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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

Monday 2 December 2019

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

Lundi 2 décembre 2019

The House met at 1030.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): We will begin this morning with a moment of silence for inner thought and personal reflection.

Prayers.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): I wish to acknowledge this territory as a traditional gathering place for many Indigenous nations, most recently the Mississaugas of the Credit First Nation.

This being the first sitting Monday of the month, I'm going to ask the Minister of Natural Resources and Forestry to lead us in O Canada.

Singing of O Canada.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Today we are honoured to remember and pay tribute to a former member of the provincial Legislature, the late Dr. Richard Alexander Allen, who was the MPP for Hamilton West during the 32nd, 33rd, 34th and 35th Parliaments. Dr. Allen's family is here with us in the Speaker's gallery: son Phil Allen and his wife, Rebecca; granddaughters Gemma and Mika; sister-in-law Ruth; nephew Bill and his wife, Colleen; niece Karen and her daughter Crystal; niece Darlene and her partner, Todd; and friends Janet, Trish and Rebecca.

Also in the Speaker's gallery are Bob Rae, Premier during the 35th Parliament, and David Warner, Speaker during the 35th Parliament and chair of the Ontario Association of Former Parliamentarians.

Please join me in welcoming our special guests who are here this morning.

Ms. Catherine Fife: I'm proud to introduce Steve Mann from Waterloo. Steve generously serves as the Sergeant-at-Arms at our local Legion, Branch 530. Welcome to Queen's Park, Steve.

Mr. Sam Oosterhoff: I have the pleasure of welcoming to the Legislature today Hospice Palliative Care Ontario, who are here for their lobby day. I hope all members get a chance to stop by their reception and chat with them about the elephant in the room, hospice palliative care.

Miss Monique Taylor: I'm pleased to do my daily welcome to autism families and advocates. Today with us we have Amanda Mooyer, her husband, Evan Lynch, and their son Finn Lynch. Welcome back to Queen's Park.

Hon. Monte McNaughton: I'm honoured to welcome a great friend of mine, the great mayor for Warwick township, Jackie Rombouts. Welcome to Queen's Park.

Ms. Suze Morrison: It's an honour and a pleasure to welcome members of the OPSEU Indigenous Circle here

to Queen's Park today. We have Paige Malcolm, Fridmar Facunda, Liisa Kearney, Tammy Carson, Tina Stevens, Lise Dampier, Theresa O'Connor, Crystal Sinclair, Tim Vining and Linda Broer. Welcome to Queen's Park. It's certainly a pleasure to have you here.

They joined us in a Kairos Blanket Exercise this morning, which I hear went very well. They are asking members to pledge to adopt June 21 as a statutory holiday for Indigenous Peoples Day.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): We appreciate our guests being here, for sure, but I'm going to ask the members to keep their introductions brief and to the point.

Mr. Mike Harris: It's a rare occurrence that I get to do this, but I'd like to welcome my partner, Kim, to the House today. We got to leave the five kids at home with my mom, graciously, so she's going to be at Queen's Park for the next couple of days.

Hon. Michael A. Tibollo: I'd like to welcome two very special guests to the House today. Belinda Marchese is joining us today from Hospice Vaughan. I would also like to welcome Kim Woodland, CEO of Matthews House Hospice in Alliston. Welcome to Queen's Park.

Hon. Sylvia Jones: It is a pleasure for me to welcome and introduce the mayor of Caledon, Allan Thompson. Welcome to Queen's Park.

Mrs. Nina Tangri: It gives me great pleasure to welcome the president and CEO of the Mississauga Board of Trade, David Wojcik.

Also, a group from Life Sciences Ontario and Medtech Canada is coming here today. I'd like to invite everybody to the legislative dining room at 5 p.m. to join them at their reception.

Ms. Jessica Bell: I'd like to introduce the family of the page captain today, Sarah Roff. Aaron Roff, David Roff and Kirsten Doucette are here to recognize their daughter as the page captain today. Thank you for joining us.

Hon. Lisa M. Thompson: I'm pleased to rise in the House today to welcome my friends over in the east lobby. I know that the Minister of Agriculture will be introducing them this afternoon, but I want to give a special shout-out to Kelly Daynard. She is an amazing lady. She is with Farm and Food Care Ontario. She leads by example and she takes great care of my husband on occasion.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): I also want to welcome very special guests who we have with us in the Speaker's gallery today: His Excellency Zvi Vapni, the head of the North American bureau at the Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs. He is accompanied by Ms. Galit Baram, the consul general of Israel at Toronto. Please join me in welcoming our guests to the Legislative Assembly today.

Hon. Ross Romano: I would be remiss, as I look up to the right, not to introduce a good friend of mine from my first by-election campaign, Mr. Jordan Falkenstein.

RICHARD ALEXANDER ALLEN

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

Hon. Paul Calandra: Mr. Speaker, I believe you will find we have unanimous consent to recognize a former member of provincial Parliament from the riding of Hamilton West, Mr. Richard Alexander Allen, with five minutes being allocated to the government, five minutes being allotted to the independent members, with the independent members going first, followed by the government and finally by the NDP.

1040

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The government House leader is seeking the unanimous consent of the House to recognize the former member of provincial Parliament from the riding of Hamilton West, Dr. Richard Alexander Allen. Agreed? Agreed.

I recognize the member for Don Valley West.

Ms. Kathleen O. Wynne: Richard Allen, MPP, was a friend and mentor to many Hamilton politicians. MPP Ted McMeekin called him “a local icon” who “modelled the life well lived.” He was described as full of love, insight and passion to his final days.

Allen was born in 1929 and raised in Vancouver, born into a family that loved music and the arts, playing violin and singing. Allen was guided by his deep faith, developing a deep love and compassion for fellow human beings. He was the son of a United Church minister. He moved frequently throughout BC during his childhood as his father was transferred from one pastoral charge to another. That’s when he fell in love with the great Canadian outdoors, spending hours as a boy trekking up the mountains and skiing back down.

He was committed to social justice and political engagement.

He was an avid academic, completing his PhD at Duke University, where he studied the intersection of religion and social reform in Canada. One former deputy minister that I spoke to called him a “scholar first.” He taught history at the University of Regina between 1964 and 1974, and at McMaster between 1974 and 1987.

Allen was married to Nettie, who was the typist for his PhD manuscript, for 52 years. They had two sons, Daniel and Philip.

He was very interested in the separatist factions in Quebec, which inspired a year-long sabbatical adventure for their family in Montreal in 1978-79.

He entered politics in 1982, winning a by-election in the former riding of Hamilton West, defeating Liberal Joe Barbera. He was subsequently re-elected three times: in 1985, 1987 and 1990. Constituents found him to be gentle, highly intelligent and non-judgmental. Allen served as Minister of Colleges and Universities from 1990 to 1993

and as Minister of Skills Development and Minister of Housing in 1994 to 1995 in NDP Premier Bob Rae’s cabinet.

After 13 years as an MPP, he returned to his work as a historical researcher and writer and published a number of books.

When I was looking up information on this—because I didn’t know Richard Allen—I came upon an article in the Hamilton Spectator that was written in March of this year by my friend Aidan Johnson. He said, “My friend,” meaning Richard Allen, “did not confine his activism to his classroom or his church. For Richard, politics was a way of love, and to love. He entered public life in order to live ‘the social gospel’—the teachings of Jesus in relation to how communities ought to be, in terms of financial policy, health care, education, protection of nature, and concern for the most vulnerable.”

Ontario stands grateful to Richard Allen and to his family for his contributions to Ontario.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): I recognize the member for Guelph.

Mr. Mike Schreiner: I am honoured to rise today to pay tribute to Dr. Richard Alexander Allen for his distinguished public service. I welcome his children, grandchildren, nieces, nephews and many friends here today.

Dr. Allen’s accomplishments were very impressive: a noteworthy career in academics, particularly his love for history, and his public service, especially his service in this Legislature, and 23 years as an academic, both at the University of Regina and McMaster University.

He was elected MPP for Hamilton West in 1982 and served in this Legislature until 1995. He held appointments as Minister of Colleges and Universities, Minister of Skills Development and Minister of Housing.

I was particularly struck by what a vocal advocate Dr. Allen was for the Meech Lake Accord, and I was especially inspired by the work he did on Indigenous rights. I think he would have been incredibly moved by the Indigenous blanket circle today, given what he talked about and stood for in this House.

Also, his support for the francophone community and francophone services was exceptional.

He was the author of many historical works. As a student of history myself, I was particularly impressed with the work he had done, both on the Prairies and also his advocacy around the social gospel and social justice.

Few people can claim such a meaningful and exceptional life as Dr. Allen, and we can take inspiration from his dedication in making our province and our country a better place. Thank you, Dr. Allen, for your contributions to academics, to politics, to public life, and thank you to Dr. Allen’s family for sharing his gifts with us.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): I recognize the member for Flamborough–Glanbrook.

Ms. Donna Skelly: I’m honoured to rise today to speak about Dr. Richard Allen and his remarkable legacy.

Dr. Allen was a rare politician. He was the son of a United Church minister, and in part, because of his strong faith, he was deeply rooted in the traditions of social justice. He attained a PhD from Duke University, where he pioneered

new ground in the field of Canadian social history. Richard was a professor of Canadian history at McMaster University for 14 years. His students say he was, among other things, a captivating storyteller. Richard Allen wanted more than simply to talk about social justice. He actually lived it, and that's why he decided to enter the political arena, to live what his family called his "social gospel."

Richard ran for the NDP in the 1982 Hamilton West by-election and won. When he went door-to-door campaigning, constituents would be surprised to see Richard standing there, a well-known professor from McMaster University, who would listen to them and actually cared about what they had to say. Richard regarded everyone as equal. His friends say this was Richard's way of doing politics. He was warm and friendly, so interacting with people came naturally to him. Even when a person disagreed with his policies or views, they never walked away feeling animosity. He made them feel valued.

It was that warmth and friendliness and empathy for people that won the hearts and minds of the constituents of Hamilton West. He had compassion, but also integrity. Given his academic achievements, Richard certainly had the right to boast, but he never did. He was a humble man. He served his constituents in this down-to-earth manner for 13 years, including five years as a cabinet minister in the Bob Rae government.

Richard won the admiration and loyalty of many people who worked in the public service at Queen's Park with over the years. He did his homework and he listened to Ontarians. Staff said he was interested in their opinions. He would ask them intelligent, respectful and probing questions. He had a strong belief in the connection between faith and social action. Richard was always a thoughtful and deeply committed advocate for social justice.

As Minister of Housing, Richard oversaw the building of much-needed social housing throughout the province. He wanted to make a difference in people's lives and cared deeply about the most vulnerable, such as those who were homeless and living in poverty. As chair of the board of Wesley Urban Ministries, he became a voice for those he wanted to help most. To this day, Wesley Urban Ministries is one of the leading providers of support to low-income and marginalized people in Hamilton.

Richard was also a renowned and celebrated author. In his later years, his body was failing, but his mind was sharp. His final book was published just two months before he died at the age of 90. In his private life, he adored his wife, Nettie, as well as his two sons, Philip and Daniel, and he loved animals, especially his three dogs.

Former NDP MPP Evelyn Gigantes remembers Richard for his decency and intelligence. Jean Poirier, a former Liberal MPP, said this when Richard passed away, "Ontario has lost a most honourable person, who never stopped caring for his fellow human beings." There was a common refrain when those who knew Richard were describing him: "Richard Allen made our lives so much better for having known him."

To his family and friends sitting in the gallery: Thank you for sharing your father, your grandfather and your friend Richard Allen with all of us.

1050

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Next I'll recognize the member for Hamilton West–Ancaster–Dundas.

Ms. Sandy Shaw: Many of us in this House had the distinct honour and privilege to have known Dr. Richard Allen. I was one of these lucky people.

Richard was first elected as MPP for Hamilton West in 1982. He went on to serve in the 32nd, the 33rd, the 34th and the 35th Parliaments. Under Premier Rae, Richard served as a cabinet minister.

We are here to honour Richard Allen. He was a remarkable historian, a fearless politician and universally described as a wise, kind, caring, compassionate person. But more than all, he was a loving and dedicated husband and father.

Richard and Nettie, his loving wife of 52 years, were an iconic duo in Hamilton. Together, they built a life dedicated to a steadfast love for one another and compassion for their fellow humans.

Richard was the son of a United Church minister, and undoubtedly this influenced his life's work. His first book, *The Social Passion: Religion and Social Reform in Canada*, explored what Richard believed to be an essential connection between faith and social action. This is a tradition that goes back to important CCF figures like J.S. Woodsworth and Tommy Douglas.

As an MPP, Richard himself wasn't above a little fire and brimstone. From Hansard, in 1990, Mr. Allen said, "Yesterday in the assembly the Treasurer attacked my activities and questions on behalf of the hungry, homeless and poor in this province as a mindless crusade...."

"Much in politics may be a careful balancing of competing interests, but for me and my party, both religious and humanistic convictions tell us that the condition of the poor is non-negotiable.... There is no trade-off between infants on watered formula and the paying down of the provincial debt.

"The Treasurer in his budget has put the rich and the poor on the scales together. God help him."

Richard was many things, but he was the feistiest campaigner that you would ever meet. The first indication in Hamilton that it was election season was the appearance of an orange sign on the lawn of his Dundas cottage, the beautiful home that he shared with his wife, Nettie. Whether Richard was on the ballot or not, Richard was there, knocking on doors, making calls.

During my provincial campaign, Richard was more than happy to make the scene. He would show up at my campaign office in a cab, ready to throw down for us again. On election night, he showed up proudly sporting a vintage T-shirt that he had from one of his campaigns in the 1990s.

Richard's last visit to Queen's Park was to watch my inaugural speech. Afterwards, he gave me some advice, and we sat together in my office and he described the pride that he felt in what he was able to achieve as an MPP and as a cabinet minister under Premier Rae. As word got out that Richard was here, my office slowly filled up, and Richard held court. He was at his best. He was a spell-binding storyteller, and there was a sense of awe in the room as he described his experience and his conviction about a life dedicated to others.

I had the pleasure to meet with Richard's family at his funeral at Westdale United Church in Hamilton. The love and admiration they have for Richard is remarkable.

To Richard's family, to his sons, Daniel and Philip, to Philip's partner, Rebecca Richardson, and to his two granddaughters, Gemma and Mika, whom he adored: We share in your great loss.

Richard was always busy, as has been described. His most recent book was published in his 90th year, just before his death, so I think it's only fitting to end this tribute by quoting from this book, *Beyond the Noise of Solemn Assemblies: The Protestant Ethic and the Quest for Social Justice in Canada*:

"For my graduate students from whom I have learned so much—then and since

"I hate, I despise your feasts,

"And I take no delight in your solemn assemblies

"Take away from me the noise of your songs

"To the melody of your harps I will not listen

"But let justice roll down like waters

"And righteousness like an ever-flowing stream."

Dr. Richard Allen.

Applause.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): I want to thank the members for their eloquent tributes in memory of Dr. Richard Allen and his life of public service and faith.

REPORT, FINANCIAL ACCOUNTABILITY OFFICER

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): I beg to inform the House that the following document has been tabled: a report entitled *Expenditure Monitor 2019-20*, from the Financial Accountability Office of Ontario.

ORAL QUESTIONS

EDUCATION FUNDING

Ms. Andrea Horwath: My question is to the Premier. Parents and students are bracing themselves for a day of job action that will close hundreds of schools across the province on Wednesday. The Ford government is plowing ahead with classroom cuts that mean larger classes, and forcing students into mandatory online learning courses.

The Ford government insists that they're on the side of parents. They point to the millions of parents they heard from in consultations. Can they tell us how many parents approved of their plans for larger classes in those consultations?

Hon. Christine Elliott: To the Minister of Education.

Hon. Stephen Lecce: The government is absolutely focused on getting a voluntary agreement with our educator unions, because we want to keep kids in class.

What we have done is listened to those we have served, and by doing so—we announced just weeks ago that we will move the classroom-size provincial average for secondary students from 28 to 25. We have listened to

parents when we made a move to move the number of online courses from four to two. We made a move when we more than doubled the mental health funding envelope, to ensure the support for those in need. We have demonstrated that we're listening to those that we serve.

What we also have seen, notwithstanding the moves the government has made, is a continuation by teacher unions to escalate, irrespective of the good-faith bargaining and the moves we have made. That is regrettable.

We believe strikes hurt kids. The question for the member opposite is, do you stand with parents against escalation by teacher unions?

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

Ms. Andrea Horwath: According to a report from Global News yesterday, the government's consultation with parents had some pretty conclusive results. Approximately 70% of parents felt an increase in class sizes would negatively impact students' learning. That means that an increase from 22 to 28, not to 25, like the minister said in his response.

A majority of parents opposed the mandatory e-learning for students—again, not four classes down to two, but zero up to two. They still oppose it, Speaker.

Why is the Ford government picking a fight with teachers to implement cuts that parents clearly, clearly told them that they don't want?

Hon. Stephen Lecce: Mr. Speaker, 100% of parents want kids to be in class on Wednesday, and our government agrees with them.

The parents of this province want all parties to be reasonable. That is why we tabled a move of the provincial average from 28 to 25. It's why, in online courses, we moved from four to two. It's why we increased support for STEM and mathematics in the class, and doubled the mental health portfolio.

For 203 consecutive days, the teachers unions have not made a single substantive change. They have been absolutely dogmatic. The continuation here is with respect to their emphasis on getting a \$1.5-billion increase in salary. That seems to be the fundamental issue at the table.

We will continue to work in good faith to get deals, because parents in this province deserve predictability, and children should be in class on Wednesday and every day thereafter.

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

Ms. Andrea Horwath: The fundamental issue is that parents and educators and educational workers in this province are fighting to save our public education system and the quality of that education system.

Let's be clear: The government held a formal consultation with thousands of parents. Parents clearly and unequivocally rejected larger class sizes, fewer courses and mandatory online learning. The Ford government not only plowed ahead with those cuts, but they hid the results from that very consultation and claimed that parents actually supported the cuts that they had clearly already rejected. Now the Ford government is ready to close every school in the province to keep those cuts in place.

1100

Will the government release the full results of this consultation today, or, better yet, reverse the classroom cuts?

Hon. Stephen Lecce: The government's aim is to be reasonable to get deals, as we did with CUPE just a month ago. But Mr. Speaker, for 203 consecutive days the teachers' unions have not made any substantive change. The onus is on all parties to be reasonable. The government has listened to those we serve. We have listened to parents and students. We made significant changes to our bargaining position. What has not transpired is any change at all by the teachers' unions, and that is regrettable.

We are in this position because they are escalating, irrespective of the Premier, who is in the chair. You could be a New Democrat, a Liberal or a Progressive Conservative. What unites them is escalation by teachers. We oppose, and I ask the members opposite to stand with parents and oppose, this escalation.

GOVERNMENT'S AGENDA

Ms. Andrea Horwath: My next question is also to the Premier. But let's be clear: We're in this position because this government picked a fight with education workers in this province.

This question, Speaker, is about the government's priorities as Canada's Premiers meet in Mississauga today. While families in Ontario are worried about hallway medicine and the high cost of drugs, Ontario's Premier says that he's opposed to efforts to create a national pharmacare plan. Instead, he wants flexibility on how health care dollars from Ottawa can be spent. Presumably, that means the freedom to not spend them on health care.

Will the Ontario Premier be recruiting other provincial leaders to oppose the plan that would make prescription drugs more affordable for the people of this great province?

Hon. Christine Elliott: I can assure the leader of the official opposition that the health and safety of Ontario patients and making sure that prescriptions are affordable are of utmost priority to us.

We have heard various things from the federal government. We're not exactly sure what they're going to come forward with since the election, since the report that was written by Dr. Hoskins, which is very broad and all-encompassing, or whether it's something more narrow than that.

I have had one conversation with the new federal Minister of Health. I've indicated to her that the priorities for us right now are making sure that we can afford and deal with the orphan and rare-disease drugs that are increasing our health costs by dramatic levels each and every year.

I think there's a lot that we can focus on. I look forward to first meeting with the provincial-territorial leaders in health care, and with the new federal minister, to discuss this.

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

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Well, Speaker, the best way to make drugs universally affordable to all Ontarians is

through a universal pharmacare plan. I would ask the minister to take that into consideration.

The Premier has also made a name for himself across the country by leading the war on the environment and fighting any effort to put a price on pollution or address the climate crisis. So will Ontario's Premier be recruiting other provincial leaders to join his lawsuit against the federal government's climate plan?

Hon. Christine Elliott: Minister of the Environment.

Hon. Jeff Yurek: Thanks very much to the member opposite.

We just celebrated our one-year anniversary of our Made-in-Ontario Environment Plan, Mr. Speaker. We've taken drastic steps over the last year to lay the groundwork to reach our emissions target of 30% below 2005 levels by 2030.

Later on today, I will be meeting with the federal Minister of Environment. We're going to have the discussion about our performance standards that we've put forward toward the ministry. That will allow us to ensure that the heavy polluters of this province are paying their fair share with regard to their pollution, but also working with them to lower their emissions so that we can start tackling the emissions in our province.

The leader opposite has no plan on the environment, Mr. Speaker. All they talk about is taxes. They have zero plans for the environment. I'm looking forward for them to join in the conversation and give us some ideas other than a carbon tax that is going to do nothing but cripple low- and medium-income people throughout this province.

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

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Well, Speaker, I dare say that was probably a pretty sad celebration.

As Ontario parents are wondering whether schools will stay open all week, the Premier has been making a play for the national stage. But instead of putting forward a vision that would actually help Ontario families who are struggling with the cost of drugs or would put Ontario at the front of the clean energy economy, the Ford government's vision for Canada is a country with no pharmacare and no plan for climate change. Does this Ontario Premier really think that this is the leadership that Ontario families deserve?

Hon. Jeff Yurek: I can take further our announcement of just last week of creating our climate change advisory panel, for which we've taken experts from across this field.

Mr. Speaker, not only are we dealing on the environment with regard to reducing our emissions; we're also taking care of our land, air and water. We're ensuring that we start dealing with plastics. Right now we just started consultations with municipalities, Indigenous communities and the people of this province in order to change our recycling programs and remove plastics out of our landfills, move plastics out of our environment and create a new circular economy that is going to recycle those plastics and create a better economy for the province.

We announced our impact assessment analysis throughout the province, so we know what key areas we can plan for

down the road, so municipalities and Indigenous communities can actually focus on what climate change is going to be doing to the region, so they can make smart investments. That does include new technology, but it also includes innovative ways that individual people in this province can move forward to clean up our environment. I am proud of our plan going forward, as is the government of this province.

RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Ms. Andrea Horwath: My next question is also to the Premier. Last week, this Legislature unanimously passed a motion opposing Quebec's Bill 21 and calling on the government of Ontario to formally request that Quebec repeal the law. The support for that motion was welcomed by groups like the World Sikh Organization, the Toronto Board of Rabbis and the National Council of Canadian Muslims.

However, immediately after confirming their support for the motion, the Ford government made it clear they would not be raising these serious concerns about human rights with the government of Quebec. Can the Ford government confirm that they have not formally communicated the views of this Legislature to the government of Quebec?

Hon. Christine Elliott: To the government House leader.

Hon. Paul Calandra: As I've said last week and on a number of occasions, the Premier was very clear on this: A law like this would never have a place in the province of Ontario. As the Leader of the Opposition knows full well, this Legislature was unanimous not once but twice on Bill 21.

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

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Unfortunately, I have not had any light shed on the question that I asked, Speaker. For people who had dared to hope that they'd see some action when this Legislature unanimously passed this motion, the Ford government's refusal to stand up for basic rights and freedoms is a betrayal.

Last week we had the embarrassing sight of Ontario's Premier insisting he would not discuss human rights at a meeting with Quebec's Premier, only to learn that Quebec's Premier planned to raise the issue himself. This Legislature asked the Premier to stand up for human rights. Why didn't he?

Hon. Paul Calandra: Mr. Speaker, this party has always stood up for human rights, and so has this Premier. This Premier was very quick to suggest that a bill like this would have no place in the province of Ontario. This caucus and this Legislature did that on two occasions, but the member opposite continues to play politics on something that is very important to all members of this Legislature.

We talked about the members of this Legislature—the first turban-wearing Sikh to become a cabinet minister. These are things that are important. But I say to the member opposite that if the member opposite is so wanting to play politics on this, may I suggest that she call her former deputy leader, the current leader of the New Democratic Party in Ottawa, and see what his position is and ask him to help on this.

On this side of the House, we will continue to stand up for those people who need our help, and going forward, of

course, we're going to continue to work on building a strong economy for all Ontarians.

AFFAIRES FRANCOPHONES

M^{me} Natalia Kusendova: Dans mon comté de Mississauga-Centre, comme partout ailleurs en Ontario, les gens travaillent durement pour gagner leur pain, et ils ont élu un gouvernement qui a à coeur d'appuyer leur travail et les différents secteurs d'industrie dans cette province. C'est pourquoi j'étais très contente de constater l'orientation que le ministère des Affaires francophones a empruntée depuis plus d'un an : celle d'exploiter le potentiel bilingue et francophone de la province à des fins d'enrichissement collectif.

Cela s'ajoute aussi au grand projet d'appui à la fondation d'une université par et pour les francophones dans la grande région de Toronto. Vraiment, c'est un bon moment pour être francophone et francophile, comme moi, en Ontario.

Est-ce que la ministre des Affaires francophones peut nous parler de la table ronde économique qu'elle a présidée la semaine dernière à Toronto?

L'hon. Caroline Mulroney: Je remercie la députée de sa question. Alors que notre gouvernement travaille avec la communauté francophone afin de promouvoir les intérêts et défendre les droits et les acquis des Franco-Ontariens, nous avons aussi pour mission de rendre l'Ontario ouvert aux affaires et aux emplois, y compris l'Ontario français.

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La semaine dernière, avec mon adjointe parlementaire, Gila Martow, et mon conseiller économique, M. Glenn O'Farrell, nous avons eu une table ronde très positive, très constructive et prometteuse au Centre ontarien des investissements et du commerce à Toronto.

Ce fut l'occasion d'une prise de contact et d'échanges sur les thèmes du réseautage entre les chefs de file économiques de la francophonie de Toronto, du potentiel économique francophone et des voies d'avenir pour bien exploiter ce potentiel au profit de tous les Ontariens à travers des mesures de développement économique harmonisant les efforts du gouvernement provincial et des acteurs économiques de la société civile.

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

M^{me} Natalia Kusendova: Je remercie la ministre des Affaires francophones pour sa réponse et pour son travail dur avec la communauté francophone en Ontario.

En effet, si la mise en oeuvre de l'Université de l'Ontario français représente un grand levier de développement et d'échanges internationaux pour les francophones de la province, il va sans dire que notre gouvernement s'efforce de toutes les manières possibles de réellement faire du bien aux gens, en rendant leur vie plus facile. Et nous faisons cela, non pas en endettant la province les yeux fermés comme les libéraux le faisaient impunément—eux qui attachaient de lourdes chaînes de dettes aux pieds des prochaines générations.

Est-ce que la ministre peut nous parler davantage de la rencontre qu'elle a eue avec les leaders d'affaires

francophones la semaine dernière et le sens des échanges qui ont eu lieu dans notre province?

L'hon. Caroline Mulroney: En tant que ministre des Affaires francophones, je veux aussi que la communauté franco-ontarienne se développe au maximum et atteigne tout l'espace de force et de rayonnement économique dont elle est capable—avec sa fougue et son audace—pour le bien de l'Ontario.

Ce que nous avons pu palper lors de cette table ronde, c'est, je dirais, une sorte de patriotisme économique chez des francophones emblématiques de divers milieux d'affaires, une volonté de tabler sur des secteurs économiques où les francophones sont déjà présents, ou où ils pourraient y aller, pour exporter des produits et des services vers des marchés francophones, comme le Québec et à l'étranger.

Nous sommes là pour leur faciliter la tâche, que ce soit en les réunissant ensemble, en les libérant du fardeau de la paperasserie quand c'est possible et en cherchant à utiliser des leviers existants de l'État judicieusement, pour aller plus loin, pour créer des emplois et faire prospérer davantage la province et la francophonie ontarienne.

EDUCATION FUNDING

Ms. Marit Stiles: My question is for the Minister of Education. After many, many months of trying to bury the truth about their plan to fire teachers and cut classes—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): I'm going to ask the member to withdraw and rephrase the question.

Ms. Marit Stiles: Withdraw.

It turns out that the government's own consultation documents confirm what Ontarians have been saying all along. No one thinks that this government's plan to jack up class sizes is a good idea. They never asked for it, they don't want it, period. It's clear from the consultation that this government doesn't care what Ontario families think.

Mr. Speaker, why does this government think they know better than the thousands of teachers, students and families who just want the best for their kids?

Hon. Stephen Lecce: Thank you to the member opposite. Mr. Speaker, all parties at the table must be reasonable, and this government has demonstrated a reasonable posture and a focus on keeping students in class. It is the impetus for why we made a move to go from a 28 provincialized average to 25. It's why we went from four online learning courses to two. It's why we're preserving the lowest classroom size in the nation for early years.

Mr. Speaker, we are doing this by investing in public education. What we expect is for all parties to be reasonable. For 203 consecutive days, the unions have made no change at all to their position, not a single substantive move, and I think that is unacceptable. I think strikes hurt kids. The question for the member opposite is: Do you agree?

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

Ms. Marit Stiles: Mr. Speaker, when you cut your cuts in half, that doesn't make an improvement. Class sizes

aren't up for negotiation. Parents don't want it, students don't want it. You're using students as pawns in your negotiations.

While this government continues to—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Order. Stop the clock. The member for Davenport has the floor. She's close to me. I should be able to hear her; I need to be able to hear her. I would ask the House to come to order.

Start the clock. Member for Davenport.

Ms. Marit Stiles: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I guess I'm getting under their skin.

While this government continues to escalate their attacks on teachers and the education system, the minister has tried to tell us that his terrible plan for class size hikes was just part of some negotiation strategy. Look at where we find ourselves. Everyone knows that when your starting point is firing 10,000 teachers and cancelling tens of thousands of classes, it's not a negotiation, it's a hostage situation.

Speaker, no amount of spin is going to get them out of this. Why won't this minister come clean with Ontarians, admit that their plan to force teachers out of their jobs and force students into crammed—

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

Minister to reply.

Hon. Stephen Lecce: Our government is absolutely laser-focused on getting deals with all tables because we want to keep the children of this province in class. That is why, Mr. Speaker, our government made a decision to move the provincial average from 28 to 25. It's why we cut the online course number from four to two; we brought that down. It's why we doubled our investment in mental health. It's why we increased expenditure to the highest levels ever recorded under public education.

What every member of this Legislature should agree with is the premise that all the parties have to be reasonable; only one has been, and it's this government. The unions have opted for 203 consecutive days to not make any significant or substantive change to their position. That is unacceptable for families. They want all the parties to be reasonable because we need to work together to keep the children of this province in class. Count on our government to continue to be student-centric and to fight to ensure that kids stay in class every day.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The next question: The member for Don Valley West.

Ms. Kathleen O. Wynne: My question is for the Minister of Education. Mr. Speaker, across Ontario today—

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The member for Don Valley West, I apologize. I'm not able to recognize you at this time.

The next question. The member for Scarborough Centre.

ANTI-BULLYING INITIATIVES

Miss Christina Maria Mitas: I'm going to keep the Minister of Education question train going.

Mr. Speaker, as a mother and as an educator, I know how devastating bullying can be on a child. We know that the longer a child is bullied, the more likely they are to develop physical, emotional and psychological scars that can last a lifetime. In several tragic cases, constant harassment and bullying has prompted students to take their own lives. This is unacceptable. We urgently need to learn from these incidents and to take action to protect the children of Ontario. Could the Minister of Education please tell the House about some of the steps our government is taking to combat bullying in our schools?

Hon. Stephen Lecce: Speaker, allow me to thank the member from Scarborough Centre for her leadership in combatting bullying, on behalf of all parents and students in this province. I was excited to stand with her and with the member from Thornhill, as well as with the Associate Minister of Children, as we work together to combat the scourge of bullying that is so clearly growing within our schools in every region of Ontario.

We announced a five-point plan. It is the first step in our commitment to combat the growing escalation of bullying in our schools. In the health and physical education curriculum, Mr. Speaker, we put a major focus on removing the visible and invisible differences that can manifest in class. That starts with respect to help young people, be it in the context of body shaming, LGBT community children, as well as so many others who face a significant level of bullying, to know with confidence they should see themselves in their curriculum. Mr. Speaker, we put a nearly \$250,000 investment to help combat bullying in the context of de-escalation training, and we'll continue to support the safety of every child in this province.

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

Miss Christina Maria Mitas: As a former teacher with the Toronto District School Board, I was honoured when the minister recently asked me to advise him and the government on educational matters, with a special emphasis on bullying prevention. As a former educator, I have seen the negative effects that bullying can have first-hand. Bullying is an age-old and global problem that requires a multi-faceted approach involving the collective work of children, parents and educators—really that requires the work of anyone who cares about our children here in Ontario.

First and foremost, though, Mr. Speaker, we need information—information so that we know what is happening, and can act decisively and accordingly. So, I ask the minister: What is the government doing to reach out to our students in order to learn more about the scourge of bullying?

Hon. Stephen Lecce: Thank you to the member opposite. Mr. Speaker, indeed we want to ensure students have a voice. That's why we announced a province-wide survey to empower them to share their voice, their narrative, and to help the government better understand the pervasive nature of this issue. It's why, Mr. Speaker, when we held a round table with the member from Scarborough Centre and with students to hear from the front line what they

want more of from our government, we had an eye-opening discussion where they wanted more online. They wanted a survey. They wanted a better review of our reporting set practices and our enforcement. They wanted more support for educators in de-escalation training. Mr. Speaker, all of these initiatives are all part of our plan to support our kids, to make sure every single child in this province, irrespective of heritage, faith, orientation, age, place of birth or colour of skin can see themselves, with confidence, reflected in our schools.

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PUBLIC TRANSIT

Mr. Joel Harden: As nauseating as it was to hear that exchange on bullying from a government currently bullying education workers—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): I'm going to ask the member to rephrase his introduction to his question.

Mr. Joel Harden: This is to the Deputy Premier. On Saturday, our office in Ottawa Centre hosted a town hall to discuss public transit. Over 100 people turned out to share their ideas and frustration with the state of Ottawa's transit system, and our light rail transit system in particular. Since its launch in September, the LRT has repeatedly ground to a halt due to mechanical failures, leaving thousands of people stranded. To make matters worse, Speaker, we've heard from riders living downtown whose commutes have lengthened because of route changes and reductions in buses that have accompanied the LRT's launch.

Speaker, as the MPP for Ottawa Centre, I was excited by the launch of the LRT, but its first two and a half months have been nothing short of a debacle. More than two weeks ago, this government pledged that help was on the way, but since then we've heard nothing. Premier, what can we count on for actual support from your government, beyond words?

Hon. Christine Elliott: To the Minister of Transportation.

Hon. Caroline Mulroney: We have been following very closely the situation in Ottawa with respect to the LRT and we've been speaking closely with our colleagues in our caucus who represent the Ottawa area. Obviously, there are a lot of difficulties in operating the LRT. The Ministry of Transportation reached out to Ottawa to see how we can support their efforts.

It's a municipally run project. We want to be respectful of their jurisdiction with respect to this project, and at the same time offer the support and technical aid that is necessary. We're still discussing this with the city of Ottawa, and we will have more to say once a resolution has been reached.

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

Mr. Joel Harden: At our town hall in Ottawa Centre, we heard story after story about unreliable schedules, overcrowding and delays. Riders are at their wits' end, and many are giving up, sadly, on public transit altogether. We heard one participant who told us how she has to walk

extraordinary distances everywhere now. Others are forced into winter cycling, without a sense of what that requires. Another simply said they were stranded from picking up their kids at the end of the day. These are real, meaningful hardships, not even counting people with disabilities who face even harsher impacts.

Speaker, public confidence in this LRT cannot get much lower, but the public-private partnership model supported by the previous Liberal government and this government right over here is leading to secrecy and problems for people in our profession of politics getting to the bottom of this problem.

The province has invested \$1.2 billion for the second phase of the LRT. We want to know in Ottawa: How are you working to make sure bad mistakes aren't repeated? How are you—

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

The Minister of Transportation to reply.

Hon. Caroline Mulroney: As the member knows, this is a municipally run project. The province has committed funding to phases 1 and 2 of the Ottawa LRT project, and we are very pleased to be able to support the transit needs in the city of Ottawa in this way. But the province, while it has committed funding, respects the jurisdiction of the municipality to operate the LRT.

That said, we have reached out and officials are working closely with the city of Ottawa to see how we can help them resolve the issues, because we don't want to see transit riders in the city of Ottawa stranded. We're continuing to work with them and when we have been able to come to some agreement with the city of Ottawa on this, we will have more to say. In the meantime, we are supporting their efforts. It is a municipally run project.

TRANSPORTATION INFRASTRUCTURE

Mr. Mike Harris: My question is to the Minister of Infrastructure. Minister, this summer it was my pleasure to have you join my colleagues and me in Waterloo region to announce Ontario's investments in transit infrastructure. I want to also acknowledge that Premier Ford visited to further support our government's investment in transit for the region.

Our government is investing more than \$61 million to support transit and road projects that will see improved service for the people living in Waterloo region. All three levels of government must work together to ensure these important infrastructure investments are made across the province, and I believe the federal government has already indicated support for these important projects.

Can the minister advise if there are any other transit projects that the Waterloo region can look forward to in the near future?

Hon. Laurie Scott: I would like to thank the member from Kitchener–Conestoga for his question and for his representation of his riding and his region.

Ontario is investing more than \$61 million for transit infrastructure that will improve services to the residents of the Kitchener and Waterloo area. In addition to the transit operations facility, Ontario is investing more than \$9

million, which will be used to add or replace conventional and specialized vehicles in the fleet. Our investments also include funding for the building of cycling and pedestrian bridges and trails that will lead to better integration of transit services.

Our government is working and will continue to work with our municipal partners, families and businesses to make smart investments in our infrastructure and keep it reliable for the people of Ontario. These projects were brought forward as priority projects by our municipal partners and are supported by the region of Waterloo, Mr. Speaker. And there will be more to come.

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

Mr. Mike Harris: Thank you to the minister for your continued support for these infrastructure projects, which are so important to the people of Kitchener–Conestoga and Waterloo region.

Minister, in addition to these transit projects, our government is providing funding for road and bridge infrastructure. I know that some of those investments include more than \$469,000 in rehabilitation of the Glasgow Street North bridge in Woolwich, and more than \$1.1 million for the replacement of a bridge over the Nith River in Wilmot township. These road and bridge projects, together with the transit infrastructure projects, will benefit families, students and businesses throughout the area.

Minister, I know that some of the region's projects have received final federal approval, while others are still waiting. Is the minister able to provide an update on these remaining projects?

Hon. Laurie Scott: The member is quite right again. Eight of the 17 projects that the province nominated through the ICIP funding agreement have in fact received final approval and can now proceed. While there are nine pending approval, I remain optimistic that the new federal government in Ottawa will move quickly to approve these projects, thus allowing the municipality to move forward.

It's worth noting that a number of these projects brought forward by municipal officials will directly benefit university and college students in Kitchener–Waterloo. Over \$1.2 million of provincial money will be put toward the building of a shelter canopy in the University of Waterloo and over \$2.8 million for the expansion of transit service at Conestoga College. Mr. Speaker, once completed, these projects will reduce congestion, improve commutes, and connect neighbourhoods, businesses and people to their jobs.

CHILD CARE

Ms. Doly Begum: My question is to the Premier. Jean Hamlyn Day Care Centre in Dufferin county is facing closure, with 65 daycare spots at risk. A report to Dufferin county council states that the child care centre is already running at a deficit, and recommends shutting the centre down entirely as a result of further funding cuts by this government.

Speaker, Jean Hamlyn Day Care Centre already has a wait-list for new kids, so my question is: With a shortage

of quality, affordable child care spaces in Ontario, why is this government cutting funding for child care and forcing centres to close?

Hon. Christine Elliott: To the Minister of Education.

Hon. Stephen Lecce: On the contrary, the government is investing over \$2 billion to build tens of thousands of child care spaces in every region of Ontario, in addition to a \$2-billion allocation to build 30,000 new child care spaces, 10,000 in new schools and 20,000 in existing schools.

Also, we're the only political party in this Legislature that believes in parental choice for child care. The member opposite does not support it, and her leader does not support it—as do the Liberals. They support a one-child-fits-all approach; we do not. We believe parents are the best decision-makers about their children's child care.

That's why we introduced the child care tax credit to provide over \$1,000, on average, per child under 18 for a middle-income family in this province. We're providing investment. We're expanding choice. We're building new spaces, and we're making child care affordable after the highest child care costs after 15 years of Liberal government, Mr. Speaker.

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

Ms. Doly Begum: Mr. Speaker, it sounds to me like this government is irresponsibly spending people's hard-earned dollars, and yet the people of this province are struggling. These parents have been told to look for day care options elsewhere in Dufferin county. For families in Orangeville, that means finding new private day care spots some 25 kilometres away, in Shelburne or Grand Valley.

High-quality, affordable child care should be available for parents in every community in Ontario. Will this government stop their reckless cuts and clearly irresponsible spending so that parents in Orangeville and across the province don't lose any more daycare spaces in their communities?

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Hon. Stephen Lecce: Mr. Speaker, the member opposite will know that our government is investing over \$2 billion to build over 30,000 new child care spaces to provide more choice for families in this province.

The specific example cited is a decision exclusively made by the municipality. However, the Solicitor General of this province was proud just weeks ago to announce, in the French board in her riding, new child care spaces for families in her community.

We're doing that because we believe in choice. We believe in both institutional day care and providing a child care benefit for every middle-class family who's eligible for up to 75% of expenses, putting over \$1,000 per child in the pockets of working families. Mr. Speaker, this is the approach of our government: more choice, more options and more monies in their pockets.

INTERNATIONAL TRADE

Mrs. Daisy Wai: My question is to the Minister of Economic Development, Job Creation and Trade. Minister,

you rose in the House last Monday to speak about the great success our government found last week—thank you for your success in India. The businesses in my riding of Richmond Hill are very excited.

You have already secured an investment deal with VVDN Technologies for the people of Kitchener-Waterloo, a deal that will bring over 200 new skilled, high-paying jobs for workers and families.

Can the minister tell this House what further agreements were signed while you were leading your business mission in India?

Hon. Victor Fedeli: Thank you to the member from Richmond Hill for the question.

During the mission, Seneca College was also able to sign three MOUs that will promote the exchange of information and expertise. Ontario's academic institutions offer cutting-edge training, skills development and services that are in global demand. Some 52,000 students from India are in Ontario.

Ontario's business delegation had 150 business-to-business meetings with Indian businesses to explore opportunities for future partnerships, including India's infrastructure needs. This will give Ontario businesses a competitive advantage in accessing contracts for the \$1.5 trillion in infrastructure projects that India is building over the next five years.

India stands to benefit from Ontario's internationally recognized construction technology and design, and our mission was key in building and strengthening those relationships.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Supplementary?

Mrs. Daisy Wai: Thank you, Minister. It is great to know our government is doing its part to help Ontario workers and businesses get access to some of the world's fastest-growing and most lucrative markets.

Minister, we know, as part of your business mission, you met with international leaders in the infrastructure sector and managed to secure deals which will benefit the people of Ontario who work in that space.

India also has one of the largest information technology sectors in the world. Can the minister explain what progress was made on giving the people of Ontario increased access to this exciting market in India?

Hon. Victor Fedeli: Speaker, during the mission we met with representatives from the state of Karnataka, home to Bangalore, India's leader in IT, to advance a formal partnership. This partnership will provide Ontario with a competitive advantage to access this market and develop opportunities for increased trade, investments and partnerships.

India's information and technology sector is set to reach US\$350 billion by 2025, making it the largest sourcing destination for IT. Ontario is an ideal jurisdiction for partnership with India. We are North America's second-largest IT cluster.

So we will continue to take a proactive lead when it comes to international trade and bring our message everywhere: Speaker, we are cutting red tape and, instead, rolling out the red carpet. This tells people that we're open for business and open for trade.

CLIMATE CHANGE

Mr. Peter Tabuns: My question to the Premier: The Auditor General is preparing her first report on this government's so-called climate policy. The forthcoming report is expected to call into question Ontario's ability to meet its Paris accord targets.

Dianne Saxe, the former Environmental Commissioner, the one this government gave a pink slip to, has said that there is "no credible evidence" behind the Conservative government's emission reduction forecasts.

In advance of the report coming Wednesday, is the government willing to state in the Legislature today that they are on track to meet their forecasts for reducing greenhouse gas emissions?

Hon. Christine Elliott: To the Minister of the Environment.

Hon. Jeff Yurek: I look forward to the Auditor General's report on Wednesday. I guess there's plenty of information being spread out there, but we'll know Wednesday what the report is entailing in its whole.

The one thing we've come to see over the last year is that not one single plan or idea is one-size-fits-all for any province, region or community. Our living document, the environmental plan, will continue to evolve over the years and change over time as new technologies come on board. We're going to maintain our work towards reducing our emissions to our 30% target. Hopefully, we're going to go beyond that target by 2030.

We're going to continue to partner with private business to look at their innovation, because we know we're going to have to partner with them. We're going to partner with other levels of government, municipal and federal, to ensure we're working together on the common goal of reducing our emissions. We've done a lot of things this year that are going to pay benefits down the road, for instance, the Watay Power corporation, which we've made amendments towards so that they can start building their transmission lines to remove seven diesel—

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

Mr. Peter Tabuns: Thanks, Speaker. So I guess they're not on track to meet their commitments.

Again to the Premier. To quote the former Environmental Commissioner, "The government's climate plan doesn't add up." So far, this Conservative government spent at least \$231 million to cancel green energy projects that were already under way. It tore electric vehicle charging stations out of the ground. It cancelled the successful GreenON home energy program, throwing homeowners and businesses into chaos. It wasted millions of taxpayer dollars to take the federal government to court, and it quoted climate-denial blogs in this House. That's not a plan, Speaker. Ontarians deserve better.

Will the government today commit to changing course, accepting the science and coming up with a real climate change plan?

Hon. Jeff Yurek: Minister of Energy.

Hon. Greg Rickford: Speaker, as you listen to that, it becomes abundantly clear what NDP really stands for:

This is the new denial party. This was the party that would deny the people of Hamilton and the workers at Dofasco an affordable supply of electricity that would not come from erratic wind turbines. This is the kind of party that would deny Timmins and the Borden mine, a fully electric line that was actually affordable. This is the kind of party that would deny Toronto and the GTA one of the largest green infrastructure projects in the history of this province and vote against it. This is the party that would deny Durham nuclear technology—a green form of energy that not only supplies this province and employs 6,000 people, but also has a dynamic profile of world-class isotopes—and deny the fact that they voted for a 65% increase in the price of electricity between—

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

RECREATIONAL BOATING INDUSTRY

Mr. Randy Pettapiece: My question is for the Minister of Heritage, Sport, Tourism and Culture Industries. Minister, I know you recently attended the Boating Ontario Conference in Niagara Falls, where there were over 300 recreational boating industry leaders and decision-makers.

In my riding of Perth–Wellington, we are blessed with some beautiful waterways which are perfect for recreational boaters. It's also a popular summer activity in my riding, although I know its impact province-wide is much larger.

Minister, can you tell us what kind of impact the recreational boating industry has on Ontario?

Hon. Lisa MacLeod: I want to say thank you to the enthusiastic and good member from Perth–Wellington for bringing this to the floor of the assembly today.

As with most things in the Ministry of Heritage, Sport, Tourism and Culture Industries, boating also plays an integral role in the spectacular double bottom line of this ministry. In fact, over six million Ontarians enjoy boating each and every summer and that contributes to amazing memories in the cultural fabric of this province. In addition to that, the recreational boating industry accounts for over 30,000 Ontario jobs, contributing to over \$4 billion in revenues, resulting in an impact of approximately \$2.3 billion in revenues for our province to continue to build roads, bridges and other valuable infrastructure.

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Speaker, I look forward to the supplemental, but I want to assure the member that we're taking this very seriously and we want to continue to support the Ontario boating association.

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

Mr. Randy Pettapiece: Mr. Speaker, it's certainly encouraging to hear how well our recreational boating industry is doing in Ontario and to hear what a great impact they have on the province, both financially and in terms of job creation.

In my riding, recreational boaters flock to places like Conestogo Lake. It attracts tourists from the region and

across the province and also from out of province. Local businesses that support these boaters are valuable job creators and respected members of their communities who have a measurable local impact.

Can the minister tell the Legislature what she and her ministry are doing to support this important industry?

Hon. Lisa MacLeod: Thank you very much to the member.

We want to ensure that the Ontario boating association and those six million Ontarians have smooth sailing on some clear waters across Ontario. We want to make sure that they continue to be supported and that they know they have a business-friendly, job-friendly and boating-friendly government here in the province of Ontario. That's why, last week, at the Ontario boating conference in Niagara Falls, I was able to announce funding of up to \$14,000 from the Tourism Development Fund for their 2020 waterfront tourism summit at the Toronto International Boat Show this coming January.

Speaker, this is an important part of our spectacular double bottom line. This ministry is committed to ensuring that we are open for business, open for jobs and open for boaters.

ANTI-RACISM ACTIVITIES

Ms. Jill Andrew: My question is to the Minister of Education. Last week, the government announced the next steps in their review of anti-Black racism at the Peel District School Board. Many in our Black communities were frustrated to hear that neither of the reviewers are Black. Black community members are once again forced to commit to the emotional and intellectual labour of educating non-Black reviewers on what anti-Black racism looks like, rather than having the opportunity the minister promised them to disclose their experiences and have solutions presented to them by experts with lived experience—the lived experience, for example, of being disproportionately streamed, as Black children, out of academic classes.

Previous reviews, like the Review of the Roots of Youth Violence, Dr. Carl James's We Rise Together, Stephen Lewis's Report on Race Relations and many more have centred Black reviewers.

Minister, why did the government fail to appoint a Black reviewer to a review that is supposed to look at anti-Black racism within the Peel District School Board?

Hon. Stephen Lecce: It is the government's commitment to ensure that every child in Ontario, particularly in Peel, feels safe, welcome and respected. That's why, upon the issues being raised by the community, by members of the Black community in Peel as well as the chair and vice-chair of the board, among others, we took immediate action to call in a review.

The two individuals we've called in, Ena Chadha, who is an experienced human rights lawyer, an educator, an investigator and a mediator—she actually worked as vice-chair of the Human Rights Tribunal of Ontario. We trust her judgment to lead this process, relying on the lived experiences of families and children and educators impacted. Suzanne Herbert is a former deputy minister, but as well

is someone who helped lead the review of York Region District School Board on a similar although different issue about anti-Black racism in schools. We denounce it. We stand with families and parents.

As well, I'll be leaning on one of my associate deputy ministers, Patrick Case, the ADM for the Education Equity Secretariat, to lead the way in ensuring that these boards end these practices and every child feels respected in Peel.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Supplementary.

Ms. Jill Andrew: Mr. Speaker, what I've just heard is that the government could not find two qualified Black professionals with lived experience to review the Peel District School Board. That is shameful.

Parents, students and educators have been contacting our offices, concerned that this government is not taking anti-Black racism and discrimination in our schools seriously. The exclusion of Black reviewers, Minister, from the PDSB review is shocking.

Michaëlle Jean, former Governor General, stated that the lack of a Black reviewer is "not only an offence but totally counterproductive."

Dave D'Oyen says that in the absence of the inclusion of a qualified member from the Black community, this review will not enjoy credibility.

Will the minister correct his decision, please, and appoint a Black reviewer to the Peel District School Board review as a lived and professional expert on anti-Black racism: yes or no?

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): I ask the members to please take their seats.

The Minister of Education to reply.

Hon. Stephen Lecce: We are absolutely committed to combatting these very serious allegations of systemic racism within our schools in Peel region and in all boards across the province. The allegations are serious. It's why, upon hearing about them directly from parents and students and educators and administrators, we took immediate action to call in reviewers. One of the reviewers is the same reviewer that helped us and the former government—helped the York region board deal with systemic issues of discrimination.

My associate deputy minister in the Education Equity Secretariat, Patrick Case, is a leader within the Black community, is a human rights lawyer, is a person of impeccable integrity who is committed to working with both reviewers to ensure accountability and to ensure those young people's voices are heard.

In fact, I met with both trustees and students of the Peel region board and members of the Peel caucus in our government just last week to listen first-hand about the allegations. They are disturbing. It is why, Mr. Speaker, we are acting swiftly to ensure there is transformation and change in Peel.

FOREST INDUSTRY

Mr. Toby Barrett: My question is for the Minister of Natural Resources and Forestry. Last week, he was in North Bay to announce the redesigned Forest Sector

Investment and Innovation Program. Ontario's forestry sector generates over \$16 billion in annual revenues and supports 155,000 direct and indirect jobs, primarily in rural and northern Ontario. It's easy to see how much passion the minister has for the sector, and I'm confident that with his hard work, the industry will finally be back on the right track.

Can the minister inform this House on how this announcement will benefit the sector and the hard-working men and women who are employed by it right across the province of Ontario?

Hon. John Yakabuski: I want to thank the great member from Haldimand–Norfolk for that question.

Speaker, as you know, Ontario wood products are globally recognized as coming from forests that are responsibly and sustainably managed. We have a plan to create the right conditions to help the forest industry innovate, attract investment and create jobs for communities all across the province.

The Forest Sector Investment and Innovation Program will emphasize the impact a project can have on a region and Ontario's forest sector as a whole while considering key outcomes such as jobs, innovation and productivity or product enhancements. This program helps address the economic development challenges of doing business in the province's rural and northern regions and is part of our government's plan for building Ontario together.

I'll have more to say in the supplementary.

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

Mr. Toby Barrett: Thank you to the minister for that answer. I'm heartened to see that our government recognizes the benefits of having a strong forestry industry in Ontario, and I'm glad to see how committed the minister is to creating an environment that will help the forestry sector succeed within the province of Ontario. By growing our forestry sector, we can help communities across the province thrive, building a future with a better quality of life and a higher standard of living.

Through you, Speaker: Would the minister please explain how this redesigned program will make it easier for those who work in the forest industry to do business in Ontario?

Hon. John Yakabuski: Thank you to the member for that question. I was pleased to meet with the Minister of Economic Development, Job Creation and Trade last week to make that announcement, along with its new name. FSIIIP will make it easier for forestry businesses to gain access and apply for funding. The new program is focused on streamlining the process and will put greater emphasis on the impact a project will have on its given region.

I'm looking forward soon to launching a draft forest sector strategy that will help industry innovate, attract new investment, and protect and create jobs, securing a future for the communities and families who depend on the industry.

These initiatives will offer better support for the industry, help us promote a stronger and more dynamic forest sector, and enable us to make Ontario the most attractive place in North America to invest, grow a business and create jobs. We're open for jobs. We're open for business.

HIGHWAY MAINTENANCE

Mr. Michael Mantha: My question is to the Minister of Transportation. Last week, the government finally disclosed the performance records of Ontario's private highway maintenance contractors. They show that last year the government issued over \$291,000 in penalties against highway maintenance contractors who violated their agreements. Why? Due to not taking care of the highways, not properly sanding and not meeting certain time limits.

1150

Why does this minister think that the people in Sault Ste. Marie, where the service providers violated the most, who service not only Sault Ste. Marie but the entire region of Algoma–Manitoulin—why does she think that the performance of companies to keep our roads safe is not there?

Hon. Caroline Mulroney: Mr. Speaker, as the member knows, it is the position of this minister and the Ministry of Transportation that the goal is to keep our roads safe and to plow our highways as quickly as possible so that motorists can travel along our roads safely and quickly. We take this responsibility very seriously, and our private contractors that work for the Ministry of Transportation are doing a good job of clearing our roads and getting to bare pavement as quickly as possible, and doing so meeting standards of the top-class highways across the province.

We are doing everything that we can to find ways to enhance our service levels in the north and across the province, and we will continue to do so.

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

Mr. Michael Mantha: Minister, I was on those highways last night and I have to tell you, you missed the goal. The standards were not even met. I would invite you at one point or another to come to northern Ontario and visit our roads. Earlier this winter, or just a couple of weeks ago, my colleague introduced a private member's bill that would end second-class treatment of Highways 17 and 11 and ensure that they're plowed as quickly as possible at the same level as the 400 series. Instead, the government showed that they are perfectly happy to let northern Ontarians roll the dice and get on the winter roads.

Now we have learned that highway maintenance contractors are violating service agreements to the tune of hundreds of thousands of dollars. Why does the minister think Algoma and Sault families deserve a private snowplow contractor with the worst compliance record in Ontario?

Hon. Caroline Mulroney: As the member knows, we take the safety of our roads and clearance very seriously, and we are working closely with our contractors to ensure they are meeting the service levels we expect in the south and in the north. As our winter conditions will continue to worsen over the next coming months, it's something that we are going to be monitoring closely.

If the member opposite wants to talk about people in this House voting against things that are going to support the people of northern Ontario, I'd like to ask him and the members of the opposition why they decided to vote against the four-laning of sections of Highway 69 and

Highways 11 and 17 in the north, including stretches between Kenora and the Manitoba border.

Mr. Speaker, why are they voting against measures to make life more affordable for people in the north by voting against the fall economic statement, which will see a reduction in the aviation fuel tax rate in northern Ontario? Mr. Speaker, that will go a long way to making the cost of groceries go down in the north and making life more affordable.

RURAL TRANSPORTATION

Mr. Randy Pettapiece: My question is for the Minister of Transportation. Speaker, we've heard a lot of great news about getting subways built for the city of Toronto in recent months. But I understand the minister is focused on improving transportation options across the province, not only here in the GTA. Rural municipalities need our help to get their communities moving and I know the Community Transportation Grant Program is a means to that end.

Could the minister please tell us about this important program?

Hon. Caroline Mulroney: I'd like to thank the member for the question. We campaigned on making life more affordable for Ontarians and making life easier for Ontarians. That's why the Community Transportation Grant Program is so important. The Community Transportation Grant Program will provide up to \$30 million over five years to assist municipalities to support local and inter-community transportation projects in areas that are currently underserved or unserved.

The municipalities will use this provincial funding to partner with community organizations to coordinate local transportation services for their communities. This is just another example of our government working together with our municipal partners to ensure that they have what they need to best serve their communities. Mr. Speaker, our government is committed to getting Ontario moving because we recognize just how important it is that every Ontarian have access to reliable transit.

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

Mr. Randy Pettapiece: Thank you to the minister for that answer. It's indisputable that access to reliable transit has the ability to improve the quality of life for every Ontarian. Going to work, attending appointments and visiting families and friends all become significantly more challenging when the transportation options are poor. I can tell the minister, from my riding of Perth-Wellington, that these projects are working very well. Thank you so much for paying attention to rural Ontario.

Can the minister tell us more about how the Community Transportation Grant Program works?

Hon. Caroline Mulroney: I would like to thank the member for all of his advocacy work on behalf of the residents of his riding.

The Community Transportation Grant Program provides support to municipalities to serve more riders, to provide more trips and to reach more destinations. There

are a variety of projects that are being funded through this program. Owen Sound received more than \$1.2 million in funding for a project to reinstate a fixed route from Owen Sound to the Guelph Central GO station. Perth county received funding of over \$1.4 million for the creation of a Perth county transit system which operates from Monday to Friday. The city of Stratford received funding of over \$1.4 million as well to support interregional bus access from Stratford, St. Marys and Listowel to intermodal hubs in Kitchener and London.

Mr. Speaker, these are only just a few examples of the great projects that are being supported by the Community Transportation Grant Program.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): This House stands in recess until 1 p.m.

The House recessed from 1156 to 1300.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

Hon. Ernie Hardeman: I apologize in advance for the lengthy list. Today I'm pleased to welcome the following individuals to Queen's Park, who are here in the galleries to support our government taking action to protect farmers: Keith Currie, Cathy Lennon and Peggy Brekveld from the Ontario Federation of Agriculture; Allan Thompson from the Rural Ontario Municipal Association; Ed Benjamins, Rob Dougans and Cory Preston from the Chicken Farmers of Ontario; Ken Ovington and Eric Schwindt from Ontario Pork; Norm Beal from Food and Beverage Ontario; Jennifer MacTavish and Mark Carere from Ontario Sheep; Joe Hill and Richard Horne from Ontario Beef Farmers; Tom Kroesbergen and Jennifer Haley from the Veal Farmers of Ontario; Bonnie den Haan from the Dairy Farmers of Ontario; Clarence Nywening and Brenda Dyack from the Christian Farmers Federation of Ontario; Kelly Daynard from Farm and Food Care Ontario; Franco Naccarato and Carol Goriup from Meat and Poultry Ontario; Kerry Towle from Sofina Foods; Mayor Jackie Rombouts from the township of Warwick; Brian Ricker and Ryan Brown from the Turkey Farmers of Ontario; and my staff and my parliamentary assistant's staff as well as the amazing OMAFRA staff who have all worked so hard on this effort.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for allowing me to make this introduction.

Mr. Jeremy Roberts: She's just on her way upstairs now, but I'd like to issue a very warm welcome to my cousin, visiting all the way from Vancouver. Please join me in welcoming Erica Roberts.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

AFFORDABLE HOUSING

Miss Monique Taylor: Today I want to talk about the housing crisis in Hamilton. All along the housing continuum, we're seeing a crisis of affordability. It's impacting

the safety, health and dignity of Hamiltonians. Over the past decade, the average price of a house in Hamilton has doubled; so has the average rent.

According to the Social Planning and Research Council of Hamilton, 45% of renters are living in unaffordable housing. Right now there are more than 15,000 people on a wait-list for subsidized housing in Hamilton. As a result of unaffordable housing, people are living in substandard conditions and Hamilton shelters are at capacity. Food bank visits are up, especially among children, as families are spending more and more of their income on housing.

It didn't have to be this way. In the 1990s we saw the federal Liberals cut their subsidized housing and download it onto the provinces. Then, the Conservative Ontario government, led then by Mike Harris, downloaded it onto the municipalities. Now the Ford government has sided with developers and landlords by scrapping rent controls and making evictions easier.

Successive Liberal and Conservative governments have let this housing crisis go on for years, and things are only getting worse. Ontario needs a government that will prioritize and invest in affordable housing, a government that will make sure that everyone's right to housing is protected and realized so that people in Hamilton and across the province can have the safety and security of a roof over their head.

TABLE RONDE ÉCONOMIQUE

M^{me} Gila Martow: Je veux expliquer que notre gouvernement travaille avec la communauté francophone afin de promouvoir les intérêts et défendre les droits et les acquis des Franco-Ontariens. Nous avons aussi pour mission de rendre l'Ontario ouvert aux affaires et à l'emploi, y compris l'Ontario français.

La semaine dernière, avec la ministre Caroline Mulroney et son conseiller économique, Glenn O'Farrell, nous avons eu une table ronde très positive, très constructive et prometteuse au Centre ontarien des investissements et du commerce à Toronto.

Ce fut l'occasion d'une prise de contact et d'échanges sur les thèmes du réseautage entre les chefs de file économiques francophones de Toronto, du potentiel économique francophone et des voies d'avenir pour bien exploiter ce potentiel au profit de tous les Ontariens à travers des mesures de développement économique harmonisant les efforts du gouvernement provincial et des acteurs économiques de la société civile.

C'était un très, très, très bon après-midi. Je veux dire merci à tous les francophones, les employés et les employeurs qui ont participé à cette table ronde.

DANCE EVOLUTION

Mr. Jamie West: Today I'd like to recognize the work of Dance Evolution. Dance Evolution is a small business in my riding that is giving back to our community. They're committed to helping their students become confident and empowered young people. As part of this commitment, the

school is certified as a YPAD school; that's the Youth Protection Advocates in Dance. This means the school follows age-appropriate artistic choices, healthy teaching techniques and behaviours that nurture the wellness of their students, including positive body image and anti-bullying education. These students not only learn how to dance; they also learn the significance of teamwork, leadership and building positive relationships with their peers in the world around them.

Beyond the studio, the school is actively engaged in the Greater Sudbury community. Students regularly perform at charity events and volunteer at the Northern Ontario Families of Children with Cancer father-daughter ball every year.

Started 11 years ago under the direction of Miss Ali Loney, this summer she passed the reins on to Miss Taylor Austin, a long-time student who is now an extraordinary teacher. I'd like to congratulate the school, Dance Evolution, on their positive impact and wish them many more years of developing dancers and our community leaders of tomorrow.

RICHARD AND PAULINE KNIAZIEW

Mr. Rick Nicholls: I don't often make triathlon announcements, but when I do, I'm so pleased to announce that Dr. Richard Kniaziew and his wife, Pauline Kniaziew, from my riding of Chatham-Kent-Leamington were recently honoured on Saturday, November 23, in Inglewood, Ontario, with Triathlon Canada's 2019 Impact Award.

This was to recognize their contributions to the sport of triathlon for over 30 years in Canada. To top it off, Olympic triathlon champion Simon Whitfield presented their prestigious award to them. In addition to their triathlon accomplishments, Dr. Kniaziew also runs a successful optometry business in Leamington, Chatham and Blenheim, and will soon be opening yet another branch in North Chatham, providing excellent eye care to thousands of people in my community.

Now, in case you're wondering, Triathlon Canada is a national organization dedicated to promoting excellence in their sport. Their team of dedicated professionals is committed to the same expectation they have of their athletes and coaches who represent Triathlon Canada. They want to be the best in their field, whether it's on the racecourse, in the training environment, or in the offices and boardrooms.

Congratulations, Dr. Richard and Pauline Kniaziew, on receiving this very prestigious Impact Award from Triathlon Canada for 2019.

CONSIDERATION OF BILL 156

Mr. John Vanthof: As agriculture critic for the official opposition and the deputy leader, I would like to welcome just about every Ontario farm leader I've ever worked with to the House. I would suggest that they're probably here for the introduction of Minister Hardeman's bill regarding security from trespass.

I would like to thank the minister. I haven't seen the bill, but we've had extensive discussions. I appreciate that. I would like to thank the government for actually allowing this bill to be stand-alone. One of the worst things about politics is when you mix something good with something not so good. I hope and I trust that there will not be a poison pill in this bill, that this bill is actually coming from the right place. We cannot predict whether a bill will pass, but we all, I believe, in this House, share the same goal: that farm animals should be protected from disease, and one of the ways to do that is to protect the biosecurity of the farm and also of farm families. With that goal in mind, we are looking forward to debating this bill, looking forward to continuing to work with farm groups, and continuing to work with the minister and the ministry to try and get the best solution possible.

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ONTARIO VOLUNTEER SERVICE AWARDS

Mr. Aris Babikian: Last month, along with a number of our colleagues, I had the pleasure of attending Ontario Volunteer Service Awards, two in Scarborough and one in Markham. Given out by the Ontario government, the awards are a great way to acknowledge the hard work and dedication of volunteers in our communities throughout the province.

Volunteers are the heart and soul of our society. Their dedication and service help us grow and prosper. Personally, as the former recipient of a 25-year service award, it was very fulfilling to help other people and community organizations. As such, I know the contributions of volunteers to our province and communities are immeasurable.

At the award ceremonies, I was able to meet a number of individuals who are making a great contribution to Scarborough–Agincourt with their dedicated service and volunteering. For example, I was able to meet a number of young recipients who are growing into the leaders of tomorrow in Scarborough. I was also happy to meet with a number of seniors who have been volunteering and contributing to the community for many years.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank all the award recipients for their hard work and continued service to our community.

CITY OF BRAMPTON

Ms. Sara Singh: It's an honour to rise here today on behalf of the good people of Brampton Centre. This past weekend, I attended a town hall organized by the Brampton First Foundation and a number of other concerned community groups. There were a number of speakers, Mr. Speaker, who shared a lot of different concerns with us.

It's no surprise to anyone here in this House that Brampton is ground zero for hallway medicine, and the participants at this town hall made it very, very clear that in Brampton, we need another hospital. People in our

community are tired of waiting in hallways. They're tired of waiting on lists in order to get the health care services they need. Our young people are tired of waiting for mental health supports, and our senior citizens are tired of waiting for long-term-care beds.

Many also made it clear that education in our community needs to be a priority. Earlier this year, we saw the government cancel Ryerson University's \$90-million project. People in Brampton want to make sure the next generation has the same educational opportunities as other communities across this province do. Not only are they concerned about the cut of this post-secondary institution in our community; they are concerned that this government is deciding to cut more and more out of our public education system, leaving children in Brampton without the education that they need to move this province forward, Mr. Speaker.

They're also concerned about this government's lack of priorities. A buck-a-beer over making sure that children with autism get services? This is not okay, and the people of Brampton are saying enough is enough.

RICHARD ARTHUR SHANGROW

Ms. Christine Hogarth: Today, I rise to pay respects to the recent passing of Richard Arthur Shangrow, a long-time resident of Etobicoke and a former district chief of the New Toronto and Etobicoke fire department. Former chief Shangrow passed away at age 88 on November 23 of this year.

Chief Shangrow was known as a no-nonsense type of fire chief, who served the people of Etobicoke for 35 years in the fire department. One of the big fires he fought, and became known for was the Pittsburgh Paint fire of July 15, 1976, in Long Branch. It is a fire that many residents still remember.

Chief Shangrow is survived by his wife of 65 years, Betty, and children Joan, Valerie, Lois, Brian and Barbara, as well as numerous grandchildren.

Chief Shangrow was active in the community through the Long Branch Neighbourhood Association and the Faustina Hockey Club, just to name a few organizations that he supported.

I would like to offer my condolences to the Shangrow family on behalf of myself and the residents of Etobicoke–Lakeshore, and I thank him for the service to our community.

HOSPICE PALLIATIVE CARE

Mr. Sam Oosterhoff: The elephant is back in the room. Hospice Palliative Care Ontario is back at Queen's Park today, along with their mascot, Ellie the Elephant, to talk about dying, death and bereavement. We're all going to die, and we're all going to lose loved ones. But generally we don't want to talk about it.

Today, members of Hospice Palliative Care Ontario are talking to MPPs about how a holistic approach to care helps people live well until their last breaths, and their

loved ones to stay well through bereavement. Hospice palliative care is consistent, quality health and social care, when and where they need it. It's highly valued and supported by grassroots and governments together.

Today's event has had all-party sponsorship, and I know I can count on that same support for my private member's bill, Bill 3, the Compassionate Care Act, which provides for a framework and reporting timelines to help us meet the rapidly growing demand for hospice palliative care due to an aging population. Community-based hospice palliative care is already working to end hallway medicine and help people stay at home or in a home-like hospice setting, at a fraction of the cost of hospitals—and it's where people would rather be. It has been great to see this organization team up with our government to provide quality, effective care.

It is true teamwork, improving the quality of life for the people of Ontario, because we know that death is death, but dying is still living, and living well is what we all want and deserve. On behalf of Hospice Palliative Care Ontario, thank you for coming to the reception, and I look forward to all of your support for Bill 3 when it comes forward for third reading in this House.

REPORTS BY COMMITTEES

STANDING COMMITTEE ON ESTIMATES

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Standing order 63(a) provides that “The Standing Committee on Estimates shall present one report with respect to all of the estimates and supplementary estimates considered pursuant to standing orders 60 and 62 no later than the third Thursday in November of each calendar year.”

The House not having received a report from the Standing Committee on Estimates for certain ministries on Thursday, November 28, 2019, as required by the standing orders of the House and as required by the order of the House dated May 28, 2019, pursuant to standing order 63(b), the estimates 2019-20 before the committee of the Ministry of Infrastructure, the Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services, the Ministry of the Environment, Conservation and Parks, and the Ministry of Agriculture, Food, and Rural Affairs are deemed to be passed by the committee and are deemed to be reported to and received by the House.

Report deemed received.

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

OLYMPIC FLOOR CLEANING INC. ACT, 2019

Mr. Thanigasalam moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill Pr22, An Act to revive Olympic Floor Cleaning Inc.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

First reading agreed to.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Pursuant to standing order 86, this bill stands referred to the Standing Committee on Regulations and Private Bills.

1320

RENT CONTROL ACT, 2019 LOI DE 2019 SUR LE CONTRÔLE DES LOYERS

Ms. Morrison moved first reading of the following bill: Bill 155, An Act to amend the Residential Tenancies Act, 2006 with respect to rules relating to rent / Projet de loi 155, Loi modifiant la Loi de 2006 sur la location à usage d'habitation en ce qui concerne les règles relatives au loyer.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

First reading agreed to.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Would the member care to give a brief explanation of her bill?

Ms. Suze Morrison: I would—thank you, Speaker. I'm happy to be able to introduce this important piece of legislation in the House today. Just a few weeks ago, in November, we heard from tenants affected by the first wave of leases that are coming up in buildings that are no longer protected by rent control. Some of the proposed increases were close to 25%, which represents an annual increase of nearly \$5,000 per year.

This bill seeks to undo the erosion of rent control and reverse the cuts made to it in November 2018.

SECURITY FROM TRESPASS AND PROTECTING FOOD SAFETY ACT, 2019

LOI DE 2019 SUR LA PROTECTION CONTRE L'ENTRÉE SANS AUTORISATION ET SUR LA PROTECTION DE LA SALUBRITÉ DES ALIMENTS

Mr. Hardeman moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 156, An Act to protect Ontario's farms and farm animals from trespassers and other forms of interference and to prevent contamination of Ontario's food supply / Projet de loi 156, Loi visant à protéger les fermes et les animaux d'élevage en Ontario contre les entrées sans autorisation et d'autres actes susceptibles de les déranger et à prévenir la contamination de l'approvisionnement alimentaire en Ontario.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

First reading agreed to.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Minister, would you care to give a brief explanation of the bill?

Hon. Ernie Hardeman: It is my pleasure and honour today to introduce an important piece of legislation called the Security from Trespass and Protecting Food Safety Act.

The bill is intended to protect farm animals, the food supply, farmers and others from risks that are created when trespassers enter places where farm animals are kept or when persons engage in unauthorized interactions with farm animals. The risks include the risk of exposing farm animals to disease and stress, as well as the risk of introducing contaminants into the food supply.

Animal protection zones are defined in the bill as areas on farms, animal processing facilities and other prescribed premises on which farm animals may be kept or located. The bill prohibits persons from entering in or on animal protection zones without the prior consent of the owner or occupier of the farm, facility or premises. The bill prohibits persons from interfering with a motor vehicle that is transporting farm animals and from interfering or interacting with farm animals in the motor vehicle without the prior consent of the driver of the motor vehicle.

The bill provides that a consent is invalid if it is obtained using duress or under false pretenses.

Section 14 sets the maximum fine at \$15,000 for a first offence under the act and \$25,000 for subsequent offences. That fine may be increased by a court in certain prescribed circumstances that increase the gravity of the offence.

Section 15 provides that, if a person is found guilty of an offence under the act, the court may, in addition to imposing a fine under the act, require the person found guilty to pay restitution to the owner or occupier of a farm, animal processing facility or prescribed premises, or to the driver of a motor vehicle for any injury, loss or damages suffered.

Mr. Speaker, we feel that this proposed bill is fair and balances the safety and security of farmers and their families and our food supply, while protecting the right of people to participate in legal protests.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, for allowing me to make those two comments.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Thank you very much, Minister, for that brief explanation.

MOTIONS

SIGN-LANGUAGE INTERPRETATION

Hon. Paul Calandra: Mr. Speaker, I seek unanimous consent to move a motion without notice regarding ASL services during statements by the ministry on December 3, 2019.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Minister Calandra seeks unanimous consent to move a motion without notice regarding ASL services during statements by the ministry on December 3, 2019. Agreed? Agreed.

Back to the minister.

Hon. Paul Calandra: I move that sign-language interpreters may be present on the floor of the chamber on Tuesday, December 3, 2019, to interpret statements by the ministry and responses.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Minister Calandra has moved that sign-language interpreters may be present on the floor of the chamber on Tuesday, December 3, 2019, to interpret statements by the ministry and responses.

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

Motion agreed to.

PETITIONS

LIBRARY SERVICES

Ms. Judith Monteith-Farrell: This petition is called “No Cuts to Libraries.

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas libraries perform a vital function storing and sharing information in our communities and are integral to healthy, strong communities;

“Whereas the Ontario Library Service—North and the Southern Ontario Library Service programs ensure that smaller libraries in rural communities have equal access to all of Ontario’s library collections; and

“Whereas libraries are particularly important spaces for people who face geographic and socio-economic barriers to accessing information and technology;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to: reverse the budget cuts to our libraries and reinstate the necessary funding to keep our libraries strong.”

I sign this petition gladly and send it with Ally to bring to the Clerks’ table.

ACCESS TO PERSONAL HEALTH RECORDS

Mrs. Gila Martow: I have a petition for the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas the Personal Health Information Protection Act, 2004, currently allows health information custodians to charge a fee that does not exceed the prescribed amount or the amount of reasonable cost recovery, where no amount is prescribed; and

“Whereas given no amount has been prescribed, the amount of ‘reasonable cost recovery’ has been left to the discretion of health information custodians; and

“Whereas in 2006 the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care proposed a regulation for fee enforcement under subsection 54(11) of the act; and

“Whereas in 2008 the Information and Privacy Commissioner of Ontario ... submitted a recommendation for amendment of the act to include enactment of a fee

regulation that is substantially similar to the regulation drafted by the ministry in 2006; and

“Whereas the IPCO’s recommendation is based on the numerous complaints from members of the public about fees charged by health information custodians for access to personal health records; and

“Whereas health information custodians continue to charge exorbitant fees for access to personal health records, against the recommendation of the IPCO; and

“Whereas the Center for Patient Protection recently cited this as one of the most common public complaints; and

“Whereas inaccessible fees continue to (1) be a widespread barrier to access of personal health records; (2) cause undue hardship and stress to the public; and (3), inundate a tribunal that could otherwise allocate its resources to other matters.

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

“That the government of Ontario enact the ministry’s 2006 fee regulation so as to enable hassle-free access to personal health records, as well as transparency and accountability of health care institutions.”

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

1330

TENANT PROTECTION

Ms. Catherine Fife: It’s my pleasure to present this petition for the first time in Ontario’s Legislature. It’s entitled “Protect our Student Tenants.

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas student tenants from post-secondary institutions are inexperienced with housing issues and can be vulnerable to unethical and illegal business practices of landlords and housing companies;

“Whereas cities across Ontario face challenges to provide safe and affordable housing for its post-secondary students;

“Whereas all Ontarians deserve safe and accessible housing;

“Whereas students from post-secondary institutions contribute to the social and economic growth of a city;

“Whereas the Landlord and Tenant Board is not meeting the needs of transient students;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to: develop a provincial strategy and stronger regulations for students to enforce their rights as tenants.”

I want to thank the students from the University of Waterloo and Wilfrid Laurier for this petition. I present this to Emily and will affix my signature.

ENDANGERED SPECIES

Ms. Kathleen O. Wynne: I want to acknowledge Sarah Filippi, who is a constituent of mine. She’s a driving force behind this petition, and she’s here today.

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas Ontario’s Endangered Species Act was seen as the best one in Canada. On June 6, 2019, the provincial government passed Bill 108, called More Homes, More Choice Act, 2019, which includes amendments to the Endangered Species Act under schedule 5. Under these changes, developers and industry are now allowed to pay a fee for the right to expand activities which would destroy critical wildlife habitat and kill endangered species;

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

That the changes be reversed “to the Endangered Species Act, made through Bill 108, called More Homes, More Choice Act, 2019, under schedule 5 in order that endangered species and their habitat be protected.” And that “more protection measures for species at risk, not fewer,” are in place.

I agree with this petition. I affix my signature, and I will give it to Suhani.

WATER QUALITY

Ms. Andrea Khanjin: I’d like to table the following petition:

“We, the undersigned, want Lake Simcoe’s water quality to improve, the Lake Simcoe watershed’s forests, wetlands and the shorelines to be protected from development, climate change adaptation and mitigation be addressed, and the province of Ontario address these issues in the Lake Simcoe Protection Act, to be reviewed and implemented.”

I affix my signature and give it to page Daniel.

EQUAL OPPORTUNITY

Ms. Suze Morrison: I have a petition here entitled “Don’t Take Away Social and Economic Rights for Women and Marginalized People.” It reads:

“Whereas Bill 47 erased many of the legislative gains achieved through Bill 148, the fairer labour laws and working conditions that had a particularly positive impact on women and marginalized people;

“Whereas statistics show that women, particularly women of colour, are most likely to be employed in precarious work, and the Bill 47 amendments to the Employment Standards Act, 2000 and Labour Relations Act, 1995 create conditions that lead to a growth in precarious employment while also eliminating protections for millions of Ontario workers;

“Whereas Bill 66 further erodes women’s and marginalized people’s social and economic rights; and

“Whereas the” Conservative “government continues to remove, cancel or freeze funding for other supports, programs and regulations that would increase women’s equality in the workforce and beyond;

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

“—reinstate paid sick days...;

“—reverse changes to daycare regulations that allow more children per caregiver;

“—reverse the retroactive cuts to funding for the Ontario College of Midwives;

“—reinstate funding increases to sexual assault centres;

“—restore the” provincial “round table on violence against women; and

“—restore the child and youth advocate commissioner’s office.”

I fully endorse this petition. I will be signing it and providing it to page Laura to deliver to the Clerks.

ANIMAL PROTECTION

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

“Whereas on June 28, 2019, the Ontario Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (OSPCA) stopped enforcing Ontario’s animal welfare laws; and

“Whereas on June 6, 2019, royal assent was given to Bill 117, Ontario Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Amendment Act (Interim Period), 2019, which provides an interim solution to ensure animals remain protected while the government developed a new permanent animal welfare enforcement model; and

“Whereas the continued protection of animals across this province is an urgent priority to the people of Ontario;

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

“To unanimously support the Provincial Animal Welfare Services Act (PAWS Act) so that Ontario’s pets and animals can be protected without delay under a system that establishes the strongest penalties for animal abusers in Canada.”

I’ve already signed my name to it, and I’m going to give it to page Sarah.

ABUSE AWARENESS AND PREVENTION

Mr. Michael Mantha: I want to thank Charmaine Loverin for her tenacity and her advocacy for this petition. It’s entitled “Loverin’s Law.

“Whereas the government of Ontario does not provide direct use of education and real life skills language, nor prevention tools about abuse in elementary (specific to first reader ages Grade 1+), middle schools and high schools; and

“Whereas the government of Ontario does not provide direct use of education and real life skills language, nor prevention tools for five top abuse situations facing many Canadian and diverse families today: physical, neglect, emotional, verbal and sexual, grooming; and

“Whereas abuse affects ages younger than 5 and 93% of abuse happens in the hands of those that young people or youth are supposed to trust; and

“Whereas statistically two in five girls and one in six boys are currently abused in Canada today, not including unreported; and

“Whereas abuse has no culture, status nor religious divide and is a long-term injury that causes stigma, shame,

guilt, anxiety, even isolation that can result in bullying, self-harming behaviours, depression, youth addiction and even suicide; and

“Whereas early education, including evidence-based and new community prevention programs, will greatly benefit intervention, awareness and empowerment for prevention of bullying, addiction and suicide for victims and early offenders;

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

“Request an act to designate an ‘annual awareness of abuse prevention week’ in all Ontario primary, middle and high schools, and to provide for abuse curricula for healthy families and safe community policies, administration and accountability.”

I agree with this petition, affix my name, and present it to page Ally to bring down to the Clerks’ table.

TAXATION

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

“Whereas the government for the people was elected on a mandate to make life more affordable for Ontarians; and

“Whereas the Made-in-Ontario Environment Plan is currently working to reduce targets by the previously agreed upon Paris accord targets without a carbon tax; and

“Whereas Ontario is the only province that is meeting the goals of the 30% reduction rates agreed to in the Paris accord; and

“Whereas the seniors, workers, families and small businesses of Ontario cannot afford another tax burden on every purchase they make;

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

“Fight the federally imposed Justin Trudeau carbon tax with every tool at the government’s disposal.”

I’m happy to affix my signature and give it to page Augustine.

SCHOOL FACILITIES

Ms. Sara Singh: I’m proud to present this petition on behalf of the students in my riding of Brampton Centre who have been busy collecting signatures. The petition is entitled “Fund Our Schools.

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas too many children are going to school in buildings without proper heating or cooling, with leaky roofs or stairways overdue for repair;

“Whereas after years of Conservative and Liberal governments neglecting schools, the backlog of needed repairs has reached” over “\$16 billion;

“Whereas during the 2018 election, numerous members of the Conservative Party, including the current Minister of Education, pledged to provide adequate, stable funding for Ontario’s schools;

“Whereas less than three weeks into the legislative session ... the Conservative government have already cut

\$100 million in much-needed school repairs, leaving our children and educators to suffer in classrooms that are unsafe and unhealthy;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to direct the Minister of Education to immediately reverse the decision to cut \$100 million in school repair funding, and invest the \$16 billion needed to tackle the repair backlog in Ontario’s schools.”

I am very proud to sign my name and support this petition and send it off with page Alexandra.

1340

RETAIL ALCOHOL SALES

Mrs. Gila Martow: I have yet again a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

“Whereas Ontario is behind the times and out of step with the rest of Canada when it comes to the retail sale of alcohol; and

“Whereas Ontario’s current system is unfair and largely benefits three global brewers, restricting consumer choice, and limiting opportunity for small businesses; and

“Whereas insider claims have stoked unnecessary fears regarding the cost associated with expanding alcohol sales, using a false billion-dollar figure to detract from the true economic potential before Ontario’s consumers, retailers and brewers; and

“Whereas an expanded retail market could create over 9,000 new jobs and add \$3.5 billion to Ontario’s GDP; and

“Whereas Ontario consumers have long called for a market that is fair, and offers more choice and convenience;

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

“Expand the sale of beer, wine and cider to convenience stores, big box stores and more grocery stores in Ontario.”

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

AFFORDABLE HOUSING

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: I have a really important petition, and I want to thank Anton Brink and Art Tiesma for collecting the signatures so I could bring this petition to the Legislature.

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas a report from the city of London estimated that over 400 Londoners currently use emergency shelters, and other estimations put the statistic as closer to 800;

“Whereas at least 59% of homeless individuals reported experiencing mental health issues, and 57% said they struggle with addiction. Indigenous people are far more likely to experience homelessness in London, making up 2.6% of the population but 30% of the homeless population;

“Whereas London and area shelters are running over 100% capacity on a regular basis and vacancy rates in London are consistently hovering around 1%;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to invest in a provincial housing strategy, affordable housing and supportive housing for those experiencing mental health issues, and we ask that the government immediately release emergency funds to London’s homelessness prevention system, including shelters, so that they are able to provide assistance to people in crisis.”

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

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Unfortunately, the time for petitions has now expired.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

LEGISLATIVE REFORM

Resuming the debate adjourned on November 28, 2019, on the amendment to the motion, as amended, regarding amendments to the standing orders.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Mr. Bisson has the floor.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: I’ll be sharing my time with the member from Brampton Centre and the member from Algoma–Manitoulin.

I just want to say a few things as we start today’s debate. The government is trying to create the narrative that they need these changes to the standing orders because somehow it’s going to make this House more efficient. The reality is that’s not the case. The government currently has standing orders that are quite friendly to the government. It allows the government to pass legislation in this House without difficulty, in a period of a week or two at the most. In many cases, and almost all the cases that legislation has worked its way through the House, the government has actually time-allocated those bills through the House. In some cases, when they time-allocated it, they didn’t even allow time for committee. So the government has had situations where they’ve been able to, in all cases, always get their bills through the House, get them done in a pretty expedited manner and get whatever business they were trying to get done in a time frame that suited them, and not necessarily that of the public.

When you see governments like this one who are further dialling back the ability for the opposition or government members to hold the government accountable to an issue, I think that’s a disservice to the public, and I think it’s a disservice to our democracy. This Legislature is the Legislature for the people, and that means to say that we do the people’s business here. Yes, I’m the first to say the government always has to have its way in a parliamentary system. At the end of the day, if they have a majority, they have to have the ability, with the rules, to pass their legislation in the end.

The government has all kinds of tools inside the standing orders to allow them to get their business through the House. They can call the question when it comes to

debate. If they think that there has been too much debate and it's repetitive after so many hours, in a very short time frame, they're able to call the question, which ends the debate and forces a vote. They're able to time-allocate a debate, and they can write a time allocation motion in such a way that allows them to speed the process not only of getting it through second reading, but to completely bypass the entire committee process and send it to the House for a short-shrift debate of five or 10 minutes when it comes to third reading.

So why does the government need these particular rule changes? I think it's a question of, as in the cases of a lot of governments, sometimes they feel that they have a God-inherited right to be able to pass stuff as quickly as they can, without allowing the public or the opposition to have its say, and I just think that is a very bad recipe. We all know that in the end the government will get its way. For example, we were here two summers ago when the government decided that they wanted to change the Toronto municipal election system in the middle of an election. They were so intent on doing that, they recalled the House so that we could sit throughout the night—that we could continue going past midnight and into the next day—so that they could get the required amount of time to do time allocation.

My Lord, they even used the “notwithstanding” clause. The Minister of Transportation, whose father, Prime Minister Mulroney, had fought the good fight to try to get rid of the whole idea of a “notwithstanding” clause in our Constitution—here was his daughter, supporting such a particular move as the Minister of Transportation here in Ontario. I'm sure that that must have created a certain amount of interesting discussions at the dinner table, when her dad was the person who was trying to get rid of the “notwithstanding” clause and the Attorney General of Ontario at the time, the now Minister of Transportation, was actually invoking the “notwithstanding” clause.

My point is that the government doesn't need these standing orders, so you've got to ask yourself why. I think the “why” is fairly evident for people: that the government thinks they're above the public. They got themselves a four-year mandate; they can do what they want. They don't have to pay attention to the public. Certainly, we know that the case—we saw a report just recently where the government had been quoting this report in the House, saying that when it comes to education, parents were wildly supportive of their changes to education, including the idea of larger class sizes and more e-learning. It turns out that the information got leaked and it was completely the opposite, and now they're standing there saying, “We need to rush through the process of getting legislation through the House because the bad old opposition are just holding us up and being dilatorious.”

Well, I'm not going to say that we're never going to be dilatorious. My Lord, I watched a Conservative opposition in the last Parliament—the Parliament before that, we were in a minority—and they were dilatorious at times when the government did outrageous things. For example, when we had the gas plants scandal and what happened

with electricity thereafter, we, along with the Conservatives in opposition, were dilatorious to the Liberal government, trying to stop them and trying to change the way they were doing things, because we understood that what this government was going to do was going to raise the hydro prices by privatizing Hydro One and doing a number of other things.

But instead, what happens? The Conservatives ran against the Liberal hydro plan, Madam Speaker, and then they got elected and adopted it as their own. Now they say, “Oh, it's the Conservative hydro plan and we're doing a great job.” Well, if it wasn't good when the Liberals did it, why is it good now that you're doing it? It's the same old plan.

Why is the government making it so that they can advance legislation through this House quickly? I think this government has an agenda. I think we haven't seen some of the worst of it yet, and they need to have these particular standing orders in place in order to be able to advance this agenda that they're going to put forward.

I'll predict a couple of things that I think they're going to do. There's going to be an increased role for the private sector in our health care system. I think this is where the government is going. You've got a government where we had a half-plan to deal with pharmacare. The NDP had proposed a complete pharmacare program for all citizens, and the Liberals came in and said that only those people under 25 need medication, so they had a plan for people under 25. The first thing the Conservatives did when they came to power? They got rid of it. What was that all about?

And now we see they're about to make changes—well, they have made changes, and they're going to make more changes—to the way that we purchase drugs and authorize drugs in the province of Ontario when it comes to medication; I'm not talking about “drug” drugs, but medication. But my point is that the government is going to move on more privatization with these replacement LHINs or whatever they're going to call them, these new family—what do they call them?

Ms. Catherine Fife: Ontario health teams.

1350

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Ontario health teams. I predict that there's going to be much more privatization.

They're going to outstrip the Liberals when it comes to privatization. That's the other thing that's so ironic. The Liberals in opposition talk a good game when it comes to making sure they have a strong public health care system. The Liberals did more to privatize hydro, health care and winter road maintenance than even the Conservatives did before them.

These standing order changes, in my opinion and in the opinion of many, are not necessary when it comes to what needs to be done as far as the government getting their agenda through the House. You have not proven once since you've been here, since the last election, that you were not able to pass your legislation because of some rule in the standing orders that prevented you from doing so. In fact, you guys have accelerated the passage of almost absolutely everything that has come to this floor. You have

managed to time-allocate it through in such a way that in many cases, we didn't even have committee—and you were prepared to use the notwithstanding clause to run over the rights of the people in the city of Toronto.

I think this particular government has pretty well proven where they're going and what these standing order changes are. They might try to make a good spin on it today—and yes, the Liberals and the Greens, who are saying, “Yes, we want to hug the Conservatives because we get an extra six questions in two weeks out of this deal”—they're prepared to do that in order to, quite frankly—

Ms. Catherine Fife: Undermine.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: —undermine democracy. I think that's really sad, that the Greens and the Liberals have taken that particular position, because I think it undermines.

With that, I know that my good friend the member from Brampton Centre wanted to speak to this. I have shared my time with her.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): I recognize the member for Brampton Centre.

Ms. Sara Singh: Thank you, Speaker, and thank you to our member from Timmins, the honourable House leader for us on the official opposition side, with decades of experience here in the Legislature so I know, when he's speaking to the standing order changes, that he's speaking from a place of experience. He understands that, really, it's absolutely not necessary to make the changes that the government is currently proposing.

The government has said to us, “These changes are going to help make this House more efficient. They're going to help things run more effectively.” Well, we could have done that from day one here in this Legislature, Speaker. I don't know how efficient it is to ram through legislation and then backtrack, backtrack and backtrack because you failed to consult, you failed to listen to people and you failed to have a full and proper discussion on the piece of legislation that you were bringing forward. That's effectively what we've seen from this government time and time again: backtrack after backtrack on pieces of legislation that they ram through.

In my short tenure here, I've served as the critic to the Attorney General and now as the critic for housing. As the critic for the Attorney General, we had the legalization of cannabis take place, and it was really interesting to see how quickly that legislation was rammed through because there was a federal timeline. But because of the lack of planning from this government, they failed to bring this legislation forward sooner. So we rammed it through.

During the committee process, we heard from members of the First Nations and Indigenous communities up in the north, who could not make it down here to Queen's Park for the one-day committee hearing that we had on this historic piece of legislation—which really warranted a fulsome debate. It was a clear example to us that when you ram through legislation, there are going to be people who do not have an opportunity to come to committee and speak their truth about the legislation.

We saw that with the cannabis bill. We received numerous letters from chiefs of First Nations communities, who said that this actually violated agreements that the government has with First Nations communities to ensure that there is a duty to consult with those communities. It was actually limiting their ability to provide their perspective for their communities.

We see that again here, where the government is saying, “We need more tools in order to move things through the House faster.” What we actually need is to create more space for communities to provide their perspective during the committee process and have their concerns heard. These standing order changes are not going to help us create more space to consult. They're not going to help us create more space for people to come to the House here—their House—in order to have their concerns addressed about legislation. They certainly aren't going to make sure that members in this House have more opportunity for debate. In fact, what they're going to do is limit the debate that we already have—the limited debate that we already have.

What we've seen from this government is that almost every single piece of legislation that has come to this floor has been time-allocated so they can rush it through and ram it through because that was their priority. It really concerns me that this government can prioritize legislation that will get us liquor, wine and beer into corner stores—buck a beer—a lot faster than they could prioritize legislation to ensure that children with autism would get the services they need. How about we use the standing orders to do things like that and move legislation like that through the House that would ensure people are getting the services and support they need rather than use it to legalize things like liquor?

It really, really concerns me that this is the direction this government wants to go, and yet it chooses actively to make sure that community members do not have a say. As I mentioned earlier, groups like First Nations communities haven't been able to have a say. People with disabilities, for example, Speaker: I'm just wondering how the standing order changes are going to help those people, people with perhaps hearing impairments, visual impairments, physical disabilities, intellectual, cognitive and developmental disabilities. How are the standing order changes going to help them? It's not very clear that we're going to be making space for those communities to be brought into committee, to be brought into the process, and to have their voices amplified here in our provincial Parliament.

I think this is why it's important that we move an amendment. I'd like to ask if I could move an amendment. I'm going to move that the amendment be amended by adding the following paragraph after the words “February 28, 2020; and”:

“That, for the duration of the 42nd Parliament, the Speaker may alter the application of any standing or special order or practice of the House, other than those that deal with number of times or duration of time a member may speak, the timing of proceedings or the time allotted to proceedings, in order to permit the full participation in

the proceedings of the House of any member with a disability; and”

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): Ms. Singh has moved that the amendment be amended by adding the following paragraph after the words “February 28, 2020; and”

“That, for the duration of the 42nd Parliament, the Speaker may alter the application of any standing or special order or practice of the House, other than those that deal with number of times or duration of time a member may speak, the timing of proceedings or the time allotted to proceedings, in order to permit the full participation in the proceedings of the House of any member with a disability; and”

Back to the debate: the member for Brampton Centre.

Ms. Sara Singh: Thank you, Speaker.

I’ve moved the amendment to the amendment in order for us to ensure that those particularly with disabilities are included in the debate here in the House.

As we’ve discussed on multiple occasions, myself and our critics here around disability and seniors and inclusion, we have stated multiple times that this House simply isn’t built for people with disabilities. When we look around, there’s a lack of ramps; there are accessibility issues all over in this Parliament. So it’s important that we create the space and we create opportunities specifically for those people to be included in the debate, to be included in committee, to be ensuring that their voices are reflected in the legislation that we ultimately are creating. The Honourable David Onley was a member who really tried to help the House understand how much we needed to ensure that accessibility was built in, not built on, in the Legislature. I want to commend him for his work.

But we need to continue that work forward, Speaker. An amendment like this really does allow us to put a special sort of light and focus on a community that, frankly, isn’t included in conversations on a regular basis. We really do hope that government members would be supporting my amendment—sub-amendment, I guess it is, at this point. All we’re really trying to do is to ensure that people with disabilities are included in the conversations that we’re having because, at the end of the day, we shouldn’t be making legislation that’s going to negatively impact one—

Interjection.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): Stop the clock, please. I’m going to ask the government House leader to withdraw.

Hon. Paul Calandra: Withdraw what?

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): I’m asking the government House leader to withdraw something I heard you yell across the floor. I’m asking you to withdraw.

Hon. Paul Calandra: I withdraw.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): Thank you. Back to the member for Brampton Centre.

1400

Ms. Sara Singh: Thank you, Speaker. I’ll just continue on.

I do recognize that I think what the government House leader was trying to say is that he is not going to be supporting our sub-amendment. That’s fair enough. We’ll just get that on the record.

At the end of the day, we should be having these conversations here in the Legislature because it is important that we consider, especially, marginalized groups that aren’t included in the processes that we are undertaking here in the Legislature, that their voices are amplified and that they are considered when we are passing legislation—ramming it through, frankly, in this House—that those voices are heard here at committee, that they are given an opportunity to make sure that whatever accessibility needs they have are addressed, whether that’s an ASL interpreter or whether that’s a ramp so that they can actually get into the public gallery to sit here and listen to a debate. Those are the types of ideas that we need to be considering.

I encourage the members opposite to think about a community that for far too long has been silenced and not included in the laws that are made here in the province, that we give them an opportunity to be heard and to amplify their voices and that we make this space welcoming to them.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): Further debate?

Ms. Jane McKenna: I appreciate the opportunity to speak to this important motion today. As a lifelong resident of Burlington, I first ran for public office in 2010. I ran for municipal council in ward 1 because I wanted to make my community better.

Like many of us in this place, I didn’t win my first election. Then, in 2011, I decided to try again, only this time at the provincial level. I want to say, Madam Speaker, that the difference between a winner and a loser is that a loser never tries. So even though I lost, I still felt like a big winner, knocking on doors and doing everything I possibly could. I was quite thrilled with that.

My desire was the same: to help make my community and our province just a little bit better than before. After an unsuccessful run in 2014, I was fortunate in 2018 to be one of only two MPPs to successfully make a comeback in this House. My role as an MPP is to serve the people of Burlington, regardless of who they voted for.

Let me tell you, I have always recognized the incredible opportunity we all have in this place to make a difference.

Today, we’re debating the government House leader’s motion to make changes to the Legislature’s standing orders. For those watching these proceedings on TV or online, standing orders are the rules that govern debate, the passage of bills and the consideration of important issues of the day. I support the proposed changes to the standing orders because they will provide all 124 members a better opportunity to participate and involve themselves in legislative business.

Before getting into the substantive changes being proposed, I want to talk a little bit about how we got to this point.

Government House leader consultations: The government House leader, the wonderful member from

Markham–Stouffville, began studying the standing orders this summer. He took the time to do this the right way. His approach to modernizing the rules of this Legislature was collaborative and inclusive. He consulted with the official opposition and with independent, Green and Liberal members to make sure the changes being proposed are fair, genuinely improve the way this place works and, in some cases, are consistent with how things work in our Legislatures in our Westminster parliamentary system. As a matter of fact, many of the changes included in this motion originated with the independent members in this place.

I am deeply disappointed that the NDP chose to withdraw from cross-party dialogue weeks ago and, as a result, may not be aware of the most recent developments. It is disappointing that the NDP has indicated they cannot support a single change in our proposals, including accommodation of members with disabilities.

Of course, I'm hopeful that once the official opposition has reviewed the proposed changes, they'll realize the only objective of the majority of MPPs in this House is to create a more productive Legislature that encourages the participation of all members.

What we're debating today is the result of a collaborative process led by the government House leader to modernize the rules and procedures of this place and to improve and enhance participation in debate, especially by our independent members.

Current process limitations: I'm sure that most people in Ontario don't realize the limits that exist in our Legislature. For example, when a government minister makes a formal statement, independent members are not given the opportunity to split their time for a response. We are changing that, Madam Speaker. Our government has listened to the independent, Liberal and Green members of this Legislature. We recognize that this is a unique Parliament, with a number of members who are not part of recognized parties. As it stands today, with unanimous consent we can make exceptional accommodations. But when it comes to our independent members, the ability to participate should be predictable and consistent. That's why the changes being proposed are so important.

Members' statements: All members in this place understand the importance of being able to rise in this Legislature to highlight local events and the many accomplishments of our constituents and local organizations. For those at home, these members' statements also give MPPs the opportunity to promote our communities, talk about the work we're doing locally, and advocate for the things that are important to our ridings or that we're passionate about.

As a lifelong resident of Burlington, I'm always proud to utilize members' statements to talk about the great people and places in Canada's best place to live in 2019—Burlington—according to Maclean's magazine. We're thrilled about that. This, of course, isn't the first time that Burlington has been named the best place to live in Canada. Whether I'm speaking about Canada's largest botanical gardens, the Royal Botanical Gardens in Burlington, or the incredible way that our Royal Canadian

Legion, Branch 60 honoured the veterans we've lost, I, like all of you, want these statements to be heard by as many people as possible.

Currently, members' statements take place in the afternoon between 1 and 3 p.m., depending on the day. Most days of the week, the House meets at 9 a.m. MPPs are ready for question period and the media is on hand waiting to report important exchanges. In fact, when most people come to visit Queen's Park, they typically stop by during question period; that's why we introduce visitors in the morning. Question period is also the most watched portion of proceedings for those tuning into the legislative channel or watching online, Madam Speaker. By changing the daily orders of business so that members' statements take place in the morning before question period, we can increase the profile of these statements. It only stands to reason that when more MPPs are present in the chamber, our members' statements stand a greater chance of being heard both inside and outside of this place. That's why so many MPPs supported this idea. I think all members, regardless of their political party, would agree that elevating the profile of these statements by moving them to a time when we have a greater audience is a very good thing.

The changes we are proposing would also specify a format for introduction of visitors. We're doing this to keep the segment as brief as possible while still recognizing the importance of noting the presence of our guests.

Debate on bills: As you know, Madam Speaker, debate on a bill is done in rotation. A member from one side of this place has the opportunity to speak to an item of business for 10 minutes. Eight minutes are then allotted to four members to pose a question or make a comment, not exceeding two minutes each, and then the original speaker has two minutes to reply. This format of debate is very constrained. It gives members an opportunity to voice their opinions, but it is rare that we see genuine questions during this time.

Under the proposed rule, after a member completes their 10-minute speech, members will have 10 minutes to question the members who made the speech, Madam Speaker. Questions will be limited to one minute, and the member who originally spoke would then immediately get one minute to reply. I think this back-and-forth question-and-answer format will encourage more thoughtful debate. It will make debate more interactive and it will encourage members to actively consider and respond to what other members are saying. It will encourage more active debate and enhance the overall quality.

Now a little trivia for those at home: Did you know that Ontario has the only Canadian Legislature which specifically requires a verbal referral of a question? That's why the change being proposed will help modernize our Legislature and allow a more direct focus on the questions being asked. It will also allow any minister or parliamentary assistant to stand and answer that question. I'm excited to try this new format, if this motion is adopted by the Legislature.

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We are also proposing that the government may debate the same bill in the morning and afternoon sessions. That

said, even with additional time for debate in the morning and afternoon, a bill would not receive enough debate to pass in one day. In fact, we have specifically indicated that a bill and a motion for time allocation for that bill can't be considered on the same calendar day. This preserves the existing standards relating to timelines for passage of legislation.

These changes are not, as the official opposition has claimed, an effort to pass legislation faster. Instead, we want to put in place processes that encourage debate and allow the engagement of as many MPPs as possible.

Private members' business: For the benefit of those watching at home, I also want to talk about private members' business and its importance to the legislative process. A private member's bill in our parliamentary system allows an MPP who is not a minister of the crown to directly propose legislation. We go out into our communities, we speak to our constituents and stakeholders, and we develop and introduce legislation. This is a very important part of legislative procedure. As the standing orders are written now, two members from the same party can't co-sponsor a bill and there is a limit of three co-sponsors of any PMB.

When I introduced my very first private member's bill, the Inherited Heart Rhythm Disorders Awareness Act, back in 2012, it was co-sponsored by the NDP member from Hamilton Mountain and the former Liberal member from Oakville. The rules then, as they are today, didn't allow anyone else. I've always thought this rule was strange.

The proposed changes to the standing orders would allow co-sponsorship of PMBs by any four members, regardless of their party affiliation. This would allow a PC, NDP, Liberal and Green MPP to come together to sponsor a bill in a show of cross-partisan support.

Madam Speaker, members on both sides of this House work very hard to develop private members' legislation, and if something can be broadly supported, I think we should remove the barriers that currently exist.

Last week, I introduced Bill 152, the Occupational Safety and Health Day Act, 2019. This bill would make the first Tuesday in May Occupational Safety and Health Day in Ontario and it would fall during North American Occupational Safety and Health Week. I developed and tabled this bill because we need to do everything we can to promote health and safety in every workplace in Ontario. One of the ways we can do this is by highlighting the roles and responsibilities of employers, supervisors and workers to support and nurture a health and safety culture in every workplace.

When this House debated my private member's bill during second reading last Thursday, I was very happy to have the support of the independent members of this Legislature, in addition to all of the government members. Yet, in a bizarre twist, only the NDP voted against legislation that would help workers. Sadly, under the current rules, independent members, including Green and Liberal MPPs, were not given the opportunity to speak in support of Bill 152.

Under the proposed changes, while independent members won't get as much time as a recognized party, they will have time to contribute productively and collaboratively to debates, as I think all members in this place seek to do.

Madam Speaker, it's time we change how the House deals with private members' business. By passing the motion, we can modernize the rules and encourage the broadest possible engagement, debate and consideration of private members' bills.

Opposition motions: In this Parliament, we have nine MPPs who are not affiliated with a recognized party. As a result, under the current rules, opportunities for debate are not necessarily afforded to the independent, Green and Liberal members. These MPPs have much to contribute and should have more of an opportunity to do so.

Madam Speaker, to have your words recorded in Hansard and broadcast on television and on the Internet is an important part of our democracy. Unfortunately, our independent colleagues are limited in their ability to fully participate. I don't think that's right. The changes being proposed by this motion will increase the participation and engagement of independent members and are put forward in the spirit of enhancing debate.

If passed, this motion would allow independent members to have:

- time in response to ministerial statements;
- up to 12 minutes overall, and three minutes each, for debates on opposition day motions;
- up to 12 minutes overall, and three minutes each, for debate on time allocation motions;
- 15 minutes at the estimates committee;
- two questions and supplementaries each day, as well as one member's statement; and
- the ability to substitute for each other at committee if schedules get too tight.

By formalizing independent participation in question period, members' statements and private members' business, we are expanding opportunities for the independent members of this Legislature, and I think that's a good thing.

Madam Speaker, I'm sure that the member from Timmins remembers the year when the NDP was either the third party or didn't have official party status. Though many members of the official opposition are new to this place, they know full well how important these changes are to the independent members of this House.

New standing order: As a mother of a child that was born legally blind, I know that we did everything we could to advocate for my son Mac. Those at home might be surprised to learn that despite the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, if an MPP has a disability, the Legislature must specifically, and usually unanimously, agree to provide accommodations to allow them to fully participate in legislative business. For example, a member in a wheelchair under today's rules would need unanimous consent of the Legislature to vote without physically standing. That is just wrong.

While the Legislature can grant specific consent to accommodate a member, our PC government thinks that a person who has put their name forward to serve should not need to jump through loopholes to be able to do their job. Our proposed changes, supported by the majority of MPPs, would allow the Speaker to grant the exception without unanimous consent. By making this change, the Speaker of the House would be empowered to alter the application of the rules and practices of this place to accommodate members with disabilities. This change is long overdue, Madam Speaker. I can't imagine anyone in this place arguing against making this change.

The changes we're debating today would also allow night sittings to take place during the final 18 days of a session, instead of the final 12 days currently allowed. This would enable the government to spread out night sittings instead of forcing them into the final sitting weeks. We are also proposing to allow the government to cancel a night sitting if it is deemed to be no longer required after notice has been given. Currently, the government must wait for the night sitting to begin before cancelling it, Madam Speaker.

Use of electronic devices in this chamber: Another change being proposed is permitting the use of mobile phones, tablets, laptops and other electronic devices in the chamber in a non-disruptive manner. Many members are already taking advantage of electronic devices, even though the rules do not yet allow it. By formalizing the rules around electronic devices, it would allow the Speaker to more selectively prevent interference with decorum.

Madam Speaker, the point of being in the chamber is to be able to monitor and participate in debate. But as we all know, there are long periods of time in which a member is not required to speak and could be answering emails or doing research to help a constituent or stakeholder in their riding.

No one in this place is suggesting that members be allowed to make phone calls, take photographs or watch videos while seated in the chamber. In fact, the language in the motion clearly states that electronic devices could only be used provided they are operated silently, do not impair decorum, and are not used as a telephone, recording device, camera or prop. This motion simply updates the rules, written in the 1920s—I was shocked to read that—and recognizes how much of our daily business is done on a tablet, smart phone or laptop.

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In conclusion, Madam Speaker, our government is pleased that the independent, Green and Liberal members support these proposed changes, but we're very disappointed that after months of consultation, the NDP have decided to withdraw from discussions.

The NDP claim the changes being proposed are about speeding up the passage of bills. This is false. We have not removed any tools of the opposition to delay the passage of legislation. Regardless of whether this motion passes or fails, a bill can only be passed in one sessional day by unanimous consent of the House.

The changes being proposed will assist members with disabilities. It will make debate more engaging and productive. It will give independent members of this Legislature a stronger voice. It will encourage members to work with other MPPs in developing private members' bills.

We have the opportunity to work together to pass a comprehensive and collaborative package of amendments to the rules of our Legislature. We can make this place function better and be more democratic by giving independent, Liberal and Green members more opportunity to make their voices heard.

I'll say this, and I say this to my kids all the time: When you work alone, you make progress. When you work together, you make history. Let's make this history.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): Further debate?

Mrs. Gila Martow: I'm very pleased to rise today. It's kind of an interesting discussion. When I first realized what we were going to be discussing today, I was kind of like, "Well, this isn't going to be that riveting," but it actually is.

When you think back, each of us, to when we were first elected—for a few of us, a little longer than some of the others—it gets harder and harder to remember everything that you didn't know before you came here.

We're talking about proposed changes to the Legislature's standing orders. Of course, the standing orders are the rules that govern this place where we work. We call it the chamber, we call it the House, but it's the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

We have some wonderful kids up in the public gallery who are riveted by what we're discussing today. Welcome. I wish I knew which school it was.

Basically we're discussing the rules that govern all of us and our behaviour, and how we interact with each other.

I just hosted Ambassador Zvi Vapni from Israel; he's from the foreign bureau. One of the things he said after being here for question period, which we think is quite raucous—he said, "I cannot believe the fantastic behaviour and decorum. I wish we had that at the Knesset in Israel, where we're all yelling and screaming at each other." It really makes you think and realize, when you see pictures—sometimes we see videos—of governments in south Asia where they literally jump out of their seats and benches and start pummelling each other. Sometimes we go home and we think it was a tough day here, but I think that, putting it all in perspective, we have a pretty nice work environment.

Now, there's always room for improvement. We all are aware that some rules are a little bit restrictive, and even though we accept some of the rules that govern us, we know that things could change around here.

There were some big changes before I got elected. I think that Minister MacLeod spearheaded some of the changes to make this place a little more family-friendly, which I haven't really heard discussed in debate today. The sittings used to begin at lunchtime and go into the evening, until about 9 o'clock or 7 o'clock. I am not quite sure how it all worked, because I wasn't here back then.

But now, of course, the Legislature begins at 9 o'clock in the morning and goes until 10:15. We have a 15-minute break, where we often have meetings and pick up our papers and check our schedule for the day, and then the question period begins with introduction of guests at 10:30.

After much consulting over the summer with the independents, with the Green Party leader and with, of course, the official opposition—the NDP were initially involved in the consultation. They have decided to remove themselves from that consultative process, so now we're just hearing what they think in formal debate, which I think is unfortunate. I think that we all have to make our voices heard inside the Legislature as well as outside, sometimes. I kind of see it as the kid in the playground with a ball, and he doesn't like the rules of the game and decides to take his ball and go home.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Oh, that's not nice. You changed the court and the ball.

Mrs. Gila Martow: I think that we do want to collaborate.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): Order.

Mrs. Gila Martow: I think I know a lot of the members from the official opposition personally, and I would hope that they would feel comfortable—one of them is smiling at me; we were at a francophone conference in Victoria this summer. I would hope that some of them would feel comfortable enough to come to me if they felt that there was any process that they felt was grossly unfair somehow or their voices weren't heard.

I remember one time being in university and asking somebody—I learned pretty early on how it was a different environment than my high school when I asked somebody, "When is the exam?" They said Wednesday when it was actually Tuesday, hoping I'd miss it—true story. I'm not naming names. So I learned very quickly not to trust what any one person tells me.

It's the same thing in politics. I think sometimes that we have to all discuss with each other and help each other, but at the end of the day, most of us are on teams and we support our teammates—and I can understand that. I understand that when I see the NDP supporting each other and supporting their opinions, supporting each other with their private members' bills, supporting each other during debate. But I would say I think they have to recognize that we were given a mandate. We made a lot of promises during the last election cycle, and one of them was that we do want to get increased accountability, increased transparency. One of the ways you do that is to collaborate and to have a lot of round tables, to invite people to visit our offices and to participate in all the round tables that we're hosting.

One of the things we're discussing here today to make the Legislature more productive, efficient and effective is that a bill, which we can now only debate in one of the sessions of the day—we have a morning session and an afternoon session. Right now, we are not allowed to debate the same bill in both sessions. We're seeking to change that because oftentimes, the government wants to finish

off with one bill. They've done their research. There are people who often, we all know, come in from way out of town to hear debate. Wouldn't it be much more convenient for them if we were able to debate the full bill and get things moving along more efficiently for them? Because people are coming in from out of town at a great personal cost. I want to really applaud people who don't just watch us on TV from home or follow us on social media, but who actually put their money where their mouth is and, at their own personal cost, take themselves away from their families and their businesses and their jobs, come down and present to committee or come down for lobby and advocacy days. I really admire those people.

One of the things that we're discussing amending—I know the NDP put forward even an amendment to an amendment, which can get a little bit silly around here, keeping track of the amendments to the amendments to the amendments that sometimes go on. But we're here debating some of the changes that are being proposed by our House leader and our team. One of them is to accommodate members with disabilities.

I'm reminded, Madam Speaker, of when I did my private member's bill when my party was in the official opposition at the time. I hosted, from Spinal Cord Injury Ontario, Peter Athanasopoulos—I think a lot of people here probably know Peter—as well as Wendy Murphy and Louise Russo from WAVE, which is Working Against Violence Everyday. Louise Russo is a very well-known advocate against random violence in our communities and also an advocate for people who are not fully able and who struggle. We heard from the official opposition about David Onley, the previous Lieutenant Governor, who had a scooter. The entire Lieutenant Governor's suite was changed. An elevator was installed and ramps have been installed in the building to accommodate people who struggle with mobility challenges. One of the things we're proposing is to have a better set-up of the desks in the Legislature so that people can come in with a wheelchair or with aides.

We all want to use our phones and our laptops to read from, and we're not allowed to right now, Madam Speaker, as you well know. You would call us out of order if we tried to do that, I would guess. But for somebody with vision problems—as a former optometrist, I can tell you that it's not just for convenience and to save the environment, because how often are we taking our notes and printing them, just to have them be shredded, when we could be reading off of the tablet? But for somebody with visual impairment, they're able to increase the font to magnify it, and suddenly somebody who would really have to use so much paper or struggle in general is able to read and participate.

We all want to see that happen. I think that we're seeing people who struggle with their hearing. It's not just about allowing them to have devices. We have the earphones that people use sometimes here.

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But it's more than that, Madam Speaker. It's recognizing that for some people with certain hearing impairments,

outside noise is a problem. Even the doors creaking in this place—sometimes I wonder how disruptive that is for people. When I sometimes watch taped video, I can hear doors creaking and banging, and people's desks banging. So it's what we can do to ensure that we're making things easier for people who have those hearing disabilities.

I want to give a shout-out to the member from Brampton Centre, who did mention that she wants to have full participation for members with disabilities, and that that was why she moved the amendment to the amendment, which she presented to us.

Right now, a bill can only be passed in one day by unanimous consent, and we are proposing that that be changed as well—that we shouldn't need unanimous consent in order to pass a bill in the same day. We have specifically indicated that a bill and a motion for time allocation may not be considered on the same calendar day, to preserve existing standards relating to timelines for passage of legislation. I wanted to make that point.

We want to also allow, for the final 18 sessional days, for night sittings. That's something I think about a little bit more this time of the year, because today just started, and I'm sure many of us already heard the carollers are here; it's what I call them. But it's holiday music, to be inclusive. There are some Jewish day schools that come down and sing Hanukkah songs and things like that. I don't think their teachers or principals would appreciate me calling them carollers. They're singing holiday songs, and the Christmas trees are going up across the Legislature, in different colours for the different teams. It took me a couple of years to catch on to that, that outside the NDP leader's office, the tree was decorated orange. I don't know why that took me a while to figure out, but it did.

This time of year, to have night sittings, when we have so many holiday parties in our ridings, and events and galas and things to get to, to have night sittings in only the last 12 days—I think it is very helpful for us to change the 12 days to 18 days. It basically gives us an extra week to spread out night sittings if we have to do night sittings. I think the last week that we're here before we break for the holidays is such an incredibly busy week to have night sittings every night on that week. This way, we could spread it out. I'm not suggesting that I would like to see all 18 nights have night sittings, but I think that if we have that flexibility of 18 instead of 12, that would basically allow more of us to attend events in our ridings, and not to have such a long workday that we're done by the end of the break, completely collapsing, before we go to celebrate with our own families and friends.

I'm reminded again about a family-friendly atmosphere. I don't know what we could do, or what we could propose, to make being a member of provincial Parliament a family-friendly job, as it were. Those of us who are here recognize that our constituents may consider us to have a job. We all have had other jobs in our lives before this. But I don't think that this is really a job. It's more than a career. It's a bit of a passion, a bit of a calling, a lot of volunteer hours. If I were to add up the hours that each of us, on all sides of the House, put in, we're probably not getting paid

minimum wage some years, when we consider all that we're doing in the evenings and weekends. We're never really off; we're available 24/7. I don't think anybody here could say to the leader of their party, "I wasn't available. Of course I wasn't available. It was Saturday. It was Sunday. It was the evening." There's no such thing as not being available, as a member of provincial Parliament, or federal Parliament, of course.

As the minister is sitting in front of me, I haven't asked him what it's like to be a minister, but I can only imagine that he has the responsibility of a member of provincial Parliament plus another entire job on top of that, and a much heightened layer of responsibility. I think that they deserve our respect and our support. I think that the ministers have quite a task in front of them, and the associate minister in front of me as well.

We also want to have some flexibility to have members' statements in the morning, during that 15-minute break that I spoke about. I've been giving that a bit of thought as well, Madam Speaker, as I'm sure you and your team have. I see the pluses and the minuses. I think the main plus is that a lot of times we're doing statements here in the afternoon and it's a bit of a ghost town, because often during statements in the afternoon, the people who are here are the ones who are on duty or have the time to be here, because committees are going on and people are needed in so many other places that we just don't have the full House the way we do for question period—because, of course, all committees are shut down during question period. All those committees are shut down from 10:15 in the morning until 10:30, as well. So the idea is, that's when the galleries are full, that's when we're all here in the Legislature. Members' statements can be very powerful and very meaningful to the members here; they're about their projects. Oftentimes, it can be very important to their constituents. I think that it is sometimes a little bit disconcerting when we come in to do a member's statement and the room is fairly empty, and we've invited somebody very important; it's a topic that's very important to them. It could even be an obituary for a family member, a memorial that we're doing. They come in—and I think we've all had it asked of us, "Where was everybody?" as though there's something wrong with us, that we are disrespected by our colleagues, that people can't be bothered to come in when they see us speaking on the schedule. Well, we all know that's not the case, that depending on the schedule and depending on committees—and we do want the committees to move along if we're going to get anything accomplished here, that we want to have that flexibility, and we want to also have people here for the members' statements to make them more meaningful for everybody. I can appreciate that and understand that. On the other hand, when you're on duty the whole day, that 15 minutes in the morning could be quite helpful.

We are also proposing to allow the government House leader to call, "No further business," at which point the House would adjourn to the next proceeding or the next sessional day. This is already done in the morning session. The House leader can do that prior to question period.

However, in the afternoon session, an adjournment motion must be moved and can be voted upon. Again, this sounds complicated to somebody listening at home, but take it from us that sometimes it's a little frustrating to be here and to realize how complicated it gets. We need a quorum. We need a certain amount of members in the House or the debate collapses, and that usually tends to collapse towards the end of the session, often just before the holiday period, because people are pulled in so many different directions. That's a challenge.

I think the most interesting change was changing what we call the two-minute hits. As soon as I was elected almost six years ago, a member from the NDP told me that she didn't like that we called it "hits" because it had a violent connotation—that it's supposed to be a time for comments. So I've gotten used to not saying the word "hits," actually. It's just an easier way—that we would change it to a question and answer. Right now, when we're debating, at certain points during the debate, after the person who is speaking sits down, a member from the opposite side will get up and comment for two minutes on what that person spoke about, hopefully, or about the topic at large. At the end of "two and two" of those two-minute comments, which comes to eight, the member who had been speaking has a two-minute wrap-up, as we call it. So that's 10—it just makes it easier to count the numbers if they're in multiples of 10. What we're proposing is that it would be one minute, one minute, one minute, one minute, 10 times, and that it would be basically different people around the chamber asking questions of the person who spoke. So the person who spoke would basically have to answer their question for a minute, sort of like question period. The idea is to make things jump a little bit more here and be a little more exciting. First of all, the person who's speaking has to be paying attention and ready to answer those questions. And everybody has the opportunity to question some comment they made. I see the pros and cons of that, as well. If the questions are not going to be on topic, that could get kind of difficult or uncomfortable, especially for a minister. And I think it makes the job as Speaker more difficult, because I think the Speakers now could just make sure that the language is parliamentary and that there's not so much heckling going on that people can't hear each other and that there's just basic decorum.

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I don't think the task of the Speaker in the afternoon is as challenging as it is during question period. That 10-minute period would become a lot like question period, and the Speakers would have to be on edge for all of that 10 minutes. I'm not proposing or offering myself up to be Deputy Speaker, but I recognize how difficult that would be for the Speakers. I think the Speakers were part of this discussion of these proposed changes to the standing orders. The independents have a lot to gain in terms of extra questions, extra opportunities for the independents to respond to ministry statements, and possibly even debate times.

I'll just give a final shout-out to the member for Lanark-Frontenac-Kingston. After I got elected, I

realized that he was quite interested in the standing orders and everything that goes on here in terms of the rules. I want to—

Interjection: He doesn't miss anything.

Mrs. Gila Martow: Yes, he doesn't miss anything. I want to thank him for answering a lot of my questions way back when, when I was a rookie to this place, about how things work.

I'm looking forward to hearing what everybody thinks about these changes. Hopefully we'll give them a try.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): Further debate?

Mr. Randy Hillier: It's my pleasure to speak to the changes to the standing orders, and I might frame it up first: The standing orders are an essential element of what we do here in this House. They actually give substance and meaning to the terms "rights and privileges" of this Legislative Assembly. I'm happy to say, Speaker, that I've been here for four terms and this is the first time I have seen the standing orders modified in a manner that is not solely for the advantage of the government. There are some advantages, but those advantages do not disrupt or diminish the functionality of the House. They do not disrupt or diminish the value of the members in this House. But this process and this iteration of the standing orders do go a long way in improving the functionality of the House, not just for independent members but for all the members.

I want to say that a lot of my comments, Speaker, will be taken from a document that I tabled in the 40th Parliament with the Standing Committee on the Legislative Assembly. It was called *Constituents First: Empowering Local Legislators*. It was a number of my suggestions for altering the standing orders. The government has taken some of those ideas, such as co-sponsorship of bills.

Although the government is moving, in my view, in a good direction and took the right approach in having a consultation with all the members—not just House leaders, but with all members of the House—first off, I want to commend the government House leader for acting in a professional and competent fashion in changing these standing orders. But I also want to suggest to the government House leader and the members opposite, and the members on this side in the official opposition and other independent members, that there are more things we can do.

One of my suggestions was removing the government's monopoly on third reading of bills. Most people know that that is strictly a government prerogative. In my four terms here in the Legislature, I have never seen a private member's bill come forward for third reading debate—never; not once—and that is because the government has that monopoly on it.

Another item in here, a recommendation, is that this House record abstentions on votes. At the current time, only yeas and nays are recorded. There have been times—there are times—when members, due to their conscience, cannot support or do not wish to oppose a bill and want to have it recorded that they are abstaining. That is not something that we do in this House, but in most Westminster systems they do.

I believe it's also important, during routine proceedings when we introduce motions, that members are entitled to and permitted to read their motions aloud. That is prohibited in this House, Speaker.

Most importantly, one of the recommendations in this document is the want of confidence motions. This is sorely lacking in our standing orders, where opposition or independent members cannot bring a want of confidence unless the government agrees to it—wholly inadequate and contrary to the Westminster system.

There are additional items. I would say one of them is making this House more accessible to people. We do not stream all our committees. We keep our media studio offline. There are things that this government can do to bring the proceedings of this House more directly to people, and I encourage them to consider that.

Finally, back in the 40th Parliament, I tabled a motion in the private bills and regulations committee to amend the standing orders on regulations and the undue delegation of power in regulations to permit members in this House to actually debate the merit and calibre and quality of regulations, which we are prohibited from doing. That motion was adopted by the regulations and private bills committee. It has sat languishing since then.

I would encourage the government House leader to consider these options in this document, Constituents First: Empowering Local Legislators, continual with his good work of consulting, discussing and not allowing the standing orders only to be decided through a narrow partisan lens. Standing orders must be considered in their entirety through a perspective of what is best for the institution, not as what is best for a political brand.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): Further debate?

Ms. Andrea Khanjin: I'm rising in this House today to speak to the current amendment before the floor.

I just wanted to point out a few things that we are debating today. I had some experience working in the Ottawa Legislature, the House of Commons, where a lot of the rules that we are talking about today had happened naturally because they were already established by the House of Commons.

When I came to Queen's Park it was rather odd that there were certain things that weren't happening here. Most notably what I was surprised about, Madam Speaker, was the fact that—as you may know, in the House of Commons there was a member, Steven Fletcher, who was a Brazilian-born Canadian. He was once leader of the Manitoba Party, and he served in the House of Commons from 2004 to 2015. He was a parliamentary secretary for health. He was also the Minister of State (Democratic Reform) and went on to be the Minister of State (Transport).

What's most important is that he was the first quadriplegic and wheelchair user to serve in the House of Commons and in cabinet. Luckily for him, the accommodations were already ahead of their time. He felt no different than any other member. He had a desk like any other minister or other member of the House. He was able

to speak to bills. In question period he was able to answer questions like any other minister, like any other member of the House. Why, Madam Speaker? Because there were rules that had already been changed.

I want to take a step back in history as to where we've gotten and where we are today, and why these changes are so important to adopt. What I wanted to do was go back in time to look at what's around us here in the room.

If you will look around where we're standing today, Madam Speaker, there are 10 Latin mottos carved into the woodwork of the chamber. They are before you and before the members who are in the House today. Eight are original to the time of the building, which opened in 1893, but to mark the millennium at the Legislature, two new Latin inscriptions were inscribed, Madam Speaker, in the series of different inscriptions. There are many areas that are left blank for future generations.

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And so, you see, there are a lot of traditions that we hold in this House, but they're always being modified. They're always being added to, and I think a lot of the carvings that you see today are a good example of that.

For instance, the two carvings that were added to mark the millennium translate to "Good government bears fruit," which in Latin is "Gubernatio bona fructum parit," and also the additional motto of "Pax sit tempus nostrum," which translates to "Peace in our time."

These mottos that were added to mark the millennium were in addition to ones that already were in the House. For instance, the inscription "Audi alteram partem," which translates to "Hear the other side," is also the official motto of the Ontario Legislative Assembly.

This is actually very significant, Madam Speaker, because as we know, the motto that describes this House, "Hear the other side"—well, it's difficult to hear all members of the other side if the rules are the way they are today and we don't amend them to the current times.

So if we follow our motto of "Audi alteram partem," you also want to make sure that members of the third party are also able to speak. When the motto is "Hear the other side," the other side might have members of the third party, as we do today. Therefore, in the motto of what this Legislature is, should we not be able to hear the other side?

Another motto that is inscribed before the chamber is "Fortiter et recte," which is "Boldly and rightly"; followed by "Palmarum qui meruit ferat," which translates to "Let he who deserves it bear the prize"; followed by "Pax vobiscum," which is "Peace be with you." The last few talk about things like "Spectemur agendo," which means "Let us be viewed by our actions."

Madam Speaker, I want to dwell on this particular motto—again, inscribed in Latin in this chamber—which is "Let us be viewed by our actions." That's what we are doing today: We are taking action to make sure that future generations of members who do come into the House, no matter their ability, feel welcome to use any device that is necessary. For instance, it would be a great shame if someone did need to use some sort of electronic device in order to help them read their speech or to help them do

their job. They wouldn't be able to do that without the unanimous consent of the House. That is not very welcoming, if you need those types of specifications.

I go back to the mention of a great federal member of Parliament, Steven Fletcher. He was able to have those abilities served out to him, and the House of Commons welcomed him with open arms because these sorts of accommodations were already made.

This is a topic that many other Commonwealth Parliaments are already discussing, in fact. I learned that this summer, when I was at a Commonwealth parliamentary forum. Many of the other parliamentary associations were saying, "Yes, we need to be more accommodating of people with different abilities and welcome them into the House." If we want them to serve—and many of them do want to serve—why not make sure the accommodations are made? Many of the changes that we have before us today are in line with those particular changes, so that when we do have someone like we did with Minister Steven Fletcher, they are able to do their role without any impediments.

Our province has a very proud history of advocating for accommodations for people with disabilities, but it shouldn't stop. We should continue to evolve as the Legislature evolves. We have an entire piece of legislation dedicated to ensuring that we accommodate people with disabilities. It is entitled the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act. In this place, for example, as I was mentioning, if a member is elected who has a disability, the Legislature must specifically, and usually unanimously, agree to provide the member with accommodations to allow them to fully participate in the business of the Legislature, as I previously mentioned.

But I think that now that we're in 2019, Madam Speaker, we shouldn't need to have special permissions for an elected member to do their job in this Legislature. If they were elected, they should be easily welcomed into this Legislature to do the job that they were elected to do and to serve the people of Ontario, like all of us serve the people of Ontario.

I can imagine that members who require, as I was saying, an electronic device to assist them in speaking or help them with any sort of medical assistance should be able to do that on an ongoing basis without special permission. They are clearly welcomed to this House, and these provisions have already been accepted and voted on. There shouldn't be special attention required for all the House whenever they are welcomed in; these things should be already agreed to before they arrive here, and that is what we're speaking to today.

I was mentioning that different Commonwealth countries are looking at this as well, looking at what they do if they have a member who has a disability. In fact, there is a Commonwealth country that has a Speaker of the Legislature who does require walking assistance, and accommodations had been made for that person. But you would think they would be done ahead of time so they could be welcomed with open arms, just like what we're doing today.

It's interesting because you look at the history of this Legislature, as I was mentioning before, and there does need to be change to get with the times. I think it's very appropriate that we get with the times in 2019 and be able to welcome members with disabilities with open arms and to make these changes.

Madam Speaker, as I'm reading and as I'm speaking the words in the Legislature today, Hansard, which is in this Legislature, is also recording officially in the transcript of all the proceedings that are happening today. But, Madam Speaker, that wasn't always the case. In fact, Hansard, the official transcript of the House proceedings, wasn't introduced in the Legislature until 1944. That change needed to be made to have a transparent, open government. That happened in 1944. We're in 2019 now. Why wouldn't we adopt future changes to make us more progressive, to make us more welcoming, make us more transparent, and allow for members on the other side, as their motto currently states, to be able to participate in debate?

That's not only it, Madam Speaker. If you look at the 1930s, the seating of this current Legislature was actually arranged into a horseshoe. The point of that, as you may know, was originally that it might make it easier for MPPs to hear one another. I will certainly say that we don't need to put this Legislature into a horseshoe in order to hear one another. Why is that? There have been a lot of technological advancements that allow us to hear each other much better, so we are seated the way we are today.

Many other Parliaments have changed the way that they're seated to get more with the times. If you look at the Scottish Parliament, for instance, they sit in more of a horseshoe kind of composition now, as opposed to how we are sitting today. They went from the horseshoe seating in 1930 back to what we have today, what all of us are used to seeing on a day-to-day basis, back in 1944, where the traditional parallel seating arrangement was returned back to its current fruition.

The fact that we're all in this building today is quite remarkable as well. As many of you may know, before Ontario was part of Confederation and part of the Dominion of Canada, Canada was known as Upper and Lower Canada, and much of our parliamentary proceedings were held in York, in Upper Canada. Then we had the War of 1812 and, of course, we couldn't meet in that building any more and so meetings were held all around different parts of York. And here we are today.

Many accommodations had to be made to obviously account for things like the War of 1812 and, of course, account for different modifications within our time in history as the Ontario Legislature.

What I wanted to also touch upon, while I have the time, Madam Speaker, is the point my colleague was making, the member from Thornhill, and that is in regard to members' statements. Many of us have very proud accomplishments back in our ridings that we do want to read in Hansard, as I mentioned, which we didn't have in this Legislative Assembly until 1944. Many of us want to champion causes that we have in our ridings but also the people—the people who make up our ridings, to make

their time on this earth timeless by forever codifying their names and their actions into Hansard so their children and their grandchildren can look it up in the future.

But the one thing about statements that I found particularly interesting when coming to the Ontario Legislature is that they happen after question period, after we have a bit of a break and then the Legislature comes back, as opposed to having it before question period, which is the common practice in the House of Commons. What was interesting about it being a very common practice in the House of Commons, when you had statements by members before question period, so you had ministers, you had ministers of state, you had parliamentary secretaries—here we call them parliamentary assistants. You had them all in the room. You had a large audience of people waiting to hear question period and now they're also listening to these statements, which bring a lot of humility to the House, a House that is very much for the people. We're all here because we got elected by the people. But now we get to champion those individuals. It allows for them to be heard and for their accomplishments to be heard by all those individuals who happen to be in the room. An observation I've made here is that we don't have that same ability at Queen's Park, because often, when the members' statements are made, there aren't that many people in the audience; there are only a few. That sort of takes away from the importance of highlighting that person's accomplishments.

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I myself would hope that a future statement I would like to make about Will Dwyer in my riding of Barrie–Innisfil—he is a household name in Barrie. At the age of 94, he really proves the term “determination.” As a World War II veteran, he served in the military for 25 years, followed by a career in public service for 10 years. At age 60, he began volunteering at the Royal Victoria hospital and the Parkinson's society. He is also volunteering for the Canadian Legion Poppy Fund. He is also the recipient of the Queen's Jubilee Medal.

There is so much to say about Will Dwyer from Barrie, being a household name, but when I do the statement in the House in a few weeks' time, there may not be that many people—unless, of course, we pass the motion that we have here before us in order to give more of a platform to champion his accomplishments as a World War II veteran, as well as bring in people from the riding of Barrie–Innisfil to truly witness the grandeur that is the Ontario Legislative Assembly and to have everyone in the House here recognize him for his great accomplishments.

At the current moment, I would be doing the statement after routine proceedings—after introduction of visitors in the afternoon and just before we get into reports by committee, introduction of bills and motions. Then there are statements by ministers and responses, and petitions. All these things would be happening after statements, but despite them happening after statements, there probably won't be a lot of people around because all of these other things are happening after. So for us to move statements by members ahead of time will certainly give well-

deserved respect for those individuals who have served in our local ridings and give the full breadth of what they've accomplished.

I wanted to touch briefly upon again—the member for Thornhill talked about the difference in moving the days for night sittings from 12 to 18 and the significance this has on certain times of the year when we might want to be in our ridings and it's the time to give. I did want to touch on that a bit because I think all of us need to remember that it is December 2. What holidays of any kind may be about—they're about giving back to others, they're about helping those less fortunate and, of course, serving the public. All of us in this House understand that full well, as we got elected to serve the public and be representatives of them in this Legislature. So to echo the sentiments of the member from Thornhill: just being able to have that flexibility to say we are able to give back.

For instance, I know the member from Barrie–Springwater–Oro–Medonte volunteered for the Salvation Army at the local mall in Barrie, collecting donations. Certainly that's something more of us could be able to do to pitch in with our local charitable organizations, like the Salvation Army, around this time of year. That's something I'm going to be doing this coming weekend, in fact, whether it's helping in certain soup kitchens or whatnot.

These are all things that all of us can get back to, and contribute in our communities and help others. So I'm kind of going off of the sentiment from the member from Thornhill about those things.

But that's not the only thing that is in this motion. In fact, if you look at private members' business—I know one of the independents had mentioned it—we often talk about times when we can collaborate and not collaborate. Question period, I would argue, is kind of difficult to collaborate on. Even if we are expanding the motion so that independent members can ask questions, it's tough to collaborate when it comes to question period. But it's nice to know that we're presenting this motion to allow them to have a voice.

But there are times when we can collaborate, and that comes in private members' business. It's a very important opportunity for anyone who is a member of the House to be able to put forward something that they're very passionate about, that may have come from their constituents, who have helped get them elected or helped bring them to where they are today in the Ontario Legislature. It allows them to introduce something into the Legislature that may not have—whether they're in government, whether they're in cabinet, whether they are members of the opposition, whether they are a member of the independents, they're allowed to introduce a private member's bill.

The point here, Madam Speaker, is that there is an opportunity for collaboration. I know that many of my colleagues who have already introduced private members' bills have worked very collegially with other members to say, “How can we collaborate for joint support for private members' bills?” Historically, we've seen that happen, but this is actually going to open up the scope to allow that to happen.

I myself introduced a private member's bill on a day of action on litter. I'm very grateful to all members of this House for having supported it, as it is going to be a very important part of educating our future generations when it comes to their environment. It would have been a great opportunity to work together with all different members to co-sponsor a bill that we all voted for at the end of the day, despite what was said in the House. So these types of motions are going to allow that to happen. I think, to the greater public, it really shows what can be accomplished in this House when you do work together and when you're provided opportunities to be able to work across party lines—and the fact that we all did get elected here to serve.

Another few things that I wanted to touch upon that are in this particular motion and are going to be able to help us move forward and improve the business of the House: Of course, you often hear, and Madam Speaker, you're in the proper chair to really hear the argument, where we have certain government business that's taken into account and someone stands up and says, "Point of order" and they want to introduce another friend or a constituent or a family member. By all means, I get really excited when I have constituents in the Legislature and when I have family members who have decided to witness the amazing things that we get to do here under parliamentary democracy, which each and every one of us has the responsibility to uphold. But those interruptions often get shut down by the Speaker. You say, "Well, that's not a point of order and you normally can't introduce people." That happens on a day-to-day basis. We've all been in this Legislature and witnessed it. So the fact that we're codifying it permanently in the motion, I think, gives a lot more teeth to you, Madam Speaker, so that you are able to utilize that ability and that rule to say that that's not a point of order and that those individuals cannot be introduced. But there are certainly other times when those members can be introduced. Of course, if we do have a private member's bill being introduced or someone is doing a statement in the House, then they will be able to look at the rules and know when is an appropriate time and not an appropriate time to introduce those members.

I just want to wrap up. I have eight seconds left, but I just want to go back to the fact that what we've all been elected here to do and the motto that holds—

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): Thank you. Further debate?

Mr. Roman Baber: I've had the privilege of serving in this House since July 2018, and looking at the order paper, it is the 134th sessional day. I'm sure that my constituents and perhaps the chief government whip would be thrilled to know that since the constitution of this 42nd Parliament, I've only missed one sessional day—just one—while being away on government business. Our duties as members of provincial Parliament are, first and foremost, to represent our constituents in Parliament; they're not to a political party and not to government or Her Majesty's official opposition. Our constituents send us to the provincial Legislature.

Madam Speaker, despite some of the difficulties inherent in this job, I find this to be the most incredible, most

interesting and most rewarding job I've ever had. Not a day goes by that someone doesn't ask me how I like my job in provincial Parliament. The answer to that really depends on the day and is often out of control for me, but I always answer with what my favourite part of the job is, and it's easy: Parliament, this magnificent building, this magnificent chamber. Every day, I walk out of the subway at Queen's Park station, and the first thing I do is I look at this palace, and I'm in awe of its beauty and what it represents. As recently as this morning, I walked into this building—and I love everything about it: the way it's designed, the way it smells, the rustic smell of wood. To me, it represents tradition. I smell the history that led Ontario to what it is today: the best place on earth to come, to live, to work and to raise a family. To me, all of that is represented through the incredible work done by parliamentarians, our predecessors in this building.

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And then there is this chamber, which I've also come to know and love—the debate, the traditions, and of course the rules, Madam Speaker. It's not just question period that excites me. It's debate and members' statements and questions and comments. Some of my friends will joke with me about petitions. All of that is really an opportunity for us to represent our constituents.

Our constituents expect a number of things. They expect good governance and good government. They expect order and decorum. They expect that we don't waste time when conducting proceedings, and they expect fairness for their MPPs. To me, Madam Speaker, this is what this government motion is all about. It's about making this chamber function better. It's about getting on with the peoples' business, and allowing fairness to members of this House, in particular the independent members, so they can do an effective job representing their constituents.

I know that it's equally important to all the members of the House to serve and govern Ontario with efficiency, collaboration and with respect for the members opposite. The proposed amendments to the standing orders, if passed, do just that, and I'm proud to support them today. Our standing orders are rules that govern how the Ontario Legislative Assembly goes about its work. They're meant to be tools to help the government move through the legislative process in an orderly, fair and efficient manner, but with appropriate checks and balances.

Ineffective parliamentary procedure is one that clunks up the process and impedes debate. The goal of parliamentary procedure is to provide a balance between the government's mandate to move legislation forward and the opposition's right and responsibility to hold the government to account.

Our standing orders are comprised of about 100 years of living history. It's a document that is a testament to the parliamentarians and Speakers who came before us. Almost every government made amendments and additions to parliamentary procedure to reflect the current needs of the time. Often underestimated, Ontario's parliamentary procedure is the framework and the foundation of our Legislative Assembly.

I'm sincerely grateful to the government House leader for bringing this forward, and I'm sincerely grateful to everyone who contributed and co-operated in the process that led to the motion before the House today.

The first rule I'd like to talk about is the amendment regarding members with disabilities. The proposed amendment would allow the Speaker to alter the application of the rules to permit full participation of a member with a disability. Currently, a member with a disability who would require special accommodation would also require unanimous consent of the House. But disability accommodations are personal, they're necessary, and should not be up for debate or decision by other members. A person's medical needs are not up for debate and should not be up for a vote. The amendment gives the Speaker the discretion to permit special accommodation instead.

For example, a member in a wheelchair would currently need unanimous consent of the Legislature to vote without physically standing. Our proposed change would allow the Speaker to grant this exception without unanimous consent. This will further the courtesy, respect and dignity that all of us must afford to members of this House and, in fact, all people with disabilities. Accommodating and affording dignity to persons with disabilities should not be a partisan issue. It is the right thing to do, and it is above party politics.

This change is especially important to me because my predecessor, the honourable Monte Kwinter, spent at least part of his last session in a wheelchair in this chamber. Mr. Kwinter served until he was the oldest serving member in this Parliament's history. He served a total of 32 years under five different Premiers and, while in government, held five different ministerial portfolios. I'm proud today, as the member for York Centre and Monte Kwinter's successor, to support this change and allow the Speaker to do the right thing when it comes to members with disabilities.

The next proposed change I'd like to speak to is the change in the format of debate from two-minute hits to one-minute questions and answers. Under the proposed rule, after a member completes their 20-minute speech, members will have two minutes to question the debater. Questions will be limited to one minute, and the member who made the speech will respond to each question and will have one minute to do so. The intent of this change is to encourage more active debate and enhance the quality of the debate.

Speaker, we campaigned on more accountability in government. This is another opportunity to allow the members of the opposition to hold the government accountable. I think the voters and the viewers at home would appreciate an opportunity to see a speaker defend their assertions. This is good for the debate, and it's good for democracy.

The next rule I'd like to address deals with the introduction of visitors. Welcoming guests, constituents, friends and family to the House is one of the most exciting moments of the day. I always note with interest the respect that all of our colleagues pay to one another, particularly

to members of family, irrespective of our political parties. The rule is meant to specify a format for introduction of visitors and specifically prohibits the use of points of order for introductions. The intent is to keep this segment as brief as possible while still recognizing that it's important to properly welcome our guests. The use of the point of order to conduct an introduction is already prohibited, but this change reinforces the rule.

A point of order is meant for order. The point of order is a very powerful point and it's actually a very powerful tool. One can rise on a point of order at any time other than during a vote. So that is an incredible recourse. It's a privilege given to members of this assembly. Such rights should not be used frequently or used improperly or else there is danger that the strength, the magnitude or the recourse afforded to a member by a point of order would be diminished. It's important to respect the point of order and to preserve it so it isn't used improperly.

The next change I propose to address deals with private members' bills. These are really important. This is where members get to import their experience, their community's primary interests and their local riding issues. This is where we get to fulfill the mandate that the people of our constituencies or communities and stakeholders have sent us to fulfill. This rule will allow co-sponsorships of private members' bills by any four members, regardless of party. Currently, the limit is three members, and all have to be from different parties. That means that currently two members from the same party may not co-sponsor a bill. Now, we have proposed this change to recognize that some private members' bills may be of utmost importance to more than one member. That also means that we engage in less politics and in more co-operation. This is also an opportunity to work across the aisle, something that our constituents expect us to do.

I know I'm not the only member of this House who believes that this change will help us co-operate, but it's also important since greater co-sponsorship and greater co-operation will increase the chances of a private member's bill passing through third reading and ultimately passing into law. This is good for members. This is good for Ontario. This is good for democracy. So I welcome this change with open arms.

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The next rule I'd like to touch on is allowing a bill to be debated more than once on the same sessional day. Currently, if a bill is debated in the morning before question period, it cannot be called again in the afternoon. That simply makes no sense. This causes unnecessary complexity in the legislative schedule. This often results in delays. Our government campaigned on more efficient and smarter government, and people expect us to get on with the government's business. This rule amendment will increase flexibility and will save time and money, something I'm sure our voters would welcome.

There are some specific changes to the 42nd Parliament and the independent members. These changes all serve to increase the participation and engagement of the independent members and are proposed in the spirit of

enhancing debate and democratic participation. They include, for example, allowing independent members the ability to share their time in response to ministerial statements. This reflects the fact that our independent members come from unique backgrounds and different spots on the political spectrum, and it's important that we allow for their diversity of opinion to be heard.

The amended rules will also allow independent members 12 minutes on opposition day motions. We also propose to allow independent members to substitute for each other at committee. This is good for clarity, and it's good for fairness. This is a unique Parliament. We have a disproportionate amount of independent members. It's important—and I'm grateful to the government for talking to the independent members and coming up with a framework, with the consent of the independent members, to allow them increased participation. This is not just good for the House; this is also something that I believe is good for democracy.

Another amendment is to hold members' statements in the morning before question period. The intent is that members' statements will receive increased profile by occurring when more guests are present in the chamber and when the media are actively observing question period. Members' statements are some of my favourite proceedings in the House. They allow us to reflect our priorities and talk about our home ridings. It's important that they receive the recognition and the audience they deserve.

Next is the amendment on the use of laptops and technology, something that received quite a bit of attention in the last couple of months. Effectively, this amendment is a formality to bring the standing orders in line with daily practice. Our constituents understand our need to use modern technology, to stay connected and to accomplish more. I'm grateful to many members in connection with this specific proposal. I also would like to recognize the work done by my friend the member from Rouge Park in connection with this specific amendment, something that he and I discussed previously in his capacity as a member on the Legislative Assembly committee. So thank you for your work. We all understand the need to pay attention to the proceedings, and we do. But we are forced to make sure that the people's business is not on hold and that we're accessible to our staff and our constituents, so I'm grateful to the government House leader for putting this amendment forward.

There is a common theme that I think is apparent through the motion before the House today. The government is not running roughshod over anyone. In fact, it's the opposite. The government is allowing the independent members and the opposition, through its own initiative, by its own motions, to hold the government more accountable. We are here for democratic participation. What we're seeing—be it through questions and comments, be it through participation of the independent members, be it through allowing for a bill to be called more than once a day—is a responsible government holding itself responsible, and allowing the members of the opposition and the

independent members to hold themselves responsible, as well. That, to me, is the epitome; it's symbolic of democracy, and it's something that I'm very, very proud of.

Instead of shutting down debate, we're increasing more opportunity for debate. Instead of shutting down members on the opposite sides of the aisle, we encourage their participation. Instead of commenting on a piece of legislation from a talking points sheet, we're going to subject ourselves to questions by other members to increase our government's accountability, something I'm very, very proud of.

In conclusion, Madam Speaker, the purpose of these rules is to improve the process and the work done in this House. The proposed amendments, if passed, in no way lessen the opposition's job to hold us to account. Instead, we're strengthening the opportunity for the opposition and the independent members to do so.

Consultations for these amendments were thorough, lasted months, and included all affected parties. We consulted with the Clerks of the Legislature, the opposition and our independent members. The goal was to modernize procedure in a way that benefits everyone. These amendments are a great way to improve the process in the House and to help carry out the agenda.

I'm sincerely grateful for the time I had to debate today, and I look forward to hearing from our friends on all sides of the aisle. We're still in the process of looking at this and we encourage everyone to participate in this debate.

Thank you very much, Madam Speaker, and I look forward to further debate.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): Further debate?

Mr. Dave Smith: What we're talking about is changes to the standing orders, and there's a lot of good things that we're talking about doing in this.

I'm going to start with the co-sponsorship of PMBs. As it stands right now, you must be members of opposite parties—or other parties—and only up to three people can do it. But we do now have representation from four different parties. And you're restricted—you must not be from the same party if you're co-sponsoring the PMB. But what I found is that there's a number of members, especially in my own party, who have got some great ideas that we've been working on in our local ridings. A number of us have been working on very similar things. This allows us, then, to show our ridings that we're actually doing things for them, that we're listening to what the feedback is, and multiple people from the same party, then, have the opportunity to introduce the same PMB and work together on the same PMB. That, to me, makes an awful lot of sense, because we're here to work together. We're here to represent the people not only of our riding but all of Ontario. The way that the standing orders are right now, it prevents us from having that collaboration.

Why not open it up? Why not make it so that if four people want to sponsor a PMB, four people can sponsor a PMB? It means that we're working better together. Excluding a fourth party means that they don't get a choice. They don't get an option to be part of it. We're

talking about doing something so that we're representing as many people in Ontario as possible. This is not partisan. This crosses all party lines.

As it is right now, the Green member is the only member of the Green Party, but there may come a time in the future where more than one Green member gets elected. It could be that there's another party that comes along that gets elected. Why would we do something that limits the voice of those in Ontario?

That, essentially, is what the NDP is saying. They want to limit the voice of the people of Ontario because they don't want four parties to be able to sponsor a PMB. The PMB is there for members to get up and say things that are important to their community, to introduce legislation that is important to their constituents. It's good for Ontario.

1530

Jeff Leal, the previous member from Peterborough, prior to it being called Peterborough-Kawartha, is a member, and has always been a member, of the Liberal Party. I'm going to quote him here, because he said something that I think all of us need to remember: No one has a patent on a good idea. Being able to share that with others, being able to share those good ideas and work together, is what we're elected to do. That's why we were all elected.

I'm going to move on to allowing a bill to be debated more than once on the same sessional day. As it stands right now, if you start to debate something in the morning, you can't debate it in the afternoon.

The NDP have said that the reason we want to do this is we want to push legislation through faster and get a bill passed all in one day. But there are not enough hours in the day to complete that. There just aren't enough hours in the day to do that, so it's not possible to do that.

We're not stopping someone from putting an amendment on it. If an amendment is put onto it, then we have to debate that amendment.

We're not saying that the NDP won't have the opportunity, or any other member won't have an opportunity, to make reasoned amendments to it. None of that has happened.

We're not saying that we're going to do a time allocation first thing in the morning, push it through in the afternoon and, Bob's your uncle, it gets passed before 6 o'clock, and let's just move on. That's not what's happening here. We're not trying to ram something through, as has already been spoken to.

What we're trying to do is make sure that what we're doing here in this chamber has value, so that what we're doing in this chamber is what the people of Ontario are asking us to do.

That leads me to the two-minute questions and comments. Yes, it has been referred to as "two-minute hits." We have a debate. We have a speech in which we'll stand up and we'll talk for 10 minutes, or we'll talk for 60 minutes, or we'll talk for 20 minutes. Sometimes we split our time with other members.

Then we have questions and comments. Right now, it's a two-minute opportunity for someone to stand up and, in

theory, talk about the speech. But what seems to be happening by a number of members is that they go back to the talking points, and they won't refer to the speech whatsoever.

Last week, on Thursday, when we were debating Bill 116, I stood up and I spoke for 10 minutes and shared some personal experiences. I thought that those experiences were fairly powerful. I received a number of emails from people—which surprised me, the number of people who were watching the debate that day on television. I received a number of emails from people telling me how they were moved by what I talked about. One lady in particular said she started to cry when I was referring to the gentleman who committed suicide because of his mental health challenges.

In the questions and comments portion of it, one member stood up and spent about 15 seconds of the two minutes addressing what I had actually said, and then went on the attack with the talking points that her party had been putting forward. She really didn't pay any attention to what the actual speech was.

Maybe I'm naive. Maybe I was foolish when I first got elected, but I thought that we were elected to represent the people in our ridings. I thought that when we came to this chamber, we came here to debate ideas.

When you don't talk about the speech that you just heard, when you go completely off that entire topic, and you just touch on the speaking points, you degrade the value of what we're doing here. We are supposed to be having this type of a discussion where we talk about things that are good for the province, where we bounce ideas back and forth.

The opposition's role—yes, the name is "opposition"—they are there to oppose. But we have symbols here in this room to keep an eye on us, and to be wise. If you don't take that opportunity to address the speech, if you don't take that opportunity to discuss and have meaningful discussion, then you degrade all that this chamber is supposed to be.

The change that we're making is to go to a question-and-answer. Now we will actually be listening to what is being said. We'll ask a question specifically to what has been said. The person who delivered the speech will have the opportunity, then, to defend what they've said.

It's going to do two things for us. Not only are the members who are listening to the speech going to be paying attention, listening and actively taking part in the debate, but the person delivering the speech can't simply take notes from an assistant or a bureaucrat and read them. They have to understand what they're talking about. They have to be able to defend what they've said. That means that they will have a better understanding of what they're trying to do. If they have a better understanding, we will have better legislation because we will understand what it is that's trying to be accomplished.

Yet we've been told that the NDP is opposing this. In fact, some of the actions show that. They haven't been willing to stand up and speak to this so far today.

Marcus Tullius Cicero is someone whom I admire a great deal and I've quoted a number of times in this

chamber already. He said, more than 2,000 years ago now, that there are six mistakes that mankind keeps making, century after century. It has been more than 2,000 years since Marcus Tullius Cicero has been alive, and we still repeat some of those same mistakes.

One of them in particular was “refusing to set aside trivial preferences.” That is a mistake that we make. Changing some of these standing orders—some of them are fairly trivial. It’s not massive changes that we’re making. And yet we have members here who refuse to set aside their preferences to expand their horizons, to think about things from a different perspective.

He also said that one of the mistakes was “attempting to compel others to believe and live as we do.” That’s an interesting thought, because Cicero was effectively saying that you shouldn’t force something on someone. You should debate it; you should talk about it; you should think about it and respond to it. That is one of the changes that we’re making. We will have a 20-minute speech and an opportunity for questions and answers for debate, so that we’re not attempting to compel someone to believe as we do, but we’re actually having debate around it and we’re discussing it.

He also said that “insisting that a thing is impossible because we cannot accomplish it” is one of the mistakes. That’s going to lead me to—you’re probably thinking, “Where is he going with this?” Well, one of the changes is so that the Speaker has the ability to make accommodations for a member with a disability.

I have a constituency assistant who has cerebral palsy. She’s in a wheelchair. She’s a very smart young lady. She does exceptional work for me in my riding. She represents a point of view that nobody else in my office can have because we haven’t had the lived experiences that she has. If she chose to run for office, currently, she would not be permitted to vote here because she cannot stand up. She would have to ask for the mercy of everyone in the House: Would you give unanimous consent to allow her to do her job in a way different than everyone else in the chamber would at the time? That is effectively devaluing her. That is effectively devaluing anyone who doesn’t have the ability to stand. We’re trying to make that right. We’re trying to make a change to the standing orders so that someone who doesn’t have the same abilities as I do but has the ability to represent the people in their riding actually has the ability to come into this chamber and represent the people who voted for them, the people who said, “We want you to be our voice.”

1540

As it stands right now, the standing orders do not permit that person to be that voice. That’s a mistake. It’s a mistake that we’re trying to correct. There are members in this House, there are members who were elected by people in their riding who don’t believe that she should have that opportunity, who aren’t willing to agree to have that change made. We’re here to represent everyone, not just those who can stand. I’m appalled that there are members in this House that would not agree that this is a good change.

With that, Madam Speaker, I move that the amendment be amended—that would be amendment 1.1—by adding the following paragraph—

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): Stop the clock, please. That motion is out of order. We can only speak to the amendment to the amendment at this time.

Back to the member for Peterborough—Kawartha.

Mr. Dave Smith: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Next, I’d like to move on to the night sittings, changing it so that we could have night sittings the last 18 sessional days.

All of us do a great deal of work when we’re here. We’re here typically from 9 o’clock in the morning until 6 p.m., but there are times where we do need to extend the day. It’s a lot more difficult when you have a number of pieces of legislation that you need to debate and you are down to that last crunch time. It means that all of us are working later on in the evening. We’re not able to do the research that we need to do. We’re not able to make the connections with the people back in the riding that we should be because everything is compressed.

Extending this so that we have 18 sessional days that we can do this means that we don’t have a massive chunk pushed in at the very end, and instead it could be spread out over the course of 18 sessional days. It means that we’re able to represent the people in our ridings that much better. Because when something comes up, when we need to have the debate that night, we’re not debating four nights in a row. We can have it spread out over a number of different nights, so we get the ability, then, to reach back to our constituents, to ask how they feel about things, to get feedback on it and to continue doing the things that we need to do to represent them.

Right now, in the morning, if debate ends on something prior to 10:15, the government House leader has the ability to stand up and say, “There’s no further debate,” or “There’s no further business,” and we stop the debate at that point and we go have a longer break before we come back for question period. What we’re asking for with this change is that that could also be said at the end of the day, so that we’re more productive throughout the day and we don’t have that half-hour or 45 minutes or perhaps an hour time period that is wasted. We continue having our debate in the morning, and rather than end it, take a break and then go on until 6 o’clock, we can have that work done in the morning and end at 5:30.

Now, there are some people who will say, “Well, Mr. Smith, if you’re ending at 5:30, you’re not doing any work. You finished your day early.” Well, no. I don’t know about everyone else, but what I can say for myself definitively is, when I’m here in the House, I’m in the House doing this: I’m debating. I’m listening. I’m trying to understand better what’s being done, what we’re introducing, what the opposition is saying to it, so that I can represent people better. Then, in the evenings, I do a lot of the other prep work. I pick up the phone and I call constituents in my riding. This still gives us the opportunity to do that. It just means that perhaps we could call somebody a little bit earlier in the evening and not later on in the evening. It

doesn't change the fact that we are all doing a lot of very good things. It just allows us to manage our day in a better way.

Changing statements so that statements will be done earlier in the day: Again, as it stands right now, at 10:15 we're finished, we take a 15-minute break and we go back to the lobbies, and we come back in here 15 minutes later. It's an opportunity that's lost. Everyone who is coming to visit Queen's Park typically comes during question period. I turn and I look in our galleries now and there's a handful of people in here.

Mr. Jamie West: It's only because you're speaking.

Mr. Dave Smith: It could very well be because I'm speaking and they find it boring.

But what we do know is that question period is the time when most people want to be here. They want to see that going on, so our galleries are full or, typically, we have a larger number of people.

When a member stands up to give a statement, they're typically talking about things that are going on in their riding. Most of the time, they'll have somebody from the riding that they're actually speaking about as part of that statement. Those individuals now get to be part of that process. Those individuals get to experience it and feel that they are part of it. This chamber is supposed to be for the people. If we're doing our statements that are raising awareness, if we're doing our statements that are praising the individuals back in our community and they don't get to be here for it, it loses some of its value.

Making this change so that there will be more members here, so that the media will be here, so that the visitors who are coming in are here means that they get to be more involved. That's more inclusive. That should be a good thing. To quote Martha Stewart, "It's a good thing." We should be doing more of that, and yet we have a situation where there are members who are opposing it, who are saying that this is undemocratic. How is it undemocratic to ask the people we're going to be talking about when we make a statement—to demonstrate to them the value of what they've done? Yes, I can give them a copy of the Hansard, but if they're actually here, if they see the reaction of the other MPPs, if they hear the applause, they know that we're representing them.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): Further debate?

Hon. Paul Calandra: It's a pleasure to rise today to speak both to the motion and to the amendments that have been proposed by the opposition.

At the outset, let me just speak briefly to the first amendment that was offered by the member for Brampton Centre. I found this to be a very curious amendment. At the outset, hearing the amendment about those with disabilities being able to participate in debate—that's obviously a good thing, and that's why, of course, we put it in the standing orders that we proposed to this House.

Let me just read, if I may, Madam Speaker, on page 20 of the Orders and Notices paper—it's actually the very first paragraph: "The Speaker may alter the application of any standing or special order or practice of the House,

other than those that deal with number of times or duration of time a member may speak, the timing of proceedings or the time allotted to proceedings, in order to permit the full participation in the proceedings of the House of any member with a disability." Now, it's actually right here. It's on page 20. It's the very, very first thing of the proposals that the government put forward.

1550

So the member for Brampton Centre rises, colleagues, on an amendment today, and the opposition gets all excited. Well, what does their amendment do? It's just for the duration of the 42nd Parliament. Why would the government approve something that only lasts for the duration of the 42nd Parliament, when what we're putting forward is something that would last forever? People with disabilities need not come back every Parliament and ask for permission of this House to be able to participate in debate.

I know the member from Brampton Centre. She's a good member and a good person. I can only assume that, perhaps, somebody wrote this amendment for her, or maybe she just didn't read page 20—

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Point of order.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): I recognize the member for Timmins on a point of order.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: I think the government House leader knows very well that the reason the amendment is written like that is to allow the House currently, until the Legislative Assembly committee would have a chance to review the standing orders, to be able to allow the Speaker to do what they have to.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): Thank you for the point of order.

Back to the government House leader.

Hon. Paul Calandra: I'm not sure that that was a point of order, but I guess we'll continue on—

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): Stop the clock, please.

I appreciate that the member doesn't necessarily agree with what my ruling was, but it is the Speaker's ruling. It's not up to you to question it.

Back to the government House leader.

Hon. Paul Calandra: Okay. I appreciate that, Madam Speaker.

Again, I will just say very directly for the record that, in fact, on the very first page of our standing order proposals, we talked about people with disabilities. We talked about it being permanently put in the standing orders, and not put in place as an afterthought, forcing people to come back every time there is a new Parliament, to ask for the permissions that we are putting in place permanently.

When the members of the opposition ask how we will vote on that, clearly we will vote against their amendment, because we would rather a permanent amendment, a permanent solution, one that is probably long overdue. We're going to put it right in place, and we're going to put it right into the standing orders because it's important that we do so. Hopefully, all members of this House will agree on that, and when we vote on this, they will reflect on that

and they will vote against their own amendment and vote in favour of the amendment that was put together, of course, by the vast majority of the members of this Legislature.

I am very happy with the fact that we're having strong levels of support, not only from members of our caucus but members from the Liberals, the Green Party and the other independents who are here, who have spoken in favour of the amendments that we have brought forward to the standing orders.

We've heard a lot with respect to the speed at which things can be proceeded through, and I talked about it. The NDP have said that the government is proposing something that will allow us to make a bill and pass a bill much faster. It's giving ourselves new powers. Well, that's not correct. It does not do that.

I would refer the members again to new standing order 47(d), which says—and I'll quote for the member for Niagara Centre, if I'm not mistaken: "A bill, and a time allocation motion applying to that same bill, may not be considered on the same calendar day."

I'll just repeat it again: "A bill, and a time allocation motion applying to that same bill, may not be considered on the same ... day."

Just one more time: "A bill, and a time allocation motion"—

Mr. Wayne Gates: I can read.

Hon. Paul Calandra:—"applying to that same bill, may not be considered on the same ... day."

The member across says that he can read, so I refer him to page 20 of the orders and notices papers, because there, the members opposite will find the discussion with respect to people with disabilities and not making them come here begging, as the members' opposite motion would do. If he goes forth further through that—I believe it's on page 24—he will find that particular part of the motion.

The other thing that we heard last week—it had to be one of the weirdest speeches I've ever heard as a member of Parliament. We brought some amendments here, colleagues. There's a large cadre of independent members in this House, larger than we've probably had in other Legislatures, and we've heard not only from them but from other people that, you know what, we could do better in helping independent members participate in debate. We thought that that's a good idea. Let's allow the independent members to have a little bit more opportunity to participate in debate.

We know that the NDP are against that, but what's the rationale for the NDP being against that? Here's where the weirdness comes into it, Madam Speaker. The NDP are against it, apparently, according to the opposition House leader, because they've been defeated so often, they've become experts at losing party status and then fighting for ways to have their voice heard. So because nobody paid attention to them when they lost party status twice—

Mr. Wayne Gates: Didn't you get thrown out of office under Harper?

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): The member from Niagara Falls will come to order.

Hon. Paul Calandra: Well, I feel we've hit a nerve, Madam Speaker. We've obviously hit a nerve, haven't we, colleagues? Imagine—

Interjection.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): Stop the clock. I'd appreciate the member for Niagara Falls coming to order. Thank you.

Back to the government House leader.

Hon. Paul Calandra: We've hit a nerve with the member for Niagara Falls, colleagues. Just for full disclosure: Did I lose an election? Yes, I did lose an election in 2015. And did it hurt to lose an election? Yes, it did hurt to lose an election, and I reflected when I lost that election in 2015. I know that's why the member for Niagara Falls is screaming out.

But Madam Speaker, one would think that if you've lost every single election since Confederation with the exception of one, you might think twice yourself. So whilst I appreciate the member for Niagara Falls pointing out that I lost one election, I would ask him and his colleagues to reflect on the fact that they've lost every single election, with the exception of one—and not just losing elections; they've actually lost party status not once, but twice. Because they've lost party status, because nobody paid attention to them, because nobody cared that they lost party status and because the people of Ontario never returned them to office again after they lost party status, what do they say? "Well, we shouldn't give the independents who are in this House any opportunity to participate." Nobody paid attention to them, so why should we care about anybody else?

That is the way the NDP are looking at the standing-order changes. It's not about what works for the people of Ontario. It's not about making this House a better place. It's about settling scores that they have with the Liberals and the Green Party. That's what it's about: It's about settling scores, because the Liberals didn't pay attention to them. I would submit that it wasn't the Liberals who didn't pay attention to them; it was the people of Ontario who never paid attention to them. That's why they took away party status from you—not once, but twice. But to get up in the House and suggest that the only reason you can't support this is because, "The Liberals didn't give us any extra questions," is absolutely wrong.

What we saw in this House last Thursday, colleagues, during private members' business, where private members' business became a proxy battle over standing-order changes and the attacks that were going to the member of the Green Party with respect to his support of the standing-order changes—and why he was supporting an electric vehicle charging bill that was brought forward by the member for Whitby and co-sponsored by the member for Guelph, his motivations for doing that—I think speaks exactly to what is wrong with today's NDP.

So let's talk about it again. We've made changes to ensure that people with disabilities can participate in debate. They voted against that. We made changes that make sure that members will not have the opportunity to pass time allocation on a bill that is debated on the same

day. They're opposed to that. Now, you might ask yourself, Madam Speaker—you might say, "How could they be opposed to that? We haven't voted on it." Well, because we started this process very early. All parties sat around a table and we started to discuss standing-order changes. We got input from the members opposite, we got input from my colleagues and we got input from the Greens, the independents and the Liberal Party. It was clear that at some points there were some disagreements on some of the items in the standing orders, so we made what I thought was a very legitimate and fair offer: Let's come to the table; let's come to this Legislature with the things that we can agree upon. Take a look at the full package and tell us what you can agree upon. Do you agree that people with disabilities should have full rights to participate in debate? If you do, let's pass a motion and we'll pass it. Do you agree that laptops and cellphones should be used in the House, as long as they don't interfere with debate? Do you agree with that? Let's bring it forward and we will pass it. But they chose to move away and say no, that they would no longer participate in anything to do with the standing orders.

1600

Then they come back to the House and they want to bring another committee—I know that the member for Timmins said, "Well, let's have another committee to discuss the standing order changes"—when they've already walked away from the table once. Having walked away from the table once, having said that there is nothing in here that they agree with, having said that there is nothing that we could get unanimous consent on, why would all of the members of this Legislature, not only the government members but the members of the Liberal Party, the Green Party and the other independents, trust them to work effectively and in the spirit in which we are coming forward, Madam Speaker? It's just a delaying tactic, because we've seen what the member for Timmins and the members of the NDP are talking about. They want to settle scores with the previous Liberal government, which paid no attention to them on the two occasions they lost power.

It's funny. At one point, the member for Timmins said, "We were talking about hydro but nobody cared." I remember how upset Howard Hampton was because nobody cared to listen to him. At that point, you might think to yourself, "Well, do you know what? Nobody is paying attention to us. Maybe it's not the people of Ontario; maybe it's the party."

I know that when I lost in 2015, I reflected upon that. Is there something that I did wrong? Could I be a better member? And people in my riding returned me. I'm very happy—the fact that they returned me to my riding. Madam Speaker, if I had lost every single election since Confederation with the exception of one, at some point I might have reflected upon what was wrong. Clearly, this NDP has not done that and have no consideration of doing that.

There's another part of this that we talked about. The member for Peterborough and a number of our members have talked about moving members' statements to before

question period. Yes, the reason we want to do that is because the whole House is full as people prepare for question period. It gives you an opportunity to really highlight some of the important things that you're doing.

I know that the member for Whitby talked about—I believe it is the Peter Perry Award, if I'm not mistaken, that was posthumously given to the honourable Jim Flaherty, a great honour. That would be nice if the whole House had the opportunity to hear that before question period.

But it's not just about that. It actually gives us more time to debate, because what we're doing is taking 15 minutes of time when the House would have otherwise been in recess, and we're using it. If the opposition wants more time to debate, these changes allow them more time to debate. What we're doing is recovering time that would otherwise not have been used. So not only do we give the opportunity for more people to hear about the great things that are happening in their ridings, and for the galleries and the people at home to hear that and to really appreciate not only the work that our members are doing but the work that they are doing in their communities—not our members, but people in their communities—that we are highlighting, on all sides of the House. We've taken that 15 extra minutes and we've added it to time to debate. I think that that is a good thing.

We've heard from the opposition, too, that they're very upset at the extra night sittings. We have 12 night sittings, colleagues. You know that. We have 12 night sittings, and we're asking to go to 18 night sittings. According to the opposition, we'll be having night sittings all of the time. Colleagues will know that in the last three weeks, the last 12 days, this Legislature can sit at night. Colleagues, we're not sitting at night tonight, we're not sitting at night tomorrow, but the opposition are upset because we've added six extra days of night sittings.

I will say this: I actually wanted to have night sittings at any point during the sitting. That is what I started with. But the NDP walked away from the table because we were going to give the independents one more question during question period. I guess, for them, that was the hill to die on. But after that, we kept debating, we kept talking, and we decided that in order to reflect what some of the independents and even what some of the members of our caucus said, we would restrict it to the last 18 days so that we had more opportunity in those last few sitting days of a session so that we didn't have to jam everything into the final few days. But had the NDP been to the table, they would have known that. Had they not just packed up and left, they would have been a part of that.

There are a number of other things here. I often talk about the reference; maybe it's just a pet peeve of mine. I know the people at home aren't screaming and hollering on this one. But during question period, when we have the opportunity, the opposition will ask every single question of the Premier. That's their right to do that; it is their absolute right to do that. The changes that we're proposing don't take away their right to do that, but it takes away the government's right to delay in answering a question by

standing up and having to refer it to the appropriate minister. It allows debate to go further and faster so that we can get more questions in, and so that the opposition has more opportunities to hold the government to account. One would think that that would be a good thing, that it's something that the opposition would want. We are, of course, the only Legislature in the entire country that has this referral, and now we are taking it away so that we can have a better question period.

A number of colleagues have referenced this: We added in there the opportunity to debate more—so to defend your speech. When a member comes into the House and gives a speech, they will have to defend the contents of their speech, as opposed to what we do right now, which is called the two-minute hits. It will be a question and answer back and forth. All colleagues will know that they will have to defend a speech that they've given on the topic that they have given. This gives the Speaker more power to ensure that colleagues are asking questions on the content that is before them, and that the responses are also on the content that is before them. So we've empowered the Speaker, we've empowered members, and we've said to those who are giving speeches that that you will have to defend the speech that you give.

Madam Speaker, what have we done? We've made sure that persons with disabilities can participate, not just for the next two and a half years but forever. We've done that. I say very clearly to the opposition: We will vote against your motion that would limit that to just two and a half years because we don't think people with disabilities should be begging Parliament every four years to have the right to participate in debate. We think, as we have done, it should be enshrined in the standing orders.

We have made sure that debate can flow better. We've done that by allowing us to debate a bill in the morning and continuing a debate in the afternoon. What we've done to ensure the opposition's demands that we don't pass bills any faster are put in place is that we've added standing order 47(d), which forbids the government from bringing time allocation on a bill that is debated on the same day.

Colleagues, regardless of anything that you hear the rest of this day, on those two items alone, if you are in favour of more debate in the House, if you are in favour of a better question period, if you think people with disabilities should have equal opportunity to participate in debate, then you should be supportive of this standing order. If you think that debate should unfold in a more precise fashion, then you're here. If you think that the government shouldn't have additional tools to pass bills faster, we have made sure of that in the standing order changes that we've put forward.

I am heartened by the fact that the Liberals, the Greens and the independents have identified this as a co-operative process that doesn't give the government more power. So I would ask my colleagues opposite to take off their partisan blinders and to work with us to make the Legislature work better.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): Further debate?

Mr. Lorne Coe: I'm pleased to have the opportunity to speak to government motion 73, amendments to the standing orders.

Speaker, for the benefit of those who might be watching or who may have just joined us in a gallery, what we're discussing are the House rules. They are the rules that govern our debate, the passage of bills, and the consideration of important issues of the day.

The proposed changes that are before us are just about making the House work better and function more smoothly.

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Speaker, you will know that it's often too easy to accept the way in which we operate as a legislative body. While working both in the private and the public sectors, prior to being elected as the MPP for Whitby in 2016, I understood that within those organizations, periodically you would examine the guidelines by which the organizations are operating and then seek ways to strengthen and improve the functionality. Under the leadership and guidance of the government House leader, the Honourable Paul Calandra, that's exactly what we're doing. We're approaching these proposed changes in a thoughtful, respectful and collaborative way. I think we all expect that.

The government House leader and staff began examining the standing orders during the summer recess. Many of us were consulted in that process. This approach was very collaborative. During his review, the House leader sought to hear the viewpoints of the NDP and the independent members.

We're pleased that the Liberals and the Green Party support these proposed changes but, as indicated earlier, we're disappointed that after months of consultation, the official opposition has decided to withdraw from discussions.

The proposed changes we are now considering are an outcome of that collaborative process. Our only objective—and I want to stress this—our only objective is a more productive, efficient and effective Legislature, with the enhanced participation of all members. I hope that, during this debate, members of the official opposition will see the value in these proposed changes and support the government's motions.

At the end of the day, the question is simply this: How can we construct change so that this democratic institution can function at its best for the people of Ontario?

A day does not pass when I don't reflect on the impact and potential that I have as an MPP for the town of Whitby in this Legislative Assembly. Often we all have school groups attend here in the Legislative Assembly and, like many other members, I take the opportunity to speak to the students. I tell them what a privilege, what an absolute privilege, it is to serve as one of the members of the provincial Parliament in this building and in this chamber.

Amending the rules so that we can do our job more effectively is the smart and the right thing to do. I firmly believe that the changes this motion creates allow for this Legislature to be more productive, effective and encouraging of passionate debate and engagement.

In addition to our individual duties to our constituents, we have a collective duty to the people of Ontario. These changes are not, as some have claimed, an effort to pass legislation faster. Once again, Speaker, the proposed changes are just about making the House work better and function more smoothly.

I'd like to turn now to the amendment to the amendment, because one of the prime changes this motion brings is to allow a complete participation of the members with disabilities now and for the future. Right now, members with disabilities may be constrained by a number of rules, traditions or practices of the Legislature. While the Legislature can grant special consent to accommodate a member, we believe that anyone who has put their name forward to serve their province should be required to ask for special exemptions.

With this proposed change, the Speaker would be empowered to alter the application of the rules and practices of this place to accommodate members with disabilities.

What's clear with this particular proposal is that we live in an age of inclusion, not exclusion, overall.

Speaker, as my colleague the member from Mississauga East–Cooksville said earlier in the debate, a member with a speaking disability who requires an electronic assistive device to communicate should not need the unanimous consent of this House to participate in debate. A member in a wheelchair who cannot stand in their place to vote should not need unanimous consent of this House to cast a vote. A member who requires a personal assistant in the chamber to support their medical needs should not be required to receive that support only by requesting an exemption from 123 of their colleagues. Speaker, we should not allow outdated procedures to restrict or hamper a member's public service and democratic participation.

Meanwhile, Speaker, I very much like the proposed change that will provide the time for members' statements to be made immediately prior to question period. The government House leader in his earlier comments referred to the late James Michael Flaherty winning, a couple of weeks ago, the Peter Perry award for his community involvement in the town of Whitby. What an opportunity it would have been to have stood in this House prior to question period and share that award with the other members of the Legislative Assembly, as well as the viewers of question period.

But the intent of the change here, Speaker, is that members' statements will receive increased profile by occurring when more members are present in the chamber, and when the media are actively engaged with the chamber activities immediately prior to question period. This is a unique opportunity to directly represent—and I know you appreciate this—or advocate for our communities, as you've done often in the riding you represent. I hope all members will agree that elevating the profile of these statements and moving them to a time when they will have a larger audience will only be a good thing, with a very good outcome.

I believe that one of the proposed changes to the standing orders will help to resolve the conflict between

the requirement of being in the Legislature and the obligations of attending to other duties as an MPP. Through these proposed changes, for the first time in our history, the amendments to the standing orders propose that we formally allow the use of electronic devices in this chamber in a non-disruptive manner. Speaker, these changes will not permit MPPs to make phone calls or take photographs while seated in the chamber. Although we have a participatory role to play here in this chamber, there may be extended periods of time in which a member is not required to speak and could be completing research to support a response to a constituent.

When the rules of this place relating to use of technology were written many years ago, the world was a very different place, as you can appreciate. Speaker, being responsive to constituent concerns has always been a priority for all of us, and the proposed changes will allow us to deal more effectively with pressing issues. At the same time, we must recognize that the demands placed upon us require a shift in the way we conduct ourselves here in the Legislature. If this motion is passed, it will be incumbent upon all members to ensure they continue to respect the rules of decorum in this place and use this technological privilege wisely.

I would like to now address the suggested rule changes relating to debate practices. For the benefit of our viewers and those in the galleries, debate on a bill is currently done in rotations. A member from one side of this place has the opportunity, as you know, Speaker, to speak to an item of business for 10 minutes, eight minutes are then allotted to four members to pose a question or comment, not exceeding two minutes each, and then the original speaker has two minutes for a reply.

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While I've enjoyed participating in debate in this fashion over the past year and a half, I look to our sister Legislatures and the House of Commons in Ottawa for alternatives. Simply put, the proposed changes will make debate more interactive and will encourage members to carefully consider and respond to what other members are saying. In eliminating what we all refer to as "hits," we're replacing them with a true debate format, where members will be asked to defend a speech on a particular subject. The member will present a speech and, following a similar rotation as we do currently, the presenting member will be questioned on the content by other members. It will be more of a true debate format. The debate will be focused and encourage the best quality of exchange of ideas and opinions. As the government House leader pointed out when he introduced the changes, the revisions to the format should lead to greater consistency in the speeches.

I'd also now like to touch on the subject of referrals. Most of the questions during question period are asked to the Premier, and the practice is that the Premier, or the Deputy Premier, or the House leader in her absence, will rise and refer the question to the appropriate minister. Ontario is the only Canadian jurisdiction that specifically requires a verbal referral of a question. The intent of this change is that question period will move smoothly, with a

more direct focus on the questions being asked. The model for this is the House of Commons, in which any minister or parliamentary assistant may stand to answer any question, usually at the direction of the government House leader.

Speaker, another proposed change in the standing orders is to limit the length of time for the introduction of visitors. I know that you've been in the House and you've been in the chair and you have experienced this. I've taken the opportunity, as you have, Speaker, to introduce guests who have been here from our communities and from other organizations, but this process has taken on a life of its own. I'm sure you would agree. It has transitioned from what was once a five-minute span into something now very different—very, very different.

Introduction of guests was directed at preventing members from rising on points of order to introduce their guests. It was thought that by embedding it in the standing orders, it would work better—and it does work better. But because it's not codified in the standing orders, as opposed to being five minutes, it can go for 15 or 20 minutes now. We've all seen the effect of that.

As important as we all know introductions to be, the time expended prevents us from engaging in question period. So that proposed change has been added to the standing orders. It now allows for a firm five minutes before question period, and then another firm five minutes in the afternoon. I think that, taken together, the proposed change allows us to keep this segment in the House as brief as possible, while still recognizing it is important to note the presence of guests.

This non-partisan plan before us to modernize the rules of the Legislature in my mind will undoubtedly enhance debate and increase opportunities for all members to engage in the legislative process. I think we all aspire to that going forward. At the end of the day—I've stated this earlier in my remarks—our objective is a more efficient and effective Legislature, with greater participation for all members.

We're presented with a unique opportunity. We can work across the aisle to pass this comprehensive and collaborative package of amendments to the standing orders of our Legislature, and by doing so, we can, I think, allow for a better-functioning democratic institution.

I just want to cover, in the remaining time that I have, some of the key points that I would like to make here.

The changes that are before us will modernize the rules of the Legislature. They've been developed in a very collaborative way, with the input of the member from the Green Party and the other independents overall, and we have a package before us that reflects all of that input going forward.

Speaker, we've not removed any tools of the opposition that would delay passage of any legislation. A bill can only be passed in one sessional day by unanimous consent of the House. Why we are proposing that the government may debate the same bill in the morning and afternoon sessions—the intent of this is so that the government may more logically move through its legislative agenda, not to expedite passage of legislation. Further, even with the

additional time for debate in the morning and afternoon, a bill would not receive enough debate to pass in one day. We've also specifically indicated that a bill and motion for time allocation for that bill may not be considered on the same calendar day to preserve existing standards related to timelines for passage of legislation.

In the case of night sittings in the final 18 sessional days: Currently, night sittings are allowed in the final 12 sessional days, and this change allows the government to spread out night sittings so that they do not have to be forced into the final sitting weeks. We're also proposing to permit the government to cancel a night sitting when notice has been given but is deemed to no longer be required. Currently, the government must wait for the night sitting to begin.

Amending the daily order of business to conduct members' statements in the morning before question period: There are so many instances where members' statements are trying to profile either an upcoming event or a significant event that has occurred which involved the participation of many volunteer members of the community and the effect of that has been far-reaching within the community. It's a message that I think requires a larger audience going forward. I think the intent of the change here is going to have the desired effect that the individual members would like to see, and the broader community overall.

Speaker, my hope will be that we can work across the aisle to pass this comprehensive and collaborative package of amendments. The opportunity is within our grasp. I believe that by working together, we can have the type of desired effect that we all would want to see. The current standing orders that are in effect, yes, were developed at a point in time. We have surpassed that point in time. We're trying to respond to the needs of our broader community here in the province of Ontario. Let's grasp that opportunity today and reflect the needs of our constituents across Ontario.

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

Mr. Michael Parsa: I'm happy to rise today to speak in favour of motion 74 on the proposed changes to the standing orders of this Legislature and to strongly oppose the opposition's proposed amendments.

Speaker, the current standing orders are, in essence, the foundation of how we conduct ourselves in this chamber as lawmakers. As I'm sure everyone is aware, the standing orders of this House are the rules that inform us on the procedures of the House: the ways in which we operate, conduct ourselves, govern debate, consider the important issues of the day and pass bills.

The standing orders of this House essentially allow us to work thoughtfully, respectfully and collaboratively to deliver on our promises to the people of this province. Like with everything else, we as lawmakers are constantly working to find innovative and more efficient ways to improve how this Legislature operates.

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With these basic principles in mind, I'm proud to say that our amazing government House leader and his office

spent the entire summer studying the current standing orders of this House to find ways in which they can be improved. During this process, the government House leader also took a collaborative approach to include the NDP, Liberal independent members and the leader of the Green Party. The proposed changes, as put forth by the government House leader for this Legislature's consideration, are as a direct result of collaborative consultations that were part of the revision process. I was sorry to hear that the NDP did not wish to take part in this important process. What we are proposing is, by design, meant to improve the structuring of the rules and procedures of this House. What we're proposing is meant to encourage the efficient flow of positive and constructive debate. I don't understand how the members opposite could oppose such a proposition.

Every member of this House has duties and responsibilities to the constituents they serve. We all try to perform these duties to the best of our abilities within the parameters of the laws, rules and regulations that govern us. However, as many members of this chamber would agree, we sometimes encounter rules that unnecessarily hinder efficiency. I'm not talking about the types of rules that are designed to act as checks and balances to maintain good order and good governance. Those laws and rules and regulations are part of the founding principles of our democratic system of governance and, as such, are beyond reproach. Instead, I'm talking about the types of rules that are archaic, outdated and simply operate as obstacles to creating greater procedural efficiency and good governance in this House.

Like many of my colleagues here, I arrived here wanting to get to work quickly and start serving my constituents. However, before I hit the ground running, I had to, like many publicly elected individuals before me, learn the rules of this place. As many of my colleagues know, there's a heck of a lot to learn here. Last week, my good friend from the riding of Willowdale summarized it best when he said, "As soon as we are elected here, large amounts of information just start pouring our way, everything from simple directions to navigating the halls of Queen's Park to procedures for entering the chamber and debating bills." For myself and a large number of my colleagues here, it was quite the experience. Initially, there were lots of firsts, but as the legislative session progressed, everything became more familiar, especially in relation to the standing orders and how they were meant to operate.

For the most part, the standing orders do their job, and they do the job really well. After all, they're a product of 152 years of tradition, innovation and evolutionary change. Therefore, most of them exist for a reason. However, those reasons don't always mean that there isn't room for improvement. That's why we are here debating motion 73 today, because we believe there is always room for improvement.

Let me take a few minutes to talk about some of the proposed changes and improvements.

Under the current standing orders, members with disabilities are restricted in how they can participate and

how they are accommodated in this Legislature. Currently, a member with a disability requiring special accommodation, whether it be through an assistive electronic device or the help of a personal support worker, requires the unanimous consent of the Legislature in order to have access to those accommodations.

For instance, let me just list a few examples. A member who requires the use of a wheelchair would currently need the unanimous consent of the House to vote without having to physically stand up. A member who requires the use of an electronic assistive device to communicate would require the unanimous consent of the House just so they could do their job. Here's another one: A member who requires a personal support worker to assist them would require the unanimous consent of all members present in order to perform his or her duties. I don't know about anyone else in this chamber, Speaker, but to me, that seems like an incredibly burdensome barrier that only hinders the member's ability to serve. We're talking about a rule that requires a duly and democratically elected member of this House to seek unanimous consent to do their job. This seems completely absurd to me, and I would strongly assume that it would sound absolutely ridiculous to the constituents of the member's riding.

Under the proposed changes, we're recommending an alteration of these burdensome and time-wasting rules. We're proposing that a change be made to allow the Speaker the power to grant an exception to the member without unanimous consent. This would allow the Speaker the power to dispense with a time-wasting procedure and simply allow the specific member and all the members of this chamber to go about doing their job. Now, I don't know if the members opposite have anything specific to say about this particular proposal in their proposed amendments, but to me it doesn't make sense why they wouldn't support it, or any of the proposed changes, for that matter.

Every change we put forward is designed to improve the efficiency and efficacy of the procedures of this House, whilst removing outdated barriers that constrain democratic participation. For instance, let's quickly take a look at how the daily order of business is conducted. Currently, members' statements are only allowed to be made following question period. What's the reason behind this? Why can't members' statements be made in the morning, before question period? I don't know if there's a reasonable answer to this—well, I guess there will be. We're proposing that the daily order of business be amended to allow for members' statements to be conducted in the morning, before question period. This will allow members' statements to be heard at a time when there are more members in the chamber to hear about all the issues and events that are occurring in the different parts of this province.

These statements are important to the members who are making them and are incredibly important for the riding they represent. They deserve to be heard at a time when a larger audience is present and at a time when media is more readily available to listen and give greater exposure to the statement that the member is making.

Earlier this afternoon, I was originally slotted to give a member's statement regarding a great initiative that a constituent in my riding started many years ago. Stan Daneman from my riding of Aurora–Oak Ridges–Richmond Hill started the annual StanD Up food drive in support of 360 Kids. Stan started this initiative to do what he can by getting members of the community together to support an organization that helps provide a safe place for at-risk and vulnerable youth. Stan unfortunately passed away earlier this year. However, his great work and legacy has been taken on by his wife, daughter Lauren, and son-in-law Jeff. I can't state enough how amazing the StanD Up initiative is and how great the family is for keeping Stan's legacy of community service alive.

I thank everyone currently in this chamber for listening to that mini-statement, but imagine how great it would have been for the profile of the StanD Up initiative and for Stan's family if there were a larger audience present here to listen. Last week, my friend the member from Mississauga East–Cooksville said that these statements are important to us as members, and even though they are permanently transcribed in Hansard, just think about how much more special it would have been if members, the general public, the media and the television audience, all assembled readily to hear question period, would have heard something about a community they previously did not know about.

I think all members would agree that these statements mean a great deal not only to us as members, but to our constituents and to our ridings. Giving them more exposure is a brilliant way to help all Ontarians feel a greater sense of connection with each other's communities. Speaker, this amendment to the daily order of business will not only encourage the promotion of our local communities, but allow for a better understanding of what is happening in communities all over this great province. I think this is an excellent proposed change, and I think that if it is adopted, it will benefit all of the representatives in this House and all of their respective constituents.

1640

Speaker, in my remaining time, I'd like to switch gears and talk about some of the other changes that this motion is proposing. There are three particular changes that I would like to touch on and discuss, as I believe they will positively impact the efficiency and efficacy of this House.

The first of these proposed improvements is a change to allow for the alteration of the format of debate from two-minute hits to one-minute questions and answers.

Like many of you in this chamber, I enjoy the often lively and passionate debate that takes place here. As you know, the format of the debate is done in rotations. A member from one side is given the opportunity to speak to an item of business for 10 minutes. Eight minutes are then allotted to four members to pose questions and comments not exceeding two minutes. The original speaker then has the opportunity to reply for a total of two minutes.

While I sometimes enjoy this current format of doing things, it's restrictive and limits the way in which we conduct debate in this House.

In sister legislatures across Canada and in the House of Commons in Ottawa, debate is not conducted in this manner. For instance, in the House of Commons, the original speaker does not sit there until the end to answer four different questions and comments with a two-minute reply.

Similar to the House of Commons, we're proposing that, following the original speaker's 10-minute speech, the floor be opened to a back-and-forth style of questions and answers.

Mr. Will Bouma: It's a great idea.

Mr. Michael Parsa: I think so too.

This new proposed format will encourage the original speaker to take one-minute questions from other members and immediately answer them with a one-minute response. It will encourage a more efficient and freer-flowing debate style that would allow for the best possible quality of exchange of ideas and opinions. This style and format will also encourage a greater level of active listening and engagement in debate for all members of this chamber.

I, for one, cannot wait to see this new, exciting change implemented—

Interjections.

Mr. Michael Parsa: I strongly doubt that the opposition have anything similar to this proposed in their amendments. After withdrawing from the collaborative consultation process, I doubt that the opposition has anything constructive and substantive to offer but mere opposition, which brings me to my next point.

Under the current standing orders, collaboration and cooperation between members on private members' bills is severely restricted.

As many of my colleagues in the chamber know, I strongly believe that helping our constituents is an issue that transcends partisanship. As elected representatives, we have a duty and obligation to Ontarians to provide the best possible representation and service we can. This means that we have to find ways to work across party lines in order to deliver the best possible outcomes for the residents of our great province.

With that in mind, there are currently rules within the standing orders that, in essence, oppose this type of cooperation and collaboration. As they stand, the current standing orders limit the number of co-sponsors on any PMB to three members. Moreover, two members from the same party cannot sponsor a bill together.

Speaker, these rules essentially seek to restrict and limit the ways in which the elected members of this House work with one another. Simply said, I think this is a bad rule and one that should be changed.

Under the proposed changes of motion 74, these restrictions would be removed to allow for a member from each party to jointly sponsor a bill as a show of cross-partisan support.

Moreover, under motion 74, we have proposed that two members from the same party should be able to co-sponsor a bill together, as some bills may benefit from this for regional reasons or political reasons.

Speaker, I strongly believe in these changes, as they seek to improve the sometimes overly adversarial nature

of this House. I don't have tell you that in this chamber, we have abundant opportunities to debate, disagree and draw lines in the sand. However, when there are opportunities such as these to build bridges and work across party lines, we should embrace them and work to build on them. This type of thinking will not only benefit the ways in which we conduct ourselves in this place, but it will benefit those who put trust in us by electing us to represent them and to do what's right.

Another change proposed by this motion would allow members to read speeches off their laptops or tablets. This is against the rules in 2019. That's just absurd. We're bringing the government of Ontario into the 21st century in so many ways. For example, through our Smart Initiatives, we're consolidating transfer payments and centralizing purchasing, giving Ontarians the ability to get services online, and many more.

This is just one more small way that we're increasing efficiency and saving taxpayers money. When you get down to it, that's why we're here, Speaker. That's what we promised to do.

When you look at the point I just talked about, about the reading, and bringing the government into the 21st century, it's something that I truly support. When you are in here—we all talk about having to do our part to save and protect the environment. I look at all of us—some of us, especially some of us newer people—having to bring speeches, and reading them, on a ton of paper. If we allow a device to be used, it would be a choice. I will take that choice, and I will bring in a device where I can read my speech and not have to print 20 pages of paper to bring in here. It's just something that I think, in the 21st century, should be allowed. It doesn't mean you have to do it. It would just be a choice: You would be allowed to do it. I just think that it would be great.

Speaker, when it comes to serving here—one of my colleagues, the government House leader, eloquently pointed this out during his speech—when we come here, we come here with a lot of goals. We come here to do everything we can for our constituents.

As I said to you earlier, for me, when I got here, during the initial meeting that we had, when they were going over the rules and regulations, there was a tonne. To be honest, even as I was listening to them at that time, I looked at it and said, "There are going to be some changes." I didn't know how old these changes were. But changes would need to be made. I would look to include my two cents, at some point, to be able to change them and allow the crossing of party lines. There's a lot that we can work on with the opposition, and I think, with the proper standing orders, it would allow us to get there, Speaker.

For all these reasons, I strongly recommend that members put aside their proposed amendments and support the passing of Bill 74, so that we can get it right this time.

Thank you very much, Speaker. I appreciate the opportunity.

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

Hon. Bill Walker: It's a pleasure to stand, which I don't get a lot of opportunity to do anymore, and speak to motion 74 on the standing orders.

I want to acknowledge my colleague from Aurora–Oak Ridges–Richmond Hill, who just finished a stellar speech, as he always does, and all the people who have spoken so far.

He made a very good point: It's good to have things like tablets and electronic aids. However, I know that my colleague from Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke also wants the option to be able to use paper—because we like to jot little notes and do that—which isn't always available. I think there's opportunity for both sides here to be able to do that and give people choice.

1650

Mr. Speaker, the government House leader and I commend him for spending the summer consulting with the Clerks of the Legislature, the NDP and independent members to develop a comprehensive and collaborative plan to modernize the Legislature's standing orders. These changes would modernize the rules of the Legislature, enhance debate and increase opportunities for all MPPs to engage in the legislative process.

We are very pleased that the independent members support these proposed changes. We are disappointed that, after months of consultation, the NDP have decided to withdraw from discussions and play politics. I want to go on record suggesting—and I sat over there for my first seven years—that the role of opposition is to not simply say no for the sake of saying no. At the end of the day, we are hopeful that once the NDP have had a chance to review the proposed changes, it will be clear—

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Point of order.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Excuse me. I recognize the member from Timmins on a point of order.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: The honourable member was the king of noes in opposition.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): That is not a point of order. We will return to the member.

Hon. Bill Walker: I just can't refrain. The "no democracy party" representative just stood up there and refuted, which is not a true statement.

We are truly hopeful that once the NDP have had a chance to review our proposed changes, it will be clear that our only objective is a more productive, efficient and effective Legislature, with enhanced participation for all members, and that they will support the spirit of democracy in a more productive, efficient and effective Legislature. How can the NDP stand here and say no to that type of interest?

The NDP claim that we just want to expedite legislation, that we want to ram it through. We have not removed any tools of the opposition to delay passage of our legislation. A bill can only be passed in one sessional day by unanimous consent of the House.

It's unknown to me—and I have only heard this second-hand, that the NDP chose to withdraw from cross-party dialogue weeks ago—

Mr. Will Bouma: What? Shame.

Hon. Bill Walker: I know; it's hard to believe—and may not be aware of some of the more recent developments in our proposal. It truly is disappointing that the NDP have indicated that they cannot support a single change. I know many of the members of the NDP, and I find them to be relatively rational, balanced, and in some ways great people I dialogue with on a daily basis, so I cannot figure out how they cannot support, in their words, a single change in our proposals, including accommodation of members with disabilities. I cannot fathom that the people I know over there would not want this. So this must be from the top. This must be a leadership decision—“You shall not support the Conservatives on the other side of the House”—which is unfortunate, because the whole intent of this is to improve. We all should be, as members of this House, looking for continuous improvement and things that we can do better to actually serve the people we're given the privilege to stand here and represent.

We are proposing that the government may debate the same bill in the morning and afternoon sessions. The intent of this is so the government may more logically move through its legislative agenda, not to expedite passage of legislation. Further, even with the additional time for debate in a morning and an afternoon, a bill would not receive enough debate to pass in one day. We have specifically indicated that a bill and motion for time allocation for that bill may not be considered on the same calendar day, to preserve existing standards relating to timelines for passage of legislation.

Mr. Speaker, I'm going to go into a little bit of background in regard to what these proposed changes accomplish and why.

Allowing the Speaker to alter the application of the rules of the Legislature to permit the full participation of members with disabilities: I can't fathom anybody in this House not wanting to ensure that anyone with any form of special need or disability would be able to participate openly and actively in our sessions. As a former critic of abilities, I want to say that we should do everything we possibly can to encourage that everyone has the same opportunity to be part our debate, to be part of the representation of their community, and to be equal to all of us. I go back to that point, that they said, “We will not support a single thing.” I can't fathom that any of them can look me in the eye and say they will not support this, and in fact, I know some of them probably wish to.

Currently, a member with a disability requiring special accommodation—for example, an electronic assistive device or a personal support worker—would require the unanimous consent of the Legislature. This change gives the Speaker the discretion to accommodate members.

Another example, Mr. Speaker: A member in a wheelchair would currently need unanimous consent of the Legislature to vote without physically standing. Our proposed changes would allow the Speaker to grant this exception without unanimous consent. We need to be role models. We need to be the people who are actually encouraging and becoming part of the 21st century. I

cannot fathom why the NDP would say no to that proposed change and improvement.

Allowing night sittings in the final 18 sessional days: Currently, night sittings are allowed in the final 12 sessional days. This change allows the government to spread out night sittings, so they do not have to be forced into the final sitting weeks. We're also proposing to permit the government to cancel a night sitting when notice has been given but it is deemed to no longer be required. Currently, the government must wait for the night sitting to begin. This is a red tape opportunity. Why would any of us want to go through old, outdated processes when we can expedite them and make them better?

At the end of the day, though, when I use the word “expedite”—this is not actually expediting anything. In fact, we're going to make it longer. We're going to allow 18 days instead of 12. So I can't understand, especially in this busy season for us to attend a multitude of events and functions with our constituents, why anybody would not want us to be able to do this. Mr. Speaker, I ask again: Why would the NDP say no to something that's going to actually improve the operation of this facility and this very important legislative House?

Amending the daily order of business to conduct members' statements in the morning before question period and to incorporate introduction of visitors into the proceeding: The intent is that members' statements will receive increased profile by occurring when more MPPs are present in the chamber and when the media are actively observing the chamber prior to question period.

We are proposing to incorporate introduction of visitors within routine proceedings, so there are strict limits on the possible length. Mr. Speaker, I have certainly noticed, especially in this last session, that a lot of members are taking advantage of partisan introductions. That was only intended to make sure that the people who visit this House from our ridings are given an appropriate introduction. I think it's unfortunate that, again, people are taking advantage of that, which is making it go on and on. We need to be very specific in inviting people, introducing them and letting us know where they're from.

But at the end of the day, we want to ensure that we have those opportunities for statements. I know now, as a cabinet member, I miss doing those statements, those very important things in our ridings. We want to make sure that that is given an appropriate profile. So I think, again, having sat here for seven years prior, when they were in the afternoon, lots of people aren't in the House. Certainly, the media, in many cases, aren't able to be here at that time, but they are here, typically, before the House rises for question period.

So I think, again, this is a great opportunity. I again ask: Why would the NDP say no to moving members' statements, when they're going to get more profile and actually profile the people from their ridings as well? Because these members' statements are shared amongst the House.

Hon. John Yakubuski: Why? Just ask about the story of the scorpion and the frog.

Hon. Bill Walker: We'll go to that one if I need more time there. Thank you, fellow cabinet minister, Mr. Yakabuski.

Allowing the government House leader to call "no further business," at which point the House would adjourn to the next proceeding or the next sessional day: This is already done in the morning session prior to question period. However, in the afternoon, an adjournment motion must be moved and can be voted upon. Again, an old, outdated thing that was just in there and no one has ever reviewed, but I ask again: If it's good enough in the morning, why would we not be able to do it to expedite and move forward in the most effective and efficient manner possible? I really, again, can't understand why the NDP would stick to this, "We will not support one single provision." What would be the negative side to supporting that provision that would actually make it a more efficient House?

Permitting the use of mobile phones, tablets, laptops and other electronic devices in the chamber: This is already done in practice, and in many cases, overlooked by the Speaker; however, the rule still says you cannot do it. This is an opportunity, as part of our movement to digitize, improve and modernize many of the different things that we do on behalf of the people of Ontario—why would we not want to do this? We want to ensure that it's a more effective use of time. In some cases, as my colleague said, we can limit the paper consumption. I know that my friend Vic Fedeli from North Bay won't want that, and probably the Minister of Natural Resources likes to keep lots of paper, because we need those mills to keep rocking and rolling. But at the end of the day, it's about choice, it's about convenience and it's about the opportunity to be effective in modernizing our Legislature.

Mr. Speaker, why, I ask, would the NDP say no to that? Many of them—in fact, I see a couple of tablets on their desks in front. Why would they not want that? Why would they not stand opposed to whoever created this arcane, "We will say no to every single change"—or at least fold them up today, if they're that concerned? Why would they not fold them right now and not use them in this Legislature?

Changing the format of debate from two-minute hits to one-minute question and answer: Under the proposed rule, after a member completes their 10-minute speech, members will have 10 minutes to question the member who made the speech. Questions are limited to one minute, and the member who made the speech will immediately respond to each question as it is asked and will have one minute to do so. The intent is to encourage more active debate and enhance the quality of debate.

1700

Again I ask: Why would the NDP not want to have more active debate and enhance the quality of debate? I'm going to continue to ask that question until I'm done today.

We're going to move on. Specifying a format for introduction of visitors and specifically prohibiting the use of points of order for introductions: The intent is to keep this segment as brief as possible while still recognizing

that it is important to note the presence of guests to our great Legislature—this House that we all have the privilege to stand and represent our constituents in. As I alluded to earlier, particularly with one party, there are a lot of partisan statements made in that introduction of visitors. That was not the intent. The intent was to honour those people who are coming to visit this House from all over, not to make political statements. The whole intent is to ensure that all of the people can get their names on this record, not to make political statements, but to simply recognize them and say, "Thank you for attending the House"—which, truly, you do own, and that we're given the privilege to utilize. The use of a point of order to conduct an introduction is already prohibited, but this reinforces that rule.

Mr. Speaker, again I ask: Why would the NDP say no to this? If they are not concerned about what I'm talking about with partisanship, you would think they would agree with me and say, "Let's limit it to simply the name and where they're from," and keep it very simple.

Ending the requirement for a verbal referral of a question from one minister to another during question period: Ontario is the only Canadian Legislature which specifically requires a verbal referral of a question. The intent is that question period will be quicker, allowing a more direct focus on the questions asked, and the possibility for more questions. The model for this is the House of Commons, in which any minister or parliamentary assistant may stand to answer any question.

This morning, I believe the Leader of the Opposition, in every question, pointed her question to the Premier, knowing full well he wasn't here. First of all, it was a waste of time. It's inappropriate to acknowledge when someone isn't in the House—actually, the Premier today was at a very important function with all of the other Premiers, so why would she continually state that? It's inappropriate.

We're spending time and words to refer it to someone else. Why can we not just stand, ask the question to the minister or the PA, and that person can stand and do the answer? Again I ask the question: Why would the NDP say no, just for the sake of saying no?

Allowing co-sponsorship of PMBs by any four members, regardless of party: Currently, two members from the same party may not co-sponsor a bill. We have proposed this change to recognize that some bills may benefit from this for regional and/or other reasons, political or otherwise. Currently there is a limit of three co-sponsors on any PMB. This change would allow a PC, NDP, Liberal and Green member, at this point, to all sponsor a bill as a show of cross-partisan support.

When these old rules were written, typically, there were only three parties here, but today there are four. There could be a change to a different four. There could be five or six in the future. Who knows? Why would we not want to encourage the spirit of co-operation, the spirit of collaboration, the spirit of working collectively for the benefit of the people?

I ask again—back to the point of the NDP saying, "We will not support a single suggestion in this legislation."

Are they opposed? Are the NDP opposed, as the official opposition, to co-operation, collaboration, working collectively and across the aisle for the benefit of the people of Ontario? Madam Speaker, I ask again: Why would the NDP say no to this type of legislation?

Mr. Will Bouma: I'll work with you, Minister.

Hon. Bill Walker: I knew you would, Will. You da man. You're all da man—and the woman.

Mr. Dave Smith: Across the aisle too.

Hon. Bill Walker: Across the aisle; there it is. See? He's got it. We don't want you to move down a few chairs, but at the end of the day, we may have to overtake even more of those next time.

Allowing a bill to be debated more than once on the same sessional day: Currently, if a bill is debated in the morning before question period, it cannot be called again after question period. This causes unnecessary complexity in the legislative schedule and is a remnant from when the House sat in the afternoon and evening. This prohibition does not substantially delay the progress of a bill, and we're maintaining other restrictions which would prevent the government from expediting a bill in a way that it currently cannot.

Again, taking old thought processes—the Legislature has changed; the makeup, the membership has changed. We need, as a government, to always be showing role-model, leadership qualities, showing the world that we are engaged, we are active, and we're listening and hearing and want to be as effective as possible.

I ask yet again: Why would the NDP say no to something that we're actually improving for the people of Ontario? Why would they stand on the merits of being the opposition and say no for the sake of saying no on such a simplistic, little change that would actually improve the lives of all of us—changes specific to this, the 42nd Parliament, in which we're all honoured and humbled to be standing or sitting, in this Legislature, on a daily basis to be able to represent the great people of Ontario? These changes all serve to increase the participation and engagement of independent members and are proposed in the spirit of enhancing debate.

Allowing independent members the ability to share their time in response to ministerial statements: Why would that be a no, Madam Speaker? Why would you not want to have that? What if you were one of those independent members and didn't have the ability?

Allowing up to 12 minutes overall and three minutes each for independent members on debate on opposition day motions: Again, Madam Speaker, each of those people who are going to vote against this should put themselves—next election, they could be an independent member. Would they want to be silenced completely in this Legislature?

Allowing up to 12 minutes overall and three minutes each for independent members on debate on time allocation motions: We hear a fair bit about this time allocation thing, Madam Speaker, and at the end of the day, this party—the NDP—want to actually limit all debate, not just

time allocation. You can't speak at all, so why would they not want to open that up and engage those members?

Allotting 15 minutes to independent members at estimates: Again, if you're an independent member, you should have the opportunity to ask questions of the government of the day. We should encourage that so there are representatives able to do that equally, on an allotment of time commensurate with the membership numbers, to be able to speak at those. Again I ask: Why would the NDP not want, if they were sitting in one of those independent chairs, to be able to do that?

Allowing independent members to substitute for each other at committee: Again, an independent is an independent is an independent. Why would we not want them to be fully engaged in what we're doing here on a daily basis?

I'm going to wrap up by summarizing that I sat over there on those chairs for seven solid years as a member of the opposition. I tried to be constructive. I certainly did my job to challenge. I did say no every now and again, I will admit to the member from Timmins. Yes, there was an occasional no, but I typically brought it, and some of the members looking at me now know that I tried to be balanced in spirit. I tried to be fair and I tried to work across the aisle wherever I could, for the betterment of Ontarians.

Mr. Speaker—Madam Speaker, I should say; sorry about that. I don't get to do this very often. I'm kind of new at this. Madam Speaker, I come back, really, to the key tenets of what this is meant to do. It's intended to bring us into the 21st century. It's to modernize. It's to make us the most effective Legislature in the world.

We want to make sure that we are allowing people with challenges, whether it be mental, physical or otherwise, to be able to fully be part of and engaged as any member in this House; to be truly accessible. I can't fathom for a moment that one of the independent members or the NDP would argue that someone who has some kind of a challenge, whether it be physical or mental or otherwise, shouldn't have an equal opportunity on the floor of this Legislature. I just will never get my head around that, and I know many of the members, I'm sure, when I walk out of this Legislature, will say, "Bill, we're with you on that. For whatever reason, we're told to vote a different way." But at the end of the day, I know that the people that I value will definitely stand and up do the right thing.

Madam Speaker, in my last minute and a half I'm going to talk about, again, what all of us talked about and what many people say from the outside, people who come as guests, people that are in this Legislature or wish to be in this Legislature: They want to see a government that co-operates. They want to see a government that collaborates. They want to see a government that works collectively for the benefit of the people of Ontario.

So I go back to my last 19 minutes, and I asked a number of times: Why would the NDP come out with a statement? Why would they, first of all, have walked away from the table? You're not really being part of democracy and improving things if you actually walk away from the table. The spirit of moving forward and continuous

improvement is coming to the table with the ability to reconcile thoughts and processes, divergent as they may be, to find a common ground.

Why would they not want to have co-operation? Why would they not want everyone to have an equal opportunity? Why would they not want to collaborate? Why would they come to the table with a statement saying, “We will not support a single one of these improved suggestions”? Madam Speaker, that’s not opposition; that’s obstinacy, and at the end of the day we expect more. I sat in those chairs. I would expect those members across to take a good look at this before it comes to the debate of this Legislature and say, “You know what? I’m going to actually stand up and do the right thing. I’m going to support accessibility for all in this House. I’m going to support co-operation, collaboration and working collectively for the benefit of the people of Ontario.”

Madam Speaker, I challenge you: Don’t say no. Stand up to your leader and say yes with us.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): Further debate?

Hon. Doug Downey: I can imagine a lot of things but I can’t imagine the minister being in the opposition and sitting there quietly.

Interjections.

1710

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): I’m going to ask the government leader and other government members—I can appreciate your enthusiasm for your member, but when I’ve already recognized another one of your speakers and you’re clapping through the remaining comments, you’re eating up their time and impeding my ability to hear what they’re saying, and I have to hear. Thank you.

Back to the Attorney General.

Hon. Doug Downey: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

As I was saying, I can’t imagine the minister sitting there quietly, like we’re experiencing today.

But I just want to mention, Madam Speaker, that when I look across to the opposition, 50% are on a tablet and three of them are on a phone. So we talk about electronics; why would they not support this innovation? I can’t imagine why they wouldn’t support this innovation.

To go further, every day when I walk in here I get the orders and notices papers. By a quick calculation, it currently has 52 pages. The first nine pages are a listing of lakes that the opposition House leader read into the record. It gets printed every single day. By my quick math, those nine pages, printed 135 times for 124 members, is about 75,000 pieces of paper wasted—wasted. Honestly, Madam Speaker, I don’t even look at this anymore because I can just look online. I look online before I come in here. That’s the kind of thing we’re trying to do. Notwithstanding we love the forestry industry, there are times where we need to be a little bit more modern.

Madam Speaker, when I go to this entire thing, that’s just the first nine pages of lakes that the opposition House leader is being cute with. But when I go to the whole 52 pages, it’s more than 75,000, as you can imagine. It’s

about 350,000 pages wasted just so far, and we’re only a year and a half in. So I strongly support using our electronics. Most people in here are using their electronics to communicate with their offices, to read their speeches, to do a whole number of things.

I can tell you, in my experience, people adapt and there are better ways. When I sat on the Orillia municipal council, everything was paper-based. It was all paper-based. We went through an exercise and said, “Why don’t we get laptops?” It was revolutionary at the time. It was back in 2000. So then we got laptops and we started to get our reports electronically. I lost count on the numbers, but millions and millions of pages that didn’t need to be printed, and you can still read them and you can still mark them up. You can do all of the things that you need to do. That innovation alone I commend our government House leader for bringing along.

But this idea that the rules can’t change is really, I don’t know, a bit of a soft argument. When we look at where rules came from, back in 1560, that’s where the rules of order originated. They were first published in 1583—talking about paper—but everything old is new again, as the saying goes.

The first rule, number one: One subject should be discussed at a time. That was a rule in 1581. Madam Speaker, what the House leader has put together through study and what we’re talking about changing in the standing orders is that we can talk about an issue in the morning and we can talk about an issue in the afternoon.

As you know, Madam Speaker, people come here to hear specific things be debated. Whether it be the agricultural community today that came to hear Minister Hardeman’s fantastic introduction of his bill on trespassing, they came here to hear it. Can you imagine if they came here in the morning for the debate for second reading and were told, “You have to come back tomorrow afternoon to hear at rest of it”?

Mr. Will Bouma: Silly.

Hon. Doug Downey: It is silly. It’s not how people function. It’s not how the House functions. I think it’s a great innovation that you can speak to something in the morning, you can break for question period, grab some lunch, and come back and hear the rest of the debate. And when I say the rest of the debate, you still can’t pass the whole thing in one day. So it doesn’t change that routine, but it allows the people who come here to hear the representatives talk about the things that are most important to them. It allows them to hear the majority of the debate live, in person, and interact with the people who are advancing positions. I think it’s an exciting way to do it and I look forward to that change if this passes.

But, like I mentioned, the rules have a long history, and rules change. And there are different kinds of rules, but one that people are often familiar with is Robert’s Rules of Order. It was a US general who’s name was General Robert; go figure. He came up with Robert’s Rules of Order in the 1800s—1876.

Others know of Bourinot’s rules. George Bourinot was the Clerk of the House of Commons. He wrote a set of rules. That was in 1894.

And then Arthur Beaudesne came along. Some people know of the Beaudesne rules. He was the Clerk of the House of Commons from 1925 to 1949. Even when he wrote his rules, they didn't stay static; they had to adapt to the time. They had to adapt to the reality of what was happening in the House at the time, and they did.

So this concept that we need to just stay with what we have because it's good and it's working is a bit artificial.

I have a bit of first-hand knowledge of this. You've heard me say this before, but I'm so proud of the experience and the ability, when I used to sit on the dais and watch this unfold—Premier Davis was sitting here, and to-be-Premier Miller was sitting there. Premier Mike Harris was sitting right here, and Premier Eves was here. Premier Bob Rae was there—and he was here this morning, actually. Bob Rae was over here, in the third party, and Premier Peterson was over here. To hear those six Premiers debate—I didn't even know what I was looking at, as a page. It's pretty phenomenal that that can happen in a magical place like this. The one thing they all agreed on was the rules, and the rules evolved.

To try to understand the rules, to understand that institutions have structure and rules and sometimes they make sense and sometimes they don't make sense—but to understand that there is a backbone.

When we're talking about the standing orders, Madam Speaker, I know we're not allowed props, but this is in my desk. We all have a copy of the standing orders. It's full of rules. But just because it's written down doesn't mean it's right. We have to have conversations and let this evolve. That's what we're doing. We have so many great things that we're looking to.

I used to sit with whip Lorne Coe. I was deputy whip. I remember that one day we had to pass a motion or get consent to allow somebody to come in to do ASL, to come in and welcome people to their own space. What I'm hearing is the NDP saying, "No, we don't want to remove that barrier." That's very disturbing. It was odd to me that we had to ask permission to allow somebody in with ASL. I think that they should think about that. I don't think it's what the opposition stands for at all, and so I would like to hear them stand up and speak for this access.

David Lepofsky told me one time, "Don't make accessibility rules for other people. Do it for yourself, because we will all be there someday, as we grow older and become more infirm." So even if the opposition won't consider it for other people, consider it for your own members and for your own communities, because it is just the right thing to do. I don't know how you can argue with that.

I want to move on to another aspect that I think is really exciting. This is going to be great if it passes: the private member's bill—the four sponsors.

There are issues that I would like to be part of if I was able to sponsor a private member's bill.

I'll give you an example. Lake Simcoe is surrounded by very committed members of provincial Parliament. There's Barrie–Innisfil, of course. We have York Simcoe. We have my riding of Barrie–Springwater–Oro–Medonte.

We have Simcoe North. And then we have other affected ridings, whether it be Simcoe–Grey, a little bit further out, or Kawartha–Haliburton, the other way, because of the watersheds. Any of those people are pretty directly affected and might want to put something forward to support Lake Simcoe, but right now we can't, because you can't have two members of the same party put forward a private member's bill.

Who knows? As a minister, I'm not allowed to put forward a private member's bill, but I might have a conversation with the leader of the Green Party and say, "This is something that's really important to us. Can we get your support on this?" And he might say, "Yes, this is a wonderful thing to do." What a message that sends to our community—that we're willing to reach across the aisle, work together, find commonality, and it's not just one or two people who are doing it.

So I'm really excited about the possibilities for collaboration on the things that we find important to us and to our constituents.

1720

The idea of the two-minute questions and comments: I have to tell you, it was a pretty good training ground when I first landed here. The first time you get to speak, you have to get your mind around what the issue of the day is, and you get up and you have your time to give a minute-and-a-half question or comment. It is a good exercise. But it's not debate, and this is a chamber of debate.

I can tell you, whether it be business or law or politics, you are better if your opposition is great, because you're sharper, you're more on your game and you're able to really articulate what you're trying to do and why you're trying to do it.

So I really love this idea of the one-minute question-and-answer. I will only put forward legislation, and I will only defend legislation, that I believe in. So the ability to stand up and explain why, and get the hardest, toughest, most incisive questions, will demonstrate how much I believe in what I'm putting forward.

It's interesting. I had to go back and read it. The way that the one-minute question-and-answer is going to work is, if the question comes down and it's only 30 seconds, then I answer in 30 seconds. There aren't just four more questions. This is a whole 10 minutes. We could end up with five questions, or we could end up with 10 questions, and sort of real pepper back and forth.

Hon. Bill Walker: Or 15, if I ask them.

Hon. Doug Downey: Or if Minister Walker asked, we could get 15 or 20 in. Absolutely. No question about that.

Madam Speaker, it's going to be very exciting. Some of us are geeks. I don't know if you watch the British Parliament and some of their question period. It's exciting. It's really good, thinking on your feet and having to engage in real time. It's not just prepared and put in Hansard. It's a back-and-forth. So I hope the opposition is up for it. I hope that they're able to dig in and ask some really good questions, so that we can demonstrate how great our legislation is as we go through it.

Now, night sittings are an interesting thing. I don't know why they're opposing it. We're making it more flexible. It allows for scheduling, and it allows for cancelling things you don't need. This is just a very practical way to do business.

To have a constrained, inflexible system really serves nobody's purpose. Quite frankly, Madam Speaker, I could be wrong, but I expect that there's probably grumbling internally, when we do night sittings and we're near the end of a session, within the opposition party. They're probably like, "Why do we have to do this?" So why not make it more flexible? Why not?

There's no secret to the fact that there are House leaders' meetings, where the House leaders and the whips get together and talk about what may be coming down the pipe and have discussions and some collaboration. That's traditionally how things are done. It's not a big secret. It's part of the institution, of how the Legislature runs. There's ability to have a discussion there. Sometimes you work out procedure, and you work out different things.

It's very troubling that the opposition has walked away from the table. Some of these things just so obviously should be supported, so I don't understand why they're not prepared to have a conversation to try and solve some things, to make this place work better.

When I talk about collaboration across the aisle—the independents. Maybe this has to do with the independents. Maybe this is, "I'm taking my ball and going home," because they don't want the independents to have more of an ability to engage in the debate, or maybe they don't want the independents to be able to sub in for each other in committees.

I think one of our members was talking about the diversity of experience in the independents. It really is quite a diverse group.

Mr. Wayne Gates: Aren't they all Conservatives?

Hon. Doug Downey: Well, we have the party of five. We have the party of five. They're there. And then there's a mix of others.

But they all do have a different experience. Although we had some members move on to other very interesting jobs, like Massey College and that sort of thing, they brought a certain expertise in constitutional law, or they brought a certain expertise in life experience. So for them not to be able to organize themselves, to participate, to bring up the level of debate in a committee? I just think that's short-sighted. We should be facilitating that.

Again, we're not afraid of opposition. Opposition should make us sharper. It should make us stronger. It should make us be able to test our message and what we're trying to do for the people of Ontario, and there's nothing wrong with that. The independents should be part of that discussion. There's no reason they should be frozen out, Madam Speaker, and so this does that. This motion proposes to bring them in in a meaningful way. We're not taking anything away from the opposition here, in my perspective. They may not agree.

As for the verbal referrals, it is kind of comical when one of the members gets up to ask a question, knowing full

well which minister it's going to, but sending it through the Premier anyway. It just burns time. It just wastes time to be able to do that. If they want the answer, let's just get the answer from the person. Every time they stand up and say, "Madam Speaker, my question is for the Premier" and it's about education, is there any shock that the Minister of Education gets up and answers the question? Not at all. We all know it's coming, we all know it's happening, so let's just get on with business. Let's get the questions going. Let's get them flowing.

Hon. Bill Walker: More questions.

Hon. Doug Downey: Hey, we'd get more questions in. That's fantastic. That would be great. You know, people can hear the issues of the day.

Madam Speaker, it's an exciting place to be, where we stand, and I think we're all proud to be here. We do things from a different perspective sometimes, but we all hold a place of pride, and you sense that when we come to members' statements. So I'm happy that we have some prominence for the statements. Like Minister Walker, I'm unable to do statements now, and I do miss that opportunity to highlight things that are really important in my area. Some of the earlier statements that I did, I'm quite proud of. I took the recording and I put it on a website so that people could see the kinds of things that are important in my community.

Sometimes it's simply things like Kempenfest, which is a fantastic event in Barrie. It attracts hundreds of thousands of people. It's just unbelievable. It's huge—to be able to display the pride of my community. And there's Fierté Simcoe Pride, which was one of the first statements that I did, as a tip of the hat to the LGBTQ community in Barrie and Simcoe county. Because when we're here doing the people's business, we can't always be at the flag raisings or be in the parades. We can't be everywhere, but the one thing we can do is stand up and talk about the things that are important in our community. So I'm really happy that we have a chance to shine more light on that and to make sure that we're giving statements that tell the story of Ontario. When I hear other members' statements, you hear things and you go, "Wow. I didn't know that. That's a really neat thing," or "That's a really neat person," or that's a really neat event or festival or—

Mr. Dave Smith: "He's a great goalie."

Hon. Doug Downey: —or "He's a great goalie." Yes—whatever.

It's a wonderful way to share our collective experience, to make sure that we're displaying—ultimately what's happening is that the people of Ontario, the people who we represent from around Ontario, whether it be Manitoulin or Thunder Bay or Essex or anywhere else—

Mr. Wayne Gates: Niagara? Is Niagara on the list?

Hon. Doug Downey: Niagara—anywhere that the NDP represents. I'm happy to hear about the things that you have pride in from your communities, because it gives me a better sense. I want the people of Ontario to hear their voice in this chamber. That is the entire point: to see themselves reflected in the things that we talk about, the choices that we make and the debates that we have. I think

that's a really important piece. The statements are just valuable.

In addition to the statements, we have the introduction of guests. Somebody from our community or somebody—the number of people that I've run into that have been in this building in the last year and a half for the first time in their life—

Interjection: It's incredible.

Hon. Doug Downey: It is incredible. Really, it's incredible. And so I want them to be welcomed. It was a real source of pride for us, when we did our inaugural speeches, to be able to highlight people, to talk about where we came from and introduce people. If my son comes—he's 18, almost 19—and he sits here and watches the proceedings, to be able to say, "This is my son. This is an important place to be, and I'm proud to be here" is the kind of thing that we need to do, but we don't need to do it through points of order and workarounds and all sorts of stuff. We need to do it the right way. So we're just reinforcing that there's a right way. Let's do it; let's highlight people. It's not for partisan shots. It's not for selling a message. It's not for any of that nonsense.

1730

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): Further debate?

Mr. Rick Nicholls: I'm pleased to stand before the Legislature this afternoon and talk about motion 74, as presented by our government House leader. I've listened to many members on the government side debate the reasons why we as a government have introduced this motion with regard to standing orders. Then I listened to the official opposition. Listen carefully: Do you hear it? Crickets. That's what I hear.

I do not understand why they have chosen not to participate in this debate. Now I understand that there may be some things in the standing orders that they may not agree with. I understand that, but we've been told that they don't agree with anything in these standing orders, and that gives me grave concern. This House is a House for democratic debate, an opportunity for members to stand in their place and to voice their thoughts, their opinions. Oftentimes it may be the party line, which they may or may not agree with, and that's okay. I don't have a problem with that. As a matter of fact, if someone professionally stands in this Legislature and states their opinion, which may not coincide with a party line—well, to me that's being courageous, but then they have to perhaps deal with some repercussions thereafter as well.

The incredible member, the Associate Minister of Energy, the member from Bruce-Grey-Owen Sound talked earlier about the importance of consultations. We as a government realize and know the importance of consulting and talking with people. We don't just suddenly stay awake all night thinking of a policy and what we would like to bring forth in a bill without consulting with stakeholders, and not just stakeholders across the aisle—and we do try to discuss things with members across the aisle, but also we take a look at stakeholders in our own

ridings. We're represented by 73 ridings on the government side, but in total 124 ridings throughout the great province of Ontario. People's voices are important. People need to be heard. It doesn't matter, though, how many consultative processes we get involved in in talking with stakeholders; oftentimes, all of a sudden, somebody says, "Well, you didn't talk to these people. You didn't talk to those people."

They need to understand that the consultative process is extremely important. That's why, even though we have an official opposition, we have independent members as well, representing themselves in some cases, representing the Green Party and representing the Liberal Party, as well. What we're trying to do is to bring this Legislature into the 21st century. We want to modernize. We want to enhance debate and increase the opportunities for, really and truly, all members to engage in this legislative process.

Now, Speaker, you and I know, because we're both Deputy Speakers in this Legislature, that when we talk about enhancing the legislative process, one of the things that we're introducing is, during debate, or after a member gets up and speaks, then normally, typically, right now, because this obviously hasn't passed yet—Speaker, as you and I both know, once a member speaks, then it goes to the opposite side, and they have two minutes, and then it goes back to another side. In other words, you have basically eight minutes of opportunity for members in this Legislature to comment on the speech that has been given by the member, regardless of the party. Then that member has two minutes to summarize, and usually about 15 to 20 seconds of the two minutes is taken up with thanking all the members who have graciously spoken to their speech and so on.

We want to change that. We want to change it.

It's going to put a little more pressure on the individuals who, in fact, are debating, because once an individual has finished their time allotment for debate, be it five minutes, 10 minutes, 20 minutes, or even an hour at the introduction of a bill, then the opportunity for those 10 minutes occurs.

However, it then goes across the aisle, whereby a member has up to one minute—one minute—to in fact ask a question. They'll probably have some comments, and then they'll wrap it up with a question. Then it goes back to the person who just debated, and they have up to a minute to provide an answer to the member who has asked the question.

That totals up to 10 minutes. If you think each person has one minute each and they use it, well, then, okay, you've got five questions, and you've got five responses, five answers. But if they take less than a minute for their time allotment, and the member takes less than a minute to respond to the question asked, then we're going to have more than five questions and five answers. And that's good; I think that's really good. When somebody asks me a question, I try my best to provide them with an answer. They don't have to agree with my answer, but it gives me an opportunity.

You see, the thing is this: When a question is asked of an individual, when somebody asks anybody a question—

“I don’t understand this or that,” or “Help me understand”—from that response, hopefully, comes greater understanding of what it is that’s being discussed, what it is that’s being debated. I think that that’s a very positive thing. It’s a very positive step.

So I commend our government House leader for wanting to introduce a change in the standing orders whereby it engages more people in this entire Legislature. That’s good. That’s good not just for the government. It’s good for the official opposition, the NDP, and it’s good for independent members as well. So I think that that’s a real positive step.

So, again, why the NDP have chosen to withdraw from this debate, I really don’t understand it. I truly, truly don’t understand it.

Again, our primary objective here is to have a more productive, efficient and effective Legislature, with enhanced participation for all members.

I heard someone say earlier, our Attorney General, the member for Barrie–Springwater–Oro–Medonte—I love saying that riding. I love saying it. As a matter of fact, I’m glad that he’s doing a great job as the Attorney General. When I was in the chair, I used to just love, love, love saying Barrie–Springwater–Oro–Medonte.

Mr. Michael Parsa: Come skiing.

Mr. Rick Nicholls: Come skiing in Oro–Medonte. There we go.

But here’s my point: Speaker, I personally feel that—the official opposition may think that we are trying to move legislation through this House faster, quicker. Well, I’d like to think—and let me be positive about this—that somewhere along the line, there has been a misunderstanding with what we’re doing, so one of the nice things about debate is it gives us an opportunity right now to explain to our colleagues across the aisle why we’re doing it and the changes that we’d like to see. Because with dialogue comes understanding, and perhaps with understanding—I respect the fact that they may or may not agree with us. That’s okay. But at least we’ve had the dialogue. That way, everyone has had an opportunity to present their side of the story. Or, as Paul Harvey would say, and now, the rest of the story.

1740

Ms. Doly Begum: You really care about this bill so much.

Mr. Rick Nicholls: Oh, I love this. I love this opportunity. You know I do.

Again, what we’re also proposing is that we may debate a bill in the morning, and we’re proposing that we can debate the same bill also in the afternoon. The intent of this is so that the government may more logically move through its legislative agenda. Yes, we have an agenda. We know that. There are several of us who are from the class of 2011. The official opposition whip was part of that 2011 class—a great class, I might add, too. You would agree with that too, right?

But the point is, having sat in opposition, we understand. We understand—and don’t take this the wrong way—the games that the opposition can play, because we

played them too. We played them too, when the Liberals were in power. We would try to do our best to give them a hard time as well.

But, again, what we want to do is have the changes so that if you want to debate something in the morning—let’s have continuity, let’s be able to debate that in the same afternoon. Don’t worry; we know that there are things such as six and a half hours of minimum debate, but it’s up to the government House leader to continue on. No bill will be introduced in the morning, debated, and then voted on in the afternoon. That is not the intent of this. Again, we have specifically indicated that a bill and a motion for time allocation for that bill may not be considered on the same calendar day to preserve existing standards.

There are a number of other things in this motion that the government House leader has proposed. We’ve heard talks about members with disabilities. The member from York Centre replaced the oldest member in this Legislature in the 2018 election. If I may use his name, MPP Monte Kwinter, in his latter days, required the use of a wheelchair, which was given. But under the standing orders, he had to receive unanimous consent in order to vote, because typically in this Legislature, when we vote, we have to stand up and be recognized by the Clerk. We’re suggesting that an individual with a disability would not have to require unanimous consent. I think that’s very, very fair.

There are a number of other things that I’d like to talk about, and I see my time is moving along. We talked about members’ statements. Now, I like this change. I really do. First of all, it does allow for more debate in the afternoon, because typically, members’ statements, when you have a number of members’ statements on all sides, takes up about 15 minutes. So what we’re proposing is that we’re going to move it from the beginning after introduction of guests in the afternoon, and we’re going to move it to around 10:15 in the morning. So those 15 minutes are then granted for members’ statements.

I love members’ statements. We heard our Attorney General talk about how it gives him an opportunity to showcase individuals or groups within his riding. It gives all of us an opportunity to showcase groups in our ridings. For example, a few weeks I showcased the Chatham Coloured All-Stars, who, back in 1934, won an all-Ontario baseball championship. Earlier today, I showcased an optometrist from Leamington because he was recognized by Triathlon Canada. He and his wife—Dr. Kniaziew and his wife—were recognized. That’s a huge award. He is a successful optometrist too, with offices in Leamington, Blenheim and Chatham, and soon to have one north of Chatham as well.

That gives us an opportunity, and the fact that we can move it to around 10:15—there are more people in the Legislature at that particular time to hear. And of course, we have a number of guests here as well. I think that’s a really positive statement as well.

Regarding the use of mobile phones and tablets and laptops and other electronic devices in the chamber: We’ve all been guilty of—well, I’ll speak for myself,

anyway. My phone will inadvertently go off. How did that happen? Well, I don't know. It just happens. It's kind of like you're at home, and you might have, "Hey, Google," but you don't say, "Hey, Google," but all of a sudden Google starts talking to you. How did that happen? I don't know. It's kind of embarrassing when your phone goes off in the Legislature and suddenly—

Interjection.

Mr. Rick Nicholls: Yes. It's even worse when that happens, as well.

Again, I think the use of electronics—the member from Aurora–Oak Ridges–Richmond Hill talked about the importance of the fact that we're moving into the 21st century. We need electronic devices to stay on top of things as well.

I need to seek clarification as to whether or not we'll actually be able to read from our tablets during debate. I think perhaps not, but I will seek clarification on that as well. I would hate to have somebody reading a speech from their tablet and suddenly the tablet power dies. I wouldn't want that on my—well, anyone on the government side; maybe on the opposition, I might. No, I'm teasing. I wouldn't want that for anyone. Again, I think it's important that we take a look at that as well, and let's move forward as we look at this.

The introduction of visitors by the members: When we come in here for question period, Speaker, we have that introduction of guests, but we also want to get into question period because that's the meat and potatoes of the Legislature, in addition to debate. Sometimes the galleries are full, the members' galleries are full, and there are a lot of people here because we have various groups coming and visiting. We seem like we have to recognize everyone. I always liked when one of the members of the opposition would often say, "By the way, thank you very much"—in this case, Mr. Speaker, at the time. "For anybody else who has been missed, I want to welcome them as well."

What I don't like to hear is the partisan approach that some members take, because it eats up a lot of time. We can't get down to business the way we should. I enjoy the fact that if someone is to introduce someone and perhaps tell where they're from, and maybe the company they represent—I'm okay with that. But leave it at that, because there are other members who want to introduce their guests as well. I think that's important. Guests appreciate being introduced, being recognized in the Legislature. And by the way, when they are recognized in this Legislature, their names are included in Hansard forever and ever. So I think that's something that is a very positive thing that we need to strive for. I know that Speaker Arnott is working very diligently on ensuring that happens, even now, regardless of this legislation, if it passes.

One last thing I'll be very quick on: our PMBs, and of course the sponsorship of PMBs. I've seen in this Legislature, back when we had—you could actually have three people co-sponsor a private members' bill, but one from each party, in that particular case. We're affording the opportunity to have two people from a party and up to

a maximum of four people co-sponsor a bill. I think that's important, and I'll tell you why.

1750

Recently, I introduced a private member's bill. I want to give a shout-out to the member from Northumberland–Peterborough South, because he did a lot of the legwork on that particular bill to assist me as well. I think that had we been able to at that time, he would have allowed me to include him as a co-sponsor.

There's much more I could talk about, Speaker, but again, thank you for the opportunity.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): Pursuant to standing order 47(c), I am now required to interrupt the proceedings and announce that there has been more than six and one half hours of debate on the motion. This debate will therefore be deemed adjourned unless the government House leader specifies otherwise.

Government House leader.

Hon. Paul Calandra: I wish to continue debate.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): Further debate.

Mr. Vijay Thanigasalam: It is my true honour to stand here in support of these proposed reforms to the standing orders. These changes are fundamentally about efficiency, good governance and responsibility.

I am especially proud to support the proposed changes that affect those members with disabilities, not only in the 42nd Parliament but for the members in many more Parliaments to come. This is about fundamental equity. This is something that we have been working on and consulting on with all parties since July, and I'm very proud of the propositions.

My constituents of the beautiful riding of Scarborough–Rouge Park elected me to come to this place and represent them. I work every day to live up to their expectations and to the high trust they have bestowed onto me. Madam Speaker, the reason I mention this is because I know that all members in this place feel the same obligations to their constituents.

This Legislature is a place of passion and thorough debate. One of the things I am most excited about are the many measures in these changes to the standing orders which will enhance the debate and enhance the participation.

Madam Speaker, I am encouraged that during this extensive process of drafting these changes, and during consultation with the Liberal independents and the independents, we have come to a good agreement that serves, first and foremost, the House—not the government, not the opposition, not the independents, but the people's House, this institution that so majestically embodies the will of the people, elected through free, fair and democratic elections.

This reform contains common-sense changes that bring the standing orders up to date to the needs and the importancies of our time.

Madam Speaker, the NDP claim is false. We have not removed any tools of the opposition that delay passage of our legislation. A bill can only be passed in one sessional day by unanimous consent of the House.

While we are proposing that the government may debate the same bill in the morning and afternoon sessions, the intent of this is so that the government may more logically move through its legislative agenda, not to expedite the passage of the legislation.

Further, even with the additional time for debate in the morning and afternoon, a bill would not receive enough debate to pass in one day.

We have specifically indicated that a bill or a motion for time allocation for that bill may not be considered on the same calendar day, to preserve existing standards relating to timelines for passage of legislation.

Next, I want to turn to the issue of participation for members with disabilities.

I am proud of the increased social consciousness, that we here in Ontario and in Canada at large have increasingly become mindful of the needs of those people who have disabilities of any form. Accommodating them is an act to fulfill equity and fundamental equality. That is why I am proudly supporting this reform to help engage them in the law-making process. If the people of their constituency entrusted them with the responsibility to make law for the good of their communities and the Ontarians living there, why should the provincial Parliament curb that right? We must empower, not suppress. We ought to lift up, not push down. Madam Speaker, we must constantly strive to make this Parliament better, more efficient, and accountable. This reform is that step. This is what we need.

We are making some changes that will allow members to debate back and forth when it comes to the defence of a speech that is made in this House. Members will know that the current practice is, when you give a speech in the House on a particular bill, you have what we call here "hits": It's a two-minute discussion on a member's speech. We are eliminating that and we are asking that members, in essence, defend a speech they have made on a topic instead of the two-minute hits.

As we outlined in the changes, a member will give a speech and, following a similar rotation that we do right now, will be questioned by other members in the House on the contents of the speech that they have given. That member will then defend their speech, in essence, for five minutes, with questioning that will go back and forth. I think that will make for more of a lively debate and will increase accountability in the House. I think it will also lead to more consistency in speeches because members, as I said, will have to defend the speech that they are making, and the questions that come from our side and from the

opposition side will have to be based on the speech that the member has given.

The other benefit of that change: It does allow the Speaker to have a bit more of a role to play in ensuring that debate focuses on what we are speaking about on any given day, on the bill that is before the House.

One of the other changes, of course, is to allow night sittings in the final 18 sessional days. I know that some changes have been made on this in the past to try to eliminate some of the night sittings. But what we are trying to do is to make it so that there is less packed into the last 12 days by providing more opportunities for there to be night sittings. I suspect what it will result in is actually fewer night sittings because there will be more opportunities in order for the government to proceed and get the legislation through and we won't have to pack it into those last days, as so often is the case.

This reform will allow for independent members to better participate in debate, both here in the House and at committee, to make things run a little bit smoother. Madam Speaker, we are cognizant of the fact that this government probably has a larger number of independents than we are used to, so many of those changes will be in effect for the duration of the 42nd Parliament. We did not think it was appropriate to tie future Parliaments to the reality of this Parliament.

One of the things that the House leader did hear—and we have heard—is that we have to do a better job of allowing more voices to be heard in this Legislature. With such a large group of independents in this Parliament, we thought that it would be appropriate to give them more of a voice both in question period and in some of the debate that happens in this place.

Madam Speaker, another part of these proposed changes which is very exciting to me: The time of the day for statements by members will be moved from the afternoon to first thing in the morning. All members in this place know the value of being able to rise and highlight local events, the accomplishments of constituents, or even some important initiative of the government—

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): Sorry, I have to interrupt the member. The next time the bill is debated, you'll be able to finish your time.

Debate deemed adjourned.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): Seeing the time on the clock, this House stands adjourned until tomorrow at 9 a.m.

The House adjourned at 1800.

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Mantha, Michael (NDP)	Algoma—Manitoulin	
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Martow, Gila (PC)	Thornhill	
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Miller, Paul (NDP)	Hamilton East—Stoney Creek / Hamilton-Est—Stoney Creek	
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Morrison, Suze (NDP)	Toronto Centre / Toronto-Centre	
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Roberts, Jeremy (PC)	Ottawa West—Nepean / Ottawa- Ouest—Nepean	
Romano, Hon. / L'hon. Ross (PC)	Sault Ste. Marie	Minister of Colleges and Universities / Ministre des Collèges et Universités
Sabawy, Sheref (PC)	Mississauga—Erin Mills	
Sandhu, Amarjot (PC)	Brampton West / Brampton-Ouest	
Sarkaria, Hon. / L'hon. Prabmeet Singh (PC)	Brampton South / Brampton-Sud	Associate Minister of Small Business and Red Tape Reduction / Ministre associé délégué au dossier des Petites Entreprises et de la Réduction des formalités administratives Minister Without Portfolio / Ministre sans portefeuille
Sattler, Peggy (NDP)	London West / London-Ouest	Deputy Opposition House Leader / Leader parlementaire adjointe de l'opposition officielle
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Scott, Hon. / L'hon. Laurie (PC)	Haliburton—Kawartha Lakes—Brock	Minister of Infrastructure
Shaw, Sandy (NDP)	Hamilton West—Ancaster—Dundas / Hamilton-Ouest—Ancaster—Dundas	
Simard, Amanda (IND)	Glengarry—Prescott—Russell	
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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 Children, Community and Social Services / Ministre des Services à l'enfance et des Services sociaux et communautaires
Stevens, Jennifer (Jennie) (NDP)	St. Catharines	
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Surma, Hon. / L'hon. Kinga (PC)	Etobicoke Centre / Etobicoke-Centre	Associate Minister of Transportation (GTA) / Ministre associée des Transports (RGT) Minister Without Portfolio / Ministre sans portefeuille
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Wilson, Jim (IND)	Simcoe—Grey	
Wynne, Kathleen O. (LIB)	Don Valley West / Don Valley-Ouest	

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Yarde, Kevin (NDP)	Brampton North / Brampton-Nord	
Yurek, Hon. / L'hon. Jeff (PC)	Elgin—Middlesex—London	Minister of the Environment, Conservation and Parks / Ministre de l'Environnement, de la Protection de la nature et des Parcs
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Marit Stiles, Vijay Thanigasalam
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