and providing it to page Aaryan to deliver to the table.

1610

OPPOSITION DAY

AUTISM TREATMENT

TRAITEMENT DE L'AUTISME

Miss Monique Taylor: I move the following motion:

Whereas the new Ontario Autism Program fails to meet the needs of children because it is age- and income-based; and

Whereas needs-based therapies are recognized to be the best approach to empowering children with autism; and

Whereas the Ford government's new Ontario Autism Program takes away support from families already receiving assistance and makes it impossible for those newly diagnosed to get the help they actually need; and

Whereas the Ford government has not provided adequate support to the education system to properly support the influx of children with autism that will enter schools when the new Ontario Autism Program is implemented;

Therefore, the Legislative Assembly calls on the government to suspend the implementation of the new Ontario Autism Program and instead develop an autism program that will provide needs- and evidence-based autism services for children with autism spectrum disorder.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Miss Taylor has moved opposition motion number 2. We turn it back to the member from Hamilton Mountain, Miss Taylor.

Miss Monique Taylor: I am honoured to rise and speak to this motion today. To the folks who are here in the House today, first of all, welcome to your Ontario Legislature. Just so you have a base of what's been happening, we see that the government has wasted 40 minutes on the clock that could have been taken up for debate time today. That's really unfortunate.

But I'm grateful that you're all here. You have been impacted by the Ontario Autism Program, and yet, in the middle of the afternoon, when your kiddos are coming home from school, you have found the time to join us here in the Legislature. Thank you to the folks who are here with us in spirit because they can't be here, and thank you to the folks who are tuning in this afternoon watching.

I have spent the last six weeks hearing from people affected by the government's awful autism plan. I've spoken with families, experts, advocates, therapists, autistic adults, teachers and many others. Everyone I have spoken with is passionate about making sure that children with autism get the support they need. They all agree that this government's autism program, which comes into place next week, will fail families and children. That's because the plan is still based on age of a child and not their individual needs.

When you base the funding on age, you end up discriminating against children who are typically diagnosed

later. As it stands now, the new autism program will discriminate against girls, who are often diagnosed at a later age than boys. It also discriminates against rural, racialized and low-income children, generally because their diagnosis comes later. Age-based funding also fails to recognize the changes that happen in life. Reducing access to services discriminates against teachers, not to mention adults and seniors with autism who get no support at all.

It's not clear to us why the government chose six as the age cut-off or how they came up with their funding amounts. Which expert decided on \$20,000 or \$5,000 funding levels? Who did they consult with that had the clinical knowledge of services that these kids receive? The government has not demonstrated the rationale for these funding levels or shared the information they used to decide the age cap. This government will not communicate their reasoning or listen to anyone. Instead, they stick to their canned message about the wait-list.

I know some parents who say they don't need the full \$5,000 for their child, and I know others who need intensive therapy for over \$70,000 for their child. The allocation of this money makes no sense. By spreading the existing funding so thinly, no one gets what they need. This government is literally wasting millions of dollars.

And this government keeps talking about choice. The elimination of the direct service option has eliminated choice and forced families to become employers and system navigators. Not all families can take on the added responsibility and the pressure of the direct funding option. How can we expect new immigrants who don't speak English to navigate a system that's more and more fractured all the time?

The full privatization of the system makes access to service harder. It's causing service fees to increase and availability of providers in northern and rural areas to decrease. But thanks to the hard work of families and their allies, the government blinked last week. The minister added new services that could be accessed—services like OT, speech-language pathology and physiotherapy. This is a great win for children and their families.

While we welcome these services for children with autism, we also recognize that all children with all types of disabilities should have access to those same services. I know that disability advocates have been demanding these supports for their children for many years, and rightfully so. We must push this government to extend these vital supports to all children with disabilities. As it stands right now, children with physical or developmental disabilities get very little from their government. All children deserve to be supported so that they can reach their full potential. This government should be extending access to these new services to a wider group of children who need them.

This government hasn't been listening. It's only now, after weeks of protests, that the government has decided that some consultation is needed to design a better plan. If they had actually listened to people trying to meet with them back in January, they would have created a better program and saved parents a lot of anxiety. But they didn't

listen to anyone or think about the consequences of the new program.

Since the announcement, the government has created chaos for families. Families have received none of the necessary information that would help them plan for their kids' future or for their own financial future. They do not know what specific services will be included under the OAP. They don't know how long they'll have to wait to get funding. They don't know which kids will be prioritized on the wait-list. Families keep coming to our offices with specific and practical questions that the ministry has not provided answers for.

No one really knows what is actually going to happen on April 1. Will a form come out for people to sign up? Will that be available? Will parents be notified? Will the ministry send out letters? The ministry has not shared enough information for families to plan for their future. It's really quite shocking how poorly this plan has been rolled out.

The only thing that families know for certain is that they will somehow have to scrounge together thousands of dollars each year to pay for therapies. We know that for some children, therapies can cost \$50,000 to \$80,000 per year, and that funding offered by this government is woefully inadequate to meet these needs. If families don't have the money to make up the funding shortfall, they will have to sit by and watch as their child receives less supports, and possibly regresses.

When it comes to therapy providers, they don't have any of the critical information that they need to plan, either. Many of these providers are finding that they have to make cuts. More and more layoffs are happening as a direct result of the changes to the OAP. Providers are also questioning whether they can provide ethical services on a parent's ability to pay. We already have a shortage of trained therapists. It took decades to get to the number of therapists that we have now, and now we're losing them at an alarming rate. The Conservative autism program will destroy the capacity in this province to serve our kids. They should be investing in strengthening autism services, not gutting them.

Speaker, it's important to remember that the disastrous changes to the autism plan did not happen in a vacuum. They're happening in the context of this government's overall cuts to services for vulnerable kids. Last fall, they cut the office of the child advocate, leaving many of our most vulnerable children without a voice. The PCs cut funding from schools that was used to provide support for kids who need it.

And now parents with children with disabilities are concerned about another funding program called Special Services at Home. This funding—I hope it's not going anywhere, Minister, because it really shouldn't; parents need that. Parents are being told that this program is on a freeze until budget day. They're leaving parents to feel anxious until their announcement. Come clean. Tell parents how to plan for their future.

It pains me to imagine what is coming next for our kids.

Speaker, it wasn't that long ago—a year ago—in this House that the Conservatives put forward a plan to stop the Liberals. They put down an opposition day just like this, with wording very similar to what we put forward today, asking the Liberals to stop and to reverse their plan. We voted in support of that bill with them. Today, will they vote in support of our motion?

1620

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further debate?

Mrs. Amy Fee: As I speak this afternoon to the member from Hamilton Mountain's motion, I'm going to highlight how we got here and also talk about the enhancements to the Ontario Autism Program and how we are still working to continue to improve that program.

Last year before the election, my discussions with the now Premier began on what it was like to have a family member with autism, as two of my four children are on the autism spectrum. During that first meeting, the MPP for Ottawa West–Nepean, who has a brother with severe autism, and I met with the leader of our party to talk about our vision for how, if we form government, we need to be working across ministries and supporting people with autism and their families across all aspects of their lives. We discussed the Ontario Autism Program, what appeared to be working with that program and what likely wasn't working. We talked about education supports, school exclusions, the transition into adulthood, and housing and employment options. We also had that very hard conversation about what happens when I'm no longer there to take care of my son, what happens when Jeremy is no longer around to take care of his brother.

When we formed government, I was asked by the Premier to take on the role as Minister MacLeod's parliamentary assistant for children and autism, because he knew I was already a strong advocate for people with autism and would continue to be an advocate within our government. Within days of the minister being sworn in, we were briefed on the Ontario Autism Program. What we found out was way worse than we had ever expected, and the projections were that, over the next few months, we were going to see things more clearly, including the financial situation and how the wait-list would move over the next few years. We quickly realized that the former government's system was on the verge of collapsing. We were running out of money for the children who were already in service, and by the end of the summer, the projections for what was going to happen with that list were getting even worse. We were being told that if we did nothing to try and get that wait-list to move, there was a good chance that there were children even as young as five or six years old that may never get into service before turning 18 and aging out of that program, and therefore would never receive any help from their government. We were also told about how only a quarter of the children in the province with autism were actually in service and receiving any funds and supports from the OAP. The minister knew she had to do something.

We started consultations with stakeholders right away, talking to service providers, children's treatment centres, parents and autism experts. While we were doing that, the minister had to go to the Treasury Board twice to ask for more money to keep the system, which we knew was broken, afloat. We were tasked with figuring out how to make it sustainable. Over our first few months in government, we continued consultations. The minister knew we couldn't continue to have a system that only supported a quarter of the children with autism in the province.

That's why we launched the first part of the Ontario Autism Program, while I continued to meet with families about the realities that they're facing and trying best to support our children with autism across Ontario. We heard from families that they needed us to do more within the OAP and our education system. Families talked to me about just how that income test was making it more difficult for them to support their child. So we listened, and we scrapped it. I continued to hear that parents need choice on how best to support their child, including speech and language, occupational therapy and physiotherapy.

As I've said often, including in our round table discussions on autism, there are times when you're trying to support a child with a challenging behaviour and you actually may need the expertise of a speech and language pathologist or an occupational therapist in order to work on that behaviour. For a child who is struggling to communicate, that could be the total function of a behaviour that they're working on targeting in therapy. As an example, one of the first things we worked on in therapy with my son Kenner was to help him when he would curl up into a ball and rock. This was especially important to me because not only would he bang his head against the wall, but I could tell he desperately wanted to tell me something but couldn't. We worked for months trying to get him the ability to communicate. It took a lot of support from a speech provider, other therapists, his patience and our patience, and we quickly realized there were many triggers. When we would see that behaviour, it could be because he was overwhelmed by noise or a particular cartoon that he was terrified of came on the TV, or simply that he was hungry or thirsty and couldn't tell us what he needed.

Over the first few years of therapy, we watched Kenner improve in his ability to communicate, and his need for that coping strategy decreased. Kenner needed, though, the support of speech and language therapy to gain functional language in order for us to work through that behaviour to stop him from injuring himself.

There are also families who feel their children will benefit appropriately from just speech and language or just OT, and that's why we're giving them those options in the OAP.

During the round tables, I heard from the mother of a young boy with autism who was avoiding food. This isn't just a typical young boy who is a picky eater. Things are so bad for him that he is malnourished, and doctors feel he needs a feeding tube. For anyone, the prospect of a feeding tube can be overwhelming; but add in his sensory issues, and that's terrifying, not only for him but for his family.

The child's mother talked to me about how she desperately needs the support of not just a behaviour therapist but also an occupational therapist to help her son work through his extreme sensory needs, and to ensure that he can keep that feeding tube in. Then they can start to work on the behaviours that are restricting his diet.

I'm telling you that story about this little boy today because I continue to advocate for enhancements to the OAP to include other therapies other than ABA. He is one of the main reasons why I continue now to advocate for the OPA to take into account different severity levels of autism and the various needs of children on the spectrum. Mr. Speaker, that's what autism is: It is a spectrum.

A mother in Ottawa who has been a fierce advocate for all children with autism, Kerry Monaghan, has two children with autism, and they have very unique needs. Her son is on the more severe end of the spectrum and needs more hours of therapy than his younger sister. While she has told me that there is no doubt that her daughter is benefiting from currently being in private therapy, and deserves that support as well as her brother, she knows her son has more complex needs and therefore needs more funding and therapy than his sister. This highlights another reason why we're looking at how best to support children on their level of need.

In my own family, I do see this first-hand. We have a very similar situation to Kerry's. Kenner, my son with autism, needs more support than his sister. Kenner was non-verbal when he started school, and, while he talks non-stop now, he still struggles to communicate his emotions and has multiple meltdowns every day. When his sister was younger, she had pica symptoms. She would eat anything. If she saw rocks, if she saw anything lying on the ground, she would eat it. Yet she had no problems, then, telling us how she felt. She was reading and printing before she started school and is in the gifted program. But when it comes to understanding social cues, communicating in the social world and life skills, she can really struggle. That leads to breakdowns and meltdowns for her, as she gets very frustrated.

My point is that while every person has their own struggles, for people with autism it is a daily reality. And for each individual person with autism, child or adult, those struggles are different, and the supports and level of supports that are needed are different. This is why we are continuing our consultations with stakeholders, experts and parents, and are focusing the discussions around how we can better support children with more complex needs.

We know our goal to ensure that every child with autism receives some support from the provincial government is key, though. We couldn't continue to have a system that only supported a quarter of the children with autism, while everyone else just waited and had a good chance of aging out of the system before receiving any funding.

One of the reasons why we are ensuring we have, for the first time ever in Ontario, a program that supports all children with autism in the province is because there was a time, even a few short years ago, when the former government didn't.

1630

When I was here protesting with families for the Autism Doesn't End at 5 campaign, we were fighting for children who were on the wait-list for intensive services who were just kicked off the list, and let's not forget that initially they were only going to receive \$8,000 as a one-time payment. Mr. Speaker, we even had to fight to ensure that those children who were getting kicked out weren't getting just a one-time payment.

When I look back at the system for intensive intervention that the former Liberal government changed from, that actually caused those protests in 2016, there were major issues with that system as well, with children getting left out with no options for direct funding or choice of services. Under that old system, children with autism were assessed by psychologists with the regional service providers for the autism program. Only if a child actually met certain criteria were they accepted into that program for 20 hours a week of provincially funded therapy. Under that system, parents were often pitted against each other in the community as they fought for one of those precious spots available. Parents would meet and discuss whose child needed it more, how to make sure your child looked in the assessment like they actually needed therapy, and what to say or not to say in those meetings.

Overall, that system created stress and fear over your child either getting those 20 hours a week of therapy or maybe getting a few hours a year in a social skills group, and that was if they were actually lucky enough, as the wait-lists for those groups were getting out of control.

For Kenner, he was seen by a psychologist to assess him for the program shortly after his diagnosis. After that first meeting, the psychologist said my son, who could sing part of Twinkle, Twinkle, Little Star and easily copy back the words "Thomas" or "cracker" but was otherwise nonverbal, was too high-functioning to benefit from therapy. I begged for them to keep him on that wait-list and re-evaluate him in a year. The psychologist from the regional centre agreed and saw Kenner the following summer. That same psychologist, when she saw Kenner the second time, though, to my surprise, didn't tell me he was too high-functioning. She told me he was too low-functioning and she didn't feel that he would be able to learn. I was stunned. It was the same doctor who had told me a year earlier not to worry, that my son had a bright future ahead of him. She was now telling me she didn't think he could learn or benefit from the one thing, at that time, that I was being told could help him. I fought back and I begged her to keep him on that wait-list. She eventually agreed, but cautioned me that she didn't think he could learn and reach his therapy goals. She said that if by his first six-month review he couldn't learn, she would remove him from the program immediately. He ended up staying in that program for two years.

I wish I could say that Kenner's story was unique. Unfortunately, it is not. That program only supported a few lucky, if you will, children on the spectrum who fell into that always-moving middle of the spectrum: not too severe, and not too high-functioning as well. If you weren't in that

sweet spot, you didn't have the option to receive direct funding or more than a few hours a year of help. This is why the minister and I know we want to see a system in Ontario that better supports all children with autism with direct funding to families, and one that also respects autism for the spectrum that it is.

Mr. Speaker, parents and stakeholders across the province are relieved that we're enhancing the Ontario Autism Program and that we're continuing with consultations to see how we best move ahead while giving children currently enrolled in the system the additional six months of behaviour plans and also starting on our goal to clear that wait-list in 18 months.

Linda Kenny, for example, the CEO at KidsAbility in Waterloo region, told me that she welcomes the enhancements. She also told 570 News in Kitchener that she is happy to see that we're extending the current behaviour plans. She also told them that she is encouraged to hear that we're still consulting with families and service providers to find ways to meet the unique and diverse needs of children with a wide range of complex needs.

A mother of a young daughter emailed my office. She said, "My daughter ... along with nearly 23,000 other children support your commitment to clear the wait-list.

"My daughter received a diagnosis in July 2016 at the age of two. After nearly three years of waiting for intensive IBI therapy, we find ourselves forgotten on this list. During the nearly three years of waiting, my daughter has not received any sort of ABA therapy and that's just heartbreaking.

"My husband and I are hard-working people. We put our trust in the hands of the previous government only to be lied to. It is unfair that other children have received adequate intervention while our daughter has received none. I echo your sentiment, this is just not fair."

From a mother in Waterloo region: "First of all I would like to say that I am pleased with the announcement made by the Honourable Lisa MacLeod concerning enhancements to the OAP. While there is much work to be done I believe that it is an important step in the right direction. I am pleased that you have already done the important work of meeting with stakeholders. It gave me a bit of hope for my son's future."

This one is from a service provider who works with children with complex needs: "The extended time to support these children is single-handedly the most relieving piece of news I've experienced in months. I am not a parent, but I care deeply for these children and families. As such, on their behalf (and for the sake of my blood pressure) I want to thank you for your ongoing efforts. It is hard for me to put into words the relief I feel this evening....

"Again, thank you for your efforts."

From a parent of a teenager with autism in London: "First of all, I would like to state that our family is satisfied with the proposed changes to the Ontario Autism Program. Our 13-year-old son is on the spectrum, having been diagnosed about 10 years ago. He is on the wait-list for the program here in London, somewhere about number 500 I

think. We never really paid much attention to it because it is such a chimera. So the opportunity to get some resources sooner is very appealing to us.”

Mr. Speaker, every member of this Legislature knows that these last six weeks have been extremely difficult for families. I'd like to remind this House that these are parents standing up for their children, telling us about their very personal situations, and the vast majority are voicing their thoughts with dignity and respect. I'd like to thank the parents who have taken the time to meet with me today here at Queen's Park and to be here, and those who have reached out to tell me about their children.

As I conclude here this afternoon, I'd like to stress that our consultations and enhancements around the OAP will continue. Our government will also continue to look at how we can best support people living with autism across their lives.

Mr. Speaker, I will never stop being an advocate for people with autism.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further debate?

Ms. Andrea Horwath: I want to say at the beginning that I'm honoured to rise and speak to this motion tabled by the fierce advocate for families of children with autism, the NDP member for Hamilton Mountain.

Over the weeks since this government introduced its new autism program, I have also had the honour of speaking with so many families—parents, grandparents, siblings and loved ones—who have been speaking up and speaking out on behalf of the children in their lives who are living with autism. It has been inspiring to hear from these parents, who aren't just talking about the many things that are wrong-headed, callous and dangerous about the government's plan, but who are also thinking about the future that children with autism in Ontario could have. They've shared with me how children would thrive if their services were based on needs, how children would be able to fulfill their potential if they didn't face caps and gaps in service and never lost their progress.

Families across this province already have a vision for a better future, a future in which every child has the support they need to build their own best life. Sadly, the minister used to talk like that when she was the critic; unfortunately, she rolled out a program that does not reflect those sentiments at all. Mr. Speaker, it is our responsibility to try to make this vision a reality in Ontario.

We know the system created by the previous government had a heck of a lot of problems. It wasn't very long ago that Ontario families were forced to take the previous Liberal government to court so that they could get the services they needed for their kids. And for years, tens of thousands of children with autism were shuffled from one waiting list to another.

I remember that many members of this House—New Democrats as well as a few members who now sit over on the government side—took the previous government to task and demanded that children be provided with the supports that they need to thrive. The member from Hamilton

Mountain already mentioned the motion that we and they supported against the previous Liberal government.

But instead of fixing the problems with the previous government's autism program, instead of listening to parents and advocates and experts and making autism services better for Ontario families, the Premier and the Minister for Children, Community and Social Services have decided to make things so much worse. Despite this government's 11th-hour efforts to sugar-coat it, their plan tears services away from children with the highest needs, and it cuts services for everyone else.

1640

They know that some families can pay up to \$70,000, \$80,000 or more each and every year for intensive autism therapies, but they've decided to cap funding at just a small fraction of that. Only an avalanche of public pressure from Ontarians stopped them from clawing back funding from families.

Mr. Speaker, for some of these families, the government's cuts will force them to remortgage their house. For others, it will mean selling their car. For others it will mean racking up even more debt. And for so many Ontario families, those options aren't even available and their kids simply will not get the treatment and services they need. This is not acceptable. This is not an acceptable situation in the province of Ontario—not in Ontario and not for any child.

It does not have to be this way. It doesn't have to be this way in our province. Families should not have to go it alone. They shouldn't have to do that. There's far too much at stake to let the Premier take kids living with autism and their families from bad to worse, which is exactly what this minister and the Premier are doing—to let another four years go by where children don't have access to the care, services and supports that would make their lives so much better.

But it's not all bad because it isn't too late to fix this. We can still take a big step forward instead of moving backwards on this critical issue for Ontario families. We can actually listen to the thousands of Ontarians who need their government to step up and make investments in autism services a priority. I know that with this motion, we can begin the work of doing right by these families, of showing them that they do not have to go it alone and that change for the better is, in fact, possible.

We can make Ontario a leader in supports and services for high-needs children by focusing on evidence-based solutions that actually put the needs of kids and their families first. I'm glad that this government appears to have backtracked somewhat very late in the day when it comes to the decisions that they've been making. But I have to tell you, Speaker, that autism advocates have been forced to protest on the lawns of Queen's Park even though the Premier himself said that they would never have to do that.

We can come together and give every child living with autism the supports they need to grow and thrive, so that every family and every child can live their best life right

here in this province. I'm urging all members to support this motion.

We have to listen to parents. We have to listen to advocates. We must base autism funding on need, not age. Instead of dragging families from a bad autism plan to an even worse one, we can finally turn back the tide on years of nickelling and diming parents and their children. We can turn the tide on excruciating wait-lists, on families taking their government to court, on parents going deep into debt to help their children grow.

I am urging all members to support the motion. I'm calling on the government to get rid of age caps and develop needs- and evidence-based services. Together we can build an Ontario for children with autism and their families, where, instead of coldly and callously dragging parents of children with autism through weeks of agonizing uncertainty and fear, we have a government that actually designs a program and doesn't just sharpen the pencil and cut the budgets, because that's what this government did and they thought they could get away with it. Well, shame on them.

Congratulations to the families of children with autism in this province and the great advocates in our caucus because we pushed them back and we're going to keep pushing until we can have an Ontario where every single child gets the supports and the services that they need to develop to their best selves. That's what this motion is all about. I invite every member of this Legislature to support it.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further debate?

Mrs. Belinda Karahalios: Since taking office last June, our government has been clear and consistent about putting parents in the driver's seat when it comes to their children. We believe families make the best decisions for their families.

I was humbled to hold a round table in my riding of Cambridge with the Honourable Minister of Children, Community and Social Services and my fellow parliamentary assistant, the member from Kitchener South-Hespeler. It gave me an opportunity to hear from parents directly about the challenges that they're facing. Many explained that they had been waiting for years on a wait-list and had been paying thousands out of pocket for treatment while they waited to get government-funded services: 23,000 children were left waiting for support from the government. As a mom, I simply can't imagine having to wait indefinitely for my child to get any type of help.

The changes to the Ontario Autism Program that our government has introduced are about protecting what matters most: families. Now parents will receive childhood budgets and they will be empowered to support their children the best way that they see fit. These childhood budgets will allow parents to purchase the eligible services they value most, from providers of their choice, on a fee-for-service basis. Some of these supports include behavioural services, including assessments and consultations; family/caregiver capacity-building and training; respite services; technology aids; and travel.

In addition, we heard from families after our announcement. Our government never stops listening to those who elected us. As part of the enhancements to the program announced last week, we added speech-language pathology, physiotherapy and occupational therapy in the list of eligible services.

The minister has often said that when you meet one child with autism, you're doing just that: meeting one child. Every child on the spectrum has individualized needs that require different, individualized supports. Our program does not assume that one size fits all. It allows parents to have a broad range of options they can use to support their child. Under the previous Liberal government, the OAP was narrow. It gave parents a limited number of options. Families were often funnelled into direct service that was not always the best fit for their child.

As we continue to enhance our plan over the next few months, we will continue to listen to families during the consultation period. This plan is about empowering them and ensuring they have options for their children. We want to ensure that parents have access to the right supports for their children.

In calling for this opposition day, the NDP have failed to offer their own alternative. They have not provided any sort of plan, much less one that is sustainable or realistic. While our government appreciates the stories of families with autism, the official opposition appears to only listen and take no action. They propped up the previous Liberal government that failed to help families. They allowed three in four children to wait indefinitely for service. While the members opposite want to stir up anger in the autism community, our government wants to listen and empower families.

That's what I'll continue to do in my riding of Cambridge. After we announced the plan in February, all members of our caucus continued to meet with families of children with autism. Myself, I met with a group of families a week after a protest to listen to them, and I gathered—and we all gathered—feedback on our reforms. While our plan is the best possible plan for Ontario, we also acknowledge that parents were bringing forward legitimate concerns. That's why Minister MacLeod announced enhancements to the program last week. It was a recommitment to a strengthened plan. Hearing from those with lived experience and then making informed decisions is a key part of how our government leads.

Our motivation throughout this process has been making the lives of children with autism better. For the first time in the history of Ontario, no child with autism will be left behind on a wait-list. Every child will receive support. In our ongoing consultations, we will be continuing to look at how best to support children with complex needs. This came about because of listening to parents. When we held our round table in Cambridge, parents with children with autism on the wait-list were afraid that they were missing the window for early intervention. The window where the most difference can be made for their child was closing as they were left waiting for their

government to provide help. This was not okay; in fact, it was cruel.

These changes are rooted in compassion for these families. Giving every child with autism support will mean that parents will no longer have to watch as their child isn't getting any help. With the introduction of childhood budgets, parents are given the ability to take action to support their children how they best see fit. For some children, that can mean purchasing a technological aid that makes it easier for them to communicate. For another family, that can mean some funding put towards caregiver training so the stay-at-home mom is better equipped to manage her child's needs. Another parent might use that funding for speech therapy so their child can improve their speaking ability.

Speaker, the great thing about our changes to the OAP is that they allow so much choice for families. They allow parents to make the best-informed choices for their kids. Autism is a spectrum in which every child will exhibit different needs. They do not all require the same therapy. Our government has crafted a program that recognizes this. We have created a program where children that would have previously been stuck on a never-ending wait-list will now have access to a wide range of services that can improve their quality of life.

1650

The changes we have made to the OAP are compassionate reforms that will ultimately empower families and will lead to better support for children with autism.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further debate?

Mrs. Lisa Gretzky: It is my privilege to get up and speak to the opposition day motion that was brought forward by my friend and an amazing advocate, the member for Hamilton Mountain.

I just want to start by mentioning what the member from Kitchener South–Hespeler, the parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Children, Community and Social Services, had said. She talked about a system that's broken. She talked about how much money they've had to put into the system. What she didn't talk about, though, was the \$1 billion in tax breaks that this government has given to the wealthiest individuals and corporations in this province while telling parents that they're going to have to make do with an autism program that is not sufficient—that is not sufficient, Speaker.

She also mentioned that this is emotional for parents, that parents are really just trying to do what's best for their kids, to fight for the kids, to make sure that they have the supports and services they need. I really hope—I really hope—that the Premier and the Minister of Children, Community and Social Services and every other member of the Conservative caucus was listening to what that member said, because it is the government side of the House that has been standing here and in their community offices and in the media calling every single one of these families “professional protesters.” I hope that all the members on that side were listening to the parliamentary assistant to the minister, because that is all that these parents are

doing: They just want what's best for their children. It's unfortunate, it is so unfortunate, that with the previous Liberal government and now this Conservative government, these parents have to spend so much time, so much energy and so many tears fighting for what their children need. It's shameful, frankly, Speaker.

As my colleagues have said before, what we need is a plan that's based on need. I've heard the Minister of Children, Community and Social Services get up and say, “It's really strange. The NDP used to say they wanted to clear the wait-list.” Yes, we do. We want to see the wait-list gone. We don't want to see it done the way the Conservatives are doing it. We have always said that what we need is a government—the Liberals and now the Conservatives—that is actually going to put the money into the system, to truly invest in these children and these families to ensure that they are getting the appropriate supports and services.

Speaker, this government had an opportunity, an opportunity to really sit down with families, sit down and listen to individuals with autism, and formulate a plan that would do exactly what they need to make sure that there are evidence-based, needs-based supports. They had an opportunity to do that. But the consultations that they've done were staged consultations. They were staged. They hand-picked who got to come to them, in my area gave them two days' notice to respond to say whether they could come or not and try and make arrangements to be there, and then they didn't actually listen to what people were saying. And then the minister had the audacity to stand in this House and quote a parent from Windsor and twist her words for the government's gain. That's not working with families, Speaker.

I want to talk about another issue that this government has not talked about yet—they don't want to talk about it, frankly—which is special services at home. Not only have these children with autism and these families already been kicked, they're now getting kicked while they're down again because the government has frozen the SSAH. They're being told they now have to wait until April 11 to find out the fate of the program and the funding. That doesn't mean that they're actually going to get funding on April 11, by the way. That just means that there will be some sort of decision on April 11. That means that these families who rely on this funding for respite—and it's not just autism. It's for all developmental disabilities. So this government isn't just going after vulnerable children with autism; they're going after vulnerable children with developmental disabilities. And now these families are going to have to wait until April 11 to find out if they can continue on with respite care.

I've had families contact me and ask me, “Why is this government doing this to us? Why do they continue to attack us?”

This government isn't talking about adults with developmental disabilities and the fact that we have 14,000 to 16,000 adults with developmental disabilities languishing on a wait-list for Passport funding. They're not talking about the fact that there is an over-two-decade-long wait-

list for supportive housing, and they sure as heck aren't investing in any of those things, Speaker.

What I'm going to say before I wrap up, because I know I have lots of colleagues who want to add to this, is that when it comes to adults with developmental disabilities, when we're talking about Passport funding and the fact this government cuts them off as soon as they turn 18 and they go on a wait-list for four to five years for funding—the government could fix that. They could call my bill, Noah and Gregory's Law, at committee, get it through committee, back into this House and pass it to bridge that gap. But instead what they're doing is focusing on the most vulnerable in this province and making it harder for them, and that is shameful, Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further debate?

Mrs. Robin Martin: It's an honour to stand today and add my voice to this important conversation happening. Like my friend and colleague from Kitchener South-Hespeler, I too am the mother of a wonderful child who happens to be on the autism spectrum. While it was many years ago, I remember the challenges associated with obtaining a diagnosis, coming to terms with what that meant for my daughter and our family, and obtaining appropriate services. And like other parents, I just wanted what was best for my child.

That's why I was very pleased earlier this year when the Minister of Children, Community and Social Services came up with a plan and announced a plan to get 23,000 children off the wait-list and double the funding for diagnostic hubs, ensuring that children would be diagnosed quickly and get help from their Ontario government.

Based on my past personal experience, I particularly appreciate the fact that our changes give parents choice about what services are most appropriate for their special children. This option wasn't available to my family. No two children on the autism spectrum are alike. Each has individual strengths and needs. This is something that we've learned over the years with our daughter, and it's a message that our government has heard loud and clear. That's why the minister has made announcements of changes this last week that our government can make further enhancements to the program. Income-testing has been eliminated, ensuring all eligible families have access to childhood budgets, and families now have the ability to choose a broader range of eligible services.

The minister is going to continue to consult on ways our government can better support children with more complex needs on the spectrum. We're also working on regulating service providers, and in my role as parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Health I look forward to a multi-ministry approach so that families can find qualified clinical behavioural services. Our children deserve access to high-quality treatment options. Ensuring that there is reasonable oversight and regulation will help that happen, and I look forward to working on that.

But while that work continues, Mr. Speaker, all families who currently have an Ontario autism behavioural plan will continue to receive services outlined in their plan until

its end date, plus a six-month renewal at its current intensity. I know, from speaking with many families, how important the renewal time will be for them. It will also help ensure that schools don't have to manage an influx of special needs students on April 1.

Mr. Speaker, it is critically important that the Ontario Autism Program be the best possible program that we can deliver, and to be the best possible program we must ensure children are diagnosed quickly. We must ensure children, once diagnosed, don't languish on an indefinite wait-list, and we must ensure that every child, every single child with autism receives support from their government.

1700

To be the best possible program, we must better support children with autism and their families. That's what our plan, with the enhancements announced last week, will do. And the best thing that we can do for children with autism and their families is to move forward with a new Ontario Autism Program, while continuing our consultations to ensure that those with more complex needs get support.

Families on the current wait-list can expect to receive their first childhood budgets within the next 18 months, and that is something we can all be very proud of.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further debate?

Mr. Joel Harden: I also want to thank the member for Hamilton Mountain for her leadership.

I'm so proud to rise today. I want to acknowledge Kate Logue, here from Ottawa. Kate, thank you. And thank you, parents, for doing all the organizing you've done.

False hope—that's what we heard, sadly, from the minister when we talked about the need for more from this government when it came to this particular program. We were encouraging false hope.

Well, guess what we learned last week. Fighting back makes a difference. I learned it from my grandmother and my grandfather when they talked about surviving the Great Depression, and from the people who came back from the war, and the sacrifices they made and the kind of country they wanted to build—a place of equal opportunity for everybody. More and more, when I sit and listen to the debates in this place, I start to think we are squandering that legacy.

Do you know what gave me hope? Kate gave me hope. The parents gave me hope.

And guess what? We didn't stir them up. This government stirred them up. This government decided that they were going to determine who could access autism services based on what their T4 slip said. This government decided that they could decide which child was adequate for getting autism services. This government decided to take wait-lists in the public sector and push them into the private sector because there aren't enough providers to help the children, the adolescents and the adults. We too often forget about the adolescents and the adults who need help. That's what this government did. We didn't stir them up; you did. It's time for you to be honest about that.

And it's time for us to have a maturity moment in this. The maturity moment is this: It's bigger than us. It's bigger

than the Conservative government, and it's bigger than the loyal opposition. This is about what we decide to do in this moment in history to say people with health care needs should be able to get them. That's what our grandmothers and grandfathers fought for. If we turn around and think that we can buy people off with a late-breaking announcement, I've got news for you: It's not going to stop.

This Sunday, I will be marching with hundreds of parents from the minister's office in Barrhaven to Parliament Hill, a 22-kilometre march, because this community knows they have the eyes of the province on them; maybe the eyes of the country. This movement knows that fighting back makes a difference, and I implore this government to listen to them.

Let's put down our partisan cudgels for a second; let's come together on this. If you can find a billion dollars for the investors of McDonald's and Walmart and the big banks I walk by on my way to this building when I get out of Union Station, for God's sake, you can find money to make sure every autistic person has the services they need in this country.

There will also be a march—and I invite all the Ottawa members to come with me on that march, including the minister herself. There's going to be a march here in this city on April 29 called the Solutions march. It's going to happen at Nathan Phillips Square, and they're going to march right up to this building. I know the minister has been invited. I encourage the minister to come. I encourage every politician and I encourage everybody watching at home to come—because do you know what we just learned last week? When we rise up and we come together and we organize, we get change. Keep organizing.

Thank you, Kate. Thank you, parents. Keep fighting. We're close. Let's do this.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further debate?

Mr. Ross Romano: Since day one, the Minister of Education has made it a priority to ensure that every student in Ontario has access to a safe and supportive learning environment. What that safety and support looks like varies from student to student, but what remains constant is the focus on the individual student.

Ensuring support for students with autism spectrum disorder has always been a priority. After being named Minister of Education, one of the first steps she took was to extend the after-school ASD development program pilot. This pilot focuses on developing social and communication skills for students with ASD. Since 2016, 38 schools have implemented this program and have all reported positive outcomes.

Last summer, the minister introduced the Safe and Supportive Classrooms Act. If passed, this will pave the way for a consistent approach to the use of service animals in classrooms across the province. Today, only 39 school boards in Ontario have specific policies in place to address service animals in schools. This policy ranges from board to board, which means there is a limited consistency across the province in how these requests are treated. We look

forward to hearing from education stakeholders as we plan our path forward.

Members across our government have met with educators, parents and stakeholder groups to discuss what's happening in schools to meet the needs of students with ASD. Before I say more, I must acknowledge the hard work and dedication on this issue across government, but we know there is always more to be done. That's why Minister Thompson recently announced further supports for school boards with students with autism and their families. These resources and supports will start immediately.

As you know, more children and youth with autism will begin entering school or transitioning from part-time to full-time school this coming spring. We are making changes to school board funding so supports can be put in place this school year. For each new student entering the school system, school boards will receive an average of \$12,300 per student. This funding will allow school boards to make sure that there are proper supports available during the transition from therapy to school.

In order to make sure students with autism will continue to succeed, we need to put a long-term plan in motion. Minister Thompson has announced the Ontario government's four-point plan to support success for students with ASD: (1) professional development; (2) funding; (3) after-school programs; and (4) collaboration. Our strategy will promote training, increase student development and support school board decision-making.

We believe a key factor in student success is the educator. Starting this fall, we will fully subsidize the ASD-related additional qualification course. Any teacher who wants to build on his or her skills will be able to do it for free. And when new teachers enter the system, their onboarding will have increased training in supporting students with ASD.

We understand the need for boards to address the specific priorities of their schools. Once again, this coming school year, we will provide over \$3 billion in special education training. This will allow boards to be responsive to any changes in enrolment. They can hire more ABA professionals or purchase new sensory equipment. Going forward, we are asking all boards to dedicate a professional activity day of learning to support students with ASD. By the 2020-21 school year, we will be able to say that every teacher in this province will have had training in supporting students with ASD. We're also doubling our investment in the Geneva Centre for Autism, providing over 4,000 educators each year with the opportunity for more ASD-related training.

Earlier on, I mentioned the after-school development pilot. We know the boards who have this program believe in its outcomes. For that reason, we're expanding this program to all 72 boards in the province.

Finally, the ministry will also host a series of virtual sessions to engage parents, educators, administrators and others in a dialogue about these complex issues.

As you can tell, we have a lot to say about this matter, and a lot to be proud of in our four-point plan. We look

forward to sharing more information on this in the near future.

The ministry will be working with school boards regularly to assess enrolment numbers as children transition into the school system. We will continue to partner with the Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services as we work to support transitions through the Connections for Students transition teams. Parents, educators and stakeholders can find more information and specific details on the ministry website.

Our government is committed to making sure the education system meets the needs of Ontario's families and educators. We look forward to the important work that we will do together with school boards to support our students, our families and our educators.

1710

We've said it over and over and over again, and I will repeat it once more: We have some of the best teachers in the entire world right here in Ontario. Together, we will create opportunities for our young people to participate and to drive our economy forward like never before, and we will ensure that our teachers have all of the tools they need to be able to do their jobs, because our students are our future—all our students are our future—and we want to ensure that they have the education they need moving forward to help them to be successful and thrive.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further debate?

Ms. Marit Stiles: I want to start my remarks by echoing the remarks of others here in the official opposition and thanking the MPP for Hamilton Mountain for being such a fearless, tireless champion and for putting forward this important motion today.

As the education critic for the official opposition, I have also heard very serious concerns from many families about supports for children with autism in the school system. I held an emergency round table on autism just a few weeks ago.

I'm really pleased that our motion today keeps that aspect front and centre, recognizing that "the Ford government has not provided adequate support to the education system to properly support the influx of children with autism that will enter schools when the new Ontario Autism Program is implemented."

Schools were already struggling to support the needs of children with autism long before the government announced its cuts to the Ontario Autism Program. Nearly every school board in this province spends more on supports for students with special needs than they are given by the province, and educational assistants and special support workers are stretched thin. Reports of exclusions in our schools are growing, where children with behavioural challenges are separated from their classmates for longer periods of time or asked to stay home altogether. I know many of the families that are here today know that problem all too well. Crowded classrooms mean that distractions are a consistent problem for learners with autism.

It's in that context that families found out that their children would lose these important therapy supports and

would be spending more time in those schools, or entering the school system for the first time.

Mr. Speaker, it was as if the government had not even thought about the impact of their program changes on children's education. Indeed, when we repeatedly questioned the Minister of Education on this, she had little to say. She simply pointed to the service animal policy changes that they had introduced and to the extension of the autism support pilot projects that were introduced under the last government. Mr. Speaker, let me tell you, that was news to the members of the advisory committee set up to oversee those pilots, since they have never met under this government.

It was only as that public outcry really grew and as parents filled the lawn of Queen's Park that the Minister of Education was finally forced to announce a plan—I mean, I don't even think we can call it a plan. Let's be completely clear here. Contrary to what the member from Sault Ste. Marie said, it contained no new money for special education. It said nothing about increasing educational assistants or support staff. It simply told boards that they could count new students beyond the pupil count date. Those students would receive the same amount of funding as any other child that would enter the system.

Let's also be clear here: a day of professional development for educators—that's okay. But it will do nothing to replace the professional support that students with autism need now and will continue to need. This was somehow supposed to represent the real concerns about a lack of support, but it has really been more about damage control.

Mr. Speaker, I want to close by saying that with 10,000 fewer adults in our schools because of this government's \$1-billion cut from education funding, there will be fewer supports for students in the classroom, fewer supports for students with autism. How can we expect them to thrive in that environment?

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further debate?

Mrs. Nina Tangri: Our government is taking action for children with autism. It's an issue that is becoming increasingly relevant. In Canada, it's estimated that one in 66 children are on the autism spectrum. In Ontario, it is estimated that there are about 40,000 children and youth with autism.

The research on this shows that early intervention is crucial. We must ensure that kids are getting support as soon as we can. Currently, there are more than 2,400 children waiting for assessment at one of Ontario's five diagnostic hubs. The average wait time to receive an autism diagnosis is 31 weeks.

Waiting over half the year just for a diagnosis is unacceptable, particularly when we know the most effective time for a treatment is in the earliest years of a child's life. Delaying the diagnostic process cuts into the small window of time when support would do the most good for a child with autism. This is why we are doubling the funding to diagnostic hubs for the next two years. With a quicker autism diagnosis, families will then be able to use their childhood budgets and access services in their communities.

In my riding of Mississauga–Streetsville, I've been meeting with autism families since before the government was sworn in, and the message has been the same. Families were being put on wait-lists rather than getting the help they need; and once they cleared one wait-list, they were put on another. Families want intervention as early as possible. Being wait-listed for years at a time is not conducive to that goal.

That's why our government is working to protect what matters most by clearing this wait-list. In 18 months, we will be supporting every child in the province with autism for the first time. During the previous Liberal government, only one in four children received any support. This was the wrong policy that left 75% of kids with autism waiting indefinitely for help.

With our childhood budgets, families will have \$20,000 up to age six that can be used for a wide range of services to help their child. Our reforms to the OAP are designed so that children receive the bulk of funding earlier in their life. This ensures that they have access to more resources during the crucial early intervention period. These changes are compassionate, and they put the power in the parents' hands to make the best decisions for their children.

Under the current Liberal OAP, the vast majority of youth are on a wait-list that offers support for a limited number of programs. Perhaps the official opposition would prefer if these children were forced to wait indefinitely for service, but our government has been clear: We do not want children waiting for support.

My constituents in Mississauga–Streetsville come from a variety of backgrounds. We have different jobs. We come from different places. We practice our faiths differently. But we all agree on this: We want the best for our children.

Speaker, 23,000 children with autism are currently waiting to get support. Our government is taking action to ensure every one of them will get support soon. By investing in early intervention and moving children off the wait-list, we will have support in 18 months. Our government is working to ensure that children with autism in Ontario get the help they need.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further debate?

Ms. Catherine Fife: On May 17, 2016, the Conservative Party on their opposition day tabled a motion about autism treatment services, and this is what it said: "The Legislative Assembly of Ontario accepts that autism does not end at the age of five," and that IBI—intensive behavioural intervention—should be available to children regardless of age. This was a good motion. We supported this motion. They were right here on this side, in these chairs, on May 17, 2016. It wasn't that long ago, Mr. Speaker.

Yet, now that they're in power, the Conservative plan punishes a child with autism for growing older and does not provide enough money for any child of any age to receive therapy. How did they get from this side of the bench to that side and lose sight of what is important to all of us as legislators?

The people of this province have every reason to be disappointed, because they feel betrayed. The people from Kitchener South–Hespeler—when that member was running in the election, the autism community rallied around her and helped her get elected by 770 votes. She made promises to that community, and they feel betrayed.

1720

When the government announced its new autism plan with age and income criteria, there were lots of questions that went unanswered, because the government itself did not have the answers. KidsAbility, in my riding of Waterloo, laid off its front-line staff because of the government's uncertainty of what the funding will look like. The minister, just yesterday, described that as "premature." We would say it was premature for them to roll out a plan that does not meet the needs of children with autism—families and children in the province of Ontario.

Major job losses in any field, combined with a reduction in service capacity, will have economic ripple effects and will affect choice. This is what we hear from the government: choice. Giving families direct funding when there are no front-line staff for them to go to will not solve this issue. There is no choice if there are no options. And they talk about the wait-list. If there are no therapists to help families to get direct service, then the wait-list will continue to grow. Their plan has compounded the problem.

This is where we are right now. This is why our critic and our party are standing before you, using an oppo day motion to hopefully get through to this government. Redesigning the program and allocating \$600 million to it might sound great in the headlines, but these families see through it. They have already challenged those numbers.

We're trying to get clarity on the numbers, Mr. Speaker. The plan is not equitable. It doesn't give every child what they need. That was the goal; that's what their motion was about almost two years ago. For a government whose main priority is supposedly fiscal responsibility, why are they still giving certain families more money than they need while giving children with higher needs less than they need? How is this a wise use of tax dollars? It is not.

There is a gender/rural component with financial implications that stretch beyond the impact on our economy but directly impact our families. Rural and northern families are struggling to access services. This plan that has been rolled out by the PC government has further destabilized an already fragile community of therapists and agencies, and they are tired, but they are not giving up.

The government had a plan. The OAP, the implementation committee report, was done. They didn't have to create a crisis on the autism file. They have a committee report. It does not recommend age discrimination. It does not recommend income testing. It does not say "zero funding for school transitions." They have a plan that they could have used, but they instead chose to create a crisis.

Linda Kenny, the ED from KidsAbility, says that she is going to have to go back and get those therapists back, but she doesn't know what that six-month reprieve is. That's

an important piece of this puzzle, destabilizing an already marginalized group.

What I would say to you is that every day I bring a young boy, Sebastian, to this debate. I never lose sight of that little boy, because his mother is Dr. Janet McLaughlin, and she is a fierce advocate for all children on the autism spectrum. She has met with the Liberal caucus, she has met with the PC caucus, and she's going to meet with the NDP caucus. Those voices of those parents need to be respected, and I hope that the government is listening. You have the chance to do the right thing today. Please do it.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further debate?

M^{me} France Gélinas: I'm happy to add my voice to this debate. I would like to focus as to the repercussions of the government announcement on two specific communities that I represent, the first one being the francophone community, and the second one is everybody who lives in northern and rural Ontario.

Quand on parle des francophones, on a exemple après exemple de familles francophones qui veulent avoir accès à des thérapeutes, qui veulent avoir accès à un service équitable pour leurs enfants qui ont l'autisme, mais qui sont incapables de trouver des thérapeutes. On à l'histoire de M^{me} Jasmine Maynard, qui a dû déménager de 630 kilomètres. Elle demeurait à London. Elle a dû se rendre à Ottawa pour avoir des services en français.

Si tu regardes dans le nord de l'Ontario, je peux vous donner l'histoire de Josée et Chad Pharand, qui ont une belle petite fille, Manon. Eux aussi ont dû faire le choix difficile de—tu as le choix d'avoir des services en anglais. Pour une famille francophone, c'est un choix que personne ne devrait jamais faire.

M^{me} Maynard dit : « Je suis en colère de devoir choisir entre mon identité et ma culture et les options de thérapie de développement neurologique dont mon fils a besoin. » Ça, c'est une conséquence un peu non prévue, et que le gouvernement n'a pas prise en ligne de compte.

Les thérapeutes francophones, il n'y en a pas beaucoup. La plupart d'entre eux autres travaillent déjà pour des organismes à but non lucratif. Puis, de penser qu'ils vont commencer à s'ouvrir une pratique privée quand tu as un enfant ici et un autre à 60 kilomètres et puis un autre à 120 kilomètres plus loin—il n'y a personne qui va faire ça. Qu'est-ce que ça veut dire? Ça veut dire que les francophones n'auront pas accès à des services en français. Ça, c'est contre la loi. Le gouvernement sait qu'ils sont en train de faire ça, mais ils en font fi.

The same thing is happening with people who live in northern Ontario, whether you live in rural northern Ontario or whether you're on a First Nation. I can tell you that there is a child in Atikameksheng Anishnawbek First Nation who needs therapy. He was hoping to be followed by Child and Community Resources in Sudbury, but Child and Community Resources in Sudbury has let go of four therapists and their supervisor because the money is not coming from the government anymore. Those therapists are not interested in opening up a private business, because

in northern Ontario you would have to travel about 220 kilometres to go to Mattagami First Nation and then 200 kilometres further to go to Atikameksheng Anishnawbek, and then another 120 kilometres to go to Wahnapiatae First Nation. How can you make a business of this?

The model does not work in northern Ontario. The model that you're putting forward does not work for the people that I represent. You have to be responsible for everybody in Ontario, not just those who can—you know, you say that you want choice. We want choice, but we in northern Ontario are faced with a false choice—a choice that will not exist. The therapists are not there for us. They are not there to be hired, and with \$5,000 per family, we're not going to attract new therapists to come to Nickel Belt. We're not going to attract new therapists to come to Algoma or northern Ontario. None of this will happen. Our children will have to do without. This is wrong, and this is on your shoulders, Minister.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further debate?

Hon. Lisa MacLeod: I thank all members for participating in this very emotional debate, a very important debate, and one that has brought people to the assembly. I welcome all of those who are here today who have a vested interest in making sure that Ontario moves forward with a very strong Ontario Autism Program.

Between June 30, 2018, and December 31, 2018, the Ontario government added 2,535 more children to Ontario Autism Program behavioural services. As of June 30, 2018, 4,823 children and youth were receiving OAP behavioural services; by September 30, 2018, 6,441 children were receiving it. And as of December 31, 7,358 children were now in the old Ontario Autism Program.

It's estimated that we have 40,000 children in the province of Ontario that are somewhere on the autism spectrum. In Canada, we know the prevalence rate for children with autism is estimated to be one in 66 kids. The vast majority of youth in the current OAP are on a wait-list for behavioural services. Some of these children have been waiting over two years.

1730

Four ministries fund services and supports for children with ASD, in varying degrees. The first, and by far the most, is the Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services for children and youth with autism and community supports for adults with disabilities. We fund it through our school system. The Minister of Education made an enhancement during the March break. We fund it through training, colleges and universities in our college and university system. And we fund it through health and long-term care: primary care and adult mental health services.

Demand for autism spectrum disorder diagnosis continues to grow. There are more than 2,400 children today currently waiting for an assessment through Ontario's five diagnostic hubs. The average wait time for those children to get a diagnosis is 31 weeks. That's why our government for the people is doubling funding to those diagnostic hubs over the next two years to help more children receive an

autism diagnosis sooner and help connect families to local services in their communities.

Ontario's government for the people is empowering parents by moving to a direct funding model through our changes to the Ontario Autism Program, but let me be clear: There is no cut to funding on the Ontario Autism Program. In fact, Ontario has increased our annual budget on the Ontario Autism Program to over \$600 million, which is the largest spend by any government in the history of this province, in the history of this country, and in North America.

Over the next 18 months, there will be four times as many children receiving support from the childhood budget that provides funding directly to parents to choose the services that are in the best interests of their child. We trust that providers will continue to provide quality support and care to meet the needs of the influx of children and youth seeking autism services and support. And we believe, in the next 18 months, that will be an additional 23,000 children who were denied support by their Ontario government.

We will continue to implement our plan on April 1 to eliminate the wait-list for the three out of four children with autism who were being denied support by their Ontario government. We will do this, as I mentioned, by doubling the investment into diagnostic hubs and moving to a childhood budget of up to \$140,000 per child at the age of 18. Our government is going to be establishing a new intake agency that will be led by Autism Ontario to assist families with registering for the program, determining their eligibility, providing them with their childhood budgets and helping them access services. And, as importantly, we said last week we are prepared to make enhancements to reform the Ontario Autism Program to better support families and children with autism.

My parliamentary assistant, Amy Fee, along with our Premier, Doug Ford, has been working very hard through our consultations and, of course, with Amy's lived experience. I'm very grateful to our entire Progressive Conservative team for allowing me the additional flexibility to double what the Ontario Liberal Party had been spending this time last year.

I'm grateful to the ministry, the cabinet and, in particular, to the Treasury Board—

Mr. Michael Coteau: You made a cut of \$100 million. It's clear; it's a \$100-million cut.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): The member from Don Valley East will come to order.

Hon. Lisa MacLeod: Speaker, I think Progressive Conservatives sat through the entire debate respectfully, understanding that this has been emotional and asking people to take the temperature down. Unfortunately, what we have seen, time and time again, in particular from the opposition, is to increase the rhetoric, to vilify people, to insult people personally. I don't think that's where we want to be, Speaker. I think there's a better way for all of us to move forward together, and that is why we're embarking on additional consultations.

We heard from parents that they expressed concern about income testing. I listened, and that's why we have eliminated income testing so parents' income will not have any change in what the child's needs would be. Parents were right when they said that autism is a spectrum and that each child has different needs. That's why I'll be taking their input for the next several months to best assess how we can support those with more complex needs.

Speaker, I think this is really important. These meetings have started already. They started with me at the beginning of the week and then, just yesterday, with Premier Ford doing some meetings. I know we're going to continue to do that as MPPs. We certainly would encourage the opposition to be constructive in these consultations and participate with us, and that is my invitation to them.

Our motivation has been and always will be to ensure that all children with autism get a level of support from their Ontario government. I have never been comfortable with the fact that only 25% of the children with autism in the province of Ontario were receiving support. We're trying to build that up, and that is why we are working very hard.

We understand that parents have expressed their personal anxiety about service that they currently have for those 25% of the children. That is why I made the decision, along with our government, to extend the contracts for the children who are currently in service for an additional six months so that we can ensure that there's going to be an orderly transition. As I've said many times in this House, I could not in good conscience ever continue with the plan that denied three out of four children support from their Ontario government as the previous government had done.

The new Ontario Autism Program is the best possible program we can deliver, and it is the only program in the history of the province that will support every single child, and we will do it by extending choice for families so that they can use behavioural therapy, technological aids, respite training, caregiver support, and we've enhanced that by listening to parents and saying, "If you want private speech and language and occupational therapy, we will support that as well." That's where we're at.

But I want to be perfectly clear: As I look at this motion, we have met every single one of the points the members opposite wanted. The opposition wanted to clear the wait-list until this government said it would. They wanted direct funding until this government promised it. They opposed income testing until we said we would get rid of it, and they asked for an extension on contracts. Every single point, Speaker, we are delivering on, with a record investment of over \$600 million in just this ministry alone.

Mr. Michael Coteau: We set up direct funding. I made that announcement.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): The member from Don Valley East, second time.

Hon. Lisa MacLeod: I see the Minister of Education is here, and the Minister of Health. They're two fantastic partners to be providing wraparound supports with as we move forward. I look forward to more announcements in the coming days and the coming weeks, and I look forward to taking a total human service wraparound approach for

the first time in this government's history. It reminds me of the great work we're doing on social assistance for the individual, and that's what we're going to do for children and autism in this province.

But let me perfectly clear: We have moved to a fair, equitable and sustainable plan because what we inherited was broke and it was broken. An emergency \$102 million had to be injected into the system just to protect the integrity of the 25% of the children who were receiving service. Nobody should underestimate the challenges that families of children with autism face, and our challenge as a government is to be there for them, but it's not to be there for just one quarter of the children, Speaker, we need to be there for 100% of the children and all of their families.

So let me be clear: Our government is going to clear the wait-list, and we will do that in 18 months. We are going to treat people fairly. We are going to make the system sustainable. We will make the system more accountable. We will guarantee that there are supports for families with the greatest need now and into the future.

I'm proud of the work that our government for the people has done. We will, together, clear the wait-list for diagnosis. We will, together, clear the wait list for those children who need support. We will empower families to make the best choices for their children.

Speaker, we must do better and we will do better because children with autism deserve better. That is what we have been working on, and that is what we are focused on. That is why, as a Progressive Conservative government, we will continue to speak with those in the field, clinicians, parents, children, those who have lived experience with autism and every Ontarian who is interested in having that conversation.

Speaker, let me be perfectly clear: The Progressive Conservative Party of Ontario will not be supporting this motion. We are going to spend more money than any government in the history of this province, and we are going to assemble the best and the brightest minds in order to ensure that Ontario is the centre of excellence. I look extremely forward to talking with people throughout the next several months as we move forward to a needs-based assessment, as we ensure that we continue to support children from zero to 18 with the childhood budgets and we provide increased flexibility.

1740

Speaker, make no mistake: The tone of the debate over the past six weeks has been incredibly emotional and difficult for many people. I think today is an opportunity for us to move forward. I certainly signalled that last week when we made our enhancements, and I'm continuing to do that, along with my government colleagues, as we continue to provide wraparound supports and more consultation for families.

We invite all families who have children with autism or who have been affected to directly engage with our government. We are very proud of that. I know we have a strong and committed Progressive Conservative team that is excited to engage in round tables across the province, and we're excited to roll out a larger consultation phase.

This is an opportunity for all of us to move on together, so that we can create something excellent in the province of Ontario that we can all be proud of.

Thank you for the opportunity to debate. Though I do not agree with the members opposite, I will always take the opportunity to engage in robust discussion, particularly when it's based on public policy and not on personal attacks.

Mr. John Fraser: Point of order.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Point of order from the member from Ottawa South.

Mr. John Fraser: I'd like to remind the minister that we have a late show together tonight, and I look forward to speaking with her on the same topic.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): That's not a point of order.

Further debate?

Ms. Bhutla Karpoche: As always, it is an honour to bring the voices of the people of Parkdale–High Park to this Legislature, especially on this issue, the Ontario Autism Program, which will drastically change the lives of many in my community, and is an issue that has proven to be important to all Ontarians, as we have seen with the outpouring of concern from people across the province regarding the government's cuts to the autism program.

Last month, I hosted a discussion with parents and therapists in my riding about the government's recent announcement of the new Ontario Autism Program, and my office has received countless emails and phone calls from concerned and nervous families impacted by these cuts. Parkdale–High Park families with children diagnosed with autism spectrum disorder have overwhelmingly emphasized that there is no one-size-fits-all approach or form of therapy that benefits all children. Children diagnosed with ASD require a variety of supports and services to meet their specific needs. Parents and families have said again and again that the new OAP will, in fact, reduce choice by giving families and children fewer options because, as of April 1—that's just in five days—they won't be able to afford to access the necessary individualized supports and services that their children deserve.

Speaker, I'd like to share with the members of the government the experiences of Parkdale–High Park families in the hopes that the members opposite actually hear how these changes, these cuts, will be devastating for children and families.

When the government first brought in their new Ontario Autism Program, I heard from Chanai. Chanai's family has been on the wait-list for nearly two years. She's angry and frustrated and terrified at the thought that they may have waited this long for proper funding for essentially nothing.

She writes:

"The only reason I am responding to this email so late is because I find it difficult to sleep the closer April 1 grows near. All I can think of is the Conservative plan was poorly executed"—and poorly planned—"and it is not equitable. It makes no sense that funding will be equal for

children with different needs.... the Conservatives are giving up on my child.

“Our son Liam was born prematurely at 26 weeks. Because of such an early birth he had grade IV hemorrhage which led to other challenges. At five months old he had brain surgery. He has a bilateral hearing loss, cerebral palsy and at the age of three going on four was diagnosed with being ‘on the severe side’ of the ASD spectrum.

“Liam is non-verbal and needs assistance with all aspects of daily living. He is currently five going on six and he is still in diapers, self-harms himself and does not grasp the concept of danger. Last summer I got a glimpse into what kind of therapy he might be getting once he got off the wait-list and for the first time since he was diagnosed I felt a glimmer of hope.

“I was asked if I would choose direct funding or direct services once he got off the wait-list and I opted for the services because guess what? We are not in it for the money. Liam is ... a happy boy and is very loving but he gets frustrated because he cannot communicate....

“Under the Ford government’s new program, Liam will probably be over 6 by the time he gets off the wait-list. He will qualify for a minuscule amount of funds ... which would pay for only a week worth of therapy for him. Staying on the wait-list is better for our family than being told that we should be grateful that we will be receiving a small handout as if the government is doing us a favour. We have lost all hope for our son and the only way forward for us is to challenge that new plan. Liam is different, not less. He deserves a chance.”

Another parent, Sukri, attended the community discussion and shared her family’s experience. Sukri’s six-and-a-half-year-old daughter was assessed as medium-to-severe. Her daughter receives OAP funding and is currently in a full-time, five-days-a-week program. The cost of this program is approximately \$7,000 a month. When Sukri attempted to register her daughter for public school again recently, due to the cuts, she learned that the schools have not been given any support or funding, or even enough notice to prepare for the influx of children with autism. Previously, her daughter was in public school but had to leave due to behavioural issues.

She also has a four-year-old son who was assessed as medium-to-severe. Sukri’s son has been on the wait-list for funding for two years. For Sukri, the OAP is critical, and as April 1 looms closer, she feels increasingly desperate.

Speaker, parents have also expressed great anxiety over the utter lack of information on the transition plan as of April 1, less than a week away. Mario’s son John-Paul is 10 years old and is diagnosed with moderate ASD. His family currently receives OAP funding, and because of this John-Paul attends programming at Surrey Place once per week, and also occasional intensive week-long or two-week-long programs. He isn’t sure of the exact costs, because OAP pays Surrey Place directly, but he knows that it is a whole lot more than the \$5,000 per year that would ever cover his son under the new OAP. He is extremely concerned about the transition plan. He says, “They are

going to make an abrupt change without any plan, and this is going to impact my son.”

Finally, Speaker, I would like this government, the Premier and the minister to understand that behind the numbers, there are children, there are real lives who will be impacted by this government’s actions. This government is hurting the most vulnerable children of our province.

I want to close by thanking Parkdale–High Park families for taking time out of their already incredibly busy lives to advocate for their children. Thank you for fighting back. Thank you for never giving up. I hope that the members of the government side will do the right thing and vote in favour of this motion.

Interjections.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Thank you. Please be seated.

Further debate? I recognize the member from Hamilton Mountain on her right of reply.

Miss Monique Taylor: Thank you, Speaker. I’d like to use my right of reply.

I’d like to first of all thank all of my colleagues for their heartfelt remarks today, for acknowledging the parents who are here with us today, who have fought so hard across this province to ensure that their children get the services that they need.

I want to make it perfectly clear to the minister that parents shouldn’t have to fight for what’s right; that parents shouldn’t have had to fight to have the government bring forward enhancements; that parents shouldn’t have had to be lobbying across this province, standing on the front lawn of Queen’s Park, crying in the Ontario Legislature, to have their government hear them. They shouldn’t have had to do that.

I also need to make it perfectly clear to the minister that the fight is not over. She may have had to make some enhancements, but her plan does not go far enough. It does not ensure that there is a needs-based, evidence-based plan for children in this province. It does not ensure that all children will receive services, regardless of how old they are. It does not ensure that parents will not have to continue to fight for every single step of the way when it comes to their kids.

Parents have enough to deal with, Speaker. They shouldn’t have to fight their government. They shouldn’t have had to fight the Liberal government, and they shouldn’t have to fight the Conservative government just to ensure that their kids have the best opportunity in life.

1750

Here, as legislators, we stand in this House and we were elected to come here and to make our community a better place. We should be doing that today, by standing up and making sure that this motion passes and that families get what they need instead of fighting their government. That’s a step in the right direction.

Interjections.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Thank you. Please be seated.

Mr. Michael Coteau: Point of order.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): I recognize the member from Don Valley East on a point of order.

Mr. Michael Coteau: I'd like to ask the distinguished members of the Legislature to allow the Ontario Liberal Party, the independents on this side, to have five minutes to respond to the opposition day motion.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): I put the question: The member from Don Valley East is seeking unanimous consent to allow the member from Orléans to have five minutes. Is it the pleasure? No; I hear a no.

Miss Taylor has moved opposition day number 2—
Interjections.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Order, please.

I will repeat it again—
Interjection.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): The member from Don Valley East is warned.

Again, Miss Taylor has moved opposition day number 2. 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 ayes have it. Carried.

Motion agreed to.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Pursuant to standing order 38, the question that this House do now adjourn is deemed to have been made. This gives you an opportunity to leave the Legislature. I'll give you a few moments. There will be a late show, so I'll leave it up to those.

ADJOURNMENT DEBATE

AUTISM TREATMENT

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): The member for Ottawa South has given notice of his dissatisfaction with the answer to a question given by the Minister of Children, Community and Social Services on the Ontario Autism Program. The member from Ottawa South has up to five minutes to debate, and the minister or parliamentary assistant will have up to five minutes to reply.

I now turn it over to the member from Ottawa South.

Mr. John Fraser: I think this is—well, it was the biggest crowd for a late show for about five seconds there. I want to thank the member opposite for being here to respond to my questions. I appreciate it very, very much. I was pleased to have the opportunity to ask the minister to join in as well.

I want to begin by saying that there are a number of families who are here today, who were here to watch this opposition day motion and who are here because their children are going to be part of the new Ontario Autism Program. We saw a lot of debate about it, the level of emotion and the rhetoric, but what I want to say is, what we heard is from families. We heard from families that it

wasn't working for them. The emotion that you felt and that you saw and that you heard was from families.

I know that the government, subsequent to my asking for this late show, has made enhancements. What I want to say is that those are things that should have been part of the program from the beginning. While I welcome them and they are good, there is still a lot more road to travel. They should have been there in the first place, because families were brought, many of them, to an edge. And the emotion that you heard was, “I am afraid for my child. I am afraid for my family. It's not working for me.”

While those enhancements—I welcome them—should have been there in the first place, what I want to say is that we shouldn't be debating or consulting about whether autism is a spectrum. We all know that it is, and that the way that we need to deliver a program here is needs-based. There's no real need to consult. We know what the numbers are. We know what the needs are. The trick with this program is to make sure that children and families get what they need based on the needs of the child, on where they are on the spectrum. That shouldn't be something we have to debate or talk about. We have to say, “Here's how we're going to address this.” That should have been part of the plan in the first place. What I sincerely hope will happen is that that data and that understanding will be used.

I know the minister has said that you're going to double the funding to \$600 million. That's because you're running two programs at the same time. The proof will be in what happens when you end the program that you're continuing right now and the new program begins. It's not good to throw out those numbers. They don't talk about what's needed. What's needed is a program that addresses the needs based on where children are on the spectrum. That has to happen.

I know the member opposite cares about this, and cares about this deeply. It's not easy. It's not easy for anyone here. What I want you to know and I want parents to know and I want all members of this House to know is that we have to get this right. We have to get it right. So there is some space right now—families have some space, the government has some space—and you need to use that well.

I'm not going to talk anymore about what's behind us. It's what's in front of us. What needs to happen here is, six months from now, what we need to be talking about is a program that's based on needs, that recognizes that autism is a spectrum, that doesn't discriminate on age because we know it disadvantages girls.

I do really appreciate the member being here to respond, and all the members who are here right now to listen. It's actually the biggest crowd I've seen for a late show ever, since I've had one—not that I'm that interesting. I know they're here for you, not for me, and to support you. What I really want you to know is that there is some space—not just for families, but for the government to do the right thing.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Thank you. Now the parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Children, Community and Social Services may reply for up to five minutes.

Mrs. Amy Fee: When the member from Ottawa South first asked the question during question period that led to the late show tonight, he talked about a parent with a child with autism, Jessim, who you had met—I believe he was a taxi driver. You met him, and he spoke to you about his son with autism.

I'm the parent, as you know, of two children with autism, so I know how difficult it is to raise a child with special needs. You have moments of incredible sadness, fear and joy. As any parent knows, kids certainly have a knack for surprising you in many ways. But caring for a child with autism comes with different experiences—amazing and difficult ones.

When my son Kenner was first diagnosed, my full-time job quickly became taking him to hundreds of hours of appointments and working alongside his many specialists and therapists so I could support him as best I could. I would watch him struggle to express himself, to explain why he was upset or what he wanted. Eventually, though, like Jessim's son, through Kenner's hard work and that of many therapists, my son progressed from a vocabulary of only a few, very-difficult-to-understand words, to a kid, now—he still has multiple meltdowns a day and still struggles to express, especially, his emotions and feelings—who talks nonstop. And that's what Jessim, I think, described to you, was that his son made gains, especially around language, in therapy.

I remember, though, the previous government, and how they treated children with autism as well. I was out on the front lawns before, fighting for children with autism and what they deserved. It was less than three years ago that the Liberal government announced that they were withdrawing support for children over the age of five and, even then, only a few select children had actually qualified for IBI therapy and they were now being denied because of age. Initially, anyone cut off that wait-list was to receive a one-time payment of \$8,000. I think that's something that's actually been lost, that initially it was just a one-time \$8,000.

Here at Queen's Park, while protesting for those changes, I stood shoulder to shoulder with my fellow autism moms and dads and demanded that they change that system. Not only did they still have a system that only allowed a few select children into the program, they left children over five with no support except for, again, that one-time payment.

After months of protests, the previous government changed its mind. In its place, they created a program that has since seen a wait-list wait for services grow incredibly long, with no end in sight. I watched the Ontario Autism Program service only one in every four children with autism.

As I explained earlier in this Legislature this afternoon, what we found when we formed government was that children, possibly even as young as five years old, had a good chance of never getting off that wait-list before they turned 18 under that system. That would have meant no service at all throughout the rest of their childhood. The list was barely moving, and thousands of children were sitting on it.

With our new enhancements to the Ontario Autism Program, we are starting to build a system that is sustainable, that gives families choice while working to ensure that every child with autism in Ontario, for the first time, will get direct funding from the government.

One of the main reasons why I ran to become a school board trustee and then an MPP was to support people living with autism, and I continue to be an advocate within our government for those with autism. That's why our consultations with stakeholders, service providers, autism experts and families will continue, and why we're working on more enhancements to the program while we start to roll out those childhood budgets and get kids off wait-lists.

We will continue to make historic investments into autism supports in Ontario. We've already added the additional therapies under the new OAP—speech and language therapy, occupational therapy and physiotherapy—and now our discussions will focus on how we address children with more complex needs.

Let me be clear, Mr. Speaker. Just as I was a fierce advocate for autism supports before I entered government, I continue to be a fierce advocate within our government. I continue to meet and talk with families and autism experts from across this province. And again, we will continue to make enhancements and historic investments into this program.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Thank you very much.

There being no further matter to debate, I deem the motion to adjourn to be carried. This House now stands adjourned until 9 a.m. tomorrow morning.

The House adjourned at 1804.

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Mulroney, Hon. / L'hon. Caroline (PC)	York—Simcoe	Attorney General / Procureure générale Minister of Francophone Affairs / Ministre des Affaires francophones
Natyshak, Taras (NDP)	Essex	
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

Member and Party / Député(e) et parti	Constituency / Circonscription	Other responsibilities / Autres responsabilités
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 (IND)	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 COMMITTEES OF THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
COMITÉS PERMANENTS 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, Stephen Crawford
Doug Downey, Sol Mamakwa
David Piccini, Kaleed Rasheed
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, Chris Glover
Christine Hogarth, Logan Kanapathi
Daryl Kramp, Natalia Kusendova
Amarjot Sandhu, Mike Schreiner
Dave Smith, Jennifer (Jennie) Stevens
Daisy Wai
Committee Clerk / Greffier / Greffière: Julia Douglas

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
Lorne Coe, Michael Coteau
Mike Harris, Faisal Hassan
Jane McKenna, Christina Maria Mitas
Sam Oosterhoff, 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
Toby Barrett, Catherine Fife
Goldie Ghamari, Jim McDonell
Norman Miller, Suze Morrison
Michael Parsa, Peggy Sattler
Kinga Surma
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: Kaleed Rasheed
Vice-Chair / Vice-président: Will Bouma
Will Bouma, Paul Calandra
Lorne Coe, Stephen Crawford
Mitzi 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
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Deepak Anand, Doly Begum
Jeff Burch, Amy Fee
Michael Gravelle, Joel Harden
Belinda Karahalios, Robin Martin
Sheref Sabawy, Nina Tangri
Effie J. Triantafilopoulos
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